



Taxing debate

After several governments, years of international commitments, and multiple leadership oustings, Australia is finally on the brink of *actually* implementing an emissions reductions program. Whatever you call it - a “big scary tax”, a “price on pollution” or just the “carbon tax” - it is a significant step forward for Australia.

As a nation, Australia has made international commitments to lowering its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Sooner or later a large-scale mechanism would be needed to ensure that we could meet these emissions reductions commitments. The carbon tax is it.

Prime minister Gillard has taken a lot of criticism for introducing the tax. It's not too hard to imagine, however, that in several years she will be applauded for introducing policy that previous prime ministers (John Howard and Kevin Rudd) hinted at, but never saw through.

Gillard has suffered heavily in the polls recently, and this loss of popularity is perhaps what scared off previous governments from committing to an emissions reduction scheme.

It is easy to see a need but much harder to do something about it. The need for Australia (and

the world) to reduce GHG - particularly carbon dioxide - emissions has been in our sights for years, now at last action is being taken to address this need.

The difference between seeing a need and acting on it is something very familiar to us through the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Martin Luther King Junior gave this insight into the parable - that the priest and the Levite who failed to help the wounded man saw him and thought "If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?" The Samaritan, conversely, saw the wounded man and thought "If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?"

The question facing Australians is which of these two attitudes do we want to define us as a nation? Should we ignore a need in case acting impacts negatively on us? Or should we act to address a need out of selfless compassion for others?

Slowing the impacts of climate change will benefit all of us, but particularly the poor of the world. It is people living in poverty who are hit hardest by climate change, and it is their future we hold in our hands.

The “I”s have it?

Julia Gillard has had to put a lot of work into reassuring Australians that the majority of individuals and business won't be worse off under the carbon tax. You may have received an information booklet recently explaining “What a carbon price means for you”.

The purpose of this booklet is two-fold - to reassure people worried about the impact of the tax on their cost of living, and to inspire people about Australia's “clean energy future”.



It is true that some industries will suffer - particularly those trading in fossil fuels. It is indeed important for our government to acknowledge this and ease the immediate impact on individuals.

The upshot of the carbon tax is that renewable energy industries will boom, and new clean energy jobs will be created. Like any large change to the economy or to industry, there are losses and gains.

So do we look at the carbon tax positively or negatively? One campaign that is based on fostering a positive response to action on climate change is the Australian Conservation Foundation's **Say Yes to a Price on Pollution**.

This campaign encourages everyday Australians to make a positive statement in favour of climate change action. It is seeking to build up a chorus of people joyfully proclaiming “aye” rather than fearfully protesting “I”.

This is the challenge of the carbon tax - overcoming Australian people's growing

tendency towards an individualistic mentality. It seems that being prepared to make sacrifices for the common good is an attitude that belongs to generations gone by.

Those who endured world wars and depression in the 20th century had to work together to get by. This not only led to a better outcome for all, but fostered a strong sense of community.

While we have gained much since then, we may have lost something of the community mentality that was a feature of those harder times.



One could argue, however, that climate change is the 21st century challenge that could bring us together.

While it is written on the wall that the carbon tax will come into effect next year, there is still campaigning from the opposition and from certain big businesses seeking to put Australian people off the tax before it's even begun.

It is our choice now whether we join in with this negativity or whether we say “yes” to cutting carbon pollution and remind opponents what the carbon tax is really about: helping those who need us to act for their sake. We must see the need of the poor, and of the children who are not yet even born, and act to give them a better future.

The Hungry Tide

Over the years **Watermark** has chronicled the stories of the Pacific Calling Partnership (PCP). The PCP are a community organisation that advocates for people living on low-lying islands in the Pacific, whose lives are being threatened by climate change and rising sea levels.

Maria Tiimon, an I-Kiribati woman who works tirelessly for the Pacific cause, has had her story taken to the big screen by filmmaker Tom Zubrycki. Zubrycki's film **The Hungry Tide** takes the audience to the islands of Kiribati, where locals are battling rising tides with crumbling sea walls.



Maria Tiimon addressing a gathering at the COP16 Climate Conference

From the sunny Pacific islands, Tiimon and her colleagues from the Edmund Rice Centre travel to international conferences around the world, including London, Germany, Austria, Denmark and Mexico.

Zubrycki's film not only shows the environmental and political struggles faced by Kiribati and other Pacific islands, but the personal sacrifices made by Maria in order to carry out her work.

Maria's journey is in many ways representative of the bigger struggle to achieve justice for low-lying Pacific islands. She, like the islands she treasures, has but a small voice in the international arena. But it is

a strong voice and her perseverance and dedication has, like the perseverance of her homeland, begun to pay dividends. The international community is beginning to listen.

The Hungry Tide sold out when it premiered at the Sydney Film Festival in June. It was wonderful to see so many members of religious congregations at the Film Festival screening, and at another recent screening at the Chauvel Cinema in Paddington.

"It's about human rights and justice. It's about giving us a place on this earth."

Maria Tiimon

During a Q&A session with Zubrycki and Phil Glendenning, the director of the Edmund Rice Centre, one audience member commented that it was the first time that she had heard climate change issues being addressed as human rights issues. She reflected that she'd learnt "It's not just about the science - it's about human rights".

Likewise, the carbon tax is not just about money or statistics - it's about human rights and justice.

It's about the rights of Pacific islanders to live free from the climate impacts that they didn't cause.

It's about Australia doing justice to islands such as Kiribati by cutting the emissions that created the hungry tide.



Those who have seen *The Hungry Tide* or worked with the Pacific Calling Partnership will have come to know Maria and her father, Tiimon. Unfortunately Tiimon suffered a stroke some weeks ago and died on 2 August. Please pray for Maria and her family at this sad time.

Reflection

A true revolution of values will soon cause us to question the fairness and justice of many of our past and present policies. On the one hand, we are called to play the Good Samaritan on life's roadside, but that will be only an initial act.

One day we must come to see that the whole Jericho Road must be transformed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life's highway.

True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring.

Martin Luther King Jnr

Gracious God

Your creative love gave birth to our world.

Fill us with compassion for our environment.

Empty us of indifference, selfishness and fear.

Breathe into us an awareness of and solidarity with all of creation.

We see the need; inspire us to act on it.

Lead us into action to save this planet and to offer present and future generations the opportunity to live and flourish.

Amen

Have Your Say!

If you'd like to throw your support behind The Hungry Tide and its cause, you can vote for it in the IF AWARDS. Go online to register and vote at:

<http://www.ifawards.com/rating/film/the-hungry-tide>

Voting closes on September 16th.

Web Links



Carbon tax information

Read more about the tax and see how it will create a cleaner future:

<http://www.cleanenergyfuture.gov.au/>

http://www.acfonline.org.au/articles/news.asp?news_id=3469

Say Yes Campaign

Join your voice to others calling for a cleaner, greener and better Australia:

<https://support.acfonline.org.au/Page.aspx?pid=366>

Pacific Calling Partnership - Edmund Rice Centre

Connect with the Pacific Calling Partnership and join in their efforts to find justice for people in the Pacific:

<http://www.erc.org.au>

The Hungry Tide Film

Learn more about the film:

<http://thehungrytide.com.au>

To buy a copy of The Hungry Tide, please email Marita McInerney:

maritami@erc.org.au

To organise a screening of the film please contact Tom Zubrycki:

tzub@ozemail.com.au

Keep an eye out on the SBS as a shorter version of The Hungry Tide will be screened there at a later date.

Watermark is an occasional publication of the Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes in NSW

Email: clrinsw@ozemail.com.au

Web: www.clrinsw.org.au

Ph: (02) 9663 2199

