

Garnaut's Perspective on Climate Change Policies

The new Federal Government's adviser on climate change, Professor Ross Garnaut, says reconciling economic growth with effective climate change mitigation will be a complex task. Giving the inaugural S.T. Lee lecture on Asia and the Pacific at the Australian National University on 29 November 2007, Garnaut says climate change mitigation is a "diabolical" policy problem due to: the uncertainties surrounding relationships between atmospheric gas concentrations and the timing and extent of dangerous climate change; the long lags between emissions and impacts, exacerbated by the temporary masking effects of aerosols – making it difficult to rely on observation of impacts to prompt timely policy change; the need for unprecedented international co-operation for successful mitigation alongside powerful incentives for individual countries to free ride on others; and the complexity of the income distribution effects of climate change and effective mitigation. Noting Australia faced "a worse and more urgent problem" than previously thought from the environmental, economic and social impacts of climate change, Garnaut says that poorly designed government policy or "tardiness in implementation" would increase the cost of mitigation immensely and compromise efforts to cut emissions. Garnaut says clean coal will retain a significant role in Australia's future greenhouse mitigation strategies. He says Australia is well-placed to "do well as part of an effective global mitigation effort" because large resources of high-quality coal "means our share of the global coal supply would rise under an effective global mitigation regime". Garnaut dismisses the suggestion that Australia should slow its rate of economic growth to immediately reduce emissions. "When you have lower economic growth you start to get a lot of pressure to get economic activity going at any cost. I think it would be more difficult [to reduce emissions] in that situation than the current one," he says. Garnaut is scheduled to provide a report in mid-2008 to Prime Minister Kevin Rudd on the impacts of climate change on the Australian economy.

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Filename: Document3
Directory:
Template: C:\Documents and Settings\Kelera.PPA.000\Application
Data\Microsoft\Templates\Normal.dot
Title:
Subject:
Author: Kelera
Keywords:
Comments:
Creation Date: 12/3/2007 1:09:00 PM
Change Number: 1
Last Saved On:
Last Saved By:
Total Editing Time: 0 Minutes
Last Printed On: 12/3/2007 1:11:00 PM
As of Last Complete Printing
Number of Pages: 1
Number of Words: 328 (approx.)
Number of Characters: 1,873 (approx.)