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Media release

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Myths, Folklore, Lies Skew Greenhouse Solutions

The race for a solution to problems posed by growing greenhouse gas emissions is being seriously undermined by the self-interested peddling of myths, folklore and lies according to the latest report by the Australia Institute.

In *'Clean coal' and other greenhouse myths*, energy experts George Wilkenfeld, Hugh Saddler and Clive Hamilton examine sixteen common myths which the authors argue are dangerously skewing efforts to reduce emissions and combat global warming.

Releasing the paper today, Institute Director Dr Clive Hamilton said:

“Australia’s emissions continue to rise inexorably, despite the outlay of considerable amounts of private and public money, much of which has been wasted. We urgently need a near-term policy that causes emissions to peak in the next few years then fall over the next decade and beyond.”

Included in the list of popularly held myths is the assumption that expanding public transport is the answer. The authors say cars are here to stay. The primary focus of road passenger transport should be cutting emissions from cars rather than attempting to bring about a wholesale shift to public transport.

They are also sceptical of tree planting and voluntary green power schemes. On green power schemes, they argue that the myth of the magic pudding of ‘green energy’, like the myth of ‘clean coal’, is being used to mask and justify ever-rising emissions.

Most of all, they argue the myth of ‘clean coal’ must be shattered. There is no such thing as ‘clean coal’ for climate change, they say. The term is a marketing triumph for the coal industry, like ‘safe cigarettes’ was for the tobacco industry.

The authors list the basic principles of an effective greenhouse policy as: no new coal-fired generation until it meets the criteria for at least half-clean use; encouragement of renewable and gas-fired generation; an increasingly stringent cap on emissions supported by a tradeable permit system; and stringent minimum energy efficiency standards for vehicles, buildings and appliances.

The paper can be read on the Institute’s website - www.tai.org.au

Sixteen myths listed and analysed by the authors.

1. **Coal can be part of the solution.** In reality, coal is the main problem, and curtailing its use is essential. There is no such thing as 'clean coal' at present, and there is a chance there will never be.
2. **Carbon sequestration can be the centrepiece of policy.** This technology is unproven and expensive.
3. **Nuclear power can be the centrepiece of policy.** This technology is expensive and risky and, if pursued, is unlikely to have any significant impact for 15-20 years.
4. **Renewable energy is always benign.** All forms of energy have advantages and disadvantages, and not all renewables are completely 'clean'.
5. **Renewable energy can support our current level of energy use.** In reality, we cannot make the transition to a renewable energy system without first relying on natural gas and greatly increasing the efficiency of energy use.
6. **Renewable energy cannot provide baseload power.** An electricity system that uses a mix of renewable technologies, with some gas-fired power and energy storage, could supply as much reliable baseload power as the current system.
7. **Voluntary 'greenpower' schemes can make a difference.** Experience shows that they have had little effect.
8. **Buying carbon offsets is the same as actually reducing emissions.** In fact, buying offsets is too often just a smokescreen for large emitters who intend to operate on a 'business as usual' basis.
9. **We can plant enough trees to get us out of trouble.** We can't.
10. **We need to wait for new technology.** In reality, if the technology is not already available, it will come too late.
11. **The hydrogen economy will save the day.** Energy is required to produce hydrogen, so the hydrogen economy would be only as greenhouse friendly as the energy used to manufacture it.
12. **Expanding public transport is the answer.** Cars are here to stay and reducing emissions from them must be the primary focus of policy.
13. **It won't cost anything.** Tackling climate change will mean the end of the era of cheap energy.
14. **Higher energy prices mean lower living standards.** In fact, with good policies energy bills could come down while energy prices go up.
15. **Australia will meet its Kyoto target.** We won't.
16. **There is no point ratifying the Kyoto Protocol.** Australia's interests would be best served by having a seat at the table. The G8 summit endorsed the UN process.