

MEDIA RELEASE
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Mr Howard's Diplomatic Duplicity

Yesterday's astonishing revelation that the Howard Government made a secret Cabinet decision not to ratify the Kyoto treaty to cut greenhouse gas emissions unless the US Government does casts GST-funded cuts to diesel fuel costs in a new light.

During her recent visit to Australia, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright devoted her one major public address to urging Australia to implement the climate change treaty. The Clinton Administration is making every effort to have the Kyoto Protocol ratified but is confronted by a Republican-controlled Senate hostile to the treaty following intense lobbying by US oil and coal interests.

Not only is the Australian Government planning to avoid complying with its international commitments, its real priorities are revealed in the GST Package which contains fuel price cuts that contravene the provisions of the treaty and will directly promote increases in Australia's greenhouse gas emissions.

The Australia Institute last week released a detailed analysis of the environmental impacts of the Howard Government's GST Tax Package which concluded that it would result in a 2% increase in greenhouse gas emissions, or around 5 million tonnes a year. In addition, it would result in significant increases in urban air pollution which would negate a number of other Government programs aimed at healthier cities announced in the Coalition's environment policy just last week.

Commenting on the revelations, Australia Institute Executive Director Dr Clive Hamilton said: "The world community made extraordinary concessions to Australia to keep us in the Kyoto treaty after the Howard Government threatened to wreck the consensus by walking out unless it got its way. To refuse now to ratify the protocol is the ultimate act of diplomatic duplicity. The Howard Government appears willing to use any opportunity to weasel out of the commitments it made at Kyoto."

"Senator Hill claimed that he had won a great victory at Kyoto, but Senator Parer's craven appeasement of the fossil fuel lobby betrays the contempt of the Howard Government for environmental protection. No-one with any concern for the environment could possibly vote for the Howard Government."

"Just yesterday afternoon Senator Hill was reported as saying that his Government was committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, yet at the same time it is seeking re-election based on a Tax Package that will make Australia more fossil fuel dependent, not less," Dr Hamilton said.

Aside from destroying Australia's chances of being able to meet its already generous Kyoto Protocol targets the Institute report predicts other immediate outcomes of the

GST-funded cuts to diesel and petrol prices will be more urban air pollution, including the most damaging form of carcinogenic particulates, removal of the savings incentive to run more vehicles and buses on natural gas and a taxpayer funded attack on the emerging renewable energy industries because of cheaper fossil fuels.

“Australia already has higher greenhouse gas emissions per capita than any other country. The Government’s refusal to ratify the treaty together with the GST Package will make Australians in the next century the worst air polluters in the world,” said Dr Hamilton.

Contact Clive Hamilton on 02 6249 6221 or 0411 878 489 (mob). The Australia Institute’s analysis of the GST Package can be found at its web site <http://www.tai.org.au>