

Source 4 Protesters take part in the Walk Against Warming march in Melbourne, November 2007.



'The question is: has the world woken up and can the world respond to this? The answer, my friends, is in your hands ...'

Changing responses to environmental issues

Australian governments have been dealing with environmental issues with varying degrees of success since the 1960s. Sometimes governments have put economic interests ahead of the environment, as was the case with the flooding of Lake Pedder to provide hydroelectricity (see **spread 6.5**) and the granting of a licence to mine for uranium in Jabiluka in 1997 (see **spread 6.6**). At other times, often following non-violent protests by large numbers of Australians, the government has moved to protect the environment. One historic example was the Hawke government's High Court battle with the state government of Tasmania in defence of the Franklin River, which led Tasmania to scrap plans for a dam in 1983 (see **spread 6.5**). However, no environmental issue has divided the views of the federal government and the Opposition as climate change has.

The official response to climate change

In the lead-up to the 2007 Australian election, Labor leader Kevin Rudd declared that 'climate change is the great moral challenge of our generation', acknowledging that this challenge was both environmental and economic. In November that year, Rudd was voted in as Australia's prime minister, and he made signing the Kyoto Protocol his first official act, a historical reversal of the Howard government's decision not to sign

this international agreement to curb greenhouse gas emissions. To better understand the potential impact of climate change on the Australian economy, the Labor government commissioned economist Ross Garnaut to prepare a comprehensive report on the subject. The Garnaut report argued that the country should act quickly and strongly to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

After receiving the Garnaut report, the Rudd government set about building a plan to curb carbon emissions. They proposed to do this through an **emissions trading scheme (ETS)**. For some in the business sector, the 5 per cent carbon reduction target (based on year 2000 levels) proposed by the government was too high; for others, including the government's climate change adviser Ross Garnaut, it was too low. On 11 February 2010, the government's ETS legislation was passed by the House of Representatives, as former Coalition leader Malcolm Turnbull 'crossed the floor' to support it. However, it was later challenged and defeated in the Senate.

Facing pressure from the Liberal party and members of his own cabinet, the prime minister agreed to put the ETS on hold for three years, but his failure to act on his pre-election promise to deal with pollution destroyed his credibility with many voters. As his popularity plunged, the Labor Party dropped Kevin Rudd as its leader and replaced him with Julia Gillard in June 2010.

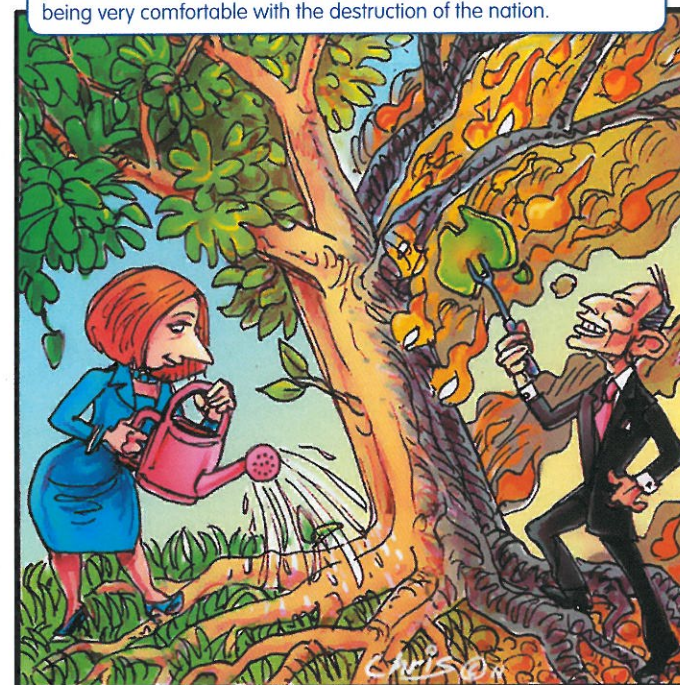
The rise of the Greens

At the 2010 elections, reflecting the Australian public's increasing interest in environmental protection and social justice, the Australian Greens picked up six seats in the Senate, bringing their total number of senators to nine — enough to gain the balance of power. They also won a

Source 5 The Garnaut Climate Change Review outlines some of the potential economic advantages to Australia if the world were to move to a low-carbon economy. This is a summary of part of the report, which was updated in 2011.

Although Australia has previously benefitted economically by supplying and using fossil fuels without considering climate change, the country is well-placed to deal with low-emissions energy sources in the future. Australia can supply uranium oxide for nuclear power; has strong insolation (exposure to sunlight) for solar power; can access some of the world's richest hydro-electric power resources in the Torres Strait; has opportunities to develop algae as a low-cost source of biofuels; has high quality wind resources, and exceptional ocean waves and tides; possesses the world's richest deep rock geothermal resources (associated with nuclear power); and has access to sites for effective carbon capture and storage. During the transition from coal dependence to low-emission sources, Australia is also able to access natural gas and coal-bed gas.

Source 6 In this political cartoon from left-wing website Eureka Street, Prime Minister Gillard is shown as the saviour of the environment, while Tony Abbott, a climate change sceptic, is seen as being very comfortable with the destruction of the nation.



seat in the House of Representatives for the first time. With neither of the major parties having gained enough votes to govern outright, the Coalition and Labor had to scramble to find support. After a nail-biting wait, Julia Gillard finally gained the support of the only Greens member of Parliament, Adam Bandt, and the majority of the Independents. She emerged triumphant.

In February 2011 Prime Minister Gillard, flanked by Independents and Greens, announced that Australia would introduce a price on carbon from 1 July 2012, making it increasingly expensive for big business to conduct business as usual. In response, Opposition Leader Tony Abbott called for a 'people's revolt', encouraging supporters to take to the streets to protest the proposed carbon tax. The 'revolt' was backed by some radio personalities and right-wing journalists. The Independent MPs who supported the tax received death threats.

emissions trading scheme (ETS) a system providing economic incentives for achieving pollution reductions

Activities

EXPLANATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 1 List five problems associated with global warming. Which threats are likely to affect you most directly? Why?
- 2 What was the average temperature in the year you were born? How does this differ from the temperature in the years your parents were born?
- 3 What role did the climate change debate play in the downfall of Kevin Rudd as Australian prime minister?

CHRONOLOGY, TERMS AND CONCEPTS

- 4 Define the following terms in your own words: *emissions trading scheme*, *sustainability* and *balance of power*.
- 5 Create a timeline of events mentioned in 'Changing responses to environmental issues'. Along with each environmental issue, include a brief description of the government's response to it.

ANALYSIS AND USE OF SOURCES

- 6 **Source 1** depicts the devastating Queensland floods of 2010. Why is an event like this often a driving force for change at the highest (governmental) level?
- 7 Based on the temperatures illustrated in **Source 2**, what should the average temperature look like in 2025?
- 8 With a partner, analyse **Source 3** and discuss parts of our region that might be threatened if the sea levels were to rise by one metre over the next 100 years. Then suggest what economic, political and social effects this sea level rise could have.
- 9 **Source 4** depicts the Walk Against Warming march in 2007. Based upon this image, who seems to have taken

- part in this protest and why? Who does not seem to be represented in this image?
- 10 According to the update to the Garnaut Review (see **Source 5**), what are the biggest advantages for Australia in embracing a low-carbon future?
- 11 Examine **Source 6** and answer the following questions:
 - a Describe the scene in detail.
 - b According to the artist, how does the response of Prime Minister Gillard and Tony Abbott differ in relation to climate change?
 - c Do you see any suggestion of bias in this image?
 - d What other sources would you need to locate to either confirm or refute the message of this political cartoon?

PERSPECTIVES AND INTERPRETATIONS

- 12 a Based on the examples referred to in 'Changing responses to environmental issues', how do you believe the Australian government's response to environmental issues has changed since the 1960s?
 - b Do you believe that the Australian government has handled the issue of climate change more or less successfully than these other issues? Explain your position.
- 13 With a partner, decide whether you agree with the following statement, and justify your opinion using information from this spread and other sources: Industrialised countries such as Australia have a responsibility to cut carbon emissions, even if it means becoming less competitive with developing nations such as India and China.

Student workbook
6.6