

Gore gives a wake-up call for leadership

A NEW REALITY now dominates the relationship between civilisation and the Earth itself, former US Vice President Al Gore told an audience of Australia's most senior corporate leaders. Whereas past generations could comfortably say that the planet was so large and humans so small that what we did hardly mattered – that was not the case any longer.

In a riveting performance that attracted a standing ovation at its end, Mr Gore named five key issues where human pressure on the planet was leading to disaster: global warming, species loss, loss of rainforest, loss of fisheries and loss of freshwater. The single most threatening, he said, was global warming and this was changing the relationship between the Earth and the Sun.

'In fifty years the Arctic Ocean will be ice free in summer,' said Mr Gore. 'We know how to solve global warming. What we need are political decisions, passion and bravery.'

Mr Gore was speaking at this year's Business Leaders Forum on Sustainable Development – an annual event held this year in Sydney, convened by Molly Harriss Olson of EcoFutures and co-sponsored by the Business Council of Australia.

Three developments over the present generation had contributed to the clash between the human race and Planet Earth, according to Mr Gore.

The first was the growth in human population measured most starkly by the fact that it took ten thousand generations for population to reach two billion by the first half of the last century. Following World War II, population has climbed to six billion in the life of just one generation.

Scientific and technological change provided the second development. This revolution of knowledge had magnified the power of the individual to affect the environment.

And finally there had been a philosophical change in the way humans think.

'Most of our grandparents thought about the way they lived differently to the way we do now,' said Mr Gore. 'They reused things and modified goods to suit a purpose. We have developed a throw-away consumer mentality over the last few decades. This is something new. Our way of thinking about our duty to the future has changed.'

Mr Gore appealed to Australia's business and political leaders to show courage and leadership in the face of global warming.

He said that if he had been successfully elected US president over George W. Bush at the last presidential election, he would have succeeded in convincing America of the need to ratify the Kyoto Protocol.

'It is not too late for Australia to show global leadership in this area,' he said. 'I urge everyone in this room to go to Canberra and press the need for Australia to move ahead under the Kyoto Protocol.'

Mr Gore's speech galvanised the audience and the conference. In the face of lacklustre domestic political attention to the environment, it led Victoria's Deputy Premier, John Thwaites, to declare the speech inspirational.

'I only wish that the whole of the Federal Cabinet could have been here to listen to Al Gore,' said Mr Thwaites.

Throughout the Forum, a



EcoFutures

Al Gore urged a change of mentality and ratification of the Kyoto Protocol.

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succession of corporate leaders presented a picture of action and concern about the deterioration of the Australian and global environment.

By its end, the Forum agreed that two key issues were necessary for progressive change. The first of these was the need for partnerships – between government, the scientific sector, the corporate sector, and the community – if solutions were to be enacted.

BP Australia's president, Greg Bourne, said government needed to employ a 'carrot and stick' approach to business – 'coach the leaders and police the laggards'.

The head of Visy Industries, Richard Pratt, agreed saying that businesses that were showing leadership around sustainability in Australia had a right to expect help – even advantage – from government.

The second issue was the need to do a better job at raising the need for change, and the benefits of change, within the broad community. It was recognised that although the community continued to see the environment as one of the most important issues to be tackled nationally, there was a disconnection between that concern and individual action.

'We need to listen to (the community), support them, and provide accurate information about sustainability issues,' said John Thwaites. 'We need the community's support if we are to move ahead.'

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