



Al Gore's message on climate change will reach an even wider audience after he trains more than 1000 people to deliver his landmark presentation. UNDP/PEP

The Gore factor

Reviewing the impact of *An Inconvenient Truth*

An Inconvenient Truth, featuring former US Vice President Al Gore's presentation on climate change, was released in cinemas across Australia on 14 September 2006. By 3 October, a Lowy Institute poll found that the issue of global warming had become a major concern for most Australians, who saw it as a bigger priority for the country than terrorism. The poll found that an overwhelming majority of Australians wanted action on climate change, even if it harmed the economy.

Alongside Al Gore's film, however, a number of other factors appear to have shifted community, business and political attitudes to the serious risks of human-

induced climate change. These include the worsening drought, crop failures and the early start to the 2006–2007 bushfire season.

The United Kingdom's Stern Review,¹ which outlined the overwhelming economic case for early action on climate change, also had a profound impact, particularly on the Australian business community.

While these influences help explain the noticeable shift in attitude to climate change in Australia, it is hard to imagine it happening so rapidly without the impact of the film *An Inconvenient Truth*, Gore's book of the same title, and his tours and television appearances in Australia.

The movie is already now the fourth highest earning documentary in Australia's history, earning \$3.9 million at box offices so far.

In addition, a significant Australian audience also watched Al Gore's widely publicised appearances on the ABC's *7:30 Report* and Andrew Denton's *Enough Rope*, during his tour in late 2006.

But Gore's recent high profile in Australia is not a one-off. His commitment goes back to 2003 when he was brought over for the first time by EcoFutures to keynote the National Business Leaders Forum on Sustainable Development. It was at this event that he gave the travelling

¹ http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent_reviews/stern_review_economics_climate_change/sternreview_index.cfm

presentation to political and business leaders on climate change that is essentially the foundation for his 2006 documentary.

In the two months after its release, different members of the Federal Cabinet, such as Alexander Downer, were reported as now accepting the scientific reality of human-induced climate change. On ABC's *Lateline* program on 12 November, Federal Treasurer Peter Costello said, 'I think the ground is changing. I think it is important that we bring new countries into this discussion. And I think, from Australia's point of view, if the world starts moving towards a carbon trading system, we can't be left out of that, that Australia has a role.'²

The Federal Government has now initiated a landmark inquiry into emissions trading. And at the state government level, the South Australian and Victorian Governments have recently committed to 60% reductions in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, a significant undertaking.

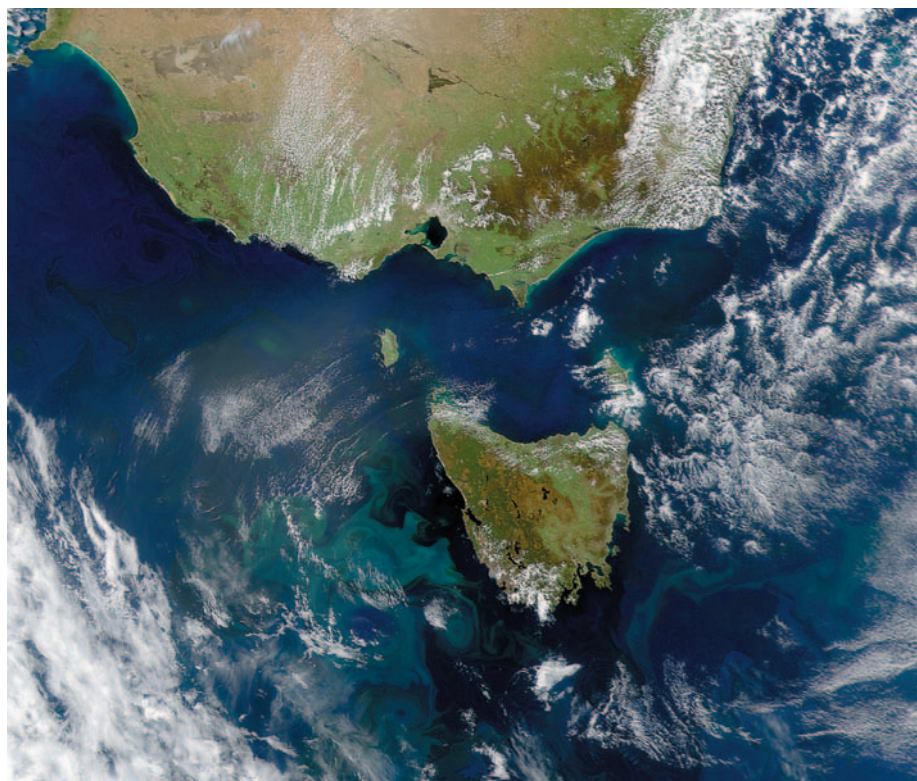
Unions too have changed their tune. A new policy announced by the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) in November includes support for the Kyoto Treaty, increased renewable energy targets and support for an emissions trading scheme.³

Less than a month later, 16 Australian faith communities representing the world's great religious traditions launched the publication 'Common belief: Australia's



faith communities on climate change',⁴ in which leaders of each faith community affirm that action on climate change is a moral imperative.

And, more recently in December, the powerful National Farmers Federation



A view of South-Eastern Australia from NASA's Sea-viewing Wide Field-of-view Sensor (SeaWiFS), flying aboard the Orbview-2 satellite, showing incoming weather and a massive phytoplankton bloom off Tasmania's western coast. NASA Goddard Space Flight Center (NASA-GSFC)

announced that their peak policy-making body had made a unanimous call for early action on climate change.

The movie's impact in Australia is also apparent in the media. Media monitoring and analysis company, Media Monitors, reports that on most days, articles about climate change in Australian newspapers significantly outnumber those on any other environmental issue. During Al Gore's tour, and at the time of the release of the Stern Review, media coverage of climate change was unprecedented.

Perhaps one of the most significant results of the 'Gore factor' has been in helping to change media baron Rupert Murdoch's mind on the issue of climate change. In parallel with reviewing other relevant information, Murdoch saw Gore's presentation and is reported to have since become an advocate for climate action.

An Inconvenient Truth has ensured that the issue of climate change has reached middle Australia and is now a top concern in all polling. Gore's clear explanation is reaching those who have never heard or

understood climate science before.

Politicians have realised that a significant percentage of voters in Australia will have viewed Al Gore's message – at the cinema, on TV or on DVD – before the next Federal Election.

Widespread interest in the film is shown by the recent response to the Australian Conservation Foundation's call for people to deliver Al Gore's climate change presentation and to attend a training session with him. Applications were received from more than 1700 people,⁵ of which 84 were chosen for a day's training with Gore to help his message to reach a still greater Australian audience.

While it is difficult to accurately measure the impact of Al Gore's film, it is clear that it has shifted the game. Arguably, its greatest political impact is yet to come now that the DVD has been widely released in Australia. This should encourage further public debate and the prospect of even more organisations, businesses, unions and politicians committing to significant action on climate change.

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www.naturaledgeproject.net

2 <http://www.abc.net.au/insiders/content/2006/s1786567.htm>

3 http://www.cfmeu.com.au/storage/documents/CFMEU_climate_141106.pdf

4 http://www.climateinstitute.org.au/cia1/downloads/041206_common_belief.pdf

5 http://www.acfonline.org.au/articles/news/news_id=1034