

Authoritative take on the warming debate

***The Hot Topic: How to Tackle Global Warming and Still Keep the Lights On* has a number of high-profile fans, including Al Gore and Tim Flannery.**

There's no denying the credentials of the authors, both of whom are qualified scientists. Gabrielle Walker is a UK science journalist and broadcaster and Sir David King is the UK's former chief scientific adviser, who is widely credited with persuading the British Government to take a lead in climate change. The book's preface reminds us that in 2004, King caused a public furore by describing climate change as 'the most severe problem we are facing today, more serious even than the threat of terrorism'.

The authors set out to explore current debates on climate change science; technological solutions; political solutions, including climate change profiles of key developing and industrialised countries; climate change adaptation; and ideas for how we can all take action in our everyday life. There is also an appendix – a series of FAQs on 'climate myths, half-truths

and misconceptions' – and a glossary.

This structure takes us methodically through the arguments: why warming is happening; why we need to set carbon reduction targets; what will happen if we fail to meet them; and the political issues, particularly the current debate between developed countries that have largely caused the problem and have the technological resources to take effective action, and developing countries, which are likely to be most affected by the consequences.

Given the unprecedented scale of the problem, any one book would be hard-pressed to convey the full picture, to the satisfaction of both global warming proponents and skeptics. This is a pretty good attempt to cover most of the bases, although issues such as population growth (see *Ecot* 142) and the need to curb consumption in industrialised countries are given little attention, so despite the writers' assertions to the contrary, readers are left with a sense that technology and a low-carbon

lifestyle ('change your light bulbs ... switch off at the wall', etc.) will get us through the worst.

On the whole, however, this book is an excellent primer on the current climate change debate. In the following excerpt, the authors explain why they wrote the book, and refer to the message of hope they try to convey to readers:

'Books, newspapers, TV, radio – another day, another headline. It has become almost impossible to sort out what really matters.

'Amid this cacophony there are a handful of voices that persist in arguing that warming isn't happening, or that it's not caused by humans, while others see disaster around every corner and indulge in gory scenarios that have been labelled "climate porn". We don't agree with either of these approaches. Climate change is happening, and humans are very largely to blame. However, we do not believe that disaster is inevitable. A few shiny new Priuses won't get humans out of this mess, and nor will sticking our collective heads in the



The Hot Topic
How to Tackle Global Warming and Still Keep the Lights On

Gabrielle Walker and Sir David King

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sand. But we do still have time to tackle the worst aspects of climate change if we act fast and work hard ...

'In fact, the world over, individual cities, towns and communities are not waiting for governments to act; instead they are taking the issue of climate change into their own hands.'

● Mary-Lou Considine

Knowledge is empowering

Thanks to AusAID, people working in Asia Pacific countries in areas such as poverty reduction or sustainable development can access a wealth of valuable information via the Australian Development Gateway.

The intricate web of organisations and structures involved in the provision of assistance to developing countries means that it is often difficult for individuals or small groups to navigate the 'aid maze'.

However, the Australian Development Gateway is a web-based portal that allows users to share their knowledge and views on everything from microfinance



www.developmentgateway.com.au

and gender equality to HIV/AIDS and sanitation.

Information is categorised in sections such as agriculture, disaster management, education, environment, governance, health, infrastructure and

water. For example, the section on disaster management – which at the time of reviewing included links to background resources on the recent natural disasters in China and Burma – offers links to databases, organisations, and standards and codes, as well as directories, case studies, manuals and other vital documents.

The home page has links to a tenders and jobs page, as well as feature resources, stories from the field and a free e-newsletter.

The Australian Development Gateway is one of more than 50 such gateways linked to the US-based Development Gateway Foundation hub, an initiative of the World Bank. Australia was a founding member of the Foundation and the first OECD country to develop its own country gateway.