

## Action on climate change and science funding

Mary-Lou Considine

**The climate change debate took centre stage last month with the federal government announcing new measures for its Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) on 4 May, followed a week later by the budget, which brought some good news for researchers.**



Credit: Carl Bento, Australian Museum

The new CPRS measures included a delay in its introduction from 2010 to mid-2011 to allow for the impacts of the global recession; a revised target of a 25 per cent reduction in emissions relative to 2000 levels by 2020, pending targets announced by other countries; capping the price of carbon at \$10 per tonne for a year after the scheme is introduced; and new 'global recession' assistance measures for industry.

It was these assistance measures and the 'aspirational' nature of the 25 per cent target that caused some environmentalists to brand the revised scheme as 'smoke and mirrors' and distance themselves from the position of the Australian Conservation Foundation, WWF Australia and the Climate Institute, which provided qualified support for the government.

Under the revised CPRS, carbon-intensive industries will have their emissions permits increased – from 70 per cent (up from 60 per cent) or 95 per cent (up from 90 per cent), depending on the industry.

The government also emphasised that the new 25 per cent target is conditional on other countries agreeing on 'an ambitious global deal to stabilise levels of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent in the atmosphere at 450 parts per million or less by 2050'.

The targets brought to the table by the US and China at the UN climate change conference (COP15) in Copenhagen in December will be critical benchmarks for global negotiation. The US is currently proposing a 17 per cent reduction below 2005 emissions levels. China has indicated it is looking for cuts of 25 to 40 per cent from developed countries before it commits.

Climate change science has added a note of urgency to the debate, with a key participant at the Greenhouse 09 conference in Perth earlier this year noting that 'all the empirical signals now indicate that trends in our climate, over

and above the year-to-year fluctuations, are close to – or above – the worst-case scenarios predicted previously in the IPCC reports’ (see p. 28).

In the midst of the debate about the revised CPRS, the government released its 2009 budget, which was largely welcomed by leaders in the scientific community, including Dr Megan Clark, CSIRO’s Chief Executive.

The organisation will receive \$120 million to build a new marine research vessel to replace the Southern Surveyor, which has played an important role in CSIRO’s marine and atmospheric research program to date. CSIRO will also be funded to expand its ‘Atlas of Living Australia’, an important tool for investigating climate change impacts on biodiversity at a national level.

Dr Clark commented: ‘The budget will see CSIRO increase its research effort in food production and food security, continue to direct our marine capability to deliver oceanographic, geo-scientific, fishery and ecosystem research, and ensure vital integration between ocean, land and atmosphere research with respect to climate change.’

The budget also included new funding of \$2 billion for industrial-scale carbon capture and storage (CCS) projects; \$1.6 billion for research on solar technologies; and \$465 million to establish Renewables Australia, a new body that will ‘advise governments and the community on the implementation of renewable energy technologies, and support growth in skills and capacity for domestic and international markets’.

For renewable energy technology expert, Dr Mark Diesendorf – Deputy Director, Institute of Environmental Studies, University of New South Wales – the budget highlights were the additional funding of over \$1 billion for four demonstration solar power stations, and the establishment of Renewables Australia.

Not so popular within the research community was the budget decision to cut funding to Land and Water Australia (LWA).

The Australian Academy of Science issued a statement protesting that the ‘consequence of [LWA’s] closure would be the loss of much-needed expertise and advice to government and key industries on the effects of climate variability and climate change on agriculture and natural resources, the Murray–Darling Basin, bushfires and food security.’

From ECOS online <http://www.ecosmagazine.com/?paper=EC149p5>