Blueprint's author didn't ask about the weather

William Kininmonth, The Australian,12:00AM June 12, 2017

"Blueprint for the Future", Chief Scientist Alan Finkel's report into the future security of the National Electricity Market, claims four key outcomes: increased security, future reliability, rewarding consumers and lower emissions.

The central theme is Australia's continuing commitment to the Paris Accord. This commitment requires a cut in greenhouse gas emissions (that is, carbon dioxide) of 26 to 28 per cent on 2005 levels by 2030. Surprisingly, and without policy direction, Finkel extends the target to zero emissions by the second half of the century.

The blueprint does not address the appropriateness of the Paris Accord as a policy objective (too hard? — politically incorrect?). There is no acknowledgment that global temperatures have failed to match the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change scenario of -anthropogenic global warming and scientists don't know why.

The need for the blueprint is that the electricity market is becoming increasingly distorted as governments pursue policies aimed at reducing carbon dioxide emissions. The distortion is manifest as a reduction in security and reliability of the infrastructure and higher prices.

Previously, Australia's electricity generation and distribution systems were world class. They were based on readily available and cheap fossil fuels. The systems employed best available technology to minimise atmospheric pollution, were reliable and provided relatively cheap energy for industry and the community. Australia was internationally competitive.

It should be noted that France also has a reliable, efficient electricity system but based on nuclear fuels. French generated electricity is exported through Europe and is available to back up other systems.

There is general agreement with the proposition that adding more carbon dioxide to the atmosphere will raise Earth's temperature. The contentious question is: by how much and will it be dangerous? The Paris Accord relies on the UN's IPCC as its authority. The IPCC claims anthropogenic emissions will raise Earth's temperature to dangerous levels unless constrained. There are also other alarmist claims that Earth might reach a "tipping point leading to runaway global warming". These latter assertions have no basis in science.

The IPCC warming scenarios rely on projections of computer models that have consistently indicated a temperature increase (or sensitivity) of between 2C and 4.5C for a doubling of carbon dioxide concentration, with a best estimate of about 3C.

Real-world observations over the period of satellite monitoring (since 1980) do not support these projections. The IPCC scenario is for warming of between 0.7C and 1.6C. The actual warming over the 3½ decades of satellite monitoring has been barely 0.3C, or half the lower model estimate. Recent climate history suggests models exaggerate sensitivity to carbon dioxide and concerns over anthropogenic emissions are misplaced.

Alternative methodologies for estimating climate sensitivity to carbon dioxide also exist. These latter are underpinned either by physics of surface energy exchanges or correlation of historical data. Mostly these alternative methods suggest that the real sensitivity is less than 1C for a doubling of concentration. The alternative methodologies are ignored by the IPCC and proponents of the dangerous anthropogenic climate change hypothesis.
A sensitivity of less than 1C makes attempts to regulate climate through atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations fraught, even futile.

The real challenge for society is to manage within a naturally varying climate. A total of 70 per cent of natural disasters involve weather and climate extremes. Regulating carbon dioxide concentration (indeed, if this is even possible) will not ameliorate these.

Also, the climate system is ever-changing. Global temperature varies by almost 1C in the shift between El Nino and La Nina conditions (linked to variations in sea surface temperature over the eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean). There is evidence of major global climate oscillation on the 1000-year timescale with the present equable climate a reflection of recovery from the Little Ice Age that reached its extreme during the 17th century.
Less than 20,000 years ago Earth was in the grip of the last glacial maximum. Deep ice sheets then covered much of North America and northwestern Europe; sea level was 130 metres lower than today. Our present relative warmth is a blessing.

It is unfortunate that the Chief Scientist did not conduct an independent review of the science underpinning the contentious hypothesis of dangerous anthropogenic climate change before embarking on a blueprint for the national electricity market. A misplaced objective of emissions reduction at the expense of affordable and reliable electricity services will unnecessarily impoverish Australians.

A shift to renewable sources will be burdensome on Australian industry because it will result in even higher prices for all Australian electricity consumers. Energy intensive industries and the associated jobs will shift to those countries with no obligations under the Paris Accord.

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