

Contraction and ¹¹ convergence

Dave Hampton says, “It’s all common sense really, and it’s reality, so it’s common sense reality I suppose - another kind of CSR?!”

We know that humankind can’t go on as we are now - unleashing billions of tonnes of carbon dioxide, year after year, as we burn up our ancient stores of precious fossil fuel. We are unlocking – as fast as we can - and from its multi-million year fossilised carbon storage place safely underground - all of the earth’s treasure of amazing hydrocarbons, (oil, gas and coal). We are downgrading our fuel store – our treasure - into Gigatonnes of invisible, but not quite harmless, Carbon Dioxide (CO²) gas. (A classic case of trying to live off our assets, instead of living off income.) No wonder the climate is changing. The miracle would be if it wasn’t.

Yes, sure, the air we all share can absorb all this extra CO² gas, no problem, and it has been, for ages. In fact, it has been doing so, uncomplainingly, for a hundred years already. But all the signs are it just

cannot carry on this way. As we wake up to this reality, scientists are telling us that we are already way past the point of no return! So how do we react to this?

It’s big. Huge. Massive news. We can ignore it, we can believe it, or we can disbelieve it. But it’s still big! One awkward twist is that all the people who do ‘get it’, understandably, can get down, angry, or otherwise lose the plot! They can become bad company! They are then best avoided! (But don’t stop reading, there is still hope!)

All this ‘burn-out’ started only around 100 years ago, and like Concorde, it can finish as fast as it started. If we are to survive, all Nations have to agree to CONTRACT (dramatically) our total national CO² emissions. Tony Blair has got us all off to a flying start suggesting 60% cuts for UK by 2050. This is way ▶



Dave Hampton

Dave Hampton is Director of ABS consulting, an associate of ‘CarbonSense’ and Chair of the Construction Industry Council (CIC) Sustainable Development Committee

T: 020 7378 0006

E: drhampton@abscons

W: www.absconsulting.uk.com

www.theFBnet.com

www.cic.org.uk/sustainability



"I DON'T KNOW WHY THEY KEEP GOING ON ABOUT GLOBAL WARMING"

ahead of most other countries, but is still not fast enough contraction for scientists to be sure that we will survive as a species. New evidence from the Hadley Centre is suggesting that even this target may not be nearly enough.

The CONVERGENCE part is also non-negotiable. Once scientists have worked out how much Carbon Dioxide we can continue to release, globally, then common sense (and our common atmosphere!) says that all nations must start to converge until, in an ideal world, every country (and every person?) takes responsibility for its share and limits its CO₂ to a rationed amount. That was essentially the process Kyoto embarked on.

There is no viable way forward other than that Kyoto picks up again. And common sense will prevail, once all the petit politics are exposed. There simply is no alternative, if we wish to have a future. People are not stupid, and awareness is growing that carbon dioxide is a 'real and present danger' of boggling proportions. Tony Blair's Chief Scientist recently stated that Global Warming was more of a threat than Global Terrorism. We are an amazingly inventive species, and we can avoid this imminent disastrous climate disruption, but only if we chose to acknowledge it is happening.

Curiously, initial 'ration' limits of carbon dioxide (and it's important not to confuse tonnes of carbon with tonnes of carbon dioxide - they are different) need not be uncomfortable. Although we need to contract to something like 2 tonnes (average) per capita, as compared to the 10 - 20 in UK and USA now, with carbon trading, it will be possible to 'buy' some carbon credits from those who don't need it or want it, thus redistributing wealth. More significantly, the tremendous force of creative innovation would be unleashed on solving the problem, and a whole world of exciting new products and solutions would emerge.

If we continue to value the atmosphere at zero, we continue to have a problem.

As population grows, we just have to hope we hit on ever cleverer (!) ways of producing carbon free energy, and ways of doing more with less. Interestingly, although free sunlight falls on all of us, the countries best placed to benefit from capturing solar energy are potentially the countries of the south. 'Desert' based hydrogen and electricity from sunlight-derived (includes wind) energy driven plant are perfectly feasible. If the peoples' 'will' is there, and it very soon will be.

Hold on to your hats. 2004 is the year we wake up to this, and the world will change. ■

"If we continue to value the atmosphere at zero, we continue to have a problem."