

17010 In Australia and the US, sound climate policy is being held hostage by vested interests

We must shift away from a culture of politically motivated climate change denialism to an acceptance of the truly existential threat now facing humanity

Michael Mann and Christopher Wright **The Guardian** Thursday 9 February 2017

It's been a bad couple of weeks for the world's climate and environment. The inauguration of billionaire property developer and reality TV star Donald Trump as the 45th President of the United States has presaged a new Dark Age of climate politics.

In an opening fortnight of controversial executive orders, President Trump has decreed the expansion of major fossil fuel developments, and the neutering of long-standing environmental protections. In addition, he and his leadership team have made it plain they intend to dismantle many of the Obama administration's climate initiatives and withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement. All this runs in direct counterpoint to the rapid decarbonisation required to avoid dangerous climate change.

Beyond destroying our politics and corroding public trust in science, climate change denial also threatens the future of a habitable planet and a viable global economy. The maintenance of a "fossil fuels forever" mentality has real implications for the future of global food production, biodiversity, social functioning and geopolitical security. Leading economies around the world have recognised that the decarbonisation of energy and transport systems are key to the future prosperity of human civilisation.

The dramatic fall in the cost of renewable energies and commitment to large-scale investment in solar and wind energy highlight a pathway away from coal, oil and gas. But government leadership is badly needed to take the threat of climate change seriously and ramp up the scale of economic transformation on a par with the political and economic mobilisation we have applied to other existential threats in the past.

The good news is that there is still time to prevent the worst climate changes from occurring. The Paris climate agreement was a step forward, in that the nations of the world committed to reductions that get us half way from where we would otherwise be headed (more than 5C warming of the planet) and to where we need to be (stabilisation of warming below 2C or so).

In the US and Australia, we must shift away from a culture of politically motivated climate change denialism to an acceptance of the truly existential threat now facing humanity. We are in grave need of courageous political leadership and a rejection of vested interests engaged in bad faith efforts to delay the needed transition away from fossil fuels toward renewable energy. To do otherwise ensures an increasingly grim future for our children, humanity and the planet.

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