

I acknowledge the concern of Ben Ashby and Mike Anderson about Australia not signing the Kyoto Protocol (Letters, August 29).

Take hope from the words of South African President Thabo Mbeki, in a speech marking the opening ceremony of the World Summit on Sustainable Development taking place this week in Johannesburg.

"As we deliberate and work on a way forward, we need to take stock of the inertia of the past decade and agree on very clear and practical measures that will help us to deal decisively with all the challenges that we face.

"This is the central task of this summit. We do not have a new agenda to discover. We have no obligation to relearn what we already know about the perilous state of human society and the environment. There is no need for us to reopen battles that have been fought and resolved.

"There is every need for us to demonstrate to the billions of people we lead that we are committed to the vision and practice of human solidarity, that we do not accept that human society should be constructed on the basis of a savage principle of the survival of the fittest."

I say what a leader!

The fact that there is global warming and it has been caused by "greenhouse gases" including carbon dioxide is not disputed by



VISION OF HOPE: South African President Thabo Mbeki.

most scientists. That something must be done is also not an issue and very few, even those who claim there is no long-term climate change, disagree with the objective of sustainability. What is holding up the process is the cost.

Unfortunately economic analyses to date show that it will be far more expensive to cut carbon dioxide emissions radically than to pay the costs of adapting to the increased temperatures. All current models show that the Kyoto

Protocol will have surprisingly little impact on the climate.

Temperature levels projected for 2100 will be postponed for all of six years. Yet the cost of the Kyoto Protocol will be \$150 billion to \$350 billion annually (compared to \$50 billion in global annual development aid).

With global warming disproportionately affecting Third World countries, the question arises as to whether the Kyoto agreement is the best way to solve the economic dilemma. For example, for the cost of Kyoto as it is for just one year we could solve the world's biggest problem: we could provide every person in the world with clean water.

This alone would save two million lives each year and protect 500 million from severe disease.

In fact, for the same amount Kyoto would have cost just the United States every year, the United Nations estimates that we could provide every person in the world with access to basic health, education, family planning and water and sanitation services.

So given the current perception that sustainability is at a cost, there does not appear a way out of the dilemma. We therefore need to change the paradigm. Ways need to be found to make progress towards sustainability of economic benefit.

To get much more out of much less, to produce more with less impact on the greater environ-

ment and so on. That more resources are required unless we dramatically reduce our population is difficult to dispute. The need is to produce and consume resources in a sustainable manner. To get much more out of much less, to produce more with less impact on the greater environment and so on.

Science got us into the situation and sound science can get us out again. A good place to initiate new sustainable technologies is in our own backyards. Our footprint on earth is the built environment and this accounts for around 40 percent of all materials flows, emissions and energy consumption.

Any change toward sustainability would therefore have a huge impact. The carbon based TecEco cements I have invented are a good start. What they promise is a shift to using carbon as a building material.

Only when people are rich enough to feed themselves do they begin to think about the effect of their actions on the world around them and on future generations.

A focus on ways of achieving sustainable development with positive economic outcomes will help people today while creating the foundation for an even better tomorrow as the Third World will become much more concerned about the environment.

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