



The Bullroarer - Sunday 16 March 2008

Posted by [Big Gav](#) on March 16, 2008 - 7:08am in [The Oil Drum: Australia/New Zealand](#)

Topic: [Miscellaneous](#)

BBC - [Australia's food bowl lies empty](#)

Though located in a remote corner of the planet, the fields of Australia's food bowl are central to the worldwide price of wheat. In this part of rural New South Wales, water-starved farms and cavernous empty grain silos have the potential to create a ripple effect which spreads around the globe. And that is precisely what is happening right now. After America, Australia is normally the second largest exporter of grain, and in a good year it would hope to harvest about 25 million tonnes. But the country remains in the grip of the worst drought in a century, which is why the 2006 crop yielded only 9.8m tonnes.

Peak Energy - ["Cheeky" Caltex Calls For Carbon Tax On Drivers - Not Refiners](#)

One story from last week that I missed while I was on holiday was local refiner Caltex Australia calling for a carbon tax to be introduced. While I think carbon taxes are a great idea, it appears Caltex were more interested in shielding themselves from the cost of carbon trading schemes than in good policy. Caltex's preferred policy option is for refiners to be exempt from any future carbon trading market - with drivers instead paying a direct carbon tax on petrol.

The claimed benefit of this policy is that it would shield refiners from "unacceptable" levels of risk - with the Caltex spokesman further recommending that the tax on petrol be "clearly identifiable at the fuel pump", as this would be "more effective at changing driver behaviour" compared to the costs of carbon trading which would have "much less carbon price visibility" and that this "hidden" tax would be "far less environmentally effective".

Just in case your head isn't spinning yet with all this balderdash, the spokesman went on further to whinge that under an emissions trading scheme exposed them to a risk that "middlemen", such as "financial institutions and offshore speculators" would become involved in the market and push carbon prices higher. Who knew that the oil industry was openly afraid of markets. What next - calls for the government to regulate the price of petrol ?

Frogblog - [Cheese prices up 59.9%](#)

Food prices continue to rise according to Statistics New Zealand, 5.2% in the year to February. Grocery food prices led that charge, increasing 9.0%. Within that the most significant upward contributions came from higher prices for fresh milk (up 20.9%), cheese (up 59.9%) and butter (up 91.2%). Oils and fats rose 29.4%. There were also significant rises in bread, cereals, coffee, tea and poultry. The dairy price rises are bizarre. We are not paying 91% more for butter because there is a shortage of butter here in New Zealand, or because there has been a sudden spike in demand for butter due to some unforeseen cake baking frenzy over the last 12 months.

It's because we are paying the going overseas rate for these products. And the going overseas rate is being driven by a global shortage of food. And the reason the world has got less food is primarily because of the increased use of crop lands for growing biofuels rather than food, a series of dramatic weather events that seem like they may be connected to climate change, and rising price of oil increasing production and transport costs. In other words peak oil and climate change may be significant drivers of food price increases.

Adelaide Advertiser - [Solar power station lift-off](#)

ADELAIDE Airport will have the second-largest rooftop solar plant in Australia when work finally starts this week. Adelaide Airport Limited will today announce the largest commercial solar installation contract in South Australia.

BP Solar will manufacture and supply 760 solar panels to be installed on the middle of the airport's Terminal 1 roof by construction company Hansen Yuncken. The solar photovoltaic panels will combined measure about 130m by 9m and take up 1170sqm of roof space. The panels will be visible from the air but - contrary to Premier Mike Rann's hope - will not be seen from the ground. The 114 kilowatt system will generate 160 megawatt hours of electricity a year, equivalent to the average electricity consumption of 30 houses.

SMH - [PNG gas project cost may blow out to \\$1.7b](#)

THE \$US10 billion-plus (\$10.6 billion-plus) Papua New Guinea liquefied natural gas (LNG) project looks likely to proceed to the forward engineering and design stage within a month, after the project partners agreed on a joint operating agreement. The ExxonMobil-led project includes three Australian companies - Oil Search, Santos and AGL Energy - but is far more important to Oil Search than the others.

The company has pinned its future on the LNG development to commercialise its stranded gas resources after a plan for a PNG-to-Australia pipeline fell over last year. Oil Search owns ageing oilfields in PNG which will have production declines from 2011. The LNG project should produce 6.3 million tonnes a year from a plant near Port Moresby, starting in 2013 or 2014.

SMH - [Resist price rises, petrol suppliers told](#)

Australian Competition and Consumer Commission chairman Graeme Samuel sent a warning letter on Friday to the oil companies, as well as to retailers such as Coles and Woolworths, demanding they justify any petrol price rises. He said the companies were showing signs of preparing to set domestic prices inconsistent with world oil market figures.

The Australian - [Chevron to sell Tasmania permits](#)

US oil and gas major Chevron said today it is looking to sell stakes in three exploration permits off the coast of Tasmania. "Chevron's focus in Australia is offshore north-western Australia, where we are planning to invest billions of dollars to commercialise our significant gas holdings for the domestic and international energy market," a Perth-based Chevron spokesman said in an email.

Stuff.co.nz - [NZ potentially sitting on energy goldmine](#)

As world energy prices rise ever higher, fuelled in part by apparent insatiable demand, New Zealand has some big calls to make about the use of its resources. For example, what to do with the vast quantities of lignite at the bottom of the South Island that Solid Energy thinks could be turned into liquid fuels. Then there is the Government's 10-year moratorium on baseload thermal generation, its emissions trading scheme, and its target of having 90 per cent of electricity generation from renewable sources by 2025. ...

Conventional technology could be used to gasify Southland lignite to produce high quality diesel, for example, he said. A price of around \$US60 to \$US65 a barrel was likely to make diesel produced from lignite that achieved required rates of return on investment. On the environmental consequences of doing so, he said carbon capture and sequestration, using conventional technology was now in a "near-to-commercial" phase .

The wait now was for the work to be done to identify whether suitable reservoirs were available for such a process, Dr Hooper said. Work was also now under way to assess coal seam gas resources. Such gas now accounted for 10 per cent of the total natural gas used in the United States, even though it was not being produced there at all 20 years ago.

Then there are methane hydrates - methane locked in ice which forms in low temperature and at high pressure and are found in sea-floor sediments. Dr Hooper said New Zealand's hydrate resources based on what would be called inferred resources were probably seven times the size of Maui. Production tests on hydrates were already under way in North America, and the Japanese and Indians in particular were making major investments in the technology. It was possible to accurately determine where hydrates were, so deposits had been mapped and drilled, and it was known with some degree of certainty they existed on the eastern seaboard of the North Island and in Fiordland. Some of the very sweet spots for hydrates were just 10km to 15km offshore, some only 40km from Wellington. Dr Hooper likened the investigation into hydrates to that of coal seam gas 20 years ago.

SMH - [Airport plan for Badgerys is re-floated](#)

AUSTRALIA'S leading property developers and equity financiers will launch a campaign to re-establish Badgerys Creek as Sydney's second airport site. The Urban Taskforce will announce its plans today to convince the Federal and NSW governments to reconsider the controversial site.

SMH - [On track to gridlock as population explodes](#)

A STATE of permanent transport gridlock is threatening to choke Sydney as it grows by a forecast 1.1 million people over the next 20 years. The Iemma Government has released draft targets for each local government area to house the population boom, promising that \$7.5 billion in road and rail infrastructure, bus services, open space, schools and health facilities will follow.

The president of the Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils, Tony Hay, said the city needed additional rail lines and bus corridors, and a substantial increase in service frequencies, if it were not to descend into transport gridlock. "While over 100 kilometres of motorway, mostly in the form of toll roads, have been built in western Sydney, the rail systems coverage is still much the same as it was in the steam era," he said. "The result is a region that is heavily car-dependent - a problem that will only get worse as the population both increases and ages.

Brisbane Times - [Brisbane missed the bus on light rail: Greens](#)

Brisbane missed a major opportunity 10 years ago to fix inner-city congestion when it rejected an offer from the Federal Government to help build a light-rail system, a Greens council candidate has said. Greens Brisbane City Council candidate and Paddington retailer Anne Boccabella believes a decision by Brisbane City Council and the incoming Beattie Government to reject the concept in 1998 was a tragic mistake.

Sunshine Coast Daily - [The S word is sustainability](#)

In the face of rapid population growth, our future will depend on being sustainable in every sense of the word, as Andrew McNamara, the Minister for Sustainability, Climate Change and Innovation told the Brisbane Institute: Tonight I want to talk about capital S Sustainability. By that I don't mean the usual narrow environmental concept of sustainability in agricultural production and land use.

SMH - [Free train travel on the way](#)

SYDNEY commuters could enjoy free weekday travel before 7am as the State Government considers copying Victoria's "early bird" offer. The Minister for Transport, John Watkins, had initially ruled out the plan but said yesterday he would watch how it worked in Melbourne. "We're looking at that," he said. However, he was quick to add that it could do more harm than good because the Melbourne experience had led to

overcrowding on trains during evening peak periods.

Peak Energy - [The End Of The Fire Age](#)

The impassioned folks from the Competitive Enterprise Institute are known fans of carbon dioxide, having long claimed it is "good for you", but I'm beginning to wonder if there is actually a mystical element behind the obsession some of the ideological conservatives have with continuing to burn fossil fuels instead of just switching over to clean energy sources and getting on with business.

Libertarians have long identified with Prometheus, one of the Titans of Greek mythology, who is best known for stealing fire from the god Zeus and giving it to mortals for their use - thus playing a pivotal role in the early history of mankind. For his trouble Zeus chained him to a rock where his liver was pecked at by vultures, until he was finally rescued by Hercules many years later.

Given this strong identification with Prometheus and the fire he gave mankind, perhaps there is some strong subconscious resistance at work in the traditional Libertarian mindset to the idea that we stop setting fire to things - clinging to the practice of burning fossil fuels like polar bears clinging to the last melting pieces of ice cap in the Arctic.

This psychological barrier then manifests itself in the form of resistance to doing anything about global warming, or even acknowledging that global warming is occurring, and to the idea that oil production will peak one day - sometimes resulting in the adoption of abiotic oil theory as a way of keeping the fires burning forever.

Cleantech.com - [Solar thermal could supply most of the U.S. grid, says Ausra](#)

The main challenge is increasing the number of hours electricity generated by this technology will be available. At the moment he said, companies can add at most a couple of hours to the solar day and remain cost-effective. One of the storage technologies currently being used is molten salts, which must maintain a temperature above 200 degrees Celsius to continuously provide energy. Keeping the molten salts from freezing without taking energy from the grid is a hurdle, said Jenkins-Stark. The solar day is now 24 hours long, according to John O'Donnell, Ausra's executive vice president. He said Spanish solar thermal power station Andasol is currently running 24-7 and has a 16-hour storage reservoir.

One of the factors in Mills' paper that makes the storage viable is using an oversized solar field - this allows some of the energy collected during the day to keep the electricity generation process running all night long as well, at no extra storage cost. The biggest thing about Mills' work, O'Donnell said, is that it proposes a path forward "where there's no cost increase." The correlations Mills found between electricity load and seasonal changes suggest that the notion of using solar thermal power for the whole nation within a few decades is viable. "We can move to an all-renewable future with the technologies commercially available right now," O'Donnell added. "It's more a matter of mobilization and deployment."

Frogblog - [Online With George Monbiot](#)

George had an interesting criticism of the global Green movement and it's persistent call for localisation. He said that this was fine in almost all policy areas, (yeah!), but not in energy. He stated that humanity lives too far away from our natural ambient energy sources, (renewables like wind wave and sun), precisely because these are uncomfortable places for humans to live. (Deserts, mountain tops and oceans) Therefore we need energy infrastructure on a grand scale out there where our daily solar/wind energy budget is and the ability to transmit it back to where we live. This implies large scale projects that governments are particularly suited to pursuing. Only then can we get past the fossil age and still have significant energy for humanity. Food for thought!

Reuters - [Australian cemetery to offer carbon-free funerals](#)

An Australian cemetery has unveiled plans to take the carbon out of cremations by offering new green funerals to help combat global warming. On the day Australia's formal ratification of the Kyoto Protocol on Greenhouse emissions comes into force, the Centennial Park cemetery in the South Australian state capital of Adelaide said it had studied the carbon impact of burials and cremations. While cremations initially produce more carbon emissions than a burial, cemetery chief executive Bryan Elliott said over time, burials ended up producing about 10 percent more greenhouse gas.

Peak Energy - [Zero. Now](#)

Alex Steffen has an essay up at WorldChanging recommending that we need to be shifting to zero carbon emissions immediately. I'm a little uncomfortable with the claim that we are in overshoot at present though. Personally I define the onset of overshoot as the point at the population exceed's the planet's theoretical carrying capacity (something we are nowhere near) or goes beyond the point from which it is still possible to adjust back to a sustainable state without the occurrence of some manifestation of collapse. Using this definition we aren't in overshoot - however we do need to re-engineer industrial civilisation so that it is on a sustainable footing, in order to avoid this happening in future. Aiming for zero carbon emissions is a good start towards this goal.

SMH - [Parched state now right as rain in parts](#)

THE long drought is finally lifting across much of NSW as good rains reach further inland. The proportion of NSW that is drought declared has fallen to 40.3 per cent, down from 46.1 per cent in January. Areas declared marginal dropped from 21 per cent to 16 per cent, and 43.7 per cent of NSW is now classified satisfactory.

Peak Energy - [The Problem of Growth](#)

Jeff Vail has finished off his series on "The Problem of Growth" with a post called "Implementing Rhizome at the Community Level". His summary of the series is quoted

below. Jeff also suggests reading John Robb's "The Resilient Community".

While I like Jeff's ideas about rhizome, as I'm one of the Roddenberry's mentioned I guess I should make some comment about promoters of technological fixes basing their beliefs on faith rather than reason. Personally I was quite prepared to accept the collapse scenario as being the likely outcome - until I'd investigated all the alternatives to oil (and other fossil fuels) after which I concluded that there is far more energy available from renewable sources - specifically solar thermal (and possibly PV / thin film), wind, geothermal, ocean energy, hydro, biogas / biomass and "negawatts", coupled with varying forms of energy storage and demand management - than we will ever need.

Most of these (with the exception of the high tech variants of solar power and using smart grids for managing demand) don't seem to add to our overall level of complexity either - they are no more complex than coal fired power, and can be deployed on a microgrid / community scale if required.

While I'm still prepared to accept that some countries / regions / companies / individuals won't handle the post peak transition comfortably, I think that many will - and these will be the successes of the coming decades.

This isn't meant to imply any criticism of individuals or groups pursuing permaculture or "transition town" style strategies - there is plenty of scope for people to respond in different ways. Nor does it mean that I think that rhizome can't or won't emerge - just that a full scale collapse of industrial civilisation is unlikely to be the trigger for this.

Peak Energy - [The Science Unfair](#)

Grist points to some articles on the recent congregation of climate "skeptics" (what is the correct word for a group of climate skeptics - an asylum ?) in New York, where modern day pseudo-science was celebrated as an act of rebellion (albeit one funded by the richest corporations around).

Peak Energy - [Fat Power](#)

This is pretty old (2005) but I just can't resist it - CalorieLab has an article on a Kiwi adventurer who wants to break a power boat speed record using fuel derived from human fat. Given the western world's obesity epidemic, perhaps part of the solution to peak oil is walking around in front of us, just waiting to be liposuctioned....

Peak Energy - [Short Takes](#) (weekly link roundup)



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