

*Climate Change — Adjournment Debate*

**HON ROBIN CHAPPLE (Mining and Pastoral)** [10.11 pm]: I rise tonight to talk further about the issue of climate change. I have no doubt that on 11 November all members assembled in this place would have paused at 11 minutes past 11 o'clock in their busy schedules for one minute of silent remembrance. This one minute a year is perhaps the only 60 seconds in which the majority of Australians are united in remembrance of the grievous and, in many cases, unnecessary loss of life experienced by our armed forces from Gallipoli in 1915 to Tarin Kowt in 2009. We are reminded annually that these 60 seconds are a faint echo of the unity and shared purpose experienced by the Australian public in the war from 1914 to 1918 and, most particularly, in the war from 1939 to 1945. It is no doubt an echo muffled by embellishment, but I think that history demonstrates that in the Second World War especially, the vast majority of Australians were prepared to make tremendous sacrifices, to adjust their priorities in life and to accept bold, decisive and far-reaching government policy under the partnership of Curtin and Chifley. Citizens whose homes lay on each side of the border in that war were equally determined to support their country and, most of all, their communities in the face of adversity, hardship and danger. I think that because that adversity was tangible and immediate—the troops massing across the English Channel, the Volga or the Timor Sea, or the bombers devastating Manchester, Dresden or Tokyo—it was easier in a sense for the generation in 1939, which was already hardened by an earlier great financial crisis, to make these sacrifices.

In today's struggle to mitigate the causes and impacts of dangerous climate change, there is no looming monolithic adversary to pin our frustrations and fears upon. I do not make reference to the sacrifices made in the Second World War in an idle appeal to historic sentiment; I refer to this period of trauma and sacrifice with the following passage in mind from the German Advisory Council on Global Change on the urgency of capping global emissions within the next six years to 2015. It states —

Delaying the peak year —

For CO<sub>2</sub> emissions —

even further to 2020 could necessitate global emissions reduction rates of up to 9 % per year — i.e. reductions on an almost inconceivable scale, entailing technological feats and social sacrifices on a scale comparable to those of the Allied mobilization during the Second World War. Whatever the details, there is thus no option but to halt the hitherto unabated rise in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions as quickly as possible ...

The effects of dangerous climate change are already beginning to affect our lives, but in a creeping fashion. A particularly deadly bushfire, a drying river system and a displaced island population are dangerous and deadly indeed, but are only a taste of what we face if the climate really gets out of control. There are no bombs or bullets and there is no Hitler or Tojo to blame it on. Fundamentally, each of us is responsible for this crisis. The cumulative effect of our current energy consumption, our transport needs and our luxuries is more than the atmosphere can reasonably bear. Our collective refusal to acknowledge this is, I believe, at the core of our emasculated response to dangerous climate change.

As a policymaker, it is easy to find the courage to take action in the face of an enemy nation or a short-term natural disaster. The policymaker is almost guaranteed the support of the public, and the cold reality of conflict or an emergency situation is generally sufficient to trump the everyday political concerns, other than the concerns to get the policy right. It is not so easy to find that courage when the adversary is oneself, one's community, one's country or, indeed, one's species. Just as it takes great self-awareness, courage and patience for an individual to recognise some unhealthy physiological trait and to take steps to manage or eliminate it, it is very difficult for a community to look inwards, to identify practices that are damaging the community's long-term prospects and to make changes to mitigate those practices.

I believe that the causes of climate apathy are manifold and do not exclude corporate or political self-interest, the howls of climate sceptics, a lack of widespread understanding of a complex bit of science, and legitimate concerns over the impact of current policy. However, I think that the underlying reason for the apathy that mutes this crisis and prevents us as decision makers, as Australians and as humans from taking bold and united action to mitigate emissions and from making significant changes or even sacrifices in our lifestyles and priorities in order to prevent climate catastrophe is psychological. It is much easier to make those concerns known when governments and Parliaments have the courage to take those self-recognising steps and to make those changes first—in other words, to lead.

I urge all members to take those steps in tackling climate change. I urge members to look at how they can make effective changes to their own everyday practices. I urge ministers and members to look at how they can assist others to make the same changes, be they part of their portfolio or electorate duties. For the sake of our children and of future generations, and the viability of the state, the country and the planet, I urge members to lead.

