



A Vision Splendid or Selective Myopia: Exploiting the Australia 2020 Summit

Posted by [Phil Hart](#) on February 7, 2008 - 6:59pm in [The Oil Drum: Australia/New Zealand](#)

Topic: [Policy/Politics](#)

Tags: [australia](#), [government](#) [[list all tags](#)]

This is a guest post by Ian Longfield from Peak Oil Awareness Campaign.

The new Australian government has [announced](#) a giant talkfest in April [[also discussed here](#)] in which 1000 experts will be gathered for weekend to discuss the big ideas of our times which will be manifest between now and 2020.

2020 of course, is as catchy as *Kevin07*, and provides a curious timeline which gives an approximate outlook of twelve years, about the same lifetime of recent federal governments, and probably a reasonable expectation of this one.

The talkfest reminds me of Gough Whitlams approach when he first came to power, promising to consult widely and govern in partnership with the people. Of course Whitlam soon found out that giving everyone a say was the best way to paralyze any sort of decision making and at least Kevin Rudd has made it clear that his ministers will pick and choose the best ideas to come out of the summit.



The hand picked thousand people will be divided into ten areas as follows and will be charged with presenting the

1. Future directions for the Australian economy – including education, skills, training, science and innovation as part of the nation’s productivity agenda
2. Economic infrastructure, the digital economy and the future of our cities
3. Population, sustainability, climate change, and water
4. Future directions for rural industries and rural communities
5. A long-term national health strategy – including the challenges of preventative health, workforce planning and the ageing population
6. Strengthening communities, supporting families and social inclusion
7. Options for the future of indigenous Australia
8. Towards a creative Australia: the future of the arts, film and design
9. The future of Australian governance: renewed democracy, a more open government (including the role of the media), the structure of the Federation and the rights and responsibilities of citizens
10. Australia’s future security and prosperity in a rapidly changing region and world.

In addition to those participating in the Summit, all Australians will be invited to make submissions on each of the 10 future challenges. These will be submitted to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet which will act as the secretariat for the Summit. An Australia 2020 website will provide a digital forum for this purpose, which is an excellent way for TOD’ers to at least have a say.

Peak Oil touches nearly every one of these areas to a greater or lesser degree. Each one of them could be the subject of an individual essay but it is the first four and the last which really require the greatest revolution in public policy thinking through the paradigm of peak oil.

Despite the press release making all the right noises about seeking ideas, listening to the experts and being generally “open”, the explanatory background is rather prescriptive about what the government expects to hear. Take this gem under the Population, sustainability, climate change, and water heading.

“As the driest inhabited continent in the world, Australia is more vulnerable to climate change than almost any other developed nation and we need a comprehensive plan to facilitate population growth.”

Perhaps we need a comprehensive plan to limit population growth as the best response, but it seems that is not what the government wants to hear.

And this under the Future Directions of the Australian Economy:

“How we best prepare for a global economy that will increasingly be based upon advanced skills, advanced technology, low carbon energy sources and integration with global supply chains“

Some big assumptions here too, that the global economy will be increasing and will be based on virtuous skills rather than manufactured things. Of course the things that are made (in China) will magically materialize out of low carbon energy. Solar produced steel and plastics should be an interesting challenge.

The summit will also examine the design of our cities for maximum efficiency, rather than maximum livability, and will push the ubiquitous high speed broad band into every nook and cranny of our lives in the name of service delivery.

Pushing the Envelope

This summit presents peak oil activists with an opportunity to challenge some of the fundamental assumptions that policy makers rely on. Getting heard however is the first challenge.

The peak oil argument is not difficult to understand when you approach it with an open, but skeptical, mind. Skepticism is a useful scientific method for challenging assumptions that may be false and peak oil should be approached the same way. Peak Oil converts have mostly come to the realization that this is a serious issue because they have tested and challenged each piece of the puzzle and come to the logical conclusion that peak oil and its consequences are as real as it gets.

Many useful primers are available from TOD and elsewhere which explain clearly and succinctly the geological reasons and history of peak oil production in various fields and regions around the world. There is now also a weight of official reports from Hirsch, US GAO, Australia's Senate Committee report from 2007, McNamara in Queensland, Energy Watch etc along with the guarded language from the International Energy Agency which is now trying to back away from its previous optimism. Even the oil majors such as Shell, Chevron, Total have all come out in recent years with veiled warnings that the easy oil is dwindling.

The challenge then is to prick the bubble firstly around two key assumptions that challenge the price to search for more information. Those two assumptions are:

1. That oil and its finished products will always be plentiful
2. That oil will always be relatively inexpensive

Think about your own experience in discovering peak oil. It is highly likely that the two assumptions were an intrinsic part of your belief system. It was only when you read, heard or were presented with something that challenged that belief, which made you sit up and say "Hey that can't be right. That doesn't gel with my plans for a consumer driven life. I better find out about this so I can dismiss it and go back to sleep". But as you peeled back every layer and discovered more, you became more convinced (and probably a little depressed) that peak oil was real, and your whole world suddenly turned upside down.

Getting to that tipping point can be a lengthy process, and a journey that many people are unwilling to take. Policy makers however do not have the right to remain uninformed simply because it threatens their agenda or position. That our elected leaders, and the non-elected but equally influential lobby groups that advise them, choose to remain ignorant or silent about long term oil supply is a failure of the democratic system, to fulfill its promise of long term relative peace, stability and economic benefit for the participants.

The Australia 2020 Summit, while flawed, is an opportunity for the Australian Peak Oil community to rediscover our democratic voice and speak up about the crazy assumptions upon which Mr Rudd wants to launch us into the future with.

My proposal for action therefore revolves around three things:

1. Nomination of prominent peak oilers who can form a cadre of experts from which the selection committee can invite delegates.
2. Grassroots campaign to flood the 2020 Summit Website when it is launched with Peak Oil information that specifically addresses the areas of concern.
3. Creation of a Peak Oil briefing paper for distribution to all delegates to the summit if indeed that is possible.

Having an event like this summit to focus on is a great opportunity and can deliver both the embryonic stages of a concerted unified lobby group, among those peak oilers who are not yet ready to abandon all hope, and maybe, just maybe, we can prick a few bubbles and gain some influential new comrades in the process.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 United States License](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/).