

Climate change can happen without us

By **Robin Boom**, *Agronomist*



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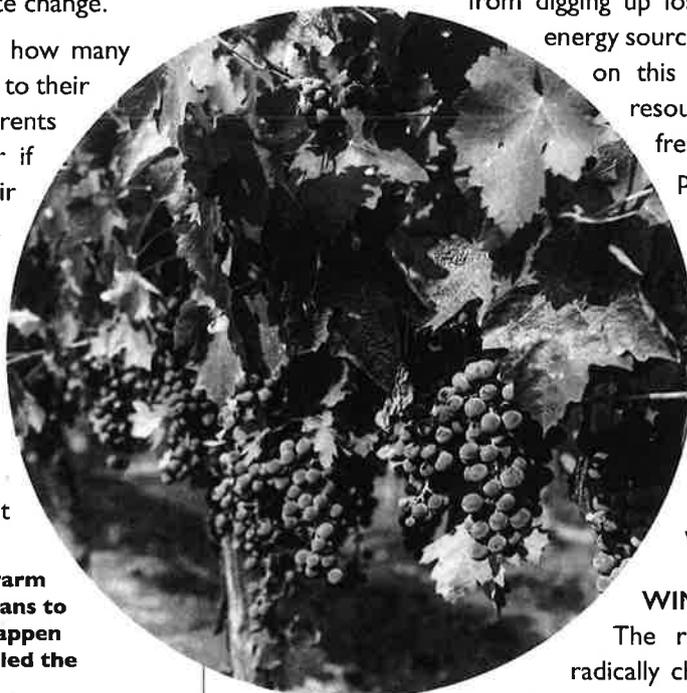
The government recently called for submissions on the proposed **Climate Change Response (Zero Carbon) Bill** which closed on July 16.

Farmers were urged to make submissions because agriculture accounts for around half of the nation's total greenhouse gas emissions. Introducing a carbon tax along the lines of an Emissions Trading Scheme would make the viability of many farming enterprises more difficult, and along with the much trumpeted 'billion tree' directive, large tracts of land now in agriculture are likely to go back into forestry – both indigenous and exotic. Trees are deemed the saviour from rampant global warming, acting as carbon sinks, giving us all breathing space for technology to improve and reduce our dependence on fossil fuels.

SKEPTICISM VS DOGMA

On May 24, 2019, we saw school children around the country go on strike and protest at city centres, and also on Parliament grounds, declaring the government and councils were doing nothing about rampant climate change.

One could cynically wonder how many of those children were driven to their city centres by protective parents in their gas-guzzling cars, or if they were consistent in their protest message and took public transport, or better still either walked or cycled to these events. In my own school days 50 years ago, being driven to school was a rare treat, and only happened when it was bucketing down with rain. Ninety-nine percent



Some 2,000 years ago it was warm enough in Britain for the Romans to grow grapes. This could not happen for 1,500 years until 1850 - called the Little Ice Age.

of the time it was either walk or cycle the one kilometre trip to and from my local schools. Today, driving through the city close to when school starts or finishes, there is a marked increase in traffic volumes as children are dropped off and picked up en-masse. Students cycling to school are almost a novelty.

On June 20, 2019, the Wellington City Council declared a climate emergency, stating that protecting the environment and climate change issues need to be front and centre in all decision making. Many contend that the future of life on this planet is on a knife-edge, and that we humans are largely responsible for this crisis, and if urgent action is not taken there is imminent impending doom. The world is at an ecological tipping point. In as few as 10, 20 or 30 years' time, there will be irreversible and serious consequences unless there are radical changes in the way we live our lives.

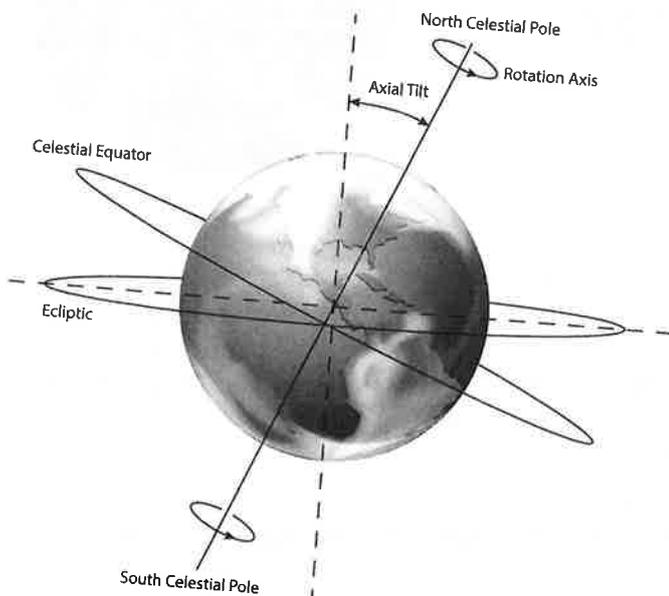
Now don't get me wrong, I am not a nay-sayer or complete climate change skeptic, as I do think there are consequences from digging up fossil fuels and burning them as an energy source. I also think the human population

on this planet is nearing its capacity as resources for minerals, top soil and fresh water become exhausted; and pollution of our air, water and land continues almost unabated. These potential crisis points must be attended to, some with more urgency than others, but there is a quasi heated religious fervour in the climate change dogma, feeding fear and peril into young minds, and we need to stop and catch our breath and see the wood from the trees.

WINDING BACK THE CLOCK

The reality is that climate has been radically changing on this planet for millions of years. Over the past two million years there have been a series of ice ages and warming periods, driven by

Axial Tilt of the Earth



the Earth's axial tilt and orbit around the sun. Around 12,000 years ago at the end of the last ice age, northern Britain was covered in huge glaciers, and our own Southern Alps were covered by a massive ice sheet. This ice age, which peaked around 22,000 years ago, is called the Late Glacial Maximum, and from about 19,000 years ago until 6,000 years ago, as these ice sheets melted, the sea levels rose 120 metres, about 1 metre per century - double what it is expected to in this current century. Therefore, cries of sea levels rising alarmingly fast are in line with what took place naturally for over 12,000 years, with no human influence whatsoever. As ice melts, sea levels rise. Two thousand years ago, it was warm enough in Britain for the Romans to grow grapes, something which could not happen for the 1,500 years of the Little Ice Age which ended about 1850. This is why climate alarmists use the date 1850 as their benchmark, claiming global temperatures have risen by 0.8 degrees Celsius since then. They avoid saying that the world got colder for 1,500 years after the time of Julius Caesar and Jesus Christ, and even today it is no warmer than it was 2,000 years ago.

The polar ice caps have not existed for most of the time biological life has been on this planet. We are currently in an interglacial period. Antarctica has its own oil and coal reserves from plant life that once existed on this now barren, frozen, uninhabitable continent.

As the northern ice cap disappears, polar bears will struggle to survive, and there will be other major dynamics taking

place in the ecology of the arctic environment, such as narwhal, walrus and beluga whales being hunted by orcas. Some small Pacific Islands may disappear and equatorial countries may become increasingly hostile places to live due to heat waves. Coral reefs may disappear, and Greenland and Alaska may become food bowls in their own right, fit for large scale human migration and habitation.

The forces driving these changes are largely the same forces that have been causing changes for millions of years; though there is little doubt that the claimed 'hockey stick' effect of increase in CO₂ levels from burning of fossil fuels is contributing to seasonal fluctuations. But the claimed impact may be highly inflated.

Taking a long-term view of our planet, when CO₂ levels were five times higher than they are today, in the Jurassic period, speciation [the formation of new and distinct species by evolution] occurred on a massive scale. In all likelihood, with such high CO₂ levels, plants grew prolifically. This explains why the massive herbivorous dinosaurs grew so large. A lot of this excess CO₂ has since been incorporated into coal and oil reserves, which we have been mining for the past 200 to 300 years, and are now putting back into the atmosphere. But, it is highly unlikely we will ever see CO₂ levels get anywhere near the levels they were 250 million years ago.

According to Sydney University geologist, Professor Ian Plimer, five of the six major ice ages occurred when CO₂ levels were up to 1,000 times higher than they are today, and for half of Earth's history this CO₂ has been naturally sequestered into algal reefs, coral reefs, sediments, altered rocks, bacteria, plants, soil and oceans. That process is still taking place.

The atmosphere currently contains only 0.001 percent of all carbon at the surface of the earth, most of which is contained in sedimentary rocks like limestone; the oceans contain almost 50 times more CO₂ than the atmosphere.

Beneath the Earth's crust there are untold carbon reserves which get belched out via volcanoes, thermal vents, tectonic plate shifts etcetera. All of these factors, as well as the tilt of the Earth and its proximity to the sun, have a much greater influence on our changing climate than any human induced greenhouse effect. So, thinking we can change the climate may be akin to the legendary King Canute's attempt at stopping the tide from coming in.

It didn't work.

In my next column I will discuss some consequences of meeting our obligations under the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

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