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Econote No.106 IPCC Climate Change 2021. The UN report- Read and weep 17 August 2021

Summary and conclusions:

If you are over 70, no need to worry, by the time that humanity will bake, freeze, drown, starve or be swept away you won't be there to participate. As Woody Allen said, "I am not afraid of death, I just don't want to be there when it happens". The basic report of 354 pages long, plus Press Release, plus Summary for Policy Makers, plus, plus... makes, by comparison, the Tibetan Book of the Dead positively light reading for the weekend.

Basically, we have till about 2050 to keep within the 1.5C degrees of global warming by hitting globally zero CO2 emissions. (NB zero, not nets, offsets, neutrals or other definitional palliatives). If not: **"The report projects that in the coming decades climate changes will increase in all regions. For 1.5°C of global warming, there will be increasing heat waves, longer warm seasons and shorter cold seasons. At 2°C of global warming, heat extremes would more often reach critical tolerance thresholds for agriculture and health...."** (IPCC, Press Release)

Global responses: corporate and governmental

1. Muted and mostly blah- blah, for the main reason that nothing in the Report is new, except the starkness of the conclusions backed a humongous amount of academic and scientific research. This makes it difficult to claim that it is all a "huge satanic conspiracy by pyromaniac, pedophile groups" bent to destroy civilization as we know it. But then, what could the reactions have been other than expressing support and concern and look forward to the UN meeting in Glasgow in November 2021 which will decide what actions to take on the basis of this Report.

2. Ah.... but responses could vary.

(A) Australian senator Matthew Canavan described the report as "fear porn" and said that the panel that drafted it "was always warning that the sky is falling in and it never does" (24France, 10/8/2021). He added, as an afterthought in a Tweet "Whether people knew if the Taliban would sign up for net zero ". Slightly more restrained, Oz Prime Minister Scott Morrison said that Australia would not adopt a firm and quantifiable net zero target and would rely instead on technological change to make the whole thing go away. (France24 10/8/21)

(B) "Don't rinse plates before putting them in the dishwasher, freeze old bread and ditch plastic shower gel bottles to save the planet," says Boris Johnson's Climate Change spokeswoman Allegra Stratton (Mail on line 16/8/2021). In all fairness she said all that a few days before the UN Report was released, but....

3. Question: What are the chances that the more than 190 countries who signed off the research will take the necessary action to eliminate CO2 emissions altogether by 2050?

Answer: Zero

Why ?:

(A) For a start the first and second biggest emitters of CO₂ are China and India and neither of them would be willing to suppress their growth rates for the next 30 years. Instead they will point the finger at the US, EU and Japan, the second, fourth and eighth biggest emitters and ask them to do the honours since they were busy polluting the atmosphere since the start of the 20th century in order to grow their economies to stellar sizes.

(Data for 2019, BBC, May 2021)

(B) For another reason, production of electricity is the main polluting activity (44.3% of all CO₂ emissions in 2020) and it is driven mostly by burning coal and gas (63.0% of all electricity was produced by fossil fuels). So to cut emissions dramatically we must either reduce dramatically the use of electricity or increase dramatically the production of electricity by wind, solar and hydro sources (and...ooops.. A Power, but we don't want that, do we now ?). And all that by 2050. Seriously? (Data from Statista, estimates for 2020)

A sobering example of the task ahead

One of the most pressing tasks in front of us is replacing the global stock of petrol-driven vehicles, both passenger and commercial, with Electric Vehicles (EVs) . Motor transport accounts for about 21.0% of global CO₂ emissions. Consider the following statistics (all data from various issues of Statista and RFI DTIRES, data for 2020 are mostly mid year estimates)

(A) In 2020 there about **1.42 billion** motor vehicles in the world:

1.06 bl passenger and 0.363 commercial and , of all those, EVs accounted for 6.8 to 10.0 ml, a max 0.7% of total (EVs numbers vary)

(B) 2020 global motor sales (ml) All sales fell during 2019-20

Passenger 55.8, Light commercial 17.2, Heavy commercial 4.3, Heavy buses and coaches 0.210. **Total 77.5 ml**, with EVs sales at 0.231 ml or 0.29% of total.

Based on the 2020 data assume, completely unrealistically, that ALL production of petrol cars was stopped immediately and was replaced by EVs only and, hence, ALL motor sales were EVs. It will then take about 19 years, on a yearly rate, to replace all the petrol vehicles in the world by EVs, that is $1420/77.5 = \text{apprx } 19$. The assumption made here is totally unrealistic, but it shows the extent of the urgency to remove about 20.0% of global CO₂ emissions caused by motor transport. Admittedly the current production of EVs is miniscule in proportion and it is bound to increase steeply, but even with the most optimistic assumptions the world may need a minimum of half a century or more to even begin to make a dent on car pollution.

So what is going to happen ?

More of the same of what is happening now, that is genuine efforts to reduce CO₂ emissions but nowhere near that required to avoid the catastrophe awaiting in, and beyond 2050. Linus of the "Peanuts" summarised it brilliantly (With full attribution to Collectpeanuts.com)

