

## Opportunities Beyond Carbon



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*Looking Forward to a Sustainable World*

Edited by John O'Brien



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## Contents

Foreword	viii
<i>Professor Sir David King</i>	
Introduction	1
<b>Part I: Setting the Scene</b>	<b>11</b>
1 When Words Fail: Climate Change Activists Have Chosen a Magic Number	15
<i>Bill McKibben</i>	
2 What Holds Us Back from the Big Shift? Time to Stop the Hand-Wringing and Start Envisioning What We Really Want	19
<i>Dr Sam Wells</i>	
3 Towards a Fossil Fuel-Free Future	28
<i>Professor Stephen Lincoln</i>	
4 Communicating Complexity in the Carbon-Aware World	52
<i>Garth Lamb</i>	
<b>Part 2: Community Opportunities</b>	<b>61</b>
5 Building Better Communities	65
<i>Allan Tranter</i>	
6 The Carbon Economy: A New Imperative for Acting Locally	73
<i>Maggie Hine</i>	
7 Assumption Traps and a Future Vision	86
<i>Andrew Dickson</i>	

8	Transport Opportunities: Towards a Resilient City <i>Professor Peter Newman</i>	98
<b>Part 3: Business Opportunities</b>		<b>117</b>
9	The Business Case for Going Beyond Carbon <i>Dan Atkins and Nick Palousis</i>	121
10	The Cleantech Opportunity <i>John O'Brien</i>	134
11	Water Industry Cleantech Solutions <i>Joe Flynn</i>	142
12	Branding Beyond Carbon <i>Fraser Bell</i>	154
13	Reasons to Be Cheerful <i>Dave Sag</i>	165
<b>Part 4: Investor Opportunities</b>		<b>169</b>
14	The Instrumentalisation of Carbon <i>Tenke Zoltáni</i>	173
15	The Fund Manager's Perspective <i>Lisa Wade</i>	184
16	Coming into View: Environmental, Social and Governance Sustainability for Institutional Investors <i>Frances Magill and Nicholas Taylor</i>	190
17	Riding Out along the Clean Energy Efficient Frontier <i>Mark Schneider</i>	205
18	Green Investing: Towards a Clean Energy Infrastructure <i>Chris Greenwood</i>	210
<b>Part 5: National Opportunities</b>		<b>221</b>
19	Building Australia as a Solar Nation <i>The Hon Greg Hunt, MP</i>	225

20	Building Blocks for a Clean Future <i>Kristin Alford</i>	237
21	Things Aren't Always What They Seem: Jumping Hurdles to a Post-Carbon Lifestyle <i>Tony Cutcliffe</i>	245
22	The Best Crisis We Ever Had! <i>Stewart Taggart</i>	256
23	Pursuing Clean Energy Business in India: Overcoming Barriers, Finding Solutions <i>Peter Castellás and Erin Kuo</i>	270
	<b>Part 6: Global Opportunities</b>	<b>285</b>
24	Protecting Today, Promising Tomorrow <i>Amanda McKenzie</i>	289
25	Student Visions of the Opportunities Beyond Carbon <i>Joel Amos, Jack O'Brien and Lucas Lovell</i>	305
26	The Looming Peak Coal and Peak Phosphate Crises: Disaster or Opportunities for Innovation? <i>Professor Barry Brook and Stewart Taggart</i>	311
27	Australia's Emissions Contribution: Does It Matter? <i>Dr Monica Oliphant</i>	317
28	The Way We Were: Looking Back from 2100 <i>Dr John Wright</i>	330
	Acknowledgements	340
	Contributors	342
	Selected Bibliography	350
	Index	352

## Foreword

*Professor Sir David King*

As the colonists of North America extended their fingers west towards the Pacific and east to the Atlantic, that huge expanse of untamed territory became known as the land of opportunity. Land was plentiful and free for a while, but by 1900—even before the Union was complete—there was no land left to claim; it was already owned by someone.

Australia is more than three-quarters the size of the United States but, unlike North America, still has vast areas of hostile and unclaimed wilderness. It also boasts huge natural resources—not least solar power and other renewable energy sources. With climate change now the greatest threat we face, and with carbon cuts worldwide the greatest challenge we have ever been set, Australia has become the new land of opportunity.

There can never have been a more apt time to publish *Opportunities Beyond Carbon*. This year has seen the worst wildfires in Australia for more than 100 years—in Victoria—while floods have devastated land and livelihoods in New South Wales, Western Australia and Queensland.

More than 200 people died in Victoria, and at one stage more than 60 per cent of Queensland was under water, the floods lasting

for over a month and costing more than \$200 million. Climate change could well have been a significant factor in these tragic and costly disasters.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd came to power in 2007 on a wave of brave manifestos and pledges. Among them was the promise to make his country do its bit to tackle climate change. One of the first things he did was to sign the Kyoto treaty, binding Australia to greenhouse-gas cuts. Most developed countries had long since signed, and Australia, and even more significantly the United States, had stood out among those nations still sticking their heads in the sand.

But lifting its head must only be the start for Australia, and Mr Rudd is under pressure to toughen his government's policies on climate change, not least to try to prevent any repeats of the disasters Australia suffered earlier this year.

And that is where Australia can seize perhaps its greatest opportunity. The world's toughest problem ever could be, as Stewart Taggart says in his essay, the best crisis Australia ever had.

It is the developing countries that will suffer first from the impacts of climate change; some already are. In global terms, some of them are not that far from the Australian coast. All 10 000 residents of the Tuvalu islands and atolls, midway between Australia and Hawaii, are at risk as sea levels rise. And two of the thirty-three islands of Kiribati, also in the Pacific, have already gone under, while others were flooded so badly in 2005 that farmland was destroyed, wells contaminated with sea water and homes and a hospital inundated.

*Opportunities Beyond Carbon* points out that Australia, a much richer nation, is equally ripe for damage. Its dry climate and delicate coastline mean it will suffer more, and more quickly, than other developed countries.

This book rightly suggests that businesses that take on board those threats, and grab the opportunities climate change presents, could become industry leaders. Those that do not will be left behind.

The credit crunch could hamper plans to invest in renewables and other large-scale carbon-saving measures. In Britain, plans for large wind farms are at risk because of local planning difficulties. At the same time, there is relatively little government backing for carbon storage from coal burning despite coal being perhaps the cheapest

and most widely available energy source. No industry will invest without the backing of confident and determined government and a good policy on carbon-dioxide pricing.

And so back to Australia, which can steal a march on the Poms by forging ahead with renewable developments. Australia emits just 1.2 per cent of the world's carbon, according to data used in Monica Oliphant's essay. Yet Monica also shows that 90 per cent of the globe's 205 countries emit fewer emissions than Australia.

We are all obliged to act—not least Australia—and *Opportunities Beyond Carbon* shows how Australia can do its bit to slow climate change by becoming a major exporter of clean-energy technology. If Australia does this, we may become the new land of opportunity.