



The State Government's climate change summit is being held today. Victoria is about to deal with some troubling home truths. **Adam Morton** reports.

**P**ROFESSOR David Karoly is as respected a climate scientist as you will find in Australia.

He co-wrote the final report of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Along with Al Gore, the IPCC was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for shaping public awareness of the effects of global warming.

After a stint working in the US, Karoly accepted a federation fellowship at Melbourne University and returned to Victoria last year. On climate change policy, he has not been impressed with what he has found.

He sees a contradiction. On one hand, Premier John Brumby claims the Victorian Government is an international leader in tackling climate change. On the other, the emission of heat-trapping greenhouse gases from the state's brown-coal-fired power plants is spiralling — up about a quarter since 1990 on the most recent figures.

Transport emissions were up

by 26% over the same period. Taking into account declining emissions from forestry and waste, the overall rise is smaller — about 12%. But energy accounts for two-thirds of the state's emissions and it keeps going up and, according to Government transport supremo Sir Rod Eddington, Melbourne needs an east-west tunnel to meet the demands of a 30% rise in car trips by 2031.

"Victoria is leading, but it might not be leading in quite the ways the Premier would like," Professor Karoly says.

"Victoria is leading the way in terms of brown coal, which is a very inefficient way of generating electricity in terms of its carbon emissions. It's leading the way in high emissions per person (from energy) because of the brown coal. Yet it hasn't had substantial programs for wind power, so the wind turbine manufacturing plant in Portland had to close."

This is the challenge facing the 120 climate change experts and interest groups that will turn up to Parliament House today for the State Govern-

ment's inaugural climate change summit.

On the agenda is how the state will adapt in the face of rising temperatures and diminishing rainfall, how a national emissions trading system that forces businesses to pay for the right to emit their greenhouse gas will work, and how vulnerable and low-income families will be supported as electricity and petrol prices soar.

Also on the list: how will the state cut emissions from energy production.

This, many scientists and environmentalists say, is the real question — how can the state seriously claim to be tackling climate change when it continues to rely on brown coal for 95% of its electricity?

Until recently, the cheap abundance of brown coal in the Latrobe Valley was seen as a geological gift from the gods.

But the days of it being cheap are numbered. The introduction of an emissions trading scheme from 2010, which will force businesses to



buy pollution permits to emit carbon dioxide, will hit brown coal — the dirtiest fossil fuel — hardest. Brown-coal-fired plants emit up to 50% more greenhouse gas than the black-coal stations used in NSW and Queensland.

The Brumby Government shows no intention of weaning itself off brown coal. A summit paper released by the Premier yesterday says the massive reserves of brown coal will continue to play an important role in the state's energy mix. A Government spokesman yesterday reiterated that a fifth brown coal power station to supply the state's baseload power was inevitable.

To combat the resulting surge of emissions, the state is placing its faith in largely untried "clean coal" technology — in its most common form, capturing carbon as it is emitted, compressing it into liquid form and injecting it kilometres beneath the Earth's surface.

A \$40 million experimental project was launched in Warrnambool in the state's south-west earlier this week, but even its backers acknowledge it will be approaching a decade before it can be used on a commercial scale, if it is successful.

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TIM ORTON

They also warn it will not be able to be fitted on the oldest, dirtiest power stations, such as the Latrobe Valley's Hazelwood generator — the worst energy polluter in the country.

According to Karoly, and most observers, the State Government has taken some good steps. These include spending more than \$187 million developing energy sources with low emissions, setting up Australia's first energy efficiency program for industry. But its target of cutting emissions by 60% by 2050 has been overtaken by worsening scientific predictions, and Karoly says it has misrepresented how much it is doing in the face of what the science now tells us. That is, that global emissions have to peak by 2010 and be cut by about 80% by 2050 to prevent a global temperature rise of more than two degrees and the ramifications that flow from it — starvation, species extinction and rising seas flooding lowlands.

"We might have already missed the deadline, which means for Victoria that it has to have a peak in its emissions now and start to reduce them," Karoly says.

While the brown-coal question is likely to go unanswered, the Victorian Government hopes to go some of the way today towards addressing some of these concerns.

A report commissioned from consultants the Nous Group will, for the first time, show how the state might achieve its target of cutting emissions by 60% by 2050.

It estimates Victoria could cut greenhouse gas emissions by up to a third by 2020, largely by just becoming more efficient — improving agriculture and fuel and energy use, boosting renewable energy, converting wasted heat and landfill into energy.

Factor in "clean coal", which also includes drying brown coal before use, and it could lead to a 47% cut by 2050. The report

concludes that the 60% target will be within sight once new innovations over the next four decades are taken into account.

Nous group managing director Tim Orton, who will present the paper today, says the Victorian Government has led the way in its analysis and piloting of ways to tackle climate change, but said its biggest challenge remained the energy supply.

"It would be fair to say that because we generate most of our electricity from brown coal, the challenges would be more significant for us than other states whose energy sources have a smaller footprint," he says.

Climate Institute policy director Erwin Jackson, also a discussion leader today, says the report shows what is possible if the political will is there.

That will include a massive boost in investment in renewable and "clean coal" technology. Jackson, a discussion leader at today's summit, says Victoria's climate change bill expected next year must drive investment in carbon capture and storage, and quickly.

"We need to get the bill in sooner rather than later, but everyday we delay is another day that emissions increase," he says.

"The sooner industry will know where the State Government is going and the sooner they will be able to make the investments that are required in the Victorian economy."

As Tony Nicholson, chief executive of the Brotherhood of St Laurence and another speaker today suggests, the ball will be placed firmly in the Government's court.

"I think Victoria is like the rest of the country — it's at a point where it now recognises the dimensions of the issue, but there is a long way to go in terms of policy before we get in place the type of abatement measures that we think would be required."

WITH MIKI PERKINS

PICTURE: GABRIELE CHAROTTE