

## BOOK REVIEW

Review of *Climate change: the science, impacts and solutions*, by A. Barrie Pittock (2009). Second edition. Collingwood: CSIRO/London: Earthscan. 368 pp. ISBN 978-0-64309-484-0.

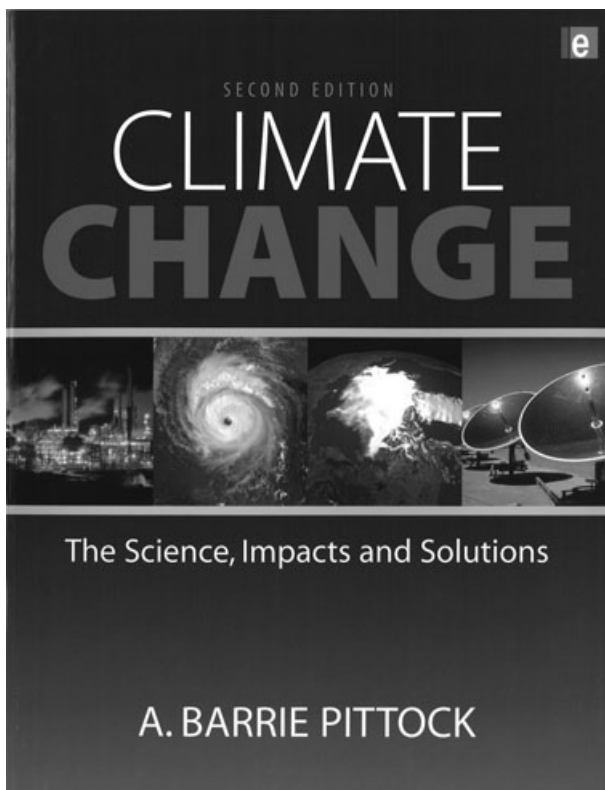
It is almost the resort of rascals to claim at the beginning of a book review that “the subject of this book has never been more topical and its publication could not be more timely”. Nonetheless, neither Barrie Pittock nor I are rascals, and the above statement is true. In fact, as I write this review, the Australian Senate, which has been held back from its Christmas recess to complete its debate on a bill to initiate greenhouse gas emissions reduction, is arguing about the cause and its possible cure. I wish I could have every member of the Senate (especially the dissenters in the Liberal Party) read the 350 pages of Barrie’s excellent book. Of course, as with all good books, they could simply read Chapter 1 “Climate change matters” and Chapter 12 “Accepting the challenge”, but as these rascals are politicians it might also be useful for them to read Chapter 10, entitled “The politics of greenhouse”.

Less frivolously, this book (in this new and updated second edition) will become an important reference for students in environmental or social sciences, policy makers, and people who are genuinely concerned about the future of our environment. It covers ground that has been well trodden by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in all four of its assessments, by Al Gore’s film *An inconvenient truth* and, just this year, by Fanny Armstrong’s movie *The age of stupid*. Topics include “Learning from the past”, “Projecting the future”, “Uncertainty is inevitable but risk is certain”, followed by specific chapters detailing what climate changes are likely, the consequential impacts, and the specifics of adaptation and mitigation strategies. In addition to this, Dr Pittock has a chapter placing climate change in a wider context, which includes stratospheric ozone, land-use change and population growth, and also in an international context, which looks at the Kyoto Protocol and the national interest of large sectors of the planet. The book includes extensive endnotes, with links to ongoing and updated references and citations.

As for peace, the desire for strategies that produce positive net benefit is hard to satisfy when little trust

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exists between nations. Barrie stresses the need to look beyond the Kyoto Protocol, and, once again, this could not be a more timely discussion as 2009 will end with the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Framework Convention on Climate Change in Copenhagen. The new material in Barrie’s second edition, which focuses on investments in large-scale renewables, such as the kind being taken up in California, as well as many smaller scale activities in individual homes and businesses, now being driven by both regulatory and market mechanisms, could serve as a “primer” for the COP participants.

Perhaps my only disagreement with this book is Barrie’s optimism. Although his message that climate change is here (and in some areas, might already be having disastrous effects) is clear, he offers hope for the future. He also proposes ideas designed to inspire people to take action, and I hope that he is successful. But, while I wish him and *Climate change: the science, impacts and solutions* “bon chance”, I am myself much less sanguine. Pittock says, “all is not doom and gloom: we can save the day” (p. 326). And goes on, “We need to reduce carbon



emissions, and we need to do it fast. Although we are facing an emergency, with an appropriate allocation of ingenuity and resources, together we can do it". I fear that my view is that we have, as a species, missed the last ship of opportunity. What is worse, we have also marooned many other species on a warming and changing planet for which we are all ill-adapted.

Nevertheless, I do very much agree with Barrie's final sentence: "We owe that, at least, to our children"

(p. 326). I very much hope that this book will go some way to persuading rascals in politics and elsewhere of the need and urgency of climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Ann Henderson-Sellers