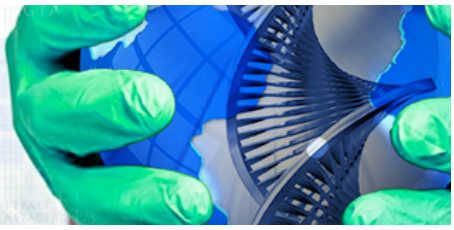
Don’t be flummoxed by Tim Flannery’s tomfoolery



Geoengineering technologies aren’t a solution to climate change

Tim Flannery’s proposed ‘third way’ is a dangerous distraction that risks diverting attention away from the urgent need to dramatically reduce the burning of fossil fuels.

What is geoengineering?

Geoengineering is the deliberate large-scale manipulation of the Earth’s natural systems. It includes a wide variety of technologies from the untested and unproven to ones with a long history of use at small scales, such as afforestation.

A third way?

Tim Flannery’s suggestion that geoengineering technologies are a ‘third way’ implies that these unproven technologies are a legitimate replacement for existing mitigation needs and technologies. While new technologies can obviously complement mitigation, they cannot solve the problem, nor can they replace the clear need for structural and behavioural changes.

Climate change is not a technological problem

Our collective failure to tackle climate change is not a failure of technology. It is the result of the systemic failure of a growth based market system and compromised political systems. Changing technologies won’t change either of these structural problems. The politics that caused climate change and has failed to address it will – unless drastic changes occur – also control these new technologies.

A distraction

Geoengineering is a distraction from proven solutions. The failure to invest, promote and implement those solutions by our leaders should not force us into promoting unproven technologies and approaches.

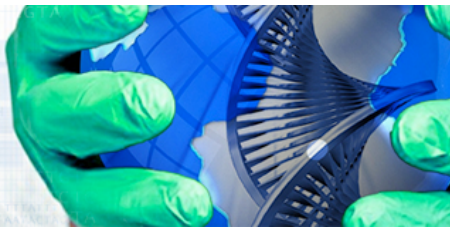
Geoengineering technologies will provide cover for our political and business leaders, offering false solutions that do not require the kind of systemic changes that we know need to occur.

Unproven and uncosted

Most of the technologies Flannery promotes such as negative emission concrete, large scale seaweed farming or carbon dioxide snow in the Antarctic are not proven technologies, do not exist at a scale that is meaningful and are uncosted and currently unsupported by governments anywhere. Flannery notes that many of the technologies he is promoting are being researched by “tiny companies.” He notes that in order for these technologies to be developed early investment by government is needed. But our government isn’t even investing in established, job creating renewable industries.

It is also important to remember that Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) was once the darling of global leaders and big business but massive government investment in CCS is now drying up in the face of insurmountable technical problems and rapidly rising costs associated with proving and scaling up the technology.

There is no evidence that the technologies that Flannery is promoting will reduce emissions at anywhere near the scale that is needed at anything near the speed that is required to address climate change.



Industrial technologies and global impacts

Some of the technologies Flannery is proposing already exist at a small scale, but are needed at an industrial scale if they are to be used to tackle climate change in any meaningful way. This may well mean unintended and unforeseen impacts - such as significant loss of habitat or food producing areas - or a carbon footprint far larger than expected. For example, tree planting is an easy and important way to reduce CO2 levels in the atmosphere. However, industrial scale proposals for tree planting however often involve large industrial monocultures of genetically modified plants that may destroy biodiversity, remove land from food production, lead to chemical and genetic pollution and displace local communities.

Not all geoengineering technologies are bad – but wise choices cannot be easily made in a broken system.

Business as usual

Many geoengineering technologies provide an excuse for decision-makers not to act – allowing powerful interests such as the fossil fuel industry, big forestry and agribusiness to undermine international efforts to deal with climate change. We cannot tackle climate change in an endless growth economy - regardless of the technology or efficiencies we develop. Carbon Capture and Storage is a classic example of a business as usual model that is designed to permit the perpetuation of a system of resource depletion, species loss, and displacement and destruction of indigenous cultures.

What are the real solutions?

Friends of the Earth recommends:

- Immediate and substantial investment in renewables;
- Immediate elimination of fossil fuel subsidies;
- Introduction of global governance mechanisms for geoengineering technologies;
- Rapid moves towards a sustainable economy.

Find out more

Visit:

http://emergingtech.foe.org.au/geoengineering/

http://www.geoengineeringmonitor.org/

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