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## Hour of no power increases emissions

Bjorn Lomborg | March 27, 2009

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**THIS Saturday, the World Wildlife Fund wants everybody on the planet to switch off their lights for an hour in a "global election between Earth and global warming", where switching off the lights "is a vote for Earth".**

In Australia, where Earth Hour started, it evidently enjoys strong support from politicians, celebrities, corporate backers and the public. The efforts this Saturday certainly will be well-intentioned. Many of us worry about global warming and would like to be part of the solution. Unfortunately, this event - as with many public proposals on climate change - is an entirely symbolic gesture that creates the mistaken impression that there are easy, quick fixes to climate change. One provincial British newspaper wrote this week: "Saving the planet could be as easy as switching off the lights in South Tyneside, green campaigners say."

It will take more than the metropolitan borough of South Tyneside, population 152,000, to solve global warming. Even if a billion people turn off their lights this Saturday, the entire event will be equivalent to switching off China's emissions for six short seconds. In economic terms, the environmental and humanitarian benefits from the efforts of the entire developed world would add up to just \$21,000.

The campaign doesn't ask anybody to do anything difficult, such as coping without heating, airconditioning, telephones, the internet, hot food or cold drinks. Conceivably, if you or I sat in our houses watching television, with the heater and computer running, we could claim we're part of an answer to global warming, so long as the lights are switched off. The symbolism is almost perverse.

In Australia last year, Earth Hour's organisers required participating businesses to pledge to reduce their emissions by 5 per cent during the following year. This year, that requirement has been dropped. "We decided we'd actually downplay (concrete cuts) this time," the chief executive of WWF Australia told *The Sunday Age*. There apparently has been no accounting of whether last year's sponsors lived up to their pledge. *The Sunday Age* reported last week: "An analysis of the key sponsors of Earth Hour reveals that most have reported increased emissions in their most recent figures."

And it gets worse: the event could cause higher overall pollution than if we just left our lights on. When asked to extinguish electricity, people turn to candlelight. Candles seem natural, but are almost 100 times less efficient than incandescent light globes, and more than 300 times less efficient than fluorescent lights. If you use one candle for each extinguished globe, you're essentially not cutting CO<sub>2</sub> at all, and with two candles you'll emit more CO<sub>2</sub>. Moreover, candles produce indoor air pollution 10 to 100 times the level of pollution caused by all cars, industry and electricity production.

No wonder that even committed climate campaigners are sceptical. Clive Hamilton, author of *Scorcher: The Dirty Politics of Climate Change*, told *The Sunday Age* last week that "we are well past the time for feel-good exercises aimed at raising awareness. It's like the band playing on as the Titanic sinks."

He said there was a real danger that Earth Hour convinced people we were making progress on climate change when we were not. And it let business and government off the hook.

There is still no cheap replacement for the carbon that we burn. This is the reason many promises of drastic CO<sub>2</sub> cuts remain just empty promises and why past global agreements to cut CO<sub>2</sub> have gone unfulfilled.

A meaningful solution to global warming needs to focus on research into and development of clean energy, instead of fixating on empty promises of carbon emission reductions.

It is vital to make solar and other new technology cheaper than fossil fuels quickly so we can turn off carbon energy sources for a lot longer than one hour and keep the planet running. Every country should agree to spend 0.05 per cent of its gross domestic product on low-carbon energy research and development. The total global cost would be 10 times greater than present spending, yet be 10 times less than the cost of the Kyoto Protocol on carbon emission reductions. This response to global warming is a realistic, achievable one.

Fossil fuels literally gave us an enlightenment, by lighting our world and giving us protection from the fury of the elements. It is ironic that today's pure symbolism should hark back to a darker age.

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