
Durban Group Discusses Carbon Trading and LNG in Astoria

by Tryan Hartill / North Coast Oregon
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Tamra Gilbertson and Kevin Smith speak at the Cannery Pier, Astoria, Oregon

As the battle over Global Warming continues on, many are looking for way cut carbon levels in the atmosphere. Today, concentrations of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere are at about 400 ppm. Before the Industrial Revolution began, this number was about 270 and has fluctuated between 180 and 300 for hundreds of thousands of years. Scientists believe that we have not seen this level since 650,000 years ago.

What to do

A large group of powerful figures have been pushing a scheme called carbon trading. This intends to limit the amount of carbon released into the atmosphere by human activity.

Carbon trading puts a cap on the amount of carbon a said area can release into the atmosphere. Since heavy polluters emit the most carbon, much of the scheme is tailored for them. If a carbon trade system is in force, it might limit the amount of carbon released to 30% of normal. A market is then formed where carbon credits are bought and sold. If a company can't reduce their levels enough, they must buy credits from another entity that has reduced levels by more than what is required. In many carbon markets, 1 credit equals 1 ton of carbon.

Supporters and opponents include a few unlikely allies. Barrack Obama, John McCain, Mike Huckabee, George Bush Sr. and Ted Kulongoski all support some type of cap and trade system. Opponents to the system feel this is just a marketing gimmick and ripe for corruption and include a number of Free-Market libertarians and many environmentalists.

The Carbon Trade industry itself also boosts major players such as Al Gore, Goldman Sachs and the World Bank. Opponents are at distinct dis-advantage because supporters are in positions of power that allow them to directly dictate policy. Some are trying to change this by taking their message directly to people around the world. One of the largest groups is Carbon Trade Watch which has teamed up with the Durban Group to tour the World spreading their message. The tour includes 4 individuals that are criss-crossing Canada and the U.S. for 3 months. Tamra Gilbertson and Kevin Smith are currently covering the West Coast, while Larry Lohmann and Jutta Kill are on the East Coast and Canada.

A Stop in Astoria

After speaking at 3pm in Olympia, Tamra Gilbertson and Kevin Smith made their way to the Cannery Pier Hotel for a 7pm presentation on Friday Night. About 50 people came to listen to the talk. Some were curious about carbon trade schemes and some wanted to learn about how to reduce their carbon footprint. But the most pressing matter to a

majority in the audience was how to better their Anti-LNG message to Oregon leaders.

Kevin Smith, who was born and raised in England, spoke first at gathering. After asking that each person in the audience give the main reason they were attending the presentation, he dove into why he thinks carbon cap and trade is a bad idea.

Cap and Trade History

Cap and Trade first appeared in a paper by John H. Dales from the University of Toronto in 1968. The first time it was used in policy was in the Clean Air Act of 1990, where it was used to curb sulfur in the air emitted by heavy polluters. This cap system is said to reduce 35% of sulfur in the air over 20 years and is often quoted by carbon trade supporters.

Smith explains while this may be true, other areas around the world saw much larger levels of sulfur reduction without a cap and trade system in place.

Smith Sulfur

The first time that actual carbon trading was discussed in policy was in 1997 during the Kyoto talks. Other countries wanted to keep the U.S. on board at the talks and agreed to a carbon cap and trade system pushed by the U.S representative Al Gore. The system made it into the final document, but the whole Kyoto Protocol was rejected by the U.S. Senate in a 95-0 vote. Other countries that signed it slowly warmed up to the idea of carbon trading and is now their main focus.

Smith Kyoto

Europe already has a carbon trading system in place called the European Union Greenhouse Gas Emission Trading Scheme. It was started in 2006 and has just finished the "first round". And Smith says it has been an absolute disaster. Not only have emissions increased, but companies are making large amounts of money from the scheme.

Smith EU Scheme

Now that there is money to be made, companies across Europe are making sure that this system is not only kept in place, but expanded through systems like the Clean Development Mechanism. And according to Smith, who attended the most recent round of climate talks in December of 2007, 7% of the 4,500 in attendance were with the carbon trading industry.

Smith Climate Talks

Smith concludes his presentation by explaining why carbon trading must be stopped and that carbon reduction needs more focus locally and without revolving around money.

Smith Conclusion

At the moment there is a large push for a carbon cap and trade system in the U.S. and 11 Bills in Congress await action.

Tamra Gilbertson on CDM

The second speaker at the presentation was Tamra Gilbertson. She was originally born in North Dakota and has lived in various parts of the world and now makes her home in Northern Spain. She is now a Coordinator of the Environmental Justice Project at the Transnational Institute. In her travels with the Institute she has witnessed many of the Clean Development Mechanism projects around the world. These projects go hand in hand with carbon trading as "offsets". Companies can break carbon caps in place if they build projects that reduce carbon footprints in developing countries. This was another addition to the Kyoto Protocol that was insisted by the U.S.

Gilbertson has recently traveled to Brazil, Indonesia and India where she has seen the CDM projects firsthand. She explains that many projects simply involve moving people and resources around and buying land to plant trees. Gilbertson first discusses a project in Brazil that involves a company called Plantar who makes car parts. Their CDM project was to plant and use eucalyptus trees instead of coal for their carbon needs. But to do this they needed large acres of land, so they bought 50,000 acres with the help of the World Bank and the locals had to move.

Gilbertson Plantar

Another CDM project that Gilbertson was familiar with was a wind project in India.

Gilbertson Wind

Gilbertson wrapped up her presentation by giving some CDM stats and figures. There are currently 2800 CDM project in the pipeline, representing 189 million carbon credits. Under the current EU system 1 credit equals 1 ton of CO₂. She also explains the downside of carbon trading and CDM projects.

Gilbertson Conclusion

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