

Introduction

Our light-bulb moment

You're concerned about climate change. So you've changed all your light bulbs, you're driving a bit less and you're having shorter showers. But you suspect those small steps aren't enough. You're right.

This book was born in a moment of shared light-bulb fatigue, after reading — or in Liz's case writing — one too many articles about the huge threats posed by climate change, running alongside tips for individual action. And the number one tip on the list was always: 'change your light bulbs!'

As well-intentioned as that tip might be, changing light bulbs clearly doesn't match up against a problem as big and complex as this. So one day the two of us said: 'Screw light bulbs! Let's look at what we really need to do to get serious about climate change.'

A funny thing happened along the way. Instead of getting more depressed about climate change, writing this book cheered us up.

That may sound strange, given what we now know about climate change: that we've significantly altered the planet's climate, and that the consequences of that are now happening faster than previously expected in the form of worsening droughts, floods and fires. Based on what is already being observed worldwide, the forecasts for coming decades can make for grim reading.

Yet, as you'll see, there are still some reasons for optimism. While the media tends to focus on the latest bad news about climate change, there are more and more positive examples of people and places taking practical steps to cut their greenhouse gas emissions. Many of them started out only wanting to solve one problem: businesses wanting to save money, or cities trying to unclog traffic jams. What their experiences can teach us is that, quite often, the best ways to save money and time can also prove to be the best ways to save on emissions.

But there are still fierce debates about the best way to reform our economy to put a dollar price on greenhouse gas emissions, known as a carbon price. Is it better to do it with an emissions trading scheme, or a carbon tax? Questions like that will affect the lives of all of us for generations to come. That's why it has never been more important for Australians to be involved in deciding which solutions we choose to cut our emissions.

And that's what this book is all about: cutting through the political spin and jargon to offer straight answers to all sorts of questions about climate change. We'll examine which solutions for reducing emissions are best suited to Australia, what has been holding us back from acting sooner, and how all this could change the way we live, work and shop. Some of the questions we'll cover include:

- Do we risk crashing our economy by tackling climate change?
- Who's investing the most in low-carbon industries and jobs?
- Should we stop eating chocolate for the good of the planet?
- How can our checkout choices cut emissions in China?
- Was Al Gore's lunch really carbon neutral?
- Why are we burning money?
- How close are we to having 'clean coal'?
- Why is Australia's very fast train running so late?
- How did cheap petrol become so expensive?
- Why don't the new six-star housing rules go far enough?

- How can we make every drop of water count?
- Is there an alternative to the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme?
- What's the real story behind Australia's light-bulb ban?

On our own, individual Australians and Australia as a nation can't solve climate change. Fortunately, we don't have to: we just need to do our fair share. And as the coming chapters will show, there are plenty of solutions available, using a combination of smarter thinking, effective regulation and proven technology.