



Our conflict of interests

IRELAND having to reduce its cattle herd, although world consumption of **meat** and dairy products may double by 2050, was the prospect raised by **Agriculture** Minister Brendan Smith last week.

He told Council of **Agriculture** ministers in Brussels how Ireland's target of a 20% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions — a high proportion of the gases comes from livestock — clashes with our role in food production.

How different his ministerial style is from that of his predecessor, Mary Coughlan.

She didn't take greenhouse gases or **global warming** seriously when she introduced the 2008-2012 Suckler Welfare Scheme. The scheme is likely to result in more cattle expelling greenhouse gases in Ireland, already ranked the fifth highest emitter in the world, per citizen.

She was poles apart from our Environment Minister, **John Gormley**, whose department says climate change caused by greenhouse gases is the most threatening global environmental problem facing humanity.

Perhaps Coughlan agrees with those who say climate change has become a religion against

But many believe in this religion, and Mr Smith thought it serious enough to bring up in Brussels, even though farmers would have thought the farmyard grant scheme deadline and low grain prices were much more important.

He said Ireland wants recognition for **carbon** sequestration from forests, and said any reduction in food production in Ireland, or elsewhere in the EU, would only be taken up elsewhere, resulting in a heavier **carbon** footprint, while damaging global food security.

Smith put his finger on the mysteries of the climate change 'religion'. Forests — and boglands — are not included in the EU's emissions trading scheme, and not fully catered for in the United Nations Kyoto protocol, which forces the EU to cut emissions. That's why destruction of tropical rainforests, causing up to 20% of global emissions, is uncontrolled, while Ireland's cattle may have to be sacrificed.

Forests — and plants — scrub **carbon** dioxide from the air, which they release back into the atmosphere when they die and decay — or when Brazilians destroy rainforest to make room for Brazilian crops and cattle.

The EU may force us to get rid of cattle to reduce our emissions, and bring **beef** instead, from Brazil, reared on areas where forest clearing makes Brazil a huge source of greenhouse gases.

It seems that if Brazil can't get our **beef** industry with cheap exports, they will get us through the Kyoto protocol.

The world powers who agreed the Kyoto protocol largely ignored forest destruction, because enforcing it would be very hard in the lawless Congo basin, Indonesia, or Amazonian Brazil. Much easier to police law-abid-

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ing Irish cattle farmers.

So, only reforestation, and new, net tree plantings since 1990 were given credit in the Kyoto agreement.

No account was taken of forests, nearly the size of 50 football pitches, being destroyed every minute — even though stopping the destruction would cost only about €3.50 per tonne of greenhouse gases saved.

Preventing peatland destruction can save a tonne of **carbon** for as little as €0.07.

That compares with €105 through using nuclear energy, and up to €210 through biofuel — just two of the incredibly costly and probably futile answers to **global warming** dreamed up by world leaders anxious to bathe in the warm glow of good intentions. It has been calculated that the Kyoto protocol would reduce the global temperature increase by 0.15 degrees Centigrade by the year 2100, at a cost of almost €127bn annually for the rest of the century.

No wonder the US declined to sign up.

But the EU did, and has promised to cut emissions by 20% by 2020 — a good political slogan that will gain someone some votes.

But not one Irish cow should be sacrificed. We will have to insist on full recognition of **carbon** sequestration in our forests, and make it worth our landowners' while to grow more and more new forests.

We can also pray to the climate change gods that the crackpot theory to inject **carbon** dioxide into deep, geological deposits will be added to the crackpot Kyoto protocol, to earn a reprieve from cattle sacrifice.

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humanity. It has a Messiah in Al Gore; disbelievers are seen as heretics, **carbon** offsets are the equivalent of indulgences, and it features original sin — because you cannot be born and live without creating some greenhouse gas.

Blind faith and mysteries are also involved. Farmers can only pray that Mr Smith's fears are misplaced.