

Testimony for CO2 Budget Trading Program Regulation



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I'm expressing complete support for Pennsylvania entering into the Regional Greenhouse Gas initiative. According to sources I've seen, including the Natural Resources Defense Council, the program has been a complete success. Member states have benefited economically, while reducing their greenhouse gas emissions. The following comes from Bruce Ho of NRDC in an article from September of this year:

“Since its 2009 launch, RGGI has saved consumers hundreds of millions of dollars on energy, with billions more in savings to come; created thousands of new jobs; and improved public health while helping cut carbon pollution from the region’s power plants in half. RGGI’s well-documented success shows how flexible, market-based approaches to cutting power plant pollution benefit everyone.”

In other words, what's not to like? Let's be clear: climate change and ocean acidification are here and they present real threats to our civilization. The pollution PA generates doesn't just effect us, it's doing damage across the world. I'm a certified diver, so I'm particularly attuned to what's happening with the aquatic environment. In a recent interview, Dr. Michael Oppenheimer of Princeton stated we could be looking at two feet of sea level rise by 2050. That puts billions of dollars of valuable real-estate in the cross-hairs of being worthless, which would damage the American economy. In addition, coral reefs and kelp forests that we depend upon for seafood production and tourism are dying off, due to increasing ocean acidity and temperatures. I used to dive the California kelp forests, and it breaks my heart to see them in decline. Also, ocean species that can move northward are doing so, leaving fishing communities devastated. The species that can't migrate die in place. Fresh water fisheries are also being adversely affected, by earlier warming. One example is the southern Lake Michigan perch

fishery. Once reliable for millions of mid-westerners, it has basically collapsed, due to earlier ice-off events that lead to earlier plankton blooms that leave new, young fish with nothing to eat.

In addition, there's the issue of impacts to the diving industry, including Pennsylvania's dive shops, who have connections to equipment manufacturers, the airlines, and the other industries connected with dive tourism. There are real jobs and livelihoods that depend on healthy aquatic ecosystems. As a friend of mine put it recently, if there's nothing to see but dead coral and lionfish, nobody's going to want to go diving.

In regard to actually addressing the crisis, the numbers have changed and majorities of people across the country and around the world favor strong action on climate. At 411 ppm CO₂ and still going (Mauna Loa Observatory), we are late to the game and RGGI is only a first step. Over the next thirty years we need to bring the 37 gigatons of carbon we currently emit to ZERO, while drawing down the 1000 metric gigatons we have already put into the atmosphere since the start of the Industrial Revolution (PBS-NOVA, "Can We Cool the Planet). On top of RGGI, we need carbon fee-and-dividend, along with renewable energy, electric transportation, regenerative agriculture, energy efficiency, direct air and seawater capture of CO₂, ocean farming, climate-safe refrigerants and more. We need it all, if we are to turn this around. Essentially, we have a moral question facing us: when is a fossil fuel job in PA too costly for society as a whole? I think we know the answer. The time for delay and parochial, short-term thinking, has long passed.