

Action on climate

From Les Carter

Gaia Vince discusses how we will cope if the Earth's temperature rises (28 February, p 28). It's time to face facts: if we don't reduce global greenhouse gas emissions by at least 70 per cent within five years, we will have blown it. Of course, what stands squarely in the way of what we must do is the will to do it.

Is it possible? The fundamental rule when managing complex systems is to supply the right information at the right time, which points the system in the right direction. At present, the world's people don't have this information. If they are going to make the right decision in time, our scientists, politicians and media need to stop lying to them. We don't "need" more energy, we don't "need" economic stimulus, we don't even "need" jobs. What

we do need is a stable climate. *Rossland, British Columbia, Canada*

From Nelson Dale

My view on climate change is radically different: there is a growing body of experience and interest in low-tech, systems-based, ecological approaches to the global climate crisis. It is possible, and not technically difficult, to sequester carbon in living ecosystems, such that large areas of currently desertified land could be transformed into productive rangeland.

While most technological fixes seem to imply incalculable side effects in unexpected areas, the effect of this kind of approach is increased land productivity, something that will be desperately needed in the coming years. Rather than merely surviving the coming century, let's restore its promise. *Bedford, Massachusetts, US*

Saltwater power

From Richard Durrant

Peter Fournier writes that proposals to produce electricity in Norway by osmosis of fresh water into seawater are impractical (4 April, p 23). Like so many "green" ideas, it suffers from remote location and low power density.

However, the idea could be applicable in Australia: an evaporating pond in inland Queensland could produce very salty water which could be used to produce high-pressure brine by uptake of water from brackish groundwater resources. The pressurised water could generate electricity and then return to the evaporating pond.

Some water in Queensland is alkaline due to the sodium bicarbonate content. This would help protect the osmotic membranes by keeping other metal ions out of solution. *St Albans, Hertfordshire, UK*

There are researchers who share some of Siegel's concerns with regard to a dogmatic view of the risks of smoking. However, a constructive attitude to criticism would be more helpful when contributing to the debate about this health problem, which kills more people than any other single risk factor. *Sydney, Australia*

Cold fusion

From Steven Krivit

The article "Many happy returns for cold fusion" contained a subtle but significant ambiguity (28 March, p 10). The article mentions my scepticism of "cold fusion" as a theoretical explanation for the low-energy nuclear reaction experimental phenomena, but fails to mention other theoretical models for these phenomena which also propose nuclear processes, namely, neutron-catalysed weak interaction processes. According to several experts, at least one of these models appears to be a viable explanation. *San Rafael, California, US*

No smoke without

From Simon Chapman, School of Public Health, University of Sydney

Michael Siegel's claim of censorship as described in David Robson's article on tobacco policy (4 April, p 34) effectively casts him as the enlightened Galileo to tobacco control's blinkered church. In fact, the international tobacco control community not only tolerates debate on scientific and policy matters, but actively encourages it.

In the past year I have published a lengthy critique of outdoor smoking bans (see <http://tobacco.health.usyd.edu.au/index.htm>) and criticised the overmedicalised view of the smoking cessation process in *The Lancet* (vol 373, p 701). My argument against attempts to ban scenes of smoking in movies played an important part in overturning the Indian government's proposed legislation on the subject.

Converting Dawkins

From Reginald Le Sueur

Mary Midgley states that "many are anticipating [Richard Dawkins's] conversion with some interest" (21 March, p 22). I think it very likely that, when the time



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- The number of occurrences of the digit 4 is
- The number of occurrences of the digit 5 is
- The number of occurrences of the digit 6 is
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