



**The Australian Health Policy Institute &
Oxford Health Alliance Seminar**

**The public health response to the
challenge of sustainability**

Tuesday May 23rd 2006

University of Sydney

Amunsden's route -1903





At last! Open for business!!



The public health response to the challenge of sustainability

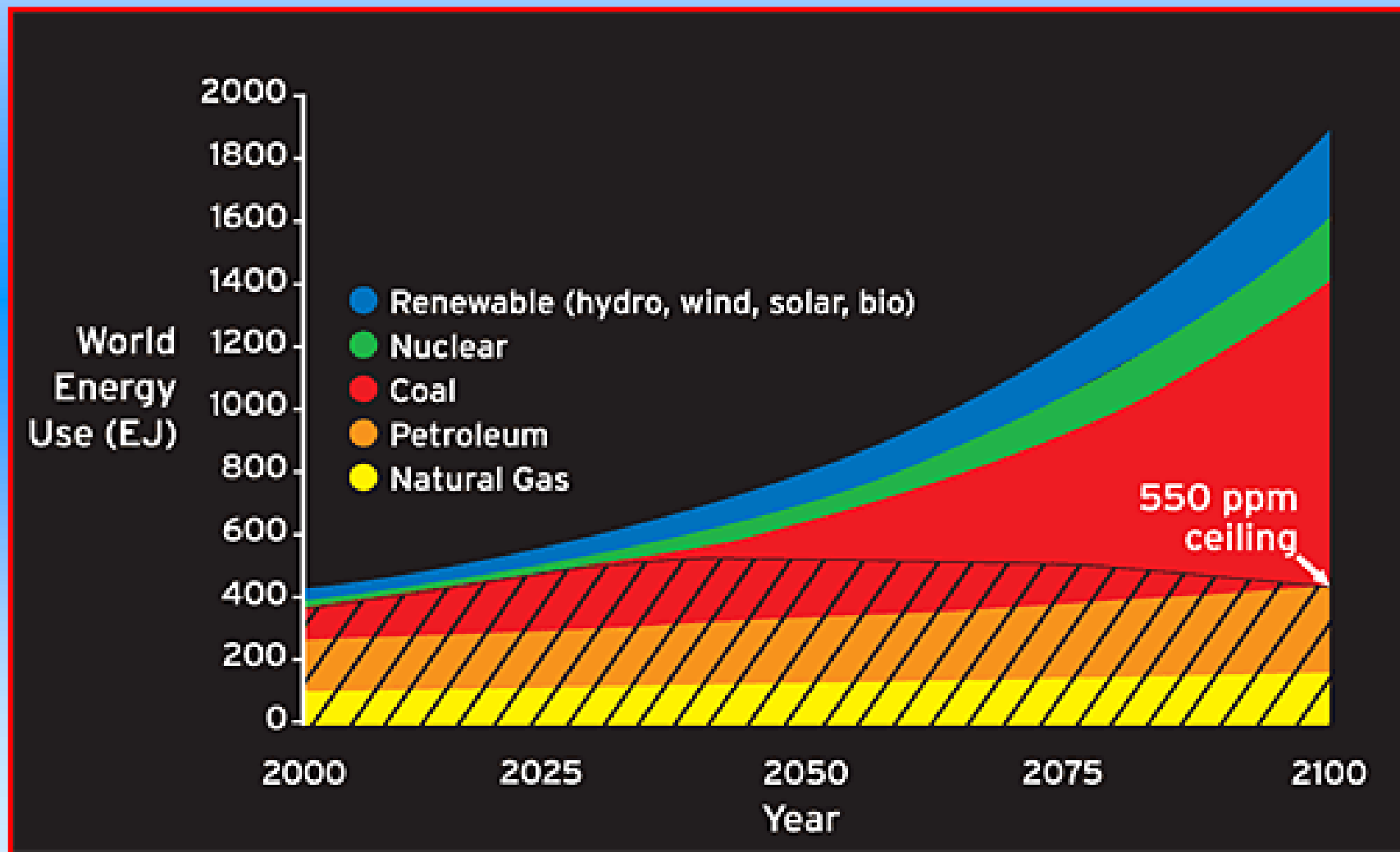
- **The dimensions of the challenge**
- ‘Coherence’ and ‘obligation’ as qualities of ethical public health response
- Modelling future health impacts
- Developing a range of mitigating interventions
- Undertaking advocacy with others
- Educating professionals for the future.

The dimensions of the challenge

- Climate change and communicable disease
- Pollution and toxicity
- Urbanisation and NCDs
- Population numbers
- Violence

Energy sources for the next century

Daniel Schrag: *Harvard Magazine* May-June 2006



John Gray's summary position

- *The NY Review of Books* – 27/4/06



- If there is a way forward it lies in the intelligent use of science and technology to develop less dangerous sources of energy; but it is a mistake to think that a large change in the way we live can now be avoided.
- Climate change cannot be prevented, only mitigated, and whatever is done to deal with its effects there is sure to be large-scale disruption and conflict.
- The defining feature of the industrial civilization that is spreading everywhere is exponential growth; but such growth is eventually self-limiting.

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Onora O'Neill

- Kantian social and political philosopher, physiologist and bioethicist
- Has worked in UK, at Harvard and at Columbia on these topics and international justice and ethics of human genetics
- Reith Lecturer (BBC) 2002 *A Question of Trust*. She contrasted accountability and trust.



Onora O'Neill's view of coherence and obligations

- **'Coherence'** occurs when a problem is considered in such a way as to define obligations – who does what to whom – that can be met in the real world.
- **'Incoherence'** occurs when a problem is said to require an impossible array of actions that are possible only in an imaginary and idealised world.

Onora O'Neill's view of coherence and obligations

- “It is easy and rather fetching to talk about a universal ‘right to health,’ but plain enough when one considers *who* has to do *what* for *whom*, that universal health **cannot** be provided, so that there can be no such right.”

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The role of epidemiology

Sunyer and Grimalt – *IJE April 2006*

- Document causal associations
- Create a forward epidemiology (McMichael) based on alternative climate scenarios
- Develop city-specific early warning systems
- Implement vector-borne disease control programs and malnutrition epidemiology.

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Mitigating interventions

- Many of these lie outside the health sector such as carbon trapping, building levies, meteorological monitoring, pollution control and urban design
- The data base is often weak and interventions are poorly evaluated
- The intervention should be matched to the best model of likely events – tropical spread, cooling, flooding
- Political will should be carefully judged for feasible intervention.

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Advocacy

- Working with concerned communities
- Political lobbying
- Working with other professional groups
- Working with private sector and NGOs

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Educating future health professionals

- Technical education with regard to sustainability and health
- Education to work with others outside the health sector
- Skilling up in communication capability – public, commerce, politicians, media