

From the Editor

MIKE NAHAN

The food-processing industry should be booming, but it isn't and is not going to be until there are changes in our workplace culture.

As the special report in this edition makes clear (pages 17–24 below), while there are some very real success stories (most notably, wine) the industry, in general, is going backwards. Exports are stagnant, returns are abysmal, productivity is low, plants are closing, jobs are being lost, and multinational investors are passing us by.

This situation has long been an open secret in the industry. The industry has also been the subject of more government probing and promotion than just about any other industry, with little success.

This has the hallmarks of being a national disaster. Not only does the food industry employ 168,000 people directly, it is the largest market for our rural products. Moreover, there are indications that the situation is going to get worse, and that for some firms the situation may be irreversible.

The key problem is not just poor workplace relations, but a great reluctance to face up to them. Many firms are in denial mode. Others habitually look to government to take the lead. Others still are inhibited from joining any squabble with unions by the very real threat of brand-name damage. As for the union movement, many elements are retreating into militancy, turf wars and a zero-sum mentality. Leadership is required now.

Leadership of a different sort will also be needed from the new Minister for the Environment, David Kemp, as he attempts to shift the focus of debate on environmental issues from the 'deep greens' to the 'browns'—that is from the crisis merchants to the problem solvers; from the PR flaks to the scientists; from the activists to the community and the individual. This will not be easy. The deep greens are vocal,



organized, media-savvy and extremely well-funded. The 'browns', by contrast, are quiet, dispersed, media-shy and operate on the smell of an oily rag. Moreover, the deep greens have invested heavily in the Kyoto Greenhouse treaty—not only as a powerful symbol of the 'catastrophic failure of unchecked capitalism', but also as an overarching institution by which they can help control 'the system'. One of Dr Kemp's key tasks will be to say 'no' to Kyoto.

A place to start the shift is with the science. For many deep greens, science, scientific methodology and facts are simply malleable campaigning tools. As a result, environment policy and priorities have a false sense of urgency, and are used to get other people to solve non-problems.

Danish environmentalist Professor Bjørn Lomborg has made a substantial contribution to debunking the methods and myths of the deep greens in his recent book, *The Skeptical Environmentalist*. Professor Lomborg's path to the book is an interesting one. He started out to defend the environmentalists against the criticisms of Julian Simon—who argued that the population explosion was a dud. Instead, after analysing the data, he was convinced that Simon was by-and-large right. He went on to examine the evidence behind a range of other campaigns favoured by environmentalists and found

them to be equally flawed. Not surprisingly, the book has received wide review and attacks by many environmentalists. Ian Castles, former Australian Statistician, discusses the attacks on Lomborg and what this says about the debate on environmental issues (see 'Scientists, Statisticians and the Prophets of Doom' on pages 6–10).

One of the key themes to come from the recent Federal election, is that the élites in Australia have lost touch with, and respect for, the general population. As with the republic and aboriginal reconciliation, Howard's battlers rebuffed the élites on the issue of refugees. Again, instead of trying to understand public opinion and debate the issues, the élite heckled, threatened and called them racists.

This is not healthy. Élites are needed to ensure that issues and ideas are developed and tested. If they lose touch with the public, populism will rule. We need to put the élites back in touch with Australian cultural norms on issues such as immigration, Aboriginal affairs and globalization. Bob Birrell and Katharine Betts make a contribution to this process with their review of the evidence about public opinion on immigration (see pages 3–5). What they find is not racism, but deep concern about 'hard' multiculturalism.

Finally, to 'their ABC'. Another outcome of the election was the ABC collective's overwhelming victory over those of us who want a more inclusive ABC. Through a campaign based on rumours, accusations and innuendo, they got the hapless ABC board to fire Jonathan Shier. We can only hope that the ABC Board will find the mettle to hire and then support a new reforming Managing Director of the ABC. In anticipation of this, Glenn Darlington, former Director of ABC Radio in WA, outlines some important ideas for reform (see pages 36–37).

IPA

REVIEW