

UNDER THE WEATHER - A FUTURE FORECAST FOR NEW ZEALAND

By James Renwick

I wonder if this book's title might lead some readers to expect less than what the book so helpfully gives us. After all, weather comes and goes, but what this book does not allow is 'business as usual'. It's a call to action that can't wait.

Professor James Renwick shares with us the fruits of many years studying what brings climate change about, and where it is leading us. He and his scientific colleagues reach deep into our planet's history of climate change, giving us the best of science, in homely detail, and in very readable language.

Their scientific findings don't permit us to take any comfort from the dismissive cliché that "there has always been climate change". The more intense heatwaves, droughts, floods, fires and winds of recent times are only early examples of what could yet more greatly devastate people's lives, livelihoods, food and water supplies, and bring on the complications of massive migrations.

Cruelly, those most likely to be affected by climate change are those who have done least to cause it. This applies both to nations, and to individuals within nations. Professor Renwick speaks frankly of the moral obligations New Zealand will have towards smaller Pacific nations that are forced to leave their island homes.

Various natural causes have always brought about our planet's ever-changing weather and climate conditions. What makes it different now is *the human contribution*. The human contribution includes some of the things we do just as part of our 'business as usual' mindset. But it also includes ideological opposition to attempts to regulate industrial and trading practices that contribute most to global warming. Historically, some in the fossil-fuel industry have even buried scientific reports, and gone on to disseminate disinformation – for no other reason than to further enrich themselves, and their investors, whatever the human cost to others. Because AI draws heavily on our planet's resources, it too will need to be properly regulated; (Pope Leo XIV, Magnifica Humanitas, 100, 101).

For such reasons, a study which identifies the causes of climate change cannot be isolated from the wider range of ways our 'business as usual' mindset needs to be challenged. Professor Renwick himself does not shy away from the ethical implications of our contribution to climate change. His example of mischief by a fossil fuel company was offshore, but it can be matched by examples within New Zealand. Our present government has interrupted proceedings through the courts by legislating to prevent a citizen from seeking redress against a corporation which fails to curtail its harmful emissions. And the right and duty of local councils to regulate forestry operations which have been causing millions of dollars of damage to private and public properties, lives and livelihoods, have been curtailed.

The idea of "market freedom" behind these examples boils down to 'freedom' for the wealthy, even by means of suppressing the rights and freedom of others. Wilful adherence to false ideology, and unthinking adherence to the 'business as usual' mindset, are what need to change.

Our author does not conclude without making specific recommendations that would require government planning, and require citizens to hold governments accountable. And he concludes with a picture of the kind of truly human environment that can yet be. One is not surprised by this positive picture because at the beginning of his book he says:

What we do to the climate, we do to ourselves. The climate, the environment, is not something separate from us, not something we can manipulate or trade on. We are in it, and part of it. If the climate changes, we change. (p. 16)