



Listen to the story of melting ice caps, says polar explorer

CAMERON COOPER

EXPLORER, environmentalist and climate change expert Tim Jarvis has been to the top and the bottom of the world. A veteran of six polar journeys — three to the North Pole and three to the South — he has a message for climate change sceptics who refuse to believe transformation of the planet is occurring. Go and see it for yourself.

What will they find? Jarvis has witnessed ice caps melting in north Greenland, a process which he says is discharging about 250 cubic kilometres of ice and water a year into the ocean. He has seen Arctic Ocean ice rapidly reducing, and permafrost in Russia and Canada melting and bubbling away as it releases enormous amounts of methane gas. He has been to the site of a major ice cap at the South Pole that is shearing into the ocean and affecting glacial movement.

“Yet we still have people who clutch at convenient information at a greatly reduced scale that helps them justify how they personally have not witnessed change,” says Jarvis, who works as an environmental scientist for engineering and environmental professional services company URS Corporation. “There are still flat-earthers out there.”

For the 42-year-old — who is best known for recreating Sir Douglas Mawson’s expedition to the South Pole and holder of the

world record for the fastest unsupported journey to the South Pole and the longest unsupported journey in Antarctica — the big issue is what happens now. Jarvis does not want business and the public to merely understand that climate change is real. He wants them to respond and become part of the solution.

Carbon emissions and water distribution are among his focal points, and he believes vested interests are disrupting attempts to make positive changes in these fields. A suite of responses is required to address the challenges, Jarvis says.

“There’s no silver bullet in any of this, and any attempts to keep looking for one are misguided.”

A guest speaker at the Ozwater 2009 conference in March, Jarvis says when it comes to water issues, for example, rather than fixating on supply issues such as desalination, we should be looking at cutting water needs.

“The public has this kind of disconnect between switching the light bulb on and turning the tap on, and understanding that this water and power has to have some kind of net effect somewhere else in the system,” he says.

“There needs to be far more done to make really communicate that.”

To help address carbon emission, power and water woes,

Jarvis endorses a number of actions: a robust cap-and-trade emissions trading scheme that does not give business an escape clause; technological improvements on the supply side to ensure more efficient water and energy use; a fundamental rethink on our demands for water and power; public and corporate education; and rural support services for farmers who want to convert to more sustainable crops.

Instead of governments endorsing “astronomical” rescue packages to prop up industries that are environmentally harmful, such as the beleaguered American automotive sector, Jarvis says it is time to rethink some paradigms.

“Why not apply that level of assistance to improving sustainability outcomes and getting a win-win?” he says. “At the end of day if there is not the demand for the new motor vehicles that these companies are making, should we be supporting them for the sake of 100,000 jobs in the (US)?”

On emissions trading, Jarvis is concerned about business pressure to abolish or reform the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme.

Jarvis urges business to look at the proposed changes in a positive way: not just as a cost impost but as a chance to do their bit to help improve the planet.

Tim Jarvis, who has just completed a fellowship at Yale, was a recipient of AM award this year for his services to the community, environment and exploration.



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