

*"We are all addicts of fossil fuels in a state of denial, about to face cold turkey."*

Kurt Vonnegut, *In These Times*, 10 May 2004

If you received all your information from newspapers and talk back radio you would think that the primary role of government was to keep the price of a litre of petrol down.

Whilst the oil price does reverberate through the whole economy and affects the price of just about everything we consume, fiddling with the excise rate really is a little like shuffling the deck chairs on the *Titanic*. The price of oil will go up. Perhaps not always in a straight line but, over the long term as demand grows and supply shrinks, it will inevitably rise. We just have to get used to it, and the quicker we do this the better we will adapt to our new environment (now there's a word I haven't heard in a while).

The pricing mechanism is a bit like the advice you might have once got from your PE teacher - "if it doesn't hurt it's not working". It needs to bite enough so that we change our habits. We need to think about walking or riding a bike for short trips, about living closer to where we work, about how far our food travels to reach our table, about what we do on our weekends and where we spend our holidays. If we are shielded from the effects of the shifting balance of supply and demand for oil we will do none of these things. And we will be that much less able to adapt when we really have to.

Wouldn't it be much better if – as individuals and as a society – we recognised that the price of oil (and all energy for that matter) will go up and just got on with the job at hand. Oh, and the good news is that walking, cycling, conversation, music, dancing, surfing, reading, eating and drinking local produce, gardening and playing in the backyard with your kids are all activities that use very little oil.

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