Better Solar Power [1]

Written by **Tim Worstall** [2] | Friday 30 November 2007

I really do love this piece in *The Guardian* about solar power [3]. Almost all of it is an interesting overview of where the science is now and thus where the technology will be in a decade or so. It's all very encouraging indeed: the scientists seem confident that they'll be able to get generation costs from solar down to around and about the same as that from fossil fuels.

Something which will, of course, make a lot of the worries about climate change go away. Of course, this being *The Guardian* there's the note of doom as well:

> *But waiting around for the science to become technology isn't an option, says Martyn Williams, senior parliamentary campaigner at Friends of the Earth. "We are aware of moves to find new ways to generate electricity from solar power. We have to move faster than that because every tonne of carbon we pump out is adding to the problem."*

So Williams' idea is that we should spend a lot of money now on bad technology now rather than wait for the technology which actually works. That is, we should make ourselves vastly poorer now than we need to be, reducing what we can spend upon the technology when it is ready.

But what really fascinates me about all of this is that if you go back and read Bjorn Lomborg's *Skeptical Environmentalist* again, his argument about climate change rested upon the following. Somewhere in the 2030-2040 time span, solar power will become cheaper than generation using fossil fuels. At that point we'll all naturally switch: and none of the models used by the IPCC acknowledge this fact (well, prediction perhaps). So all of the predictions of future emissions are too high (again, possibly).

Now as you might recall, Lomborg got a lot of stick for this argument, and it does look like he was wrong. Too pessimistic that is, not too optimistic, for that magic price moment looks like it might appear before 2020.

While there are an awful lot of people who say they like solar power, I have a feeling that if this comes to

pass there'll be a few at least who won't be happy. Cheap renewable power will allow the whole capitalist/consumerist juggernaut to carry on which isn't the point at all for some people.

blog comments powered by Disqus [5]

Source URL: http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/environment/better-solar-power

Links:
[1] http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/environment/better-solar-power
[2] http://www.adamsmith.org/taxonomy/term/5833
[3] http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2007/nov/29/research1
[4] http://disqus.com/?ref_noscript
[5] http://disqus.com