

Australia: Climate laws add to police workload

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FRONTLINE police will be forced to become “carbon cops” under the Government’s blueprint to cut greenhouse emissions.

The Herald Sun can reveal Australian Federal Police agents will have to prosecute a new range of climate offences.

But they are yet to be offered extra resources, stretching the thin blue line to breaking point.

“The Government is effectively saying to us, ‘Ignore other crime types’,” Australian Federal Police Association chief Jim Torr said.

The group had been trying for months, without success, to discuss the issue with Climate Change Minister Penny Wong, he said.

Interpol has warned the carbon market will be irresistible to criminal gangs because of the vast amounts of cash to be made. Possible rorts include under-reporting of carbon emissions by firms and bogus carbon offset schemes.

“If someone is rorting it by even 1 per cent a year, we’re talking about many, many millions of dollars,” Mr Torr said.

Ms Wong’s office said AFP agents would be expected to enter premises and request paperwork to monitor firms’ emissions reductions. They would act on the 30-strong Australian Climate Change Regulatory Authority’s orders.

It said the authority could appoint staff members or police as inspectors.

She said the Department of Climate Change had spoken to the AFPA and the parties would talk again. Carbon trading involves carbon emissions rights buying and selling. Businesses can offset emissions by investing in climate-friendly projects, or carbon credits.

Ms Wong’s office said provisions had been made to ensure compliance. “Inspectors may enter premises and exercise other monitoring powers,” she said. “The inspectors may ask questions and seek the production of documents. There is provision for the issue of monitoring warrants by magistrates.”

The AFP’s 2855 sworn agents are involved in law enforcement in Australia and overseas, investigating terrorist threats, drug syndicates, people trafficking, fraud and threats against children.

Mr Torr said breaking carbon trading laws would be like breaking other laws. “These offences will constitute another federal crime type, along with narcotics importing, people smuggling and all the rest of it, that the AFP will be expected to police,” he said. “I can see very complex, covert investigations . . . a lot of scientific expertise required.”

The Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme is facing Senate defeat unless it can secure the support of key cross-benchers or the Opposition.

Opposition climate change spokesman Andrew Robb said the scheme was problematic.

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