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Carbon tax boss has difficult task

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CECIL Morden has a tough job.

As the Treasury's chief director of economic tax analysis, he's the face of a new carbon tax to be introduced in 2015 – a tax that would see businesses paying R120 per ton of carbon dioxide equivalent they emit.

And it's not making him any friends.

Since the second discussion document on the proposed tax was published last month, it has been slammed in Parliament by MPs from both the ruling party and the opposition, who say it will slow the country's already low economic growth rate.

And some industries – most notably steel giant ArcelorMittal – have labelled it as little more than a money-grabbing policy.

But the principles behind the tax are sound, insists Morden.

"A carbon tax implemented gradually and coupled by effective and efficient revenue recycling can contribute to significant emissions reductions," he said yesterday at a gathering organised by the National Business Initiative, a coalition of businesses working towards sustainable growth.

South Africa is a carbon-intensive economy. Its heavy reliance on burning coal for energy has made it one of the highest greenhouse gas emitters per capita in the world – it's responsible for 1.5 percent of total global emissions.

In light of this, the country made a commitment to curb its expected business-as-usual emissions in 2020 by 34 percent, and by 42 percent just five years later.

● You can view the carbon tax discussion document on Treasury's website (http://www.treasury.gov.za/public%20comments/Carbon%20Tax%20Policy%20Paper%202013.pdf).

The deadline for public comment is August 2.