

Dear Stern Team, dear Sir Nicholas

Attached is a short contribution from an American scientist, Roger Pielke, whose views I respect. Pielke's doubts about the IPCC serves to strengthen my earlier contribution to you: the natural science base, even more than the economics of climate change, urgently need an independent review.

You may have noted that according to the most recent 'Nature' editorial, the emission scenarios used by the IPCC to forecast 'dangerous' warming and hence large amounts of economic damage) cannot, the IPCC managers now claim, be revised for the current Fourth Assessment (due in 2007) and will have to wait until the Fifth. Improved emission scenarios are likely to weaken the predicted degree of warming, not increase it. To judge from what Sir Nicholas Stern will say, the alarmist science underpinning the Hadley Centre's model forecasts, will be accepted without challenge. Yet the 'most recent science' he refers to has not yet been openly discussed by the whole world, though claims are made that the whole world should listen to policies based on it!

I would therefore like to disagree, from my research into climate scepticism and long-time observation of the science debate in several countries, including Canada, Russia and Australia, that:

"Climate change is a serious and urgent issue. The most recent science indicates that many of the risks are more serious than previously thought. The problem is global in both its causes and its effects, and demands an international collaborative response!"

The above statement is official UK policy that still requires a global debate. This 'most recent science' is either the result of a single research effort in one country, or negotiated consensus science that has not been properly tested against alternative ideas and evidence. It is interpreted and 'constructed' science that reflects the Zeitgeist (humanity is to blame, but technology can save us), is based on a single theory of climate change (radiative forcing), and serves the energy interests of Europe rather than humanity. I know of papers submitted to the Essex Conference which did not serve the aim of demonstrating danger, and hence were not accepted. If computer models are instructed to 'predict' danger, they naturally will do so. Finding substitutes for fossil fuels (and hence emission reduction) may well be desirable here, but to proclaim to the world that humanity is able to control climate through energy policy, is something very different and reminds me of rather outdated attitudes.

The EU and UK have made dangerous, man-made global (average) warming an urgent political issue, but for what reasons? Perhaps there are more important problems to solve.

Yours sincerely
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-----Original Message-----

Roger Pielke, Jr. on IPCC and Peer Review.

Hypotheses about IPCC and Peer Review

http://sciencepolicy.colorado.edu/prometheus/archives/climate_change/index.html#000684

Blog post by Roger Pielke, Jr.
January 27, 2006

The IPCC is the 800 pound gorilla in the climate debate. It has been the locus of legitimate and credible climate science (salience is another matter, but I digress). It is increasingly coming under criticism in a number of dimensions for some very good reasons. In this post I'd like to suggest a few hypotheses about how the IPCC has indirectly contributed to the politicization of climate science in ways we've not discussed here. These are for discussion, and I'd welcome evidence for/against and other sorts of examples.

Laundering Grey Literature

The IPCC has a requirement that its assessments be based on peer reviewed literature. It has not always held itself to this standard, particularly in its Working Groups II and III. I have noticed recently a number of peer-reviewed papers that reference so-called "grey literature" (e.g., agency, company, NGO reports) which hasn't itself been peer reviewed. Then the peer-reviewed study that cites the grey literature is subsequently cited in another publication to refer to the information in the original non-peer reviewed source. This is a way to give the veneer of peer review to a non-peer-reviewed study. Here is an example of this dynamic.

Fun with Deadlines

The IPCC sets a deadline for when papers must be accepted in order to be considered in a particular assessment report. This guarantees that the

assessment won't have to be continually updated, but it also means that the assessment is automatically out-of-date in some case where new findings have been released. Because editors and journals have considerable discretion in when they publish what papers, the IPCC's deadline can set the stage for some mischief in the publication process as papers with a particular slant are published before the deadline and other published after. I don't have any data on this, but it'd be interesting to compare the time-to-publication of key papers cited in IPCC reports with a journal's standard practices. This issue came to mind as I read this comment from RealClimate:

There are several more papers "in the mill" which we are not at liberty to discuss right now [Ed.- Embargoed, see below], which insure that the weight of peer-reviewed studies available for consideration in the next IPCC report will point towards a strengthening, not a weakening, of the IPCC '01 conclusions regarding the anomalous nature of recent hemispheric and global warmth in a long-term context.

Maybe it is just inartful language, but claims to "insure" previously found results do not make me comfortable about the agendas of climate scientists.

Embargoes as Silencers

This one is not about the IPCC, but Science and Nature. I was recently at a science talk at NCAR and a number of leading scientists refused to discuss their work because it would potentially be under "embargo" with Science or Nature, if accepted. My understanding is that embargoes refer to releasing papers accepted for publication to the media in advance of the artificial deadlines set by Science and Nature to generate news-worthiness. They do not apply to scientists talking among themselves in scientific settings. So when scientists use potential embargoes as a way to silence discussion and debate on their work, it reduces the internal vetting of scientific ideas and makes

the leading journals the only place where debate can occur. Since Science and Nature are highly selective as to what they allow as far as intellectual exchanges following up papers they publish, the entire process of scientific debate and learning is arguably slowed down. Meantime, this allows findings supporting one view or another to gain much greater standing in political debate than they might otherwise have.