

A dangerous method

Global warming dogma has damaged science itself

MAURICE NEWMAN

Call me prickly, but when I read pronouncements from the global warming establishment my defences immediately go up as I sense I am being told, not informed. 'Authority is speaking so suspend all independent thought immediately,' is what I hear.

That is how I felt when the CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology released their latest climate update. In case I had forgotten their last sermon, I was reminded that even though the recent two-year wet and cooling spell might not have been foretold, it was all due to La Niña. Lest I should have suspended my faith in manmade climate change, a hot, dry and unpleasant future still awaits, unless we all take action — now!

They tell us CO₂ is at a dangerous 800,000-year high. Never mind that the planet's temperature has been static for the past 15 years. Never mind that, according to the University of Colorado, sea level rises have slowed since 2004. And if human emissions are the culprit, how could the Earth's temperature have been warmer than now with less CO₂?

I realise how much easier it would be for me to simply acquiesce and believe what I am told by the 'consensus' of scientists and the mainstream media. It would be wonderful to contract out these weighty issues and not have to deal with the scorn of my peers. There'd be no need to fret when nature departs from the models. I should accept that the authorities know better. I ought to hand over the money and leave the worrying to them. Yes, of course I can do that. But what stops me is that I have lost confidence in the people in whom I must place my trust. And therein lies the rub.

For example, I recall reference being made in the Climategate emails to the sham-bolic nature of Australia's temperature records. This allegation has recently surfaced again in a crowdsourced audit conducted by independent scientists, statisticians and data analysts, organised by Joanne Nova. They examined 8.5 million daily observations and, according to Nova, found 85 to 95 per cent of sites in the pre-Celsius era did not comply with the Bureau of Meteorology's own measurement standards.

They also discovered 20 to 30 per cent of conversions from old Fahrenheit records to Celsius were routinely rounded up or possibly truncated. This could have resulted in a warming bias. So if, as has been suspected, Australia's temperature records are unreliable, why should we meekly accept

conclusions which are based on them?

In *The Delinquent Teenager*, her forensic demolition of the IPCC, Donna Laframboise provides even more reason for the uninitiated to be cautious. If you don't want your faith in authority shattered, don't read her book. She says that of the 18,531 references in the IPCC's 2007 Assessment Report (the so-called gold standard on global warming and reflected in climate change policies around the world), 5,587 — a full 30 per cent! — were not peer-reviewed.

To demonstrate how this lack of rigour is no handicap, Laframboise reveals a dubious finding on extreme weather events that was prepared by an insurance company which stood to gain from increased premiums. One of the lead authors for the relevant chapter of the 2001 Assessment Report was someone without even a master's degree and whose qualification to be a reviewer was that he had spent some time himself as a trainee at an insurance company. Yet it was included in the report. It then made its way into peer-reviewed scientific literature in 2005. Laframboise notes: 'By 2009 [the finding] was being treated as gospel by a US government report.' 'Welcome,' she adds wryly, 'to the confidence-inspiring world of climate science.'

Laframboise tells us of the activist scientists who emerged in the 1970s and who have been working their way into high-status leadership positions. She observes: 'Rather than keeping its distance from those whose careers have been associated with activism, the scientific establishment now honours, celebrates and promotes such people.' People like Gerd Leipold, the recently retired president of Greenpeace, who admitted on the BBC's *Hard Talk* that to make sure the public sits up and takes notice, they sometimes have to 'emotionalise'. For example, by saying the three-kilometre-thick Greenland ice sheet would melt in a couple of decades. This he finally admitted was a stretch, but then the ends justified the means.

Mark Twain knew all about this. 'People's beliefs,' he wrote, 'are in almost every case gotten at second-hand and without examination from authorities who have examined the questions at issue, but have taken them second-hand from other non-examiners whose opinions about them were not worth a brass farthing.'

In a 2010 article in the *New Yorker*, 'The Truth Wears Off; Is Something Wrong With the Scientific Method?', we are told

that all sorts of widely confirmed findings have started to look uncertain. 'It's as if the facts are losing their truth,' says the author Jonah Lehrer. He claims that the phenomenon known as the decline effect is occurring across a wide range of fields, from psychology to ecology. He shows that in many scientific fields, research findings may simply be accurate measures of the prevailing bias. He observes that publication bias was at first mainly confined to clinical trials, since pharmaceutical companies are less interested in publicising results which aren't favourable. But it is now clear that publication bias produces major distortions in fields without obvious commercial motives.

University of Alberta biologist Richard Palmer agrees. He claims scientists selectively report data and find ways to confirm their preferred hypothesis, disregarding what they don't want to see. 'Our beliefs are a sort of blindness,' he says. He laments that when he found it was everywhere in science he became quite depressed.

Still, he doesn't see it as scientific fraud. He prefers the view that it is just subtle omission and a susceptibility to all sorts of perception biases. Whatever it is, it doesn't seem like a good basis on which to suspend one's independent thoughts and contract out.

Nor is our confidence improved when we read the Climategate emails, the thoroughly discredited 'Hockey Stick', the constant cherry-picking of data, or, most recently, the Gleick affair, where a prominent campaigner for climate change and integrity in science is suspected to have falsified a document and who has admitted to obtaining information under false pretences in an effort to expose the funding sources of a conservative think tank.

As with all the other integrity issues related to climate change, academics and journalists have been quick to defend and excuse his actions in the interests of the greater good. When people in privileged and influential positions justify immoral, unethical and even criminal conduct in the pursuit of some lofty ideal, you know it's time to head for the hills. It's certainly not a time to abandon your critical faculties.

Is it any wonder then that the public has become sceptical? Surveys around the world reveal a continuing slide in trust in climate science. No end of bullying from politicians and self-appointed authorities has made a difference. The people are smarter than their leaders. That said, there is a bigger issue at stake here than the vanity and credibility of politicians and climate scientists. It is the damage already done to science and the scientific method by demonstrated false claims and alarmist predictions which have failed to come true. It will take a very long time for belief and trust to be restored.

Maurice Newman is the former chairman of the ABC.