

THE AUSTRALIAN

ABC clique in control of climate

MAURICE NEWMAN THE AUSTRALIAN DECEMBER 18, 2012 12:00AM

LAST month in this newspaper, I wrote an irreverent piece, "Losing Their Religion As Evidence Cools Off", illustrating how the global warming establishment was like a religion, replete with the structure, scripture and financial resources required to promote a faith-based movement and how it is losing disciples as the truth wears off.

I don't know about other readers, but at the ABC, for those with the religion it hit a nerve.

On November 24, Robyn Williams intoned to his audience on ABC's The Science Show, "if I told you that pedophilia is good for children, or asbestos is an excellent inhalant for those with asthma, or, that smoking crack is a normal part and a healthy one of teenage life, you'd rightly find it outrageous. Similar statements are coming out of inexperienced mouths again and again, distorting the science". My article was given as an example of an anti-scientific position.

Really? Questioning climate science is like advocating pedophilia, abetting mesothelioma and pushing drugs to teenagers? Well yes, according to the ABC's science man. Stephan Lewandowsky, a guest on the program, asserted that those with a free market background were, according to his research, more likely to be sceptical of science. As well as climate science, "they are also rejecting the link between smoking and lung cancer; they are rejecting the link between HIV and AIDS", the professor said. Happily, it was extremely difficult to detect people on the "Left side of politics who are rejecting scientific evidence".

Williams confirmed that after "a learned lecture" by one of the world's most famous scientists, bankers remained unconvinced.

So there you have it. No more proof needed. Free marketers, bankers and science contrarians are simply despicable flat earthers. Best to keep away from them.

Ordinarily it should be unnecessary to object to such appalling commentary. It should have been automatically withdrawn. But no. An ABC response used sophistry to satisfy itself "that the presenter Robyn Williams did not equate climate change sceptics to pedophiles". Tell that to his listeners.

Global warming is today more about politics than it is about science. If flawed evidence fails, coercion and character assassination is deployed. No slur is too vicious, nor, as we saw with the BBC's 2006 seminar of the "best scientific experts", which despite strenuous attempts to resist freedom of information requests were finally revealed to be mainly NGOs and journalists, no deceit is too great.

Lubos Motl, a climate commentator and string theory physicist, said about the ABC's Science Show: "We used to hear some remotely similar (Czech) propaganda programs until 1989 ... but the public radio and TV simply can't produce programs that would be this dishonest, manipulative, hateful and insulting any more".

This is not the first time I have provoked the public wrath of the ABC's climate change clique, but it is the first time I have publicly responded to it. It is important that I do.

In March 2010 as chairman, I addressed an in-house conference of 250 ABC leaders. In a speech titled "Trust is the future of the ABC", I asked, "how might we ensure in our newsrooms we celebrate those who interrogate every truth?" I lamented the mainstream media's role as an effective gatekeeper. It was too conformist and had missed the warning signs of financial failure. I blamed group think and used climate change as an example. My mistake was to mention climate change.

While most company chairs would find the tenor of my talk unremarkable, Jonathon Holmes, the presenter of Media Watch, was so angry "he could not concentrate". He found it an inappropriate forum for such remarks. I was interviewed by PM and teased as to whether I was a "climate change denier or not as obvious as that?" As a further censure, that night Tony Jones read a statement on Lateline saying: "Tonight, ABC management responded to Mr Newman's speech, saying it stands by the integrity of its journalists and its processes."

Journalistic integrity? Encouraging the leadership to achieve higher standards is to question its integrity? Surely

wanting to improve performance is an elementary objective for any organisation, but rather than take on board the challenges I outlined, management decided to put a distance between us.

Holmes ("ABC Bias - Fact or Fiction", The Spectator Australia, December 1, 2012) says ABC staff may, in certain circumstances, see the editor-in-chief's interventions as interference. This describes an organisational culture not fully at home with authority and criticism.

ABC editorial policies require a diversity of perspectives to be presented so that "over time no significant strand or belief is knowingly excluded or disproportionately represented". They also speak of "a balance that follows the weight of evidence". But who does the weighing? Who re-weights and when? Or is it set and forget?

We have seen the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change discredited. We know the science is less robust. And, for the past 16 years, mother nature has been kind to the sceptics. Because Williams says the entire globe is threatened in a way that is pretty dire doesn't make it so. Yet the "weight of evidence" argument is often used as a licence to vilify holders of alternative views. As a taxpayer-funded organisation, the ABC shouldn't even have a view on global warming. What it does have is a duty to all Australians to broadcast honestly the best available evidence on both sides of the argument so that we can make up our own minds. This is not happening.

I retain a deep affection for the ABC. But, like the BBC, there are signs that a small but powerful group has captured the corporation, at least on climate change.

It is up to the board and management to rectify this.

Maurice Newman is a former chairman of the ABC
