



# CLIMATE SCIENCE AND POLICY-BASED EVIDENCE

## HOT TAKES

- 1 Noble cause corruption and confirmation bias are rife in climate science.
- 2 Much of climate research focuses on producing evidence intended to have a political impact.
- 3 Policy-based evidence is the converse of evidence-based policy. The former is not reliable scientific evidence.

**On the night of 17 August in 1980, on a family camping trip to Uluru in Australia's Northern Territory, a two-month-old baby girl went missing from her tent. Her body has never been found. During the investigation, a forensic scientist found 'foetal blood' in her mother's car. As a result Lindy Chamberlain was convicted of murder. Police were convinced of her guilt. They were not inclined to accept the (correct) alternative explanation that a dingo had taken the baby. The stain that was thought to have been blood was later determined to most likely be a sound-deadening compound from a manufacturing overspray<sup>1</sup>. The police were so convinced of the mother's guilt they favoured ultimately discredited evidence to secure a conviction. This was a case of bringing evidence to the theory – it was the easiest way to 'confirm' the theory they already believed to be true, and the shortest path to a conviction.**

The police were inadvertently guilty of 'noble cause corruption'<sup>2</sup>. It was only the accidental discovery of the baby's clothing near a dingo lair some years later that secured Lindy Chamberlain's eventual release. There are many examples of noble cause corruption from forensic science that show there does not need to be conscious bias for it to take place.

But what if climate change were a crime? Currently, man-made carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) is the prime suspect but where is the proof? Thanks to the willing cooperation of the media, we are told 'climate change is already happening', and we know that 'CO<sub>2</sub> is going up', but have scientists uncovered enough forensic evidence to convict the CO<sub>2</sub> beyond any reasonable doubt via a proper adversarial judicial process? The anti-carbon crusade has become so noble that it is now OK to bring the evidence to the theory. The current overwhelmingly CO<sub>2</sub>-centric climate modelling is an excellent example of this practice. It is equally OK to aggressively discard alternate natural explanations for climate change, and to ridicule sceptics for harboring alternate theories of climate.

The current state of climate research has become a good example of noble cause corruption. It falls short of the criteria for good science. Many of those involved have become emotionally committed and are convinced of their righteousness. Throw in the politics and it is not a good

environment for rational decision making based on hard testable evidence (facts) over belief and political ideology. Much of climate research today focuses on producing evidence intended to have a political impact.

## Judging Good Science

Bringing evidence to the theory is also an example of confirmation bias. Confirmation bias can distort interpretation of evidence and lead to wrong conclusions. The advance of science relies upon a number of methodological features that guard against mistakes such as this. Ideally, evidence presented by either side should be subjected to critical scrutiny by the other and debated, but this isn't happening.

Climate science is replete with examples of research that concludes the data are 'consistent with model results'. But model results themselves are often also referred to as 'data', even though they are merely the product of calculations made on the basis of assumptions that may subsequently turn out to be wrong. Data are facts that spring from direct observations and measurements; they do not spring from model calculations framed around theories. Models are supposed to be consistent with the data, not the other way around. But when climate models are formulated on the assumption that recent warming is almost entirely caused by increasing CO<sub>2</sub>, and then subsequently held up as evidence of CO<sub>2</sub>-causation, it is an act of circular reasoning.

Science is inherently an error-ridden undertaking that advances through the iterative detection and correction of error. Unfortunately this process in climate science is inhibited by politics, including the smearing of sceptical voices by calling people who challenge the mainstream narrative 'deniers'.

Numerous attempts at *falsification* of an hypothesis are far more valuable than numerous scientific publications *confirming* one. However a proper evaluation of research is only possible when the data and methods used in an investigation are made transparent enough to allow reproduction of the results. This is not always the case. For example the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) states that:

*'With very few exceptions modelling centres do not routinely describe in detail how they tune their models. Therefore the complete list of observational constraints toward which a particular model is tuned is generally not available'<sup>3</sup>.*

This admission reveals that not even the IPCC understands how the models their climate projections depend on have been constructed. It also renders an independent evaluation of the IPCC's climate projections impossible.

Climate science is replete with examples of what Sonja Boehmer-Christiansen<sup>4</sup> called '*policy-based evidence*'

– ‘evidence’ guided by an overriding policy -- often institutionally mandated -- a situation falling well short of the standards we expect for scientific excellence.

The corrective mechanisms of the scientific method have been weakened by the empowerment of a kind of climate ‘science enterprise’ -- leading to a harnessing of science to state power. A kind of ‘official science’ has emerged. It is beyond challenge – ‘*the science is in*’. Consider the disconcerting homogeneity of the ‘official’ climate change policies held by all the universities, government research institutions, scientific societies, and an increasing number of large corporates. Such an overwhelming uniformity of thought (at least publicly!) is virtually unknown in any other field of science. In any other situation this should raise a major red flag, but not in climate science.

The strong moral sense that accompanies climate science, in seeking to ‘save the world’ from catastrophic man-made climate change, is part of the problem, because ‘high moral purposes’ can lead to questionable interpretive practices (QIPs) as moral purpose affects the psychology of the scientists. Established QIPs include: blind spots (overlooking data inconsistent with one’s moral agenda); selective preference (accepting research supporting one’s agenda, but subjecting opposing research of comparable or greater quality to criticism); and phantom facts (drawing implications without evidence)<sup>5</sup>.

## The Noble Cause Corruption of Climate Science

Climate science falls short of the criteria for good science. Far too frequently, noble cause corruption leads to the selection of evidence intended to have a political effect.

The controversial ‘Climategate’ emails released from the Climate Research Unit (CRU) at the University of East Anglia in 2009 showed multiple breakdowns in the all-important peer-review process – a practice intended to protect research standards. Instead, correspondents conspired to exclude research challenging the prevailing global warming orthodoxy,

seeking to arrange a favourable ‘pal’ review, and even seeking to undermine unhelpful editors<sup>6</sup>.

Garth Paltridge, a retired Australian atmospheric physicist, who was once a Chief Research Scientist at the CSIRO, was director of the Institute of Antarctic and Southern Ocean Studies, and was CEO of the Antarctic Cooperative Research Centre, wrote a paper challenging a core component of global warming theory. With co-authors, he explored a key assumption in climate models: that a modest climate impact from increased CO<sub>2</sub> (about 1.2°C for a doubling of CO<sub>2</sub>) would be amplified because this modest warming increased water vapour (humidity), the dominant greenhouse gas in the atmosphere<sup>7</sup>. They analysed humidity in the lower atmosphere for the period 1973–2007, and submitted a paper to the *Journal of Climate*, with a conclusion that held significant implications for the amplification assumption. They challenged the prevailing narrative that it would double the temperature rise due to CO<sub>2</sub> (approximately 2.4°C) but instead might actually halve it (approximately 0.6°C). The paper was rejected. An editor supported a reviewer who correctly identified, not a problem with Paltridge’s data or logic, but with its implications for the politics and policies supported by climate science. The paper was accepted instead by *Theoretical and Applied Climatology*, where it was published<sup>8</sup>.

## Conclusion

The nobility of the cause has trumped adherence to the scientific method. The generation of policy-based evidence has limited the ability of policy makers to respond on the basis of credible scientific conclusions.

Noble cause corruption should concern both citizens and governments. Some have characterised climate science as ‘post-normal science’, which is pursued when facts are uncertain, values are in dispute, stakes are high, and decisions are ‘urgent’<sup>9</sup>.

Climate science is in urgent need of repair.

## SEE ALSO

**FACT SHEET #5: SACRED BUBBLES IN ICE CORES**

**FACT SHEET #19: ON BLIND BEETLES AND SHAPESHIFTING BIRDS: RESEARCH GRANTS AND CLIMATE CATASTROPHISM**

Information in this fact sheet has been drawn from *Climate Change: The Facts 2020* (IPA 2020), Chapter 18, by Professor Aynsley Kellow. Fact Sheet series general editor: Dr Arthur Day

1. Reference Under S.433A of the Criminal Code by the Attorney-General for the Northern Territory of Australia of Convictions of Alice Lynne Chamberlain and Michael Leigh Chamberlain, Supreme Court of the Northern Territory of Australia, No. CA2, 1988. (Acquittal decision.)
2. Noble cause corruption begins when someone is so convinced of their righteousness they will do anything to attain results that confirm strongly held pre-existing beliefs.
3. Flato et al. 2013, *Evaluation of Climate Models* [https://archive.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/wg1/WG1AR5\\_Chapter09\\_FINAL.pdf](https://archive.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/wg1/WG1AR5_Chapter09_FINAL.pdf)
4. Boehmer-Christiansen, S 1994, ‘Global climate protection policy: the limits of scientific advice: Part 2’, *Global Environmental Change*, vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 185–200.
5. Jussim et al. 2016, ‘Can high moral purposes undermine scientific integrity’, in J Forgas, P van Lange & L Jussim (eds), *The social psychology of morality*, Psychology Press, London.
6. Montford, AW 2012, *Hiding the Decline: A History of the Climategate Affair*, Anglosphere Books, London.
7. This is discussed in greater detail in: Kellow, A 2018, *Negotiating Climate Change: A Forensic Analysis*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham.
8. Paltridge et al. 2009, ‘Trends in middle-and upper-level tropospheric humidity from NCEP reanalysis data’, *Theoretical and Applied Climatology*, vol. 98, no. 3–4, pp. 351–359.
9. Funtowicz, SO, & Ravetz, JR 1993, ‘Science for the post-normal age’, *Futures*, vol. 25, no. 7, pp. 739–75

Climatechangethefacts.org.au is presented by the Institute of Public Affairs of Melbourne, Australia, to address key questions about climate change. The Fact Sheets, Videos and Publications on the site are drawn from the IPA’s own climate change research program, and/or information sourced from third parties and curated by the IPA.

**Donations for climate research are tax deductible within Australia [ipa.org.au/donate](http://ipa.org.au/donate)**

 **Institute of  
Public Affairs**