



RESEARCH GRANTS AND CLIMATE CATASTROPHISM

HOT TAKES

- 1 Climate policy should be formulated on simple reason and evidence, but it isn't.
- 2 A non-virtuous triangle of self-interest has formed between government, scientists, and activists.
- 3 This is leading to flawed climate advice and wasteful research funding.

Government climate policy is not being formulated on the basis of simple reason and evidence. It is based on the number of supporters the policy has in Cabinet and the authority of those supporters. Consensus may be a determinant in the formulation of government policy but it should not be a determinant in science. Science depends on the facts and not the authority of the observer of those facts.

Key determinants in the development of national and international climate change policy are a function of the ideologies which place man-made global warming beyond contestable science. Bad science is always eventually corrected, but while bad science and bad public policy can be overturned in the long run, it can inflict a great deal of harm in the short term.

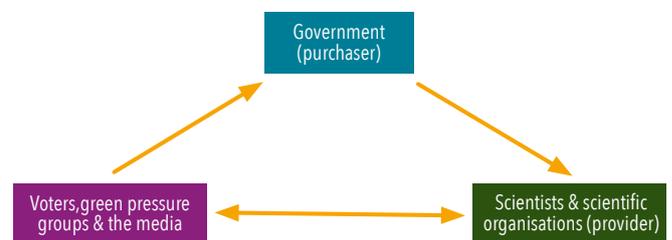
National Governments are advised directly by government scientific institutions and by the UN through the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The assumption is the scientific advice from the UN and government agencies is disinterested and objective, but funding arrangements can change behaviour. To acquire funding individual scientists and their agencies need to be aware of the political dynamic. For instance scare campaigns promoted by environmental activists and amplified in the media work to unlock research funds from government. Furthering the man-made global warming hypothesis aligns with the long-term economic interest of researchers. The survivors in the current system have learned to adjust their behaviour to suit the politics. This can distort the direction of research.

These dynamics check the influence of the many individual scientists who strongly disagree with the dominant hypothesis. They publish articles in scientific journals and newspapers, host climate blogs and talk and write to politicians stating that the evidence to support the alarm being propagated is simply not there. However, independent scientists – no matter the weight of their findings in purely scientific terms – are not the formal scientific advisors on climate-change policy to government.

An 'Iron Triangle' of Self Interest and Waste

A self-reinforcing 'Iron Triangle' has been established between government (as the purchaser), scientists (as the providers), and voters, green pressure groups, and the media, who help influence the 'purchaser' on behalf of the 'suppliers' (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The Iron Triangle



The groups occupying all three corners of this triangle stand to benefit. For example, where the 'purchaser' is a democratically elected government, if activist scientists and their employers feed the media and pressure groups with narratives of 'crisis' and 'emergency', the news articles the journalists create influence public opinion, which in turn draws a government policy response. This ultimately opens the way for more research funding. The journalists are rewarded with fame and career progression, the scientists get their money, and our government gets kudos for being seen to be 'doing something' to 'stop climate change'.

At the heart of the problem, this purchaser–provider economic model requires an *informed* purchaser for the model to work effectively. In this transaction, however, the most informed person is the scientist and researcher – the provider – rather than the purchaser, or government. This gives the provider the capacity to manipulate the purchaser, leading to adverse outcomes that may not improve policy effectiveness and economic efficiency.

Government policy has become hostage to the scientific organisations and pressure groups. This model is now largely the way science, including climate science, is funded in government scientific institutions and universities.

Because furthering the man-made global warming hypothesis aligns with the long-term economic interests of researchers, the result is poor public policy, poor research outcomes, and enormous wastage of funds.

In today's environment, with no political advantage in breaking this non-virtuous relationship, the Iron Triangle is safe.

The Australian Research Council and Universities

Along with the Commonwealth Government, the other significant ‘purchasers’ of climate change-related research include the Australian Research Council (ARC) and the universities, which are the major recipients of grants issued by the ARC. Universities have attained a special status on policy making, both as centres of expertise, and as vehicles to pursue ‘public benefit’ research.

Neither the states nor the Government are properly accountable for Australia’s universities. The states can take the view that as the universities are federally funded, the management of the university is nothing to do with them, while the Commonwealth can take the view that as they are state institutions, they are not a Commonwealth responsibility. Consequently, billions of taxpayer dollars are allocated to universities with little accountability to government. Federal funds dwarf by an order of magnitude funds from state governments.

Audit of ARC Grants for Climate Change

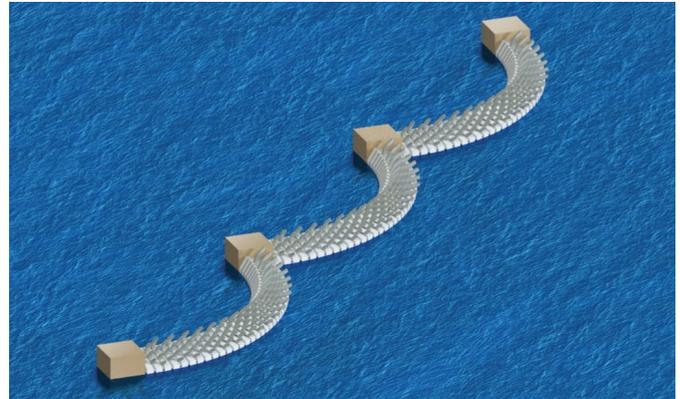
Between 2002 and 2019, 646 and 85 ARC-funded science and humanities research projects respectively were identified as addressing the theme of man-made climate change. The total amount of funding was \$286.6 and \$32.7 million respectively, distributed across six fields in science and engineering, and nine in the humanities¹.

It is important to note that while the outcomes of research projects are often reported to confirm the factual basis of man-made climate-change, this is overwhelmingly the *assumption* on which the research programs were framed around in the first place. In a significant number of cases, it appears researchers merely modified a proposal simply to justify the project on the grounds of climate change.

It is often said by activists that to combat climate change we need to consider bold new technologies. It appears the ARC endorses this approach by backing proposals that test the boundaries of science, engineering, and – one might say – *common sense*. For example, the engineers at the University of

Queensland received \$713,000 to develop an offshore floating forest as a combined breakwater and windbreak, to protect the coast from strong waves and winds caused by climate change. See Figure 2.

Figure 2: Floating forest designed to reduce coastal wind and wave damage²



The coastline of Australia is more than 35,000 kilometres long.

The ARC funding mechanism may be beyond reform. It embodies the worst aspects of the Iron Triangle while undermining the accountability of the government–purchaser and the university–provider.

Conclusion – Climate Science, a Trust Misplaced

Leaders in government rely on the authority of the scientific institutions to guide and justify their decisions. True science does not rely on the authority of the speaker, but on the evidence provided. However, this is not the way that public policy in government is made. Ministers and policy bureaucrats do not have the capacity or the time to assess the scientific evidence, so they rely on the authority of scientific institutions. It is a matter of trust and if this trust is based on a self-interested funding methodology, it is a trust misplaced. We must seek a better way.

SEE ALSO

FACT SHEET #18: Climate Science and Policy-based Evidence

FACT SHEET #16: Rewriting Australia’s Temperature History

Information in this fact sheet has been drawn from *Climate Change: The Facts 2020* (IPA 2020), Chapter 19, by Dr Paul McFadyen, Scott Hargreaves and Dr Bella d’ Abrera. Fact Sheet series general editor: Dr Arthur Day

1. Source: ARC Data Portal, Authors.
2. Source: <https://www.uq.edu.au/news/article/2019/05/floating-forest-could-protect-vulnerable-shorelines>.

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