



Can The IPCC Be Trusted?

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This article from the [August 2012 edition](#) of the [IPA Review](#) is by recent IPA guest and author of 'The Delinquent Teenager Who Was Mistaken for the World's Top Climate Expert', Donna Laframboise .

When I set out to research climate change three years ago, little did I imagine that I'd end up writing an exposé of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)-a body few people have even heard of.

Established in the late 1980s, the findings of this United Nations panel have been influencing governments far and wide. From Australia to Canada, from the UK to South Africa, legislators point to IPCC reports as justification for a long list of policy decisions.

We're told that costly carbon taxes, stringent new laws, and increased red tape are all necessary because the IPCC says so. We're told that the planet will overheat if we don't dramatically reduce our use of fossil fuels. We're advised that droughts and wildfires will increase, sea levels will rise,



cyclones will become more dangerous, the Barrier Reef will fry, and so forth.

But such prognostications should only be taken seriously if the IPCC is a credible and trustworthy organisation. What if it is not?

It is important to appreciate the degree to which the IPCC has received a free ride in the media. To hear most journalists tell it, this organisation is a paragon of scientific truth and respectability. Words such as 'authoritative,' 'pre-eminent,' and 'gold standard' are typically used to describe it. We're told it is a collection of the world's top scientists and best experts. In sum, for more than 20 years news accounts have assured us we're in good hands, that the IPCC is a mature professional in business attire-reliable, cautious, and painstaking.

But my research reveals something else: a slapdash, overindulged adolescent who has trouble telling right from wrong. My earliest attempts to verify basic facts about the IPCC failed. To my astonishment, each time I turned over a rock I discovered a new scandal. After a while it began to feel as though I were fact-checking the resumé of a pathological liar.

Let's begin with the widespread claim that IPCC personnel are the *crème de la crème*, the world's finest scientific minds. In the words of the IPCC's current chairman, Rajendra Pachauri, these people 'have been chosen on the basis of their track record.' They are 'at the top of their profession.'

If that is the case how do we explain Richard Klein, now a Dutch geography professor? He first served as an IPCC lead author at the tender age of 25-nine years before completing his doctorate. Laurens Bouwer, another Dutchman, was selected to be an IPCC lead author prior to the completion of his 2001 Masters degree. Lisa Alexander, currently a professor at the University of New South Wales, was a contributing author for the IPCC's 2001 and 2007 reports – even though she didn't receive her PhD until 2009.

And then there's the matter of Sari Kovats, currently a lecturer at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. Back in 1994 she was one of less than two dozen souls selected to work on the IPCC's first examination of how climate change might affect human health. She was 25 years old. Her first academic paper wouldn't appear until three years later. Her doctorate wouldn't be earned until 2010-16 years after the fact. How could she possibly have been considered one of the world's most eminent scientists?

Is the IPCC embarrassed about this? Hardly. It invited Kovats back to work on its 2001 and 2007 reports -before promoting her. She is now leading a chapter for the IPCC report that is currently being written.

Recently, the InterAcademy Council, an organisation comprised of science bodies from around the world, invited people to answer an online questionnaire regarding the IPCC. When their responses were later made public, we learned that many with firsthand experience of this organisation believe its commitment to scientific excellence is sorely lacking.



Remember, this is a UN body. It therefore cares about the same things other UN bodies care about. Things like diversity. Gender balance. Regional representation. The degree to which developing countries are represented compared to developed countries.

According to IPCC veterans, some lead authors 'are clearly not qualified' to fill that role. One person claimed that half of the lead authors in the chapter he'd worked on 'were not competent.' In the opinion of someone else, IPCC author selection is 'flawed by an excessive concern for geographical balance.'

The IPCC likes to boast that its findings represent the views of scientists from more than 100 countries. This sounds impressive until we remember that only about two dozen nations are in a position to nurture first-class educational and research facilities. In other words, rather than being a collection of competitive cyclists, many on the IPCC's team are actually riding tricycles.

Another IPCC fairy tale involves the claim that its reports rely solely and exclusively on peer-reviewed scientific literature. In 2008 chairman Pachauri told a committee of the North Carolina legislature that 'everything that we look at and take into account in our assessments has to carry [the] credibility of peerreviewed publications, we don't settle for anything less than that.' A year later, when a journalist asked whether a discussion paper issued by India's environment ministry might be consulted by the IPCC, Pachauri was arrogantly dismissive: 'Let someone publish the data in a decent credible journal,' he said, 'otherwise we can just throw it into the dustbin.'

There is nothing confusing about these statements. Their meaning is plain. So what are we to make of the fact that they are also patently untrue? In fact, IPCC reports have long cited 'grey literature' (material not published in peer-reviewed academic journals). IPCC personnel who answered the questionnaire were adamant about this. In the words of one person, 'The use of grey literature is unavoidable.' Someone else reported that their chapter had 'depended heavily on non-peer reviewed literature.' Again and again the words 'essential' and 'necessary' were uttered in this context.

This is fully consistent with the findings of a quick-and-dirty evaluation I personally undertook with the assistance of readers of my blog. After sorting the references listed in the 2007 IPCC report into two groups-journal articles and everything else-we found that 30 per cent of the IPCC's source material had not been published in a peer-reviewed scientific journal. Instead, the world's 'pre-eminent authority on climate change' had relied on news clippings, press releases, and material written by activist groups such as Greenpeace to make its arguments.

In other situations, this would be called a conspiracy of silence. Thousands of people knew that the chairman of the IPCC was uttering nonsense when he repeatedly made his we-only-use-peer-reviewedmaterial claim. Thousands also knew that large numbers of the individuals chosen to help write IPCC reports are not the world's best and brightest.

SO WHY DID NO ONE SPEAK UP?



How is it possible that the planet's entire science establishment failed to notice that the public was being bamboozled? Where were the publications *Nature and Science*? Where was the Royal Society?

Even more to the point: what does this tell us about climate scientists? During a period in which they authored numerous open letters warning us about impending doom, not a single letter alerted us to the fact that we were being profoundly misled by the IPCC's leadership.

Imagine you're a parent looking for a daycare centre for your toddler. One of the facilities under consideration tells you that all staff members are highly credentialed and experienced-and that the centre prides itself on meeting the strictest safety standards.

If you then discover that teenagers routinely work there and that the facility has failed its third fire inspection would you still entrust your offspring to such a facility? Or would you run the other way?

The IPCC is an organisation that has systematically told untruths about the nature of its own personnel. It has systematically misled the public about how its reports are prepared.

In the climate debate, this is the body in which governments have placed their trust.