

# A disappointing cool down

Jennifer Marohasy reviews

## *Cool It: The Skeptical Environmentalist's Guide to Global Warming*

by Bjorn Lomborg  
(Knopf, 2007, 272 pages)



We have a choice: we can save 49 polar bears a year by banning hunting or 0.06 bears by subscribing to the Kyoto Protocol. Of course nothing in the real world is ever this simple—though Bjorn Lomborg suggests otherwise in his new book *Cool It: the Skeptical Environmentalist's Guide to Global Warming*.

Lomborg begins by claiming that global warming is real and man-made, that the immediate consequences of global warming are often exaggerated, that we need simpler and more efficient solutions for global warming, and that there are other more important issues including HIV/AIDS. Even if this were the case, it doesn't make for a comprehensive, or even simple, guide to global warming.

The book continues the theme that Lomborg effectively dealt with in 2001's *The Skeptical Environmentalist: Measuring the Real State of the World*, that those who want to do good need to better prioritise issues, but his writing falls flat this time around. Indeed why should those interested in reading 'a guide to global warming' concern themselves with HIV/AIDS, drinking water and sanitation? Lomborg implies that these, and other issues, are related because he appears to accept the popular notion that stopping global warming

and curing the sick are primarily moral issues. They do indeed have a moral dimension, but global warming is essentially a technological and economic issue, while hunger and sickness are often a consequence of poverty which cannot be fixed in developing countries without also addressing issues of property rights and the rule of law—no matter how much money and conspicuous compassion is thrown that way.

The front flap describes *Cool It* as, 'a groundbreaking book that transforms the debate about global warming by offering a fresh perspective based on human needs as well as environmental concerns'. In reality, many global warming activists have dismissed the book while criticizing Lomborg for using issues relating to developing world poverty to attack proposals to mitigate warming. On the other side some global warming sceptics complain Lomborg provides no evidence to show there is human-induced global warming. Lomborg claims he tries to take a 'centrist point of view' but in reality he avoids many real issues and also the complexity of the real world.

Take for example the issue of polar bears (and putting aside a valid criticism that Lomborg should have used the latest 2006 report from the Polar Bear Specialist Group of the World Conservation Union rather than relying on the somewhat dated 2001 re-

port), why should the Inuit people of the Arctic be banned from hunting polar bears if numbers are indeed increasing? In the opening chapter Lomborg correctly explains that over the past decades the global polar bear population has increased from about 5,000 to 25,000 through the introduction of a quota system for hunters. Lomborg also makes the point that this information is ignored by many technical and media reports which overwhelmingly suggest the demise of polar bears. But Lomborg then goes on to suggest that the solution is to ban hunting altogether. But if the quota system is working why destroy it?

Lomborg conveniently side-steps the entire potentially contentious issue of hunting and just assumes that if there was no hunting there would be more polar bears and that more polar bears is an intrinsically good thing. In the same chapter Lomborg claims a concern for people's quality of life as well as the environment, so why does he want to deny the Inuit people their tradition of hunting polar bears when the evidence suggests that the practice, given current regulations, is sustainable?

*Cool It* raises issues which could challenge the armchair environmentalist's often romantic, but false, ideas about the natural world, and the left's outdated notion that we can 'make poverty history' if only first-world governments gave more aid to developing nations. But after *The Skeptical Environmentalist*—surely a classic of its genre and an heir to Julian Simon's *The Ultimate Resource*—which had 25 chapters and 173 data-rich figures, *Cool It*, which, in its American edition features just five chapters and not a single graph, is a disappointment. It lacks real substance, side steps critical issues and promotes unrealistic solutions to some of the world's most pressing problems.



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