

# WAKE UP: THEY'RE MISLEADING YOU

## The Media's Climate Change Propaganda

Andrew McIntyre & Chris Berg

Without Australia as a signatory, the Kyoto Protocol came into force on 16 February this year.

The Kyoto Protocol is an historic agreement, worthy of extensive debate and it was inevitable and appropriate for the media to increase its focus on the issue of climate change.

But not, it appears, worthy of objective coverage—at least in some quarters. As is increasingly the case with many environmental issues, instead of treating the debate with the level of objectivity and nuance that it deserves, some of the Australian media joined activists in a campaign designed to create a state of fear.

A case study of this phenomenon was a four-part series on Climate Change and Kyoto published in Melbourne in *The Age* in mid-February 2005.

On Saturday 12 February, readers were greeted with the four-page spread written by environment reporter Melissa Fyfe, with the bold headline, WAKE UP THIS IS SERIOUS, and a sub-heading, 'scientists are all but screaming that the world is on a path to disaster unless we stop global warming'.

Fyfe presents ten case studies, in fewer than 150 words each, which supposedly prove the case of catastrophic impacts of man-made greenhouse gases and the need for immediate and drastic action. This, we are told, is the end of the argument. Instead of blindly obeying her directive to START WORRYING NOW, it is worth doing some research about whether Fyfe's summary of the science is accurate. What emerges is a picture of cherry-picked facts which misrepresents the situation as scientists best know it, all in the name of environmental advocacy.



Source: *The Age*, 12 February, 2005

### DISTORTED CASE STUDIES

#### Polar Bears

Green groups and environmental activists know that the cuter the animal, the more powerful the imagery. While it is unlikely that anybody would want a polar bear for an indoor pet, they are cute from a distance—and even more so when drawn as a cartoon. Melissa Fyfe regurgitates the old, old claim that polar bears are in danger. In *The Age*, polar bears' bodies are said to be becoming thinner. It turns out that this was true at least in one area in Canada during one year. A survey of polar bears in the Hudson Bay region found that the average weight of female polar bears was eight per cent lower in 1999 than found in a previous survey. The research was conducted by Dr Ian Stirling, a researcher with the Canadian Wildlife Service.

In the study Dr Stirling stated: 'I'm reluctant to speculate too wildly' but then went on to speculate that the causes may be 'anything from the chemical composition of seals in the area, to pollutants, to hydro-electric developments in the area' and, of course, climate change. Elsewhere, Stirling was less coy. At a conference of science journalists in Montreal in 2004, he advocated curbing carbon-dioxide by 60–80 per cent to save the polar bears. WWF picked up and broadcast his statement predicting the extinction of polar bears if climate

change continues.

Such 'wild' speculation is what fuels the climate change industry. Scientists make narrow studies. They bundle the study with speculative conclusions. These conclusions are pounced upon by legions of activist cherry-pickers, excited by new prophecies of doom. Importantly, we can find no evidence of Dr Stirling or any other scientist setting the record straight or admonishing WWF and others for misrepresenting their research.

Are polar bears being endangered by an early melting of Arctic ice as prophesized by Dr Stirling, WWF and *The Age*? Not according to WWF's own study 'Polar Bears at Risk'. Their report found that polar bear populations are stable, and in many areas increasing. Indeed they were found to be in decline in only two of the 19 areas studied. True to form, the WWF press release only referred to the areas in decline.

Other more recent studies have found a 20–25 per cent increase in polar bear numbers across Canada. Indeed, the numbers have increased to the point where the Inuit people have increased the number available for hunters. In a number of Arctic villages, polar bears are 'so abundant there's a public safety issue'. Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans, which monitors and models the relationship between shifting sea ice and global warming, has concluded that 'overall

the possible impact of global warming appears to play a minor role in changes to Arctic sea ice’.

In short, speculation by a scientist is picked up and augmented by propagandists, and then transmitted around the world as an example of why Australians should reduce their energy consumption by at least 60 per cent within 45 years.

### Penguins

Far higher on the cute ladder than polar bears are penguins. Just like polar bears, penguins are said to be feeling the wrath of climate change.

While penguins might have limited contact with Man, they are the most studied type of bird. There is a huge volume of detailed research on penguin populations—in particular, of the Adelie penguin—going back as far as five decades. The evidence shows that change in population numbers has occurred almost everywhere. In some places the Adelie penguin populations have experienced long sustained growth, in some places they are stable, and in a few places they are declining.

This conflicting evidence is not particularly surprising, but neither is it fully understood. For example, an American research group team in the Antarctic Peninsula (whose results, perhaps, are those upon which Fyfe of *The Age* appears to rely—*The Age* provides no references), has found that the number of breeding pairs of Adelie penguins has dropped in some places where they were replaced by Gentoo and Chinstrap penguins. The team put these trends down to global warming. (<http://www.INTERNET.edu/vignettes/pal.html>)

Down the Peninsula, and still in the American area, another team of US scientists has been studying another Adelie penguin group for decades. They have found a large and sustained increase in the population numbers. In the Ross Sea area, the New Zealanders have also found a large sustained rise in Adelie penguin numbers. For example, the *New Zealand Journal of Ecology* reports that Adelie penguins in the Ross

Sea are repopulating areas that, in the fluctuating climate of the last thousand years, they had at times abandoned. Third, Australian researchers at the Davis, Mawson and Casey stations in East Antarctica have reported ‘sustained, long term increases for the past 30 or more years’ of Adelie penguins. In the Casey region, the total breeding population has actually more than trebled since the 1960s.

These three independent research groups are in agreement that global warming is the likely cause of the increases in penguin numbers that they have found.

So what is the public to make of all this? Scientists speculating that increases and decreases of Adelie penguin populations in close proximity to each other are both caused by global warming. These concerns are then broadcast by Greenpeace and others and used by Melissa Fyfe to demand action to curb global warming now.

### Snow Gums

Just like cute animals, beautiful scenery is an effective tool for swaying public opinion. But unlike polar bears, snow gums can’t maul you. And so Melissa Fyfe turns to the harsh environment of the Victorian Alps and Snowy Mountains, where she argues that snow gums are moving up the mountains, and that climate change, due to human activity, is undeniably at fault.

Once again, her premise is not wrong. A 2001 study by Lynise J. Wearne and John W. Morgan showed that snow gums were growing further up Mt Hotham than they had been previously. In this case, however, the study in question—unlike *The Age*—did not put it down to climate change. Indeed, despite there being an increase in average temperature over the last 150 years, the authors note that the cause is not fully known, and requires ‘further clarification’. It could well be that the snow gums have been slowly creeping up the mountains for more than a hundred years. In the absence of calamitous events—in this case, extreme frost—

plants are able to slowly encroach on areas which may not have been as conducive to growth in the past. But what if this is simply a natural cyclical trend? When the occasional extreme weather event occurs again, the recently colonized areas may recede and the cycle of re-colonization may start anew. To argue that this cycle is clearly indicative of anthropogenic climate change is disingenuous.

### Tuvalu

Sea levels are rising on Tuvalu. Silafaga Lalua wrote in *Tuvalu News*, ‘Our island is sinking together with our hearts.’ But—and readers of the Review might be detecting a pattern here—there is slightly more to the story than what is presented by Fyfe and Lalua. The sea level is indeed rising ... at a heartbreaking 0.9mm per year. The South Pacific Sea Level and Climate Monitoring Project, which has been monitoring Tuvalu for 22 years, doesn’t credit even this barely perceptible change in sea level to global warming. Instead it argues that ‘Variations in monthly mean sea level are dominated by seasonal cycles and by the effect of the 1997/1998 El Niño.’ It goes on to state that ‘even with 22 years of data, the trend can not be established without sizeable uncertainties’. The experience of other islands around the world—because, of course, this is *global warming*—confirms this trend. But, as the report from Tuvalu states, ‘We caution against drawing conclusions prematurely’. Once again, this caution has appeared to have been missed or ignored by Melissa Fyfe. Instead, with unambiguous confidence, she asserts, in 10 REASONS TO START WORRYING NOW—‘Tuvalu, a small nation made up of nine atolls near Fiji, is shrinking with rising sea levels.’

Claims such as ‘animals are on the move, glaciers are melting and drought is spreading’ are wilfully misleading. Kyoto spruikers wrap their campaigns in deception and, like all good propagandists, provide a simple solution—the Kyoto Protocol. But this simple solution isn’t enough for some ▶

activists. As Fyfe argues, Kyoto is ‘just a start’. Indeed, the Australian Conservation Foundation contends that it is ‘essential that Australia’s greenhouse gas emissions are reduced by 70–80% by 2050 and that the use of fossil fuels is phased out’. The ACF is also dead against nuclear power and more hydro-electric power.

Buy your batteries now—but how will they be charged?

### A SCIENTIFIC CONSENSUS?

Media campaigns consistently present an image of consensus amongst scientists about climate change. That is, that the science is settled and there is an overwhelming majority of independent scientists worldwide who agree that human-caused global warming is proceeding at an alarming rate. A speech by the President of the Pew Center on Global Climate Change urges pro-Kyoto activists continually to emphasize the ‘clear and overwhelming consensus among scientists’. ([http://www.pewclimate.org/press\\_room/speech\\_transcripts/climatechange.cfm](http://www.pewclimate.org/press_room/speech_transcripts/climatechange.cfm)). The remaining ‘skeptics’ are portrayed as being a small pocket of people of questionable authority and of even more questionable motives.

It is important to emphasize that, in any case, consensus has nothing to do with science; one new hypothesis can, and sometimes does, disprove the opinion of every scientist in the world. Science is not determined on a vote. Successful new hypotheses must account for existing data and also be predictive. Nevertheless, because the ‘consensus’ argument is so often deployed by alarmist global warming supporters, it is important to note that such claims of scientific consensus are, in fact, utterly false.

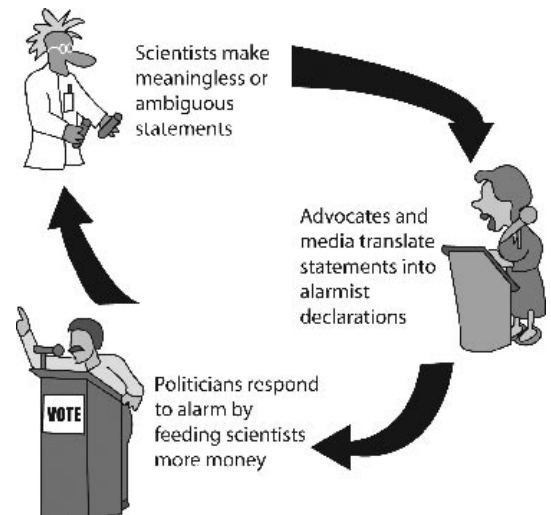
It is true that the majority of climatologists and other experts on climate change believe that change is being partly driven by human-produced greenhouse gases. But there is simply no consensus. For example, in a recent article in *Der Spiegel*, Hans von Storch,

head of the Coastal Research Institute in Geesthacht, and Nico Stehr, Sociologist at the Zeppelin University in Friedrichshafen, quoted a survey conducted last year among climate researchers throughout the world. It found that a quarter of the respondents still harboured significant doubts about the human origin of the most recent climatic changes.

The Oregon Petition (<http://www.oism.org/pproject/>) which urges the United States to reject Kyoto and argues that there is inadequate scientific evidence to back up the charge that humans are causing catastrophic heating of the Earth’s atmosphere and are affecting the Earth’s climate has been signed by 17,000 American scientists. The Heidelberg Appeal — publicly released at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, and warning of the emergence of an irrational ideology which is opposed to scientific and industrial progress and impedes economic and social development — has been signed by 4,000 scientists, and counts 72 Nobel Prize winners amongst its signatories. But in this scientific debate, *The Age* prefers to quote Frank Fitzgerald-Ryan, the principal of Vox Bandicoot, the company that created the Sustainability Street approach, labelling the sceptics, ‘Holocaust-deniers’.

A previous article by Fyfe on 27 November 2004, titled ‘The Sceptics’, disparaged any scientists who questioned her pro-Kyoto stance as mere ‘hired guns’, who followed a corporate line while jettisoning scientific process and honesty. At the same time, she uncritically reported the views of people whose livelihoods are dependent upon the Kyoto agreement and on the dramatic action needed to ‘prevent’ the impending climate change.

Underlying this approach was the headline in *The Age*—ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW—with the word ‘need’ in red. Even for those who would take The



Lindzen’s iron triangle of alarmism

*Age*’s side in this debate, that headline is outrageously patronizing of those who wish to be fully informed about the facts in order to participate in rational discussion.

### DISTORTION OF THE PUBLIC DEBATE

Why is there such distortion of the public debate on climate change?

There are at least three possible explanations: ‘noble cause corruption’; the politics of funding and rent seeking. Aynsley Kellow, *The Greenhouse and the Garbage Can: Uncertainty and Problem Construction in Climate Policy* suggests—in the context of NSW Premier Bob Carr’s recent prediction of catastrophic change if we do not act immediately to reduce greenhouse gases—that it is the nobility of the cause that leads people to rationalize the misuse of evidence. It also explains the willingness and unquestioning collusion of the activist media and the Green fundamentalists, who believe profoundly that it is the decent and moral thing to be concerned about environmental threats, irrespective of the facts or of judgements about the likelihood of particular threats eventuating.

The second reason is money. There is a *New Yorker* cartoon that depicts an elderly gentleman walking through a park with his grand-

son. 'It's good to know about trees,' he says, 'Just remember, nobody ever made big money knowing about trees'. But in this era, there is big money to be made for talking about trees. Richard Lindzen, Sloan Professor of Meteorology, Department of Earth, Atmospheric and Planetary Sciences, MIT, argues that a strong bond has developed between the media, politicians and scientists. In a recent paper 'On the Anatomy of Alarmism', he outlines the concept of an 'Iron Triangle' (of alarmism) linked with the 'Iron Rice Bowl' (of Science). Scientists make meaningless or ambiguous statements that are then picked up by advocates and the media and translated into alarmist declarations. This in turn pressures the politicians, who respond to the alarm by feeding scientists more money for their research. Of course, in turn, this motivates scientists to find more reasons for encouraging funding of research through selectively reporting more alarming science. The sums of money divvied up by governments for greenhouse science confirm Lindzen's analysis, with US\$3–4 billion annually being allocated to climate change research in the United States alone. A National Climate Change Adaptation Programme, announced by the Australian federal government in May last year, is being granted \$14.2 million over a four-year period to 'prepare governments, vulnerable industries, communities and ecosystems to manage the unavoidable consequences of climate change'. And during 2003–04, the Australian Greenhouse Office received \$107 million for tasks which are grouped under such categories as 'leading the agenda', 'promoting sustainable energy' and 'taking early action'. Yes indeed, there is money in climate change.

A third reason, somewhat dependent on the second, is the money handed out by government to NGOs and businesses. Legislation has already been introduced which allows for the capture of niche markets that have not existed previously. *The Age* lists some so-called 'clean' businesses—all of which have clear commercial interests

in catastrophic climate change and the subsidies that come from it. These include firms such as Global Renewables, which focuses on capturing greenhouse emissions from landfill and the subsidies for doing so; Pacific Hydro which specializes in developing heavily subsidized renewable energy; and CO2 Australia which specializes in tree planting subsidies. *The Age* also reports that the Australasian Emissions Trading Forum, representing these and other climate change-dependent businesses, has calculated that its members have lost up to \$1.5 billion in business opportunities due to Australia's failure to sign the Kyoto Protocol. Again the big money is with climate change. *The Age* quotes

*There is a worldwide, systematic, institutional, money-driven misinformation campaign about climate change.*

the Climate Group, a London-based international body set up last year by Tony Blair to break a perceived climate change deadlock, as saying 'Kyoto may be flawed, but it is a start'. Yet *The Age* gave no consideration to the fact that this body had a commercial and constitutional imperative to hold just this view.

Similarly, when Melissa Fyfe quotes Justin Porteli of the Carbon Management Group, as claiming that the climate change skeptics 'have no credibility whatsoever', she fails to explore Mr Porteli's own commercial conflict—his business is based on the trading of carbon credits that have themselves been created by the Kyoto Agreement. For him, no Kyoto Agreement means no business.

Instead of even briefly examining the vested interests of the new climate change industries, much of *The Age's* coverage of climate change uncritically quotes activists and other persons with

a conflict of interest and much to gain. Contrast this with the shrill and repeated criticisms regarding alleged 'fossil fuel company' funding for climate change skeptics. Indeed, in some cases, active climate scientists have seen their funding shrink (and even disappear) because of their taking a neutral or critical public position on human-caused climate change.

## CONCLUSION

The cycle that we have described is hard to break. The scientist makes a vague, speculative statement; activists and their friends in the media pick it up and present it as ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW. Media attention puts pressure on politicians to act, and those politicians respond with yet more funding to the scientists who made the original ambiguous statement.

The Australian public should be able to rely upon publicly-funded scientists to provide them with clear analyses of climate change science, and critiques of obviously fallacious arguments. Furthermore, and particularly in view of the economic and public importance of the issue, scientists should restrain themselves from making broad, ambiguous speculations regarding climate change.

There is a worldwide, systematic, institutional, money-driven misinformation campaign about climate change. Climate change is indeed a serious issue which requires public concern and discussion. This requires rigorous science, long-term planning and careful analysis. Government-driven gravy trains must be cut, and lucid, disinterested analysis restored for this important policy issue.

*Chris Berg is Director of Communications at the IPA.*

*Andrew McIntyre is an assistant editor of, and a regular contributor to, the IPA Review.*