

# The dangerous delusions of Murdoch hacks' pet denialist

Lyn Allison

The latest climate science and Prime Minister Rudd's pre-election promise to rein in greenhouse emissions are not reflected by policy responses to greenhouse, particularly the low targets and free-permit system of the emissions trading. How could this happen?

Reports from the UK and US show that millions of dollars have been poured into campaigns to lobby government and disprove climate science. The American Enterprise Institute was given \$1.6 million by ExxonMobil to offer scientists \$10,000 in cash for disputing reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). In the lead-up to debate on President Obama's carbon cap and trade legislation, oil giants-funded think-tanks employed over 2,000 lobbyists to press their case. It's a fair bet that the powerful and cashed-up mining, coal and energy intensive industries influenced the Rudd Government over the last 18 months, too, considerably slowing Australia's response. Rationalists, however, should be particularly alarmed that science has become readily expendable as just another interest to be weighed against those of big emitters.

Indeed, Climate Change Minister Penny Wong boasts that dissatisfaction from both sides shows that a good balance has been achieved. David Spratt, co-author of *Climate Code Red*, says:

Kevin Rudd and Penny Wong have adopted a traditional Labor approach to the climate problem: something for the environment lobby and something for business. But the problem is that solving the climate crisis cannot be treated like a wage deal, with the demands of each side balanced somewhere in the middle. It is not possible to negotiate with the laws of physics and chemistry. The planet cannot be bought off. There are absolute limits that should not be crossed, and doing something, but not enough, will still lead to disaster.

Scientists, largely uncomfortable in the glare of publicity, have also had to endure the media balancing their

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'claims' against the opinions of fewer than 5 percent of scientists who disagree. Professor Ian Plimer, a mining geologist, is one such naysaying scientist, happily cashing in on his speaking tours and his book, *Heaven and Earth: Global Warming — The Missing Science*, that he claims would 'knock out every single argument we hear about climate change'. He fails to do this, as climate scientists such as Professors Barry Brook and Ian Enting, and Dr Andrew Glikson, have painstakingly demonstrated, but their responses rarely get space in the mainstream press.

The kind of debate where complex science must be defended in 10 second grabs (even on ABC Radio) is highly problematic, and not just because the future of humanity and the planet depends on quick action, backed by good public understanding of the need for governments to move.

The danger is that, in a debate in which scientists are pitted against each other and neither Government nor Opposition will openly back the science or admit to the dangers we face, the general public will become more confused and more sceptical of science *per se*. Scientific method and its system of peer review ends up counting for nothing. As Professor Brook points out:

... it's rather silly to debate the science because this is the role of the scientific community as a whole and in doing so they've reached a view that this is a serious problem — but a one-on-one debate is what the media demands.

But this attitude lets off the hook governments that use science as a tradeable commodity to avoid the hard decisions.

A step has arguably been taken back in the direction of the Dark Ages when, to put science above the mutterings of the supernatural, risked being burnt alive. It is no coincidence that Plimer is devout (the notorious Catholic George Pell is a fan). Doubtless Plimer believes that, since God created humankind in his own image, we could not possibly be responsible for 'planeticide'. The believers in an

omnipresent, all-seeing and deciding deity are apparently able to reconcile his failure to intervene in tsunamis, earthquakes and the like but would surely balk at this.

Secular scientists are more secure now than in three centuries past but many are still coming under attack. *Herald Sun* fulminator Andrew Bolt hit upon Plimer's unlikely line that environmentalism is just another belief system and wrote that the ANU's earth and paleo-climate scientist Dr Glikson was '... a global warming alarmist and his writing is not science but religion'.

Despite the announcement by Rupert Murdoch a year or so ago that he is no longer a climate change denier and considers urgent action should be taken, his *Herald Sun* and *Australian* regularly toe the sceptics' line. The *Oz* worshipfully opened its columns to Plimer with an enthusiasm perhaps unseen since its boss's phony expose in Murdoch's Brisbane sheet of Manning Clark as an Order of Lenin winner. Further, it gave Plimer a platform to bitterly attack seven fellow scientists who dared write to coal power generators, urging them to make the transition from coal. Said Plimer: 'The cash cow climate institutes now seem to be drowning in their own self-importance.' He encourages the generators to '... reply by cutting off the power to academics' homes and host institutions, forcing our ideologues to lead by example'. And, 'There has never been a climate change debate in Australia. Only dogma.'

David Spratt agrees, but for different reasons:

'... most of the public policy debate on climate is delusional, that is, a fixed, false belief resistant to reason or

confrontation with actual fact ...' Tim Flannery says, 'There is no real debate about how serious our predicament is,' nor has there been the 'understanding of just how profoundly we are influencing the very Earth processes that give us life.'

Plimer presses all the clever buttons. 'To demonise element number six on the periodic table is amusing.' ... 'Without carbon there would be no life on Earth.' And indeed, 'So depleted is the atmosphere in CO<sub>2</sub>, that horticulturalists pump warm concentrated CO<sub>2</sub> into glasshouses to accelerate plant growth.'

He says every time his book is criticised, sales rise. 'This book has struck a nerve. ... there are large numbers of punters who object to being treated dismissively as stupid, who do not like being told what to think, who value independence, who resile from personal attacks and have life experiences very different from the urban environmental atheists attempting to impose a new fundamentalist religion.'

His call for 'scientific due diligence' before the emissions trading scheme legislation is passed will be music to the ears of the Federal Opposition, particularly the likes of Wilson Tuckey and the more influential Senator Barnaby Joyce, further undermining current science and

polarising the debate, as well as making agreement in the Senate and at Copenhagen less likely.

It's time to stand up for science — it's our only hope for the survival of our species.

See *Climate Revisionist fails Science and Chemistry*, page 45/

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Lyn Allison is a committee member of the Rationalist Society and a former Senate Leader of the Australian Democrats.