



## Warming skeptics struggle to resist the new orthodoxy

Scientists who doubt the evidence on global warming are feeling the political heat, **PAUL MALEY** reports

**A**T BEST they are considered ideological recalcitrants who really ought to get with the program. At worst, they are regarded as corporate turncoats whose outrageous opinions are wholly-owned subsidiaries of the fossil fuel industry.

But climate-change skeptics argue they are merely responsible scientists who have yet to be convinced by the theory of global warming, because the evidence supporting it remains partial and ambiguous, despite the sometimes fervent insistences to the contrary.

As the consensus on climate change grows, or is said to grow, those who doubt the theory have found themselves increasingly marginalised.

But questions about climate change persist.

Some skeptics dispute the basic proposition that humans are responsible for the earth's warming, others argue that the extent of the projected warming is vastly exaggerated and still more doubt the accuracy of the computer models used to forecast climate patterns in the future.

But what all agree on is that the intellectual environment in which the debate is now conducted has changed markedly. Climate-change advocates, say the skeptics, have become more strident in their views and less tolerant of those who don't share them. Dissent, free enquiry, university funding — even jobs — are all threatened by the imperious tone in which the conversation is now taking place.

Dr Bob Carter, a geologist with James Cook University, points to the language used by British Prime Minister Tony Blair this week when he released the Stern report as an example of this trend.

Blair said the Stern report had "demolished the last remaining argument for inaction in the face of climate change".

Carter says such statements are highly misleading. He says the science around global warming remains "hugely contentious".

"It's astonishing that there are so many people, who are mostly not scientists, I might say, in really senior positions, like the Prime Minister of Great Britain, who make comments like the science is settled. I think that's just a ludicrous statement."

Like most skeptics, Carter agrees the earth has warmed, but says there is no strong evidence to support the view that humans are the main cause of that warming. Historically, the climate has always fluctuated in temperature, and this current warming may be yet another example.

He describes himself as a "climate agnostic" — an open-minded scientist who is ready to be convinced.

He says a few years ago this was a respectable position, but that recently it has

been badged extremist. He says green groups have been successful in discouraging the media from seeking out the views of doubters.

"There's two main lines of argument taken," he says.

"One is that by talking to me, you're over-emphasising this side of the story. What I have to say is so wacky and so far out that nobody should be listening, and you certainly shouldn't be promulgating it. The other argument that anybody who gives an opinion such as the one I've given must be being paid by the fossil fuel industry."

Former head of the Australian Bureau of Statistics and climate change-skeptic Ian Castles says there is an increased willingness to impugn the motives of those who question the orthodoxy.

Castles says some of the language used to describe doubters is contrived to discredit them.

"This word 'denialist' is being used by the mainstream. Often in a context where there's a clear link with Holocaust denialists."

Writing for *The Wall Street Journal* earlier this year, Richard Lindzen, Professor of Atmospheric Science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and arguably the most respected climate skeptic, said the growth in federal spending on climate research — a few hundred million dollars before 1990 to \$1.7 billion today — had contributed to a culture of alarmism.

"After all, who puts money into science — whether for AIDS, or space, or climate — when there is nothing really alarming?"

Lindzen said scientists had been cowed not just by money, "but by fear". He pointed to the example of Henk Tennekes, the former research director of the Royal Dutch Meteorological Society, who he says was dismissed from his post after "questioning the scientific underpinnings of global warming". He lists other prominent scientists whose reputations were defamed or who "disappeared from the debate" after offering contrarian opinions.

It is perhaps no surprise then that skeptics say some of the loudest critics of global warming come from those who have retired from the academic mainstream.

Former head of the National Climate Centre William Kininmonth is a skeptic who disputes that global warming has been caused mainly by humans and says the computer models used to project future temperatures are unreliable, because they rest on too many assumptions.

"The fact that the computer models predict anywhere between 1.4 and 5.8 degrees warming for a doubling of CO<sub>2</sub> shows you the sort of uncertainty that is there," he says.

"Then, of course, you have the added problem of we don't really know how much carbon dioxide is going to be put in the ..



atmosphere over the next 50-100 years.”

Kininmonth says finding a forum in which to make these points has become harder, a lament shared by other skeptics — although it should be noted that in the week this article was written, both Kininmonth and Carter had articles published in the opinion pages of major Australian papers.

“A couple of times I’ve had a forum organised by people who want to have a debate, and they have difficulty getting the opposition to come and talk,” he says.

Skeptics point out that carbon curves and temperature curves have not run in tandem over the last century. The temperature increase for the first and second half of the 20th century was roughly the same — about 0.4 degrees for the first half and about 0.5 for the second, according to the CSIRO’s Dr Mark Howden, a climate-change scientist.

However, the CO<sub>2</sub> emission levels were much greater in the second half as the developing world industrialised and the post-war reconstruction effort got under

way.

Surely, then, the temperature rise should have been considerably more than it was, given the emission levels? No, says Howden. “The things that were driving temperature increases in the first half of the century when emissions were lower were solar events and volcanic activity.

“In the second half of the century you can’t explain the increase in temperature except by including the effects of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere,” he says.

Howden says skeptics play an essential role in the hurly-burly of scientific enquiry, but that it is important to recognise the intellectual rigour under-girding the prognostications of the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, generally considered the most authoritative institution on the subject.

“The reports they produce could be some of the most reviewed documents in the history of mankind,” he says.