

Warming to the topic

Right from the start of the interview, I know I'm in trouble.

It seemed like such an innocent opener, to call Professor Bob Carter one of the nation's most prominent climate change sceptics, but immediately his hackles are up.

He jumps on that phrase - "climate change sceptic" - and argues with relentless logic why the three words contain two crucial errors.

"You should stop and ask yourself why other people use that terminology," he says in a tone that will brook no dissent.

"Yes, I am a sceptic - of course I am. I am a trained scientist.

"If you talk to any scientist, whether on climate change or anything else and they say they are not a sceptic, then don't waste your time.

"It's bandied around as a term of abuse which is amazing because there isn't such a thing as a good scientist who isn't also a sceptic."

Next, he turns to the seemingly innocent term used to describe his scepticism, "climate change".

"When people talk to you about climate change, they don't mean climate change," Carter says.

"What they mean is 'dangerous warming caused by carbon dioxide emissions'.

"Because everyone uses the term 'climate change', you're lost from the start. You can't even have an intelligent discussion.

"Change is what climate *does*. The whole public discussion is polluted, corrupted, beyond redemption by that problem."

At last we're talking about pollution - though of a different kind. Yet even here, Carter laughs at the suggestion that carbon dioxide can be termed a pollutant.

It's a beneficial trace gas, he argues, essential for life as we know it.

So here, in essence, is Carter's counter-cultural argument:

□ That there is no scientific evidence on the climatic effects on human-caused carbon dioxide. Emissions certainly have an effect,

Professor Bob Carter is a scientist who believes the panic over greenhouse gases is "the biggest scientific scam there has ever been", writes WILLIAM VERITY.

but no-one can say whether that will be minimal or catastrophic.

□ That climate has always changed, sometimes dramatically, and that this natural oscillation between warming and cooling is far more powerful than anything caused by humans.

□ That the Earth's temperature stabilised in 1998 and has cooled since 2002, predicted by models which further suggest that the cooling will continue for the next 50 years or so.

□ That from 1979 when satellites began monitoring temperatures (a more accurate method than terrestrial gauges), the average has oscillated but not risen in 30 years, in which time the atmospheric carbon dioxide has risen 15 per cent. So where's the warming?

□ That what he calls "global warming alarmism" is a new religion which seeks to produce wildly expensive "non solutions to non problems".

Carter started his academic career 45 years ago studying fossils and then narrowed his research to the study of how layers of rock formed, and what that could tell you about the historical environment.

"For example, you might have a

particular sandstone that has a structure that tells you it was deposited by wind and is a desert sandstone. The environment was ancient desert," he explained.

"Above that, you might have a limestone layer full of little shellfish very similar to the shellfish that live in Port Phillip Bay today, so you know that is shallow marine deposit.

"As it goes deeper, the shoreline is going further away and you end up in deep water where you don't get the sand and mud from the landmass.

"All you get is the remains of the plankton that settle down to the seabed like snow and they form mud layers on the sea floor.

"They are exquisite climatic indicators because as the climate changes, so the surface waters of the ocean change and the environment changes."

From 1981 to his early retirement in 1999, Carter led the marine geology school at James Cook University in Townsville, heading an international program for three years that drilled holes in the ocean floor.

"You pull the mud core out and put it on the side and you have the history of the ocean and of the climate," he said.

At around the time of his retirement he

read a statement about climate change in a newspaper that looked peculiar.

"I followed that up and, two weeks later, I realised I was looking at the biggest scientific scam there had ever been," he said.

It took another three years of full-time research before he felt confident to make his first public statement questioning the global warming hypothesis.

"Climate change as a discipline has about 100 sub-disciplines, which means that nobody is an expert on climate change," he said.

"Atmospheric physics, atmospheric chemistry, geology, meteorology, sociology, politics, economics ... How can I say anything in public unless I have made sure I understand at least the basics of these disciplines?"

"Here I am, expert in perhaps two of those hundred disciplines."

Carter insists he is far from alone, pointing to the recent formation of like minds in The Australian Climate Science Coalition.

Although he insists his views require no unusual courage, his position on this, at least, is ambiguous.

"People often say that I must have courage to have my views, but I deny that," he says. "Being a scientist requires courage because you are letting it all hang out."

Yet he also admits that most of the criticism is aimed at him not his arguments, that activists picket his talks and hand out libellous leaflets and that he is accused of taking money from the oil and coal industries.

Most revealing is his answer to the question, "What would it take you to stop?":

"I'm not going to answer that on tape because it might suggest somebody do it," he replies.

"I'm dead serious. It's like asking you, what would it take for you to stop earning a crust for your wife and family? That's what you do.

"I'll be doing science until they nail the lid down."

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