

## **Global warming sceptics fuel hot debate**

Mark Lawson

The ranks of the doubters are legion and speaking up as the climatic change debate rages, writes Mark Lawson.

Despite being scorned, derided and accused of links with oil companies, the climate change sceptics are still out there and, although the greenhouse lobby will never admit it, occasionally scoring major points. They may also be more numerous than the greenhouse lobby or politicians believe.

One example of this scepticism breaking to the surface is a dissenting minority report issued by a group of federal government backbenchers as part of a parliamentary committee investigation into viability of geosequestration (burying carbon produced deep underground).

The report by four MPs - three Liberal and one National - declared that the evidence that humans were altering climate was “not compelling”, but it was largely derided by the media.

A much more serious, if not devastating, attack on greenhouse claims concerning likely future temperature increases was the recent release of a paper entitled *Global Warming: Forecasts by Scientists versus Scientific Forecasts*.

Written by J. Scott Armstrong, a professor of marketing at The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, and Kesten Green, a visiting fellow at the business and economics forecasting unit at Monash University in Melbourne, the paper assessed, as forecasts, the temperature projections made by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change earlier this year. It found little to approve.

In the paper prepared for the International Symposium on Forecasting 2007, Armstrong and Green conclude, “the forecasts in the report were not the outcome of scientific procedures. In effect, they present the opinions of scientists transformed by mathematics and obscured by complex writing.”

The paper also points to one of the recognised rules of forecasting, namely that “unaided judgement forecasts by experts have no value. This applies whether the opinions are expressed by words, spreadsheets or mathematical models. It also applies regardless of how much scientific evidence is possessed by the experts.” A group of experts is little better.

Kesten Green told The Australian Financial Review that there were plenty of examples of experts being wrong, both individually and collectively, about their own area of expertise. Albert Einstein, for example, famously declared that atomic power was not possible. Other examples are in the treatment of stomach ulcers and head injuries, where the medical establishment held to treatments which harmed rather than helped for many years.

But in the greenhouse debate it is incorrect to say that there is overwhelming agreement or that there is no doubt about the science behind it, he says. For every aspect of the theory which the greenhouse lobby declares has been settled, it is possible to find eminent scientists who strongly disagree. “It is a case of where a statement is repeated

often enough everyone takes it as fact, and the media has to bear much of the blame for this," he says.

The Armstrong-Green paper is particularly scathing of one IPCC approach - a cornerstone of its work - of fitting models to match historical results and then claiming the model is accurate enough to make forecasts. They say the approach has been shown not to work in forecasting.

A number of distinguished scientists have spoken publicly against the prevailing orthodoxy that the IPCC forecasts are correct. One of the more vocal local dissidents is Bob Carter, a research professor and former head of the School of Earth Sciences at James Cook University in Townsville. He says that there is no established theory of climate as there is, say, of gravity and planetary motion, which can be used to make predictions.

"We have a hypothesis that increases in carbon dioxide increase temperatures, but that hypothesis fails all tests. Global average temperatures are known to have varied little since 1997 - just moving up and down - but in that same period carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has increased by 15 parts per million or 4 per cent."

Stewart Franks, an associate professor in hydroclimatology at the University of Newcastle, says the alarm over climate has grown sharply in the past 10 years, "but in that time temperatures have been stable, so it's a case of never mind the evidence".

He says the greenhouse effects of the atmosphere's water content (known as humidity at ground level) and of clouds are many times greater than that of carbon dioxide, which still counts as only a small part of the total atmosphere. Yet very little is known about the mechanisms behind variations in humidity or cloud cover.

Despite sceptical voices there is also no doubt that many eminent scientists are on the side of the IPCC. However, a recent paper by David Henderson, formerly head of economics and statistics at the OECD and now visiting professor at the Westminster Business School in London, argues that part of this support is due to those eminent scientists trusting the IPCC to get it right. But he also argues that their trust in the panel is misplaced, as it is taking a very one-sided view of global warming.

His paper states that one major example of that bias is the dispute over the Hockey Stick graph. This was an early piece of research indicating a direct link between industrial emissions and temperatures (its shape was that of a hockey stick), which featured prominently in its reports. However, two Canadian statisticians discovered a major flaw in the statistical analysis which made it valueless. After a great deal of dispute the issue went to two high-level committees of eminent statisticians which both confirmed the flaw. Although the hockey stick has been dropped from the panel's documentation, he says the panel has never admitted any error, made any comment on the committee findings, or announced any review of its processes to prevent such problems from recurring.

Henderson says the panel seems reluctant to admit any error.

Among many other suggestions for reform he recommends thorough audits of the IPCC work and that environmental scientists adopt the best practice of economic journals, of submitting data and computer code along with any papers for publication so that others can reproduce the analysis. This would avoid some of the worst features of the hockey stick debate, Henderson says.