



Global warming skeptics and procrastinators

Tim Blair, writing in *The Bulletin* of July 4 2006, claimed proof positive that global warming is a hoax. He cited record cold weather for June (or the coldest for three to five decades) in Perth, Adelaide, Victoria, Aspen, Forbes, Ohio, Rotorua, Berlin, and the French Alps.

Despite some cold nights in June, Perth went on to have its equal warmest winter on record (equal with 1983 and 1976). Many parts of Europe and America experienced record heat in July. On 19 September, Melbourne sweltered through its earliest ever spring day of 30 degrees – only the fourth time in 150 years that the mercury has hit 30 degrees in September. We have been waiting for Tim Blair to be consistent in his logic and proclaim an end to the brief ice age that gripped the world in June and become an advocate of Al Gore's "An Inconvenient Truth". Of course, we are waiting in vain.

The weather is highly variable so it is not hard to find particular areas at particular times which are unusually cold or unusually hot. It is the trend which matters and that is unequivocal (see "Global warming update" in this issue of *Prophets Profit*). Cherry picking apparent counter examples is an easy and common tactic for global warming skeptics.

It is our philosophy, in all matters including global warming, to critically analyse both cases for and against. We do not accept the conventional wisdom just because most scientists support it. The skeptics may have some important information or analysis from which we can learn more about the future of climate.

The Competitive Enterprise Institute (www.cei.org) created and aired advertisements in 14 U.S. cities between 18 and 28 May this year. The ads, which can be viewed on their website, position carbon dioxide as essential to life rather than a pollutant and suggest that

if we cut back on carbon dioxide emissions, we would not have the transport, lighting, and comforts that are now part of our life. According to *The Age* newspaper (September 9 2006) the CEI's financial supporters include ExxonMobil and Ford.

CO2Science (www.co2science.com.au) claims that there has been no net global warming in the past 70 years. They analyse temperature records from USA locations covering the period 1930 to 2000. This is a very carefully selected period because it includes a period of cooling between about 1930 and the mid 1970's. This cooling was caused by sulphur dioxide emitted from coal burning power stations which causes short wave solar radiation to be scattered back to space. When clean air acts resulted in a very significant reduction in sulphur dioxide emissions the atmospheric warming continued. Had CO2Science included data before 1930 and after 2000, the conclusion would be very different.

Patrick J. Michaels is senior fellow in environmental studies at the Cato Institute and professor of natural resources at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. He is concerned that both media reporting and peer reviewed literature filters out studies which are not consistent with conventional wisdom. He has assembled a number of studies, not conducted by himself, which do not support polar ice melting, increased hurricane severity due to warming, and species extinctions. We don't know if there is bias in reporting in the media and scientific literature, but these studies should see the light of day in some way. Even if the studies he presents are rigorous, some at least appear to be consistent with the period of cooling between the 1930's and the mid 1970's explained above. So far as we can tell, he does not dispute the basic science of global warming.

Bob Carter is a professor at James Cook University in Queensland. He is regularly trotted out by the Institute



of Public Affairs. In the Australian Financial Review of 27-28 September 2003 he said that weather balloon and satellite temperature records fail to show any overall global warming over the past 45 years. This statement is simply wrong. Naturally, we wrote to the Australian Financial Review pointing out his error. Naturally, they did not publish that letter. In Issue 1 of Prophets Profit (December 2003) we analysed the balloon data and found it to contain a statistically significant upward trend of 0.8 degrees Celsius per century. In that article we also showed that the satellite data was not consistent with the hypothesis that there was no warming and in this Issue of Prophets Profit we report our finding that the satellite data now has a statistically significant upward trend of 0.9 degrees Celsius per century. Nowhere can I find any paper Carter has written which shows how increasing atmospheric carbon dioxide does not lead to higher temperatures.

William Kininmonth is a former head of the National Climate Centre and a consultant to the World Meteorological Organisation. In The Australian of September 12 2006, he says "The former US vice-president and his fellow travelers would have us believe that the actions of our civilisation are leading to dangerous climate change." He states that "Increasing the carbon dioxide concentration will have little additional effect." He makes no attempt to explain the significant warming evident over the past 100 years and especially the past 30 years and presumably he thinks that it is simply natural variation. His views are frequently promulgated by the Institute of Public Affairs and the Lavoisier Institute, an Australian think tank that denies global warming. His arguments are primarily based on the inherent uncertainties of current climate models and the natural variability of climate. But we have seen no compelling evidence he has presented which indicates that human activity is not adding to that variability and that feedback mechanisms could increase the rate of anthropogenic warming. We do not need the double blow of natural warming combined with anthropogenic warming.

In Australia, Alan Moran is a serial skeptic. He is the director of the Institute of Public Affairs deregulation unit. Writing in The Age of September 8 2006, he says "It will not matter a toss whether or not Australia reduces its carbon dioxide." He says that "the only solid measure of global warming, the NASA satellite data shows that over the 27 years that the data has been available, warming has been at a negligible rate of 0.13 degrees Celsius per decade. This level is engulfed by the statistical variation for reliability."

He concedes that the increasing level of carbon dioxide, other things being equal, will raise temperatures but by how much is highly contentious. He argues that for Australia to get in front and lead on programs of emission reduction is futile and extravagant.

His concession that global warming is real is an improvement on past claims he has made, although he still advocates taking no action. A search of the Australian Financial Review archives from 1992 to 2000 shows several references he made to the satellite data "proving" that there has been no global warming:

- On 17 June 1994 he concluded "Global warming is a con" on the basis of less than 15 years of satellite data;
- On 14 April 1999, he used the satellite data to proclaim global warming a myth.
- On 16 September 1999, he said that 20 year satellite data is the only reliable data and that no global warming is taking place.

While there are uncertainties about the future of climate change, we have not detected any plausible disagreement with the science. Even George W Bush now accepts that global warming is real and that burning fossil fuels contributes to the warming – although he did not accept this until the Kyoto protocol was ratified by Russia in early 2005 thus saving the protocol from falling apart.

But Bush and Australia's prime minister John Howard have not ratified the protocol and only after Russia saved it did they set up the Asia Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate. The main thrust of this partnership is to do as little as possible to reduce burning fossil fuels but to sequester carbon dioxide after it is burned in power stations and bury it. If this works, it will be an important contribution to reducing carbon dioxide entering the atmosphere. But it will not do so for many years and even when it comes into operation, carbon dioxide levels will continue to rise, albeit at a reduced rate. There is also the issue of a price signal (or emission trading) to pay the cost of sequestration and storage. Bush and Howard have spurned emission trading as economic vandalism but the Australian Coal Association says that there must be an emissions trading scheme for sequestration to be viable.

Howard says that an emissions trading scheme would send jobs overseas to countries like China who do not have such schemes – but that has been happening in other industries without a whimper from him. Australia's environment minister is still using circular

logic to argue against doing anything significant now because "that would harm the economy and we need a strong economy to be able to fight climate change".

A favourite excuse for inaction on global warming given by John Howard and The White House is that any reduction in carbon dioxide emissions achieved by Australia or the USA would be outweighed by the increase coming from China. This is a flawed argument in three ways.

First, while it is true that China's emissions are increasing quickly that is all the more reason for rich countries to reduce emissions. That would tend to offset the China effect with considerable benefit to the whole world.

Second, if rich countries don't set an example then China will be able to claim that they are only doing what developed countries have done. In addition, there may be opportunities to export to China renewable energy technologies developed in rich countries.

Third, this excuse ignores the fact that China is increasing its renewable energy capacity faster than Australia and the USA. A higher proportion of Chinese than Americans are concerned about global warming. The government too is concerned and is building huge windfarms. Last year it pushed up fuel-efficiency standards for cars sold in China, and by 2008 it will raise them above federal American levels (The Economist, September 9th 2006). China is also developing an "eco-city" that will be self-sufficient in energy and water and will generate almost no carbon emissions. Petrol and diesel vehicles will be banned in favour of solar-powered boats and fuel-cell powered buses (The Economist, September 23rd 2006).

Procrastinators are supported by the Australian newspaper - their editorial of September 12, 2006 portrayed the cleaning up of coal as the only economically viable strategy. An interesting test for the editor of the Australian, which is owned by Murdoch, may be forthcoming. Murdoch is showing signs of conversion to global warming activism - his London Sun has launched a campaign warning of the need to take the issue very seriously.

"Owing to past neglect, in the face of plainest warnings, we have now entered upon a period of danger. The era of procrastination, of half measures, of delays is coming to a close. In its place we are entering a period of consequences; we can not avoid this period, we are in it now. Unless this house resolves to find out the truth for itself, it will have committed an act of abdication of duty without parallel."

Winston Churchill, 1936.



The future of lighting

A global switch to efficient lighting systems would trim the world's electricity bill by nearly one-tenth, according to a BBC news report (30 June 2006). The carbon dioxide emissions saved by such a switch would be larger than cuts so far achieved by wind and solar power because 19% of global electricity generation is consumed by lighting. This amount is more than the current production of nuclear power stations or hydro power stations.

The current efficient lighting technology is compact fluorescent (CFL) globes, which use about one-fifth as much power as normal incandescent bulbs. Powergen, one of the UK's largest energy suppliers is offering cash sponsorship to 200 major retailers to enable them to sell CFL's at less than one-quarter of the average price (The Guardian March 23 2006). Powergen is partly motivated by reducing carbon dioxide emissions and also by the savings of not having to invest in so many new generators.

Light emitting diodes (LED's) are more efficient than CFL's and have an even longer lifespan - up to 100 times that of an incandescent bulb. LED's are currently available to replace 12v lights. The light quality of CFL's has improved since they were first introduced, although the quality of LED's still needs improvement.

These technologies are good examples of how reducing carbon dioxide emissions does not have to cost money nor degrade our standard of living. They are likely to be adopted quickly in the developing world, where 1.6 million people are without electricity - LED's can be run on batteries which are recharged by the sun in the daylight hours.

