

GLOBAL WARMING

Science by Consensus, Popularity, or a Show of Hands

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“Historically, the claim of consensus has been the first refuge of scoundrels; it is a way to avoid debate by claiming that the matter is already settled. Whenever you hear the consensus of scientists agrees on something or other, reach for your wallet, because you're being had.”

[Aliens Cause Global Warming](#), Michael Crichton, 2003

Scientific ‘Consensus’ in General

Consensus is a tool of politics, or, as noted [by Crichton](#), a tool of scoundrels who wish to stifle dissent. It is not a tool of science. [According to Crichton](#):

“Let's be clear: the work of science has nothing whatever to do with consensus. Consensus is the business of politics. Science, on the contrary, requires only one investigator who happens to be right, which means that he or she has results that are verifiable by reference to the real world. In science consensus is irrelevant. What is relevant is reproducible results. The greatest scientists in history are great precisely because they broke with the consensus. There is no such thing as consensus science. If it's consensus, it isn't science. If it's science, it isn't consensus. Period.”

Crichton gives numerous examples of the scientific consensus being proven wrong but one notable Australian example was the discovery by Australian medical scientists Barry Marshal and Robin Warren, that [helicobacter pylori infection could cause stomach ulcers](#). This revolutionary discovery completely overturned prevailing medical beliefs (ie consensus) such as stress and childhood upbringing as the cause of ulcers. The prevailing medical consensus at that time constituted an enormous obstacle for Marshal and Warren to overcome. It was an obstacle which was only overcome after years of ridicule, forcing Marshal and Warren to deliberately infect themselves to produce an ulcer.

Consensus clearly acts to preserve the prevailing orthodoxy and prevent acceptance of any new discoveries which are considered to be outside the square. If a radical new discovery is made today, consensus dictates that it would be rejected by the prevailing orthodoxy, irrespective of the scientific evidence supporting it.

Is this the direction in which we wish science to go, a guarantee that no important new discoveries will ever be accepted? Should we now reject the discovery of Marshal and Warren because it was not based upon a consensus? Should science be determined by popular vote or a show of hands, or is this a corruption of science?

The Scientific 'Consensus' of Human Caused Global Warming

Those who support the belief that humans are causing a catastrophic degree of global warming and sea level rise, such that the future of the planet is threatened, commonly support their view by claiming it is supported by a consensus of scientists. Such claims are commonly based upon 3 studies, the first we will consider being by [Doran and Zimmerman \(1\)](#). [Doran and Zimmerman posed the following survey questions](#) to 10,000 scientists :

- 1." When compared with pre-1800s levels, do you think that mean global temperatures have generally risen, fallen, or remained relatively constant?*
- 2. Do you think human activity is a significant contributing factor in changing mean global temperatures?"*

Of more than 10,000 scientists surveyed by Doran and Zimmerman, 70% failed to respond to the survey. Of the 30% or 3146 who responded, 96% of the 30% were from the USA and Canada, only 5% of these 30% were climate scientists. Overall, 82% or 2579, were reported to have responded positively to question 2. This represents 25% of the 10000 scientist surveyed. Only 75 scientists in the world however, out of those judged knowledgeable on climate science, agreed that [human activity is a significant contributing factor in changing mean global temperatures](#).

Two vital points need to be made here.

Firstly of course, it is absolutely ridiculous to suggest that 75 scientists in the world represents a 'consensus'. Secondly, the controversy with human caused global warming relates to the alarming, catastrophic, or 'planet threatening' changes being predicted by some scientists. Exactly why Doran and Zimmerman refused to pose a more relevant question, such as follows, has not been explained:

Is human activity causing potentially catastrophic changes to global temperatures and sea level?"

This survey was not designed to assess support for a belief in catastrophic human caused changes.

Dennis Ambler summarised the shortcomings of the Doran and Zimmerman study in "[Climate 'Consensus' Opiate, the 97% Solution](#):"

"What a gross travesty of the truth, and such appalling reporting, but these are the messages fed to acquiescent politicians who do not bother to check the facts, and criticise those who do. How low has science sunk, that scientists will dispense this sort of disinformation to promote their own agenda?"

A further survey of scientific literature by [Oreskes](#), claiming a 75% consensus of 928 peer reviewed papers over a 10 year period, [has also been discredited](#). The suggestion that there has only been 928 such papers in 10 years, which were not specifically referenced by Oreskes, [has been rejected](#). [According to Monckton](#):

"There is no scientific consensus on how much the world has warmed or will warm; how much of the warming is natural; how much impact greenhouse gases have had or will have on temperature; how sea level, storms, droughts, floods, flora, and fauna will respond to warmer temperature; what mitigative steps – if any – we should take; whether (if at all) such steps would have sufficient (or any) climatic effect; or even whether we should take any steps at all. Campaigners for climate alarm state or imply that there is a scientific consensus on all of these things, when in fact there is none. They imply that Oreskes' essay proves the consensus on all of these things..... It is not clear whether Oreskes' analysis was peer-reviewed, since it was presented as an essay and not as a scientific paper. However, there were numerous serious errors, effectively negating her conclusion, which suggest

that the essay was either not reviewed at all or reviewed with undue indulgence by scientists who agreed with Oreskes' declared prejudice – shared by the editors of Science - in favour of the alarmist position."

A further attempt to establish a consensus was made by [Cook et al](#) by examining 11 944 climate abstracts from 1991–2011. According to Cook et al:

"We find that 66.4% of abstracts expressed no position on AGW, 32.6% endorsed AGW, 0.7% rejected AGW and 0.3% were uncertain about the cause of global warming. Among abstracts expressing a position on AGW, 97.1% endorsed the consensus position"

Cook's paper has been seriously discredited by Montford ([2](#), [3](#)). Various authors of papers included in Cook's survey even [disagreed with Cook's classification of their article](#). Cook apparently listed them as supporting the consensus when the reverse was true. In the words of Hulme, [cited by Montford](#):

*"The last word on the paper goes to Professor Mike Hulme, founder of the Tyndall Centre, the UK's national climate research institute:
The [Cook et al.] article is poorly conceived, poorly designed and poorly executed. It obscures the complexities of the climate issue and it is a sign of the desperately poor level of public and policy debate in this country that the energy minister should cite it. It offers a similar depiction of the world into categories of 'right' and 'wrong' to that adopted in [an earlier study]: dividing publishing climate scientists into 'believers' and 'non-believers'. It seems to me that these people are still living (or wishing to live) in the pre-2009 world of climate change discourse. Haven't they noticed that public understanding of the climate issue has moved on?"*

It seems Cook et al overlooked the 'consensus' of 31,000 scientists opposed to CAGW, as listed in the [Petition Project](#).

In a detailed examination of the four studies upon which the consensus claims are based, the [Friends of Science have concluded](#):

"Friends of Science deconstruction of these surveys show that there is no 97% consensus on human-caused global warming as claimed in these studies. None of these studies indicate any agreement with a catastrophic view of human-caused global warming.....The idea that 97% of scientists hold a consensus view on human-caused global warming/climate change has become part of the climate change mythology, reaching the highest echelons of science such as NASA, and the highest political office – that of President Barack Obama.the persistent effort to make the public believe 97% of all scientists agree can only be understood as an intentional manipulation of data and public opinion for commercial gain.As this deconstruction of the data has shown, the 97% figure is arrived at through significant manipulations and redactions of source data. So one must ask why this particular figure is so important in creating social proof (Cialdini 2006). It is our contention that there are significant psychological and visual reasons for the selection of the 97% figure.....we find that each of these 'consensus' studies has built its case on the preceding study, yet each of those has been shown in this deconstruction to be statistically or procedurally inadequate (or both), lacking in statistical significance, rife with situational bias, or offering semi-attached figures that leads to drawing irrelevant conclusions. The most irrelevant conclusion is that consensus proves anything scientifically about human-caused global warming/climate change, or the impact of human carbon dioxide/greenhouse gas emissions.....The implications are that trillions of dollars are being spent, millions of jobs and thousands of industries affected, by policy decisions that are based on faulty 'consensus' studies."

Discussion

No global consensus of scientists supporting CAGW has ever been established. And neither would it matter if it were established unless of course science now operates according to popularity contests. Claims of a consensus are repeatedly made by those on one side of the debate, apparently to justify their position when they feel unable to do so by utilising sound science.

But the importance of this issue is clearly demonstrated when the existence of a so called scientific consensus is so widely misused as some kind of proof to justify or legitimise a certain viewpoint. For instance, media organisations such as the [Australian Centre for Independent Journalism](#) have attempted to justify [their own position](#) by [utilising discredited surveys of scientific consensus](#). [According to Wendy Bacon and the ACIJ](#):

*“This second report focusses attention on the coverage of climate science and addresses these questions: What is the nature of Australia’s press coverage of climate science? Do patterns of coverage of climate science reflect political debate? Are Australian audiences receiving adequate and accurate information about climate science? If they are not, how is that likely to impact on public debate ?.....The Australian Centre for Independent Journalism starts from the perspective that the media’s role in a democracy rests on the public’s right to know. There are few media stories of more obvious public interest than that of climate change, which scientists are warning threatens the lives, security and livelihoods millions of people and whole species. **Scientists (over 97%) overwhelmingly agree that the activities of human beings cause climate change. This is referred to as the consensus position.** The term ‘climate sceptic’ refers to those who do not accept this consensus position. Articles were coded according to whether they ‘accepted’ the consensus position; ‘suggested doubt’ about it; or outright ‘rejected’ it. The latter two positions are both sceptical of the consensus position..... The Australian was more likely than any other publication to suggest doubt on the consensus position. 52% of its articles were coded as accepting the consensus position and only 5% rejected it. However, 42% of articles were produced in a way that could raise questions or suggest doubt in the mind of the reader about the consensus position. So nearly half (47%) of articles in The Australian either suggested doubt or rejected the consensus position..... **This study confirms that the Australian media is generating substantial amounts of material that rejects the consensus position.** Some Australian publications are even reporting more scepticism than the views of established climate scientists. In other words, **these more sceptic publications are communicating material that nearly all scientists consider to be false and misleading.**”*

Emphasis added

Bacon and the ACIJ justify what they refer to as the 97% consensus by citing the studies of Oreske and Doran and Zimmerman. According to the [Bacon report](#):

In 2009, Doran and Zimmerman published a survey of more than 3000 geoscientists mostly from US institutions. They found that 96.2% of climatologists who actively publish peer-reviewed research on climate change responded yes to the question: “When compared with pre-1800s levels, do you think that mean global temperatures have generally risen, fallen, or remained relatively constant?” An even higher proportion, 97.4% responded yes to a second question: “Do you think human activity is a significant contributing factor?”

So according to Bacon and the ACIJ, when 75 climate scientists answer yes to a simple survey question this constitutes a consensus position from which they can judge the accuracy of media reports about global warming. The claim by Bacon and the ACIJ that **“these more sceptic publications are communicating material that nearly all scientists consider to be false and misleading,”** is obviously ridiculous and raises serious questions about bias and the ethical standard of their report. This unfortunately, is a clear example of the depths to which journalism has sunk.

Bacon does draw attention to the influence of political or ideological beliefs upon editorial policy and bias within the media, repeatedly criticizing what she describes as “right wing” media outlets or commentators. In fact, Bacon and the ACIJ seem to see media reports of climate science related matters as being some kind of left wing v right wing political controversy rather than being simply a scientific matter. Of course the relationship of left wing groups to extreme environmentalism or radical climate change strategies is extremely well known, but less publicized however, is the influence of left wing members of the media upon bias.

Recently, in a detailed [study of members of the American Meteorological Society by Stenhouse and colleagues](#), it was found that even the climate change views of professional meteorologists are influenced by their political beliefs. Stenhouse et al, found the main influence determining the views of members was the peer pressure to conform created by an environment of ‘consensus’, but the second biggest influence was the result of political views. [According to Stenhouse et al:](#)

We suggest that AMS should: attempt to convey the widespread scientific agreement about climate change; acknowledge and explore the uncomfortable fact that political ideology influences the climate change views of meteorology professionals; refute the idea that those who do hold non-majority views just need to be "educated" about climate change; continue to deal with the conflict among members of the meteorology communityIn other words, the notion that expertise is the single dominant factor shaping meteorologists' views of global warming appears to be simplistic to the point of being incorrect. We found that perceived scientific consensus was the factor most strongly associated with AMS members' views about global warming. This suggests that scientists' thinking on scientific topics may be subject to the same kinds of social normative influences that affect the general public. Rather than rationally weighing the evidence and deciding for themselves, as would be expected under more traditional ideas of scientific judgment, scientists may also use the views of a relevant peer group as a social cue for forming their own views

The importance of political ideology upon views about climate change has also been noted by former Chief Climate Commissioner, Tim Flannery, [who apparently claimed Richard Lindzen's views were due to his political ideology, not science](#):

“Yet despite his own thinly-disguised ideological bias, Flannery has not been averse to smearing other scientists for their supposed political beliefs. Speaking of the highly regarded Richard Lindzen, a Professor of Meteorology in Department of Earth, Atmospheric and Planetary Sciences at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, he said; ‘the problem with Richard Lindzen is his politics is to the right of Andrew Bolt and Genghis Khan’.”

The obvious question of course is, if views of climate change are determined by politics rather than science, does this apply to Tim Flannery's views also? **And, as the American Meteorological Society suggested, should scientific authors be required to declare their political ideology?**

The bottom line is, there is no AGW consensus, and unless scientific truth is now determined by a show of hands, it is of absolutely no relevance anyhow. After all, if I could obtain a ‘consensus’ of 75 for my own theory of gravity depletion, would it then become reality?

A show of hands from consensus scientists please!