

APPENDIX 3

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by *Terry Dunleavy*

Prime Minister John Key needs to re-think the conditions under which he has appointed a Chief Science Adviser, lest he end up with egg all over his own face and that of his appointee, Professor Sir Peter Gluckman. The more so now that utterances by, or in the name of the adviser, are being seized on by proponents of human-caused global warming to bolster their calls for trading in emissions of carbon dioxide and other so-called “greenhouse” gases.

Recently, Climate Change Minister Nick Smith has circulated to all members of Parliament, the Chief Science Adviser’s first position paper, that addressed the topic of climate change. And broadly supported the Minister’s recorded view that the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the fount of all wisdom on the subject, and therefore the basis of New Zealand’s official policy.

In announcing Sir Peter’s appointment on 20 May, Mr Key said: “I campaigned on creating this role because I recognise that New Zealand’s prosperity rests on our ability to make full use of the expertise that our scientists can contribute. Professor Gluckman will provide me with a direct line to advice when I need it. He will be an independent voice that will complement existing channels of advice such as government departments and the Royal Society.”

The reality, at least in the field of climate science, suggests that this independence is nothing more than a smokescreen.

The position paper on climate change released by the adviser stated that the vast majority of the world's climate scientists believe the current warming trend is of human origin. About the same time, in a speech to the AgResearch Institute in Hamilton recently, Sir Peter said that advice he gives to the Prime Minister will be peer reviewed by the Royal Society of New Zealand (RSNZ).

These two pronouncements warrant some closer analysis.

Setting aside the obvious question of how independence can be equated with peer review, it is not unreasonable to expect that RSNZ peer review of Professor Gluckman’s position paper on climate change would have been undertaken by the society’s climate committee. According to its website, this committee is comprised of Dr David Wratt (chair), Dr JA Hall, Dr WA Matthews, Dr Brett Mullan, Dr Jim Renwick and Dr PJH Sutton all from NIWA, along with Assoc Prof R Warrick and Dr SA Weaver.

With six of the eight members of this committee from NIWA it is therefore no surprise that the professor’s position paper almost exactly mirrors the views expressed by NIWA’s climate people. Similarly, there is no surprise that NIWA relies for its credibility on the reports of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the most recent of which, in 2007, has Dr Wratt as one of the 33 drafting authors of the Summary for Policymakers (SPM), the cornerstone document with which all other sections of IPCC Assessment Reports are required to agree.

The net result is that the desired independent advice to the Prime Minister, at least on climate issues, turns out to be the IPCC line recycled by NIWA, while NIWA itself, in addition to its reporting channel via Science Minister Wayne Mapp, acquires its own new and separate pipeline to the Prime Minister; a win-win situation for the tight little beltway cabal that has uncontested control of official climate policy advice.

If the Prime Minister really wants “to make full use of the expertise that our scientists can contribute”, and if he values “an independent voice that will complement existing channels of advice such as government departments and the Royal Society, ” he would be better advised to ask Professor Gluckman to enquire into the lack of contestability in advice the government currently receives on science matters, with particular emphasis on RSNZ.

Among our members, the NZ Climate Science Coalition numbers an honorary fellow and several qualified scientists members of RSNZ, who are all annoyed by the custom of RSNZ issuing public statements of belief, ostensibly in the name of the members it represents, when their advice has never been sought.

Professor Gluckman himself ought to reconsider this reference in his climate position paper: "nevertheless there are some scientists, although few of these are active climate researchers, who dispute the generally held conclusions," by comparing the 33 drafting authors plus 18 drafting authors responsible for IPCC's 2007 SPM, with the numbers who oppose IPCC's "scenarios"(remembering that IPCC pointedly and expressly does not "do" predictions, just "scenarios" and "projections"): the 31,478 Americans with university degrees in science – including 9,029 PhDs, who have signed the petition of the Ohio Institute of Science & Medicine (<http://www.petitionproject.org/index.php>), the over 700 signatories to a US Senate minority report (<http://tinyurl.com/6oqu3m>), the 103 scientists who signed a letter to UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon in 2007 (<http://tinyurl.com/2y94k9>), the New Zealand-inspired Manhattan Declaration of 2008 (<http://tinyurl.com/mjj3me>), the 60 German scientists who wrote to their Chancellor Angela Merkel recently (<http://tinyurl.com/lndon5>).

As well, Professor Gluckman should acquire a copy of a revealing book, “The Climate Caper”, by Emeritus Professor Garth W. Paltridge, a distinguished Australian, with an unchallengeable international record in climate science, and ponder the questions he raises in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, reflected in these snippets:

“Perhaps the most interesting question... is how it can be that the scientific community has become so over-the-top in support of its own propaganda about the seriousness and certainty of upcoming drastic climate change.....

“How is it that the rest of the scientific community... continues to let the reputation of science be put at considerable risk because of the way that the dangers of climate change are being so vastly oversold?....

“Scientific research is particularly reliant on its reputation for immunity to the forces of the politically correct. In the long term it is particularly reliant also on the very existence of skeptics both within and without its ranks.

“It has not been solidly established, and it is certainly not accepted by the majority of scientists as a proven fact, that global warming from increased atmospheric carbon dioxide will be large enough to be seriously noticeable – let alone enough to be disastrous.”

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