

OPEN LETTER TO ALL TEACHERS OF SCIENCE AT PRIMARY, SECONDARY & TERTIARY LEVELS

Global Warming (aka Climate Change) and the role of humans in causing it through carbon dioxide emissions has become a major social and political issue throughout the world. Many Western Governments have apparently accepted the popular view and are implementing, or planning to implement, policies to reduce CO₂ emissions. Australia is leading the way in this regard with the recent imposition of “The Carbon Tax”. Not surprisingly therefore, many teachers, assuming that the science is ‘settled’, are presenting to their students the anthropogenic view of global warming as an established fact.

The scientific and economic implications for Australians are enormous – such as forced reduction in use of fossil fuels, growth of the ethanol industry, possible future construction of nuclear power stations and dramatic rises in the cost of electricity, hydrocarbon fuels and transport leading, in turn, to major price increases in all the commodities which depend on these services.

This writer would assert that, in actuality, the link (CO₂ causing global warming) is NOT an established scientific fact but rather an hypothesis based on dubious evidence. An alternative hypothesis, which seems to be more soundly based, is that changes in atmospheric CO₂ levels FOLLOW climate change rather than precede it.

Moreover, it appears that predictions of the disastrous consequences of a small rise in average Earth temperatures are most often based on computer models which assume that the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is the major determinate of climate and usually do not factor in other, more likely, causes of climate change such as ocean currents, solar activity, cosmic radiation, vulcanism and Earth/Moon orbital patterns.

This sceptical view is shared by many notable scientists – including distinguished geologists, climatologists, oceanographers and astronomers - who, although vocal in their scepticism, do not receive the mainstream media attention afforded to those members of the scientific community who are committed to the doomsday prophecies. Worse, it seems the sceptics are often put under psychological pressure by those on the other side to suppress their contrary views. Some are even accused, without foundation, of being in the pay of the oil companies or other organisations with vested interests in energy supply.

Clearly, the issue provides a wonderful opportunity for the introduction of “Climate Change” as a topic of great relevance into science curricula at all levels. It can bring together and beautifully integrate many aspects of Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Geology and Astronomy.

At least at high school level, and presumably at University, the teaching of science has always placed great emphasis on developing ‘critical thinking’ abilities in our students – the tendency to keep an open mind, to weigh up the worth of different ideas, to base conclusions on reliable evidence and to assess the credibility of those propounding competing views.

If therefore we are to ‘teach’ about global warming, it behoves us to present both sides of the argument in a balanced way. If we are to cite Tim Flannery we should also refer to the writings of Ian Plimer and Bob Carter. If we are to refer to the IPCC reports we should also compare that body’s conclusions with the views expressed in the Oregon Petition or by the NIPCC. If we are to screen Al Gore’s documentary *The Inconvenient Truth*, we should also screen *The Great Global Warming Swindle* or *Doomsday Called Off*. (The internet provides easy links to all of these and many other sources which highlight that the issue remains highly controversial in the scientific community).

I would assert that any less balanced an approach would be an abnegation of our ethical responsibilities as teachers of science and a capitulation to the views of those whose political, career or pecuniary ambitions may be motivating the presentation of misinformation, camouflaged as science, to a gullible community.

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