

CLIMATE COMMISSION MISLEADS OR FAILS IN DUTY TO ACCURATELY INFORM THE PUBLIC

Three Strikes & Struck Out?

Graham Williamson

January 2013

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the government established the Climate Commission to supply the public with accurate, reliable information regarding the science of climate change, this paper examines three Climate Commission reports in order to assess their accuracy. The three Climate Commission reports considered are, [The Off the charts: Extreme Australian summer heat Report](#), [The Critical Decade, International Action on Climate Change Report](#), and [The Critical Decade, Climate Change & Health report](#). Extensive examination of these reports reveals the following facts.

- **The reports frequently fail to define terms and use words misleadingly, ambiguously, or deceptively, rendering the reports meaningless as an accurate and reliable source of information.**
- **Often alarming claims are made with no scientific substantiation whatsoever, again rendering the reports scientifically meaningless.**
- Further, the **Commission endorses a “carbon price” as a mitigation measure** to combat climate change before any human impact of Australians upon climate has been identified and quantified. This completely defies science and basic common sense. Quite simply, **the Commission has prescribed the treatment in the complete absence of any diagnosis or cause.**
- **The Climate Commission, in proposing a carbon price as an economic measure rather than as a means of saving the planet, is clearly trivialising and making a mockery of, claims that the world faces catastrophic changes as a result of human caused climate change.** The Climate Commission sends confusing contradictory messages.

There is no excuse for these very serious failings. The Climate Commission is backed by the science advisory panel of 8 distinguished scientists and these scientists have clearly presided over the reports produced by the Commission.

As is perfectly clear from the evidence cited in this report, the Climate Commission has not only completely failed in its duty to accurately inform the public, but further, it has been complicit in misleading the public and propagating fear or panic based upon unsubstantiated or misleading claims. **If it remains unable to substantiate these claims then It must be disbanded and funds allocated to areas of genuine need.**

The Commission should immediately state whether they are endorsing a scientifically justified measure to prevent catastrophic climate change or, on the other hand, they are simply promoting an economic reform. They should clearly differentiate between the two.

PART 1

Introducing the Climate Commission

Who Are the Climate Commissioners?

The [Climate Commission is comprised of six Climate Commissioners](#), Professor Tim Flannery, Roger Beale, Gerry Hueston, Professor Lesley Hughes, Professor Veena Sahajwalla, and Professor Will Steffen. The Commission is headed by Chief Commissioner, Tim Flannery, [described by the Commission](#) as a “*writer on climate change, an internationally acclaimed scientist, explorer and conservationist*”. Tim Flannery, though [not a climate scientist](#), is a “*mammalogist, palaeontologist, environmentalist and global warming activist*” and a believer in [Gaia](#) or the concept of a [living mother earth](#).

Roger Beale, also not a climate scientist, is [described by the Commission](#) as an “*economist and public policy expert*.” Gerry Hueston, also not a climate scientist, is described by the Commission as “*a prominent businessman who recently retired as President of BP Australasia*.” Professor Lesley Hughes, also not a climate scientist, is described by the Commission as an “*ecologist in the Department of Biological Sciences at Macquarie University*.” Professor Veena Sahajwalla, also not a climate scientist, is described by the Commission as having “*substantial research and development expertise in the fields of energy efficiency, sustainable materials and recycling*.” [Professor Will Steffen](#), originally a [chemical engineer](#) rather than a climate scientist, is described by the Commission as “*a climate change expert and researcher at the Australian National University*.”

Although, for some reason, it was apparently decided it was best not to appoint climate scientists to the role of Climate Commissioners, the Commissioners are nevertheless backed up by a “[science advisory panel](#)”:

To support its role in providing information and expert advice on the science of climate change and the impacts on Australia, the Commission is supported by a science advisory panel. The members of the Panel are:

- **Professor Matt England**, University of New South Wales, expertise in global-scale ocean circulation and its influence on regional climate.
- **Professor David Karoly**, University of Melbourne, expertise in climate variability and climate change, including interannual climate variations due to El Niño-Southern Oscillation and weather extremes.
- **Professor Andy Pitman**, University of New South Wales, climate modeller with a major focus on land surface processes.
- **Professor Neville Smith**, Bureau of Meteorology, expertise in ocean and climate prediction.
- **Professor Tony McMichael**, Australian National University, expertise in impacts of climate change on environmental conditions and human health.
- **Dr Helen Cleugh**, CSIRO, expertise in the dynamics of carbon, water and energy cycles in Australian ecosystems and the effects on climate variability and change – especially the vulnerability of land-based carbon sinks.
- **Dr Lisa Alexander**, University of New South Wales, expertise in changes in the frequency and/or severity of extreme climate events.
- **Professor Brendan Mackey**, Griffith University, expertise in forests and climate.

It is these scientists who stand firmly behind the Climate Commissioners and their reports.

What is the Purpose of the Climate Commission?

According to Climate Change Minister Greg Combet, as cited by [Tina Perinotto](#):

“the Climate Commission had been established by the Gillard Government to provide an authoritative, independent source of information for all Australians. “It will provide expert advice on climate change science and impacts, and international action. It will help build the consensus required to move to a clean energy future,” Mr Combet said.”

The [Climate Commission claims](#) it **“was established to provide all Australians with an independent and reliable source of information about the science of climate change, the international action being taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and the economics of a carbon price.”** The [Commission defines ‘climate change’](#) thus:

‘Climate change’ refers to the way long-term [weather patterns](#) have been changing over many decades. One of the ways the Earth’s climate is changing is through increases in global temperatures, or ‘global warming’.

From this definition it is clear the Climate Commission was NOT established to focus upon human caused climate change.

The [Climate Commission’s terms of reference](#) are:

Purpose

The Climate Commission (the Commission) has been established to inform Australia’s approach to addressing climate change and help build the consensus required to move to a competitive, low pollution Australian economy.

Tasks

The Commission will provide information and expert advice to:

- *Explain the science of climate change and the impacts on Australia.*
- *Report on the progress of international action dealing with climate change.*
- *Explain the purpose and operation of a carbon price and how it may interact with the Australian economy and communities.*

Duties

The Commission will be required to:

- *Hold a series of public outreach events to explain:*
 1. *the science of climate change and issues raised by climate scientists;*
 2. *the magnitude of the challenge to address climate change;*
 3. *the role of a carbon price in effectively tackling climate change;*
 4. *what contribution other policy mechanisms are making;*
 5. *how a carbon price works and its interaction with the economy and the community; and*
 6. *the opportunities for Australian firms and communities in moving to a low carbon future*
- *Draw on their expertise and that of the other relevant experts and organisations to prepare targeted information products to help inform the public and build community support for climate change efforts.*
- *Engage in other community forums and public debate as required.*

In addition, the Commission will, as required, provide updated assessments to the Government and the Multi-Party Climate Change Committee on the science of climate change.”

The [taxpayer funded Climate Commission](#) was [established to provide “authoritative” and “independent” information, and “expert advice”](#), on climate change and [according to Tim Flannery](#), was intended to “*fulfil a key information and education role, enabling the Australian community to have a more informed conversation about climate change.*” The Climate Commission “[recognises that it is in the public interest](#) for the Commission to provide accurate and relevant information to inform public debate.”

As is perfectly clear from the evidence below, the Climate Commission has not only completely failed in its duty to accurately inform the public, but further, it has been complicit in misleading the public and propagating fear or panic based upon unsubstantiated or misleading claims. It must therefore be disbanded and funds allocated to areas of genuine need.

PART 2

Have the Climate Commission Been Performing Their Duties?

Strike 1 – The [Off the charts: Extreme Australian summer heat](#) Report

The Commission’s report, [Off the charts: Extreme Australian summer heat](#), was produced to (1, 2) “*provide a summary of the influence of **climate change** on Australia’s temperature and extreme heat events.*” This was also confirmed by report co-author David Karoly (3). The report claimed:

“climate change is increasing the risk of more frequent and longer heatwaves and more extreme hot days, as well as exacerbating bushfire conditions.....Climate change has contributed to making the current extreme heat conditions and bushfires worse”

However, why did the report fail to mention the Commission’s definition of ‘*climate change*’ includes natural climate variability? Of course natural climate variation may be associated with extreme heat, but what has this to do with AGW and mitigation measures? Problems with this report have been detailed (4):

“Overwhelmingly, the report prefers to discuss ‘climate change’ rather than [AGW](#) or ‘human caused climate change’. This apparent decision to downplay the fundamental matter of human attribution is extremely significant and is the dominant theme throughout the report. It is clear that this report was intended by the Commission NOT to distinguish between natural climate change and AGW or human caused climate change.

The report, which relies upon obfuscation, and ambiguous use of the term ‘climate change’, completely fails to link Australia’s high temperatures to human caused climate change. The vague use of language, ambiguous expressions, or [weasel words](#), creates the perception that this report is about political spin and manipulation, not communication. Such tactics can be expected to become more popular as the truth about the unscientific nature of [AGW](#) continues to be exposed.”

The *Off the Charts* report, in failing to define climate change, and in using this term loosely, ambiguously and unscientifically, has effectively rendered the report a propaganda piece with no relevance as far as human caused climate change is concerned. The report is also of no relevance when it comes to so called mitigation measures such as a carbon dioxide tax. Since the Climate

Commission failed to publicise the fact that The *Off the Charts* report did not seek to differentiate climate change from human caused climate change, the report was fundamentally misleading or deceptive, a fact which provides *prima facie evidence* that the Climate Commission has completely failed in its primary purpose **“to provide all Australians with an independent and reliable source of information about the science of climate change.”**

Strike 2 – [The Critical Decade, International Action on Climate Change](#) Report

According to Australian Climate Commissioners Tim Flannery, Roger Beale, and Gerry Hueston, in their recent report [‘The Critical Decade: International Action on Climate Change’](#), the reason why Australians are disproportionately to blame for global climate change is because of so called per capita emissions (6). According to the Climate Commissioners, (5) *“the average Australian produces emissions almost five times that of the average Chinese person and 16 times that of the average person from India.”*

The totally fictitious and meaningless nature of average per capita emissions is perfectly clear, though this was not explained by the Commissioners (6):

“If an (undefined) average Indian person, who allegedly produces only 1/16th the emissions of the (undefined) average Australian, moves to Australia but adopts exactly the same life style in Australia as he/she did in India, then automatically he or she will suddenly be producing sixteen times more emissions!”

Australia’s high per capita emissions are due to our low population combined with relatively high transport and industrial emissions, especially from aluminium and metal production (7, 8), or, according to the government’s [Fifth National Communication on Climate Change](#), our high per capita emissions are caused by *“the dominance of resource-based industries in our economy and its reliance on low-cost fossil fuels.”* **Therefore, when our typical low emission Indian citizen moves to Australia, irrespective of his lifestyle, he will become just as responsible for the emissions from Aluminium smelters as are other Aussies!**

But wait, it also depends upon what state of Australia our typical Indian citizen moves to! If he moves to Queensland he will produce more than double the emissions of those he would produce if he crossed the border into NSW ([Ben Cubby, Greenhouse gas emissions still on the rise, data shows](#))!

When it comes to climate change and the per capita approach endorsed by the Climate Commission it seems, Queenslanders, are more guilty than anyone in the world.

This we are asked to believe, is genuine climate science, endorsed by the Commonwealth government, the Climate Commissioners, the Commission’s science advisory panel, and the CSIRO!

The Climate Commissioners also apparently forgot to mention that emissions per square kilometre are much more important than emissions per capita (6).

But while the Commonwealth Government’s Climate Commissioners point out that (5) *“Australia has the highest emissions per person of any developed country”* and *“the average Australian produces emissions almost five times that of the average Chinese person and 16 times that of the average person from India,”* they also claim: *“Emissions generated in one country will contribute to the impacts of climate change in all countries”*. So according to the Climate Commission, Australians are to blame for climate change in cities and countries around the world.

But if we are so guilty of changing global climate wouldn't we effect our own country first rather than countries thousands of miles away? Or do our emissions only impact distant non-capitalist countries and dictatorships who want our climate change compensation payments? And shouldn't the NSW government be taking legal action against all Queenslanders because of their high per capita emissions (9) which must surely be impacting the NSW climate?

The Climate Commission, and Commissioners Flannery, Beale, and Hueston, urgently need to substantiate their above claims. If indeed there is evidence that emissions from Sydneysiders impact the climate of New York, or NSW emissions cause less snow in Greenland, or Australian emissions cause increased sea levels in the U.K., then why not reveal the evidence for all to see?

The Critical Decade: International Action on Climate Change report, in completely failing to substantiate the above amazing claims, has effectively discredited the entire report and rendered it a propaganda piece with no relevance as far as human caused climate change is concerned. The relevance of fictitious average per capita emissions to global climate change was not established and the claim that "Emissions generated in one country will contribute to the impacts of climate change in all countries" was completely unsubstantiated.

This report provides further **prima facie evidence** that the Climate Commission has completely failed in its fundamental purpose "**to provide all Australians with an independent and reliable source of information about the science of climate change.**"

Strike 3 – [The Critical Decade, Climate Change & Health Report](#)

In [The Critical Decade, Climate Change & Health report](#), the Climate Commission attempts to causatively link 'climate change' or 'human caused climate change' to various human diseases or deaths. According to the report:

*"The full range of risks to human health from climate change is mostly foreseeable from our existing knowledge about how natural variations in climate and weather, and **the level of human-induced climate change already experienced, have affected rates of illness, disease and death.** Climate change affects our health in a number of ways, some of which are direct and others that flow on from other changes. Direct risks include:*

- » more frequent and intense heat waves resulting in more heart attacks, strokes, accidents, heat exhaustion and death;*
- » more frequent or intense extreme weather events—particularly storms, floods and cyclones—resulting in more injuries, deaths and post-traumatic stress; and*
- » more fires increasing the number of cases of smoke-induced asthma attacks, burns and death."*

Of vital importance however, the report **omits the scientific methodology which was utilised to quantify and distinguish health impacts caused by human caused climate change from those due to normal climatic variation or severe weather events (10)**. Not only was this methodology omitted from the report, but the Commission, and the authors, have refused to supply this information even after repeated requests over a 12 month period (10). **The Climate Commission, with the backing of the scientific advisory panel, were unable to answer the following simple questions:**

- 1. Please supply scientific evidence quantifying the number of people, in various countries, whose health has been adversely impacted by human caused climate change per se.*
- 2. Please supply in full detail, the scientific methodology which has been utilised to distinguish health impacts caused by human caused climate change from those due to normal climatic variation or severe weather events.*
- 3. Since the mitigating climate change strategy adopted by the government is a CO2 tax, are you*

suggesting that such a tax is capable of preventing asthma, heart attacks etc? Please provide substantiation.

When it comes to medical matters it is grossly irresponsible to falsely or unnecessarily generate public fear or anxiety. In the past we have seen all sorts of charlatans profiting from false health claims and for this reason we must be certain claimed health benefits (of a CO2 tax) can be substantiated. Indeed, publication of false health claims have always been treated very seriously by the health establishment and have often been relegated to the charlatan's world of quackery and snake oil.

For these reasons it is incumbent upon the authors, and the Climate Commission, to promptly substantiate their very serious and alarming claims. Not to do so supports the sceptic case against global warming and invites continuing speculation about the credibility of this report and the Climate Commission itself. **Any attempt to deliberately mislead and cause alarm by falsely implying that the health consequences of human caused climate change have been scientifically differentiated from those due to normal climate variation or severe weather events, warrants a public apology by the Commission and the most severe disciplinary action.**

[The Critical Decade, Climate Change & Health report](#), in completely failing to substantiate the above alarming claims, has raised very serious questions indeed about scientific credibility. In the absence of such evidence, this report again provides *prima facie evidence* that the Climate Commission has completely failed in its fundamental purpose *"to provide all Australians with an independent and reliable source of information about the science of climate change."*

PART 3

Saving the Economy or the Planet....or Both?

What is a Carbon Price?

The term "carbon pricing" refers to taxing or putting a price on carbon dioxide emissions. The reason a carbon dioxide price is said to be necessary is because it is claimed that carbon dioxide emissions are changing global climate to such an extent that the future survival of the planet is at risk ([11](#), [12](#), [13](#)), hence the term used by the Climate Commission, the [Critical Decade](#). A carbon dioxide pricing mechanism is proposed as a mitigation measure to lower emissions and hence save the world from climate change ([14](#), [15](#), [16](#), [17](#), [18](#), [19](#)). The object of [Australia's Clean Energy \(CO2 tax\) Act](#) is to ([20](#)) *"ensure that average global temperatures increase by not more than two degrees."* This controlling of future climate and saving the planet is the entire justification for putting a price on carbon dioxide emissions, as has been summarised by the Climate Commission ([21](#)):

"There is no doubt that the climate is changing and that failing to take sufficient action today entails huge potential risks to our society, economy and way of life...It is clear that decisions we make from now to 2020 will determine the severity of climate change our children and grandchildren experience."

Indeed, The [Climate Commission's terms of reference](#) include explaining *"the role of a carbon price in effectively tackling climate change."* However, the Climate Commission also stresses that a carbon price is an economic measure, not just a measure to save the world ([21](#)):

“Putting a price on carbon pollution is about creating an incentive across the economy to reduce pollution and invest in clean energy.....Pricing pollution is a fundamental economic reform.”

In fact, The [Climate Commission points out](#) it **“was established to provide all Australians with an independent and reliable source of information about.....the economics of a carbon price.”**

The Commission further points out ([22](#)):

“Putting a price on carbon pollution is about creating an incentive across the economy to reduce pollution and invest in clean energy.”

It is difficult to imagine how it is possible to confuse the matter of saving the planet from climatic destruction with economic reforms, yet these two issues are continually blurred and fused together by many who promote action on climate change. Of course the decision to combine and blur these two issues is counter to adopting any sensible scientific response to climate change.

All this confusion about making money or saving the planet is also reflected by our politicians. Prime Minister Julia Gillard said in May 2011, we must act now to **“save the planet”** with a CO2 tax ([25](#)). Although Julia Gillard promised she would not introduce a CO2 tax, suddenly she claimed it is now or never ([26](#)) and we must act ([25](#)) *“not in a couple of generations' time, or even a couple of years' time, but now.”* Senator Bob Brown, Julia Gillard’s coalition partner, confirmed the seriousness of the situation ([27](#)): *“There is no bailout option for the planet, like there is for Wall Street. If the world can take massive action to save Wall Street within weeks, it should take urgent action to save the planet.”*

But according to Anthony Albanese saving the planet is not enough, we should save money too ([28](#)) **“early action on climate change is what is required. By taking early action you will actually save money as well as save the planet.”** Believe it or not, Deputy Prime Minister Wayne Swan agreed, noting that **just** saving the planet may not be enough when money is involved ([29](#)):

“But we are proceeding with this because we do believe in the science of climate change, and we understand the economics of climate change, that we must do something about dangerous climate change, not just to save the planet and our environment but to keep a prosperous economy.”

This confusion, or trivialising of the save the planet initiative by putting a dollar value on it, is clearly being propagated by the Climate Commission as well as the government. The perception is clearly created, in agreement with what the so called sceptics have said all along, that putting a price on carbon has nothing whatsoever to do with saving the planet and controlling the climate.

Interestingly, Christine Lagarde, managing director of the International Monetary Fund, recently told the [World Economic Forum](#), *“Unless we take action on climate change, future generations will be roasted, toasted, fried and grilled.”* Of course the action she referred to is economic action – more money is needed to control the climate and save the planet. Such comments from international financiers are hardly surprising, economists commonly being at the forefront of the drive to control climate. However, in spite of the dire predictions of Lagarde, the [2013 Global Risks Report](#) of the [World Economic Forum](#) points out that the environmental concerns which figured so prominently in 2011, namely meteorological catastrophes, biodiversity loss, and climatological catastrophes, now no longer appear in the top five global threats (see Figure 6 in the report). **The top threats now are economic, not environmental.**

Perhaps recognising this downgrading of environmental threats, the Australian government points out what they claim are the many economic advantages of putting a price on carbon dioxide, though the survival of the planet somehow seems of much less importance ([23](#)):

“A carbon price is an effective and efficient way to reduce carbon pollution and move towards a clean energy future. Putting a price on carbon pollution is the first element of a clean energy future. A carbon price is the most environmentally effective and cheapest way to reduce pollution.

A carbon price puts a price tag on carbon pollution. Under the carbon pricing mechanism, Australia’s biggest polluters will be required to pay for each tonne of pollution they release into the atmosphere. This will create economic incentives to reduce pollution in the cheapest possible ways. These incentives will flow through the economy. The carbon price will also make lower-polluting technologies, especially clean energy technologies, more competitive by boosting investment in these technologies. In this way, introducing a price on carbon will trigger the transformation of the economy towards a clean energy future.

Our economy will continue to grow strongly with a carbon price in place. Treasury modelling estimates that under a carbon price:

- *Incomes grow: Gross National Income per person increases from today’s levels (around \$56,000) by about \$9,000 per person to 2019–20. By 2050, the increase is expected to be more than \$30,000 per person in today’s dollars.*
- *Jobs grow: national employment increases by 1.6 million jobs by 2020.*
- *Pollution falls: Growth in domestically produced carbon pollution slows.*
- *Large-scale renewable energy (excluding hydro) is projected to be 18 times its current size by 2050. Total renewable generation (including hydro) will comprise around 40 per cent of electricity generation in 2050.*
- *Gas-fired electricity increases by over 200 per cent by 2050.*

The Australian government summarises ([24](#)):

“A carbon price means a strong and growing economy”

So although, according to the [Climate Commission’s terms of reference](#), it is the duty of the Commission to educate the public regarding *“the role of a carbon price in effectively tackling climate change*, in actual fact it seems a carbon price has more to do with stimulating the economy and driving investment in clean energy rather than saving the planet. Clearly there are confusing double messages coming from both the government and the Commission here. After all, who cares about making money if the planet is doomed? **It seems it is the Commission’s task to convince the public that saving the planet has never been such a profitable venture as it now is.**

If the government, and the Climate Commission, wish to convince the public of the urgency of saving the planet with a CO2 tax, then they urgently need to clearly separate these two matters instead of continually fusing them together to turn saving the planet into a profitable business.

By obsessing over economic gains and saving money, the government, and the Climate Commission, are making a complete mockery of any suggestion the world is facing a catastrophic threat from human caused climate change.

But all this is hardly surprising when scientists have been unable to clearly identify any human impact upon on Australia’s climate. As CSIRO point out in their publication [State of the Climate 2012](#), **natural climate variability caused by “El Nino and La Nina events” “have continued to produce the hot droughts and cooler wet periods for which Australia is well known”**, over the past century.

This has been reinforced by Kevin Hennessy of the CSIRO and Scott Power of the Bureau of Meteorology ([30](#), [31](#), [32](#)):

“Trends in climate are evident over the Pacific as a whole, including the PCCSP region, however the

extent to which these trends are attributable to natural variability and to human activities is not yet well understood.”” “little research has been conducted to quantify the relative importance of human-induced change and natural variability as causes of the observed trends in the PCCSP region.”

Clearly, any suggestion of introducing mitigation techniques, such as a CO2 tax or ETS, is completely inappropriate and lacking scientific justification until the human impact upon climate can be clearly identified and quantified and appropriate cost effectiveness studies have been completed.

Conclusion

The three Climate Commission reports considered above, [The Off the charts: Extreme Australian summer heat Report](#), [The Critical Decade, International Action on Climate Change Report](#), and [The Critical Decade, Climate Change & Health report](#), demonstrate quite clearly that the Commission has completely failed in its purpose ***“to provide all Australians with an independent and reliable source of information about the science of climate change”***. Terms such as ‘climate change’ are repeatedly used ambiguously and deceptively. And various alarming claims are made which are without any scientific substantiation whatsoever.

Further, the fact that the Commission endorses a “carbon price” as a mitigation measure before any human impact upon climate has been identified and quantified, completely defies science and basic common sense. Quite simply, the Commission has prescribed the treatment in the complete absence of any diagnosis or cause.

Alarming, it seems the Climate Commission is more interested in the carbon price as an economic measure rather than as a means of saving the planet, even in spite of their constant warnings that this is the “Critical Decade”.

There is no excuse for these very serious failings. The Climate Commission is backed by the science advisory panel of 8 distinguished scientists and these scientists have clearly presided over the reports produced by the Commission.

Serious questions must be asked of all those involved in these reports and funding for the Commission should clearly be terminated and re-allocated to areas of genuine need.