

Submission to the Leveson Inquiry

From

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INTRODUCTION

Background

- 1) This submission is made by two bloggers, Andrew Montford of *Bishop Hill*¹ and Tony Newbery of *Harmless Sky*². The *Bishop Hill* blog was set up in November 2006 and *Harmless Sky* dates from December 2007. In each case our interest in what has come to be known as the climate change debate pre-dates our blogging activities. Andrew Montford is the author of *The Hockey Stick Illusion: Climategate and the Corruption of Science*.

Both blogs are sceptical about global warming to the extent that their authors are not convinced that the case for a significant anthropogenic impact on climate has been made yet. This does not mean that either of us believes that the case will never be made. It does mean that we both consider that forums in which alternative views on the subject can be expressed, exchanged, and discussed, make a contribution to a scientific controversy that has become influenced by politics at every stage. From the funding of research to the reporting of ethical and moral issues relating to mitigation of, or adaptation to, any future variation in climate, there always seems to be a political dimension as well as a scientific one. Inevitably this is reflected in the way journalists report on this very controversial subject.

- 2) We make no claim to expertise in the reporting of science generally, but where climate change is concerned both of us have devoted much time – and space on our blogs – to monitoring and criticising the way this subject has been represented to the general public by the mainstream media (MSM). For this reason our submission is confined to issues relating to climate science.

Summary of Evidence

- 3) This submission is divided into two parts: comments on the evidence presented to the inquiry on behalf of the *Science Media Centre* (SMC), and our own experience when attempting to address a major problem affecting science reporting by the media.

¹ Website at <http://www.bishop-hill.net/>

² Website at www.harmlessky.org

- 4) In our comments on the SMC's evidence to the *Leveson Inquiry* we first provide additional information about two alleged cases of unsatisfactory press reporting. This new information conflicts with the evidence from the SMC. We then consider whether the SMC's evidence is compromised by a conflict between its claim to be independent, and its advocacy role on behalf of the scientific community. We also consider the interface between politics and climate research, and some of the issues this raises, before commenting on the SMC's recommendations to the inquiry, and adding recommendations of our own.
- 5) From our own experience we set out the difficulties we have experienced in persuading the BBC to consider evidence that the impartiality of its newsgathering may have been compromised by its journalists having become far too close to environmental activism.
- 6) The purpose of this submission is to demonstrate that the media coverage of a highly politicised field of research such as climate science is not nearly as straightforward as the SMC has led the inquiry to believe. Unfortunately, due to the complexity of the issues this raises, it has been necessary to deal with the subject at some length.

[Note: Links to documents relied on are provided in the text or in footnotes. As many are web pages, and therefore ephemeral, alternative links to PDF captures of the pages are provided as alternatives where possible, however the formatting and content of these are not always identical to the original.]

COMMENTS ON THE SCIENCE MEDIA CENTRE'S EVIDENCE

Climate Prediction and 11°C global warming

- 7) In Ms Fox's witness statement, under the heading *Taking the Extremes*, she voices her concern that:

Another bug-bear of scientists is the media's tendency to emphasise the most alarming figures in a given study.

To illustrate this problem, for which she seems to hold the media wholly responsible, she cites an example related to climate change:

... when a *Nature* paper modelling climate change projected warming between 2 degrees and 11 degrees, almost all the newspapers carried the latter figure in their headlines, with one tabloid splashing a huge 11 degrees on the front page alongside an apocalyptic image. This in spite of the fact that the researchers speaking at the SMC press briefing to launch the paper had all emphasised that the vast majority of models showed warming around 2 degrees. Ironically, a Radio 4 programme several years later used the story as an example of scientists exaggerating the case for climate change.

MOD100054261, para 3

There is no mention of a press release in the SMC's witness statement although, as we set out below, such a press release seems to have been the source of the alarming media coverage that the scientists' research received. Nor did Ms Fox mention the press release when answering Mr Jay's questions during her oral evidence:

MR JAY: It's a similar point analytically in relation to climate change, because 11 degrees is at the outer level of probability?

A. Yes.

Q. In other words, very unlikely.

A. Yes, and that particular press briefing the Science Media Centre ran and there were four scientists on the panel and I watched them at such pains to repeat time and time again -- because the questions were coming from the floor, you know: "Will it be like *The Day After Tomorrow*? Will London freeze over because of this 11 degrees?" And time and time again, the four scientists said, "90 per cent of the models come back and show us it's likely to be around 2 degrees warming, but some -- a tiny minority of models show us 11 degrees." And what did every newspaper do the next day? Everybody splashed with 11 degrees. In fact, one newspaper, that was the front page, a massive big "11 degrees" with a picture from "*The Day After Tomorrow*", which is a terrifying blockbuster movie. So again -- and I think I said in the evidence that again, a year later, Radio 4 did a documentary accusing the scientific community of exaggerating the impact of climate change and cited this briefing, which was incredibly unfair and I actually emailed each of the journalists who had been present at that press briefing and asked them for an email back to send to these producers on Radio 4 to say that it was not the scientists. In fact, many of them were very upset that their peers would no longer trust them because they'd gone out and told the media that we were going to have 11 degrees warming.

Fiona Fox Evidence, page 30, line 13 et seq

Unfortunately the SMC's account of these events in both the witness statement and oral evidence is misleading .

- 8) The paper published in *Nature* was Stainforth et al, *Uncertainty in predictions of the climate response to rising levels of greenhouse gases*, and it appeared on 27th Jan 2005.

The BBC programme that Ms Fox refers to was part of *The Battle for Influence* series and was entitled *Overselling Climate Change*. The presenter was Simon Cox, and the producer was Richard Vadon. It was broadcast on Thursday 20 April 2006 20:00-20:30 (Radio 4 FM)³, just over a year after the SMC press briefing, not 'years later' as Ms Fox claims. Among other things, the programme describes the genesis and effect of a very controversial press release.

The relevant section of the programme starts with voices intoning apocalyptic headlines:

³ Still available for Listen Again. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/thebattleforinfluence/pip/abkim/> or http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/The_Battle_for_Influence.pdf

Global warming is twice as bad as previously thought⁴

Screen saver weather trial predicts 10 degrees Celsius rise in British temperatures⁵

Global warming may be twice as bad as feared⁶.

Simon Cox: These are the broad sheet headlines from the first results of the world's largest climate experiment. The first two headlines are simply wrong. The last one is just misleading. But how did all of these reputable newspapers get it so wrong. Our story starts with *climateprediction.net*, a group of British scientists who try and predict the effect of global warming using computer models running on thousands of ordinary home computers across the World. In 2005 they published their first results from the project in the well-known scientific journal *Nature*. The team had been testing what effect doubling the amount of carbon dioxide, or CO₂, in the atmosphere would have on temperature; or as it's known in the trade, climate sensitivity. They ran thousands and thousands of models, each with slightly different parameters, to try and get the widest range of responses. They were left with just over two thousand results. The vast majority of these, well over a thousand, showed that doubling Co₂ would lead to a temperature rise of around 3 degrees Celsius. This is in line with the findings of many other climate researchers. A tiny percentage of the models showed a lot of warming, the highest result was a startling 11 degrees. When it came to publicising their research the scientists chose to focus on this 11 degrees figure. In a press release headlined 'Bleak Results from the World's Largest Climate Change Experiment' the only number mentioned is 11 degrees. There was no reference to the fact that most of the results were around 3 degrees.

Transcript

This is how the Climate Prediction press release starts:

Climateprediction.net
Natural Environment Research Council
Oxford University
Embargoed until 1800 hrs (GMT) 26 January, 2005

Bleak first results from the world's largest climate change experiment
Greenhouse gases could cause global temperatures to rise by more than double the maximum warming so far considered likely by the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), according to results from the

⁴ The Independent, Steve Connor, Science Editor 27th January 2005
<http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/global-warming-is-twice-as-bad-as-previously-thought-488375.html> or http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/twice_as_bad.pdf

⁵ The Telegraph, Roger Highfield, Science Editor 31 Jan 2005.
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/science-news/3338704/Screen-saver-weather-trial-predicts-10C-rise-in-British-temperatures.html>

⁶ The Times, Mark Henderson, 27th January 2005
<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/public/journalist.do?querystring=&offset=2200&hits=10&sort=new&p=tto&author=Mark+Henderson> behind paywall. Or
http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/www_thetimes_Mark_Henderson.pdf

world's largest climate prediction experiment, published in the journal Nature this week.

The first results from climateprediction.net, a global experiment using computing time donated by the general public, show that average temperatures could eventually rise by up to 11°C - even if carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere are limited to twice those found before the industrial revolution. Such levels are expected to be reached around the middle of this century unless deep cuts are made in greenhouse gas emissions.

Chief Scientist for climateprediction.net, David Stainforth, from Oxford University said: "Our experiment shows that increased levels of greenhouse gases could have a much greater impact on climate than previously thought."

...

Climate Prediction Press Release

This press release was prepared by the *Natural Environment Research Council* (NERC), which had funded the research, and Dr Myles Allen⁷, a member of the research team who, 'signed it off'⁸.

As *Overselling Climate Change* pointed out, there is no mention of any result other than 11°C in the press release. Therefore it is hardly surprising that the media responded with apocalyptic headlines about an 11°C increase in temperature, and there is reason to suppose that was exactly what the authors intended. In an interview for the programme Dr Allen says:

The press release was absolutely fine. The press release identified what was interesting about the paper. And the other thing which our, our, press advisers tell us to do is to make sure that a press release could be used by the sort of hard-working journalists in the Oxford Times who don't have time to go and read the whole story, that they can essentially go and copy it out. And in that respect the press release was accurate as well. It said up to 11 degrees, and that was precisely the result that we got. There were problems with some journalists who decided to embroider on the press release, without actually going back to the paper. I have no sympathy for them really. If journalists decide to embroider on a press release without referring to the paper which the press release is about then that's really the journalist's problem. We can't, as scientists, guard against that.

Transcript

⁷ Now Prof. Myles Allen, head of the Climate Dynamics group at the University of Oxford's Atmospheric, Oceanic and Planetary Physics Department. He has also served as a review editor on the IPCC's Fourth Assessment Report.

⁸ See Comment 53; <http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2008/04/blogs-and-peer-review/comment-page-2/#comment-83889> or http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/realclimate_blogs-and-peer-review_comment_53.pdf

However, when defending the press release in a blog comment in April 2008, Dr Allen takes a rather different view:

I think the offending paragraph was written by a long-suffering Natural Environment Research Council press officer who has since moved on to other things. But I don't think it's fair to tee off on the press officers, who have a pretty thankless task. If I recall correctly the 11 degree number went in and out of successive drafts like a yoyo, and ended up being left in on the grounds that it had to highlight something "new and concrete" – not, I might add, "alarming": my impression was that the Press Officer would have just as happily drawn attention to zero-sensitivity models, if we'd have found any.

Anyway, I eventually signed it off on the understanding that no serious mass-circulation journalist would rely on the press release in reporting the story, and that its sole purpose was to encourage journalists to find out more. It seems, judging from the responses Fiona got and despite Richard Vadon's claims, that this understanding was correct.

The press release could undoubtedly have been clearer, but it seems no-one who reported the story directly actually misunderstood what had been done, so it didn't in fact do any damage. But of course, if Richard had stuck to "scientists issue a press release that might have been misunderstood but wasn't" his editors probably wouldn't have been very impressed.

Real Climate, 5th April 2008, Comment 53

The second paragraph, in particular, conflicts with what Dr Allen had told the BBC two years earlier. Rather than saying the press release was intended to be used verbatim by non-specialist reporters, now Dr Allen is claiming that the press release was only intended to encourage specialist science reporters to read the whole of the paper published in *Nature*.

- 9) At no point in the SMC's witness statement or oral evidence is this press release mentioned. Ms Fox only refers to a press briefing at the SMC, and asserts that the criticisms of the scientists' actions in the *Overselling Climate Change* programme referred to that event:

... a year later, Radio 4 did a documentary accusing the scientific community of exaggerating the impact of climate change **and cited this briefing**, which was incredibly unfair ... [emphasis added]

Fiona Fox Evidence, page 31, line 9 et seq

In fact the programme did not mention the press briefing at any point, but only referred to the press release. Ms Fox's account of events is puzzling as there is also compelling evidence, outlined below, that she was aware of the centrality of the press release to the case made in the BBC programme.

The day after *Overselling Climate Change* was broadcast, the well-known climate science blog *Real Climate* published a post entitled *How not to write a press release*.⁹

⁹ <http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2006/04/how-not-to-write-a-press-release> or http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/How_not_to_write.pdf

This was a reaction to the BBC programme and was critical of what the *Climate Prediction* researchers had done.

As this blog is run by a team of high profile climate scientists, and defends climate research against outside criticism, there can be no suggestion that this blog post was an attempt on the part of climate sceptics to discredit the researchers by attacking their press release. Rather it was a demonstration of disquiet in the climate science establishment at what the researchers had done.

Dr Myles Allen contributed a very long comment to the ensuing discussion on the blog which revealed, among other things, that he had enlisted the assistance of Ms Fox of the SMC when he realised that the press release he had signed off had become the target of criticism in the BBC programme:

We were naturally concerned when David Frame and I were interviewed for this programme at any suggestion we were “sexing up” the results of Stainforth et al (2005), so we asked Fiona Fox of the Royal Institution Science Media Centre, who convened the January 2005 press conference announcing those results, to follow up. None of those involved in the Battle for Influence programme were present at the press conference or covered the story at the time. Fiona kindly wrote to a number of journalists who were at the press conference asking them for their reaction to the “sexing up” accusation, stating:

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...

My own clear memory of this briefing is that the scientists were very clear that the results showed a range of warming between 2 degrees and 11 degrees and that each time they were asked about the impact of 11 degrees they reminded journalists that this was the worst case scenario and it could just as easily be at the lower end. Obviously we all knew (the press officers that is) that you would report 11 degrees and the fact that this was twice the level suggested by previous studies was clearly a significant news story. However I believe that the scientists themselves were very measured and did not emphasise the 11 degrees.

...

Fiona Fox , Director
Science Media Centre
The Royal Institution

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The responses Fiona received were as follows:

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Hi Fiona,

My memory tallies with yours. They presented the range, they described the concept of the ensemble, they emphasised (in response to a very perceptive

question from some star BBC journalist) the role of clouds in the uncertainty, they mentioned 6 main reasons for uncertainty.

If anyone went for the exaggeration it was the journalists – we all mentioned 11 degrees I'm sure but as far as I recall, PA and Metro presented it virtually as a fait accompli.

Richard Black, BBC

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Thanks Fiona, my memory is as yours. Let me know what feedback you get and I'll write you something properly tomorrow.

Ruth Francis, Nature

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Hi Fiona,

As I recall, the researchers, and Myles Allen in particular, emphasised the fact that the bottom end of the range (ie the 2 in 2-11 degrees C) corresponded to previous predictions of 2-5 degrees C. I seem to remember that they said this gave strength to the prediction that there would be a warming of **at least** 2 degrees C, but that there was a greater degree of uncertainty at the top-end. This last point was definitely underlined. To back that up, refer to Myles' quote in my article:

<http://www.scidev.net/News/index.cfm?fuseaction=readNews&itemid=1878&language=1>.

Hope this helps.

Catherine.

Catherine Brahic

Senior correspondent

Science and Development Network (SciDev.Net)

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I'd agree with Catherine's interpretation – as far as I recall, they were all quite careful to stress the greater temperature change the greater the degree of uncertainty. I'll try and dig up the bulletins report.

Sarah Mukherjee, BBC

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Hi Fiona – my memory is that the scientists took pains to point out that it was a range and quite a broad range at that. I also remember Myles in a rather vivid phrase saying that we had to remember that we could still take actions to avert the worst warming and that we shouldn't assume "that our

children will stand by and watch as the seas boil around them”, showing that the worst case wasn’t necessarily the most likely outcome.

Thanks,

Fiona Harvey
Environment Correspondent
Financial Times

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Real Climate, 22nd April 2006, Comment 28

So Ms Fox’s enquiry elicited a number of replies that enthusiastically endorsed her own recollections of the press briefing, in spite of the event having occurred more than a year previously.

It would be interesting to know how many journalists attended the SMC press briefing. In her oral evidence to the inquiry, (page 31, line 12) Ms Fox says “I actually emailed each of the journalists who had been present at that press briefing”,¹⁰ but Dr Allen only reproduces five responses, two of which were from the same organisation, the BBC.

Dr Allen’s goes on to say:

We told the *Battle for Influence* team about all this, but they refused to discuss revising their programme.

Real Climate, 22nd April 2006, Comment 28

And he concludes:

We think these responses speak for themselves, and that their allegation that we sexed up the results of Stainforth et al for the benefit of the media is simply false.

Real Climate, 22nd April 2006, Comment 28

The BBC’s indifference may, perhaps, be excused given the quality of the evidence that Ms Fox had obtained; her email had evidently jogged the journalist’s memories. Furthermore, their programme was concerned with a press release that would have had far wider reach than a single press briefing held at a venue in London.

- 10) Given the extent of Ms Fox’s involvement, it would seem inconceivable that she was not aware of the controversy over the press release, or that *Overselling Climate Change* was concerned with the press release and not with her briefing at the SMC. The evidence she has submitted to the tribunal is therefore very misleading in that it

¹⁰ Ms Fox’s oral evidence to the Inquiry, page 31, line 12
<http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Transcript-of-Afternoon-Hearing-24-January-2012.pdf> or <http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/Transcript-of-Afternoon-Hearing-24-January-2012.pdf>

gives the impression that the media mendaciously exaggerated a climate change story when in fact the fault seems to lie entirely with the scientists, and with NERC which funded them. In collaboration they were prepared to publish a press release that invited alarmist interpretation and apocalyptic headlines that would secure extensive publicity for the *Climate Predictions* scientists' research.

- 11) In April 2008, the controversy resurfaced at *Real Climate* when the producer of *Overselling Climate Change*, Richard Vadon, went head-to-head with Myles Allen in the comments section over an accusation in the header post that his programme had been 'scurrilous'; an accusation that was subsequently withdrawn.

Dr Allen again used the evidence collected by Ms Fox to argue that the programme had been unfair to him. On this occasion Tony Newbery addressed the following comment to him:

It was very thoughtful of Fiona Fox to provide the journalist who attended the press conference with her own recollections of what had happened more than a year previously when asking for theirs.

[Real Climate, 6th April 2008, Comment 77](#)

This received the following response from Dr Allen:

Tony,

Yes, if we'd known this was turning into some kind of forensic examination, it would have been better for her not to have written the e-mail like that (which is why I included it along with the responses). But all she knew was that a concern had been raised: we had no idea Richard Vadon was going to go to such lengths to pin the blame for the headlines on us.

[Real Climate, 6th April 2008, Comment 81](#)

Unfortunately Dr Allen had to abandon the discussion¹¹ before he could be pressed to explain why he thought that the journalists' testimonies obtained by Ms Fox were reliable evidence of what happened at the briefing when she had so obviously jogged their memories, or if whether he would be willing to publish the whole of the email she had sent out, rather than just a single paragraph.

- 12) Richard Vadon, producer of the BBC programme, had this to say in a comment at *Real Climate* in the course of his defence of *Overselling Climate Change* against the scientists' attacks:

Many scientists have contacted me privately to commend the programme but I will mention a couple of people close to CPDN [*Climate Prediction Dot Net*] who have written about the programme and the press release.

¹¹ Real Climate, 6th April 2008, Comment 86, <http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2008/04/blogs-and-peer-review/comment-page-2/#comment-83954> or http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/www_realclimate_blogs-and-peer-review_comment_86.pdf

Tim Palmer, the head of the Probability and Seasonal Forecasting Division at the *European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts* wrote the following in *Physics World*:

” A recent well-researched BBC radio programme exposed a number of exaggerated press releases by climate institutes.”

Bryan Lawrence of NERC who fund CPDN said on his blog of the infamous press release:

“I was staggered to read the actual press release that caused all the fuss (predictions of 11C climate sensitivity etc). The bottom line is that had I read that press release without any prior knowledge I too might have believed that an 11 degree increase in global mean temperature was what they had predicted (which is not what they said in the paper). I can't help putting some of the blame back on the ClimatePrediction.net team – the press release didn't reflect the message of their results at all properly, and they shouldn't have let that happen. I'm still naive enough to believe it's incumbent on us as scientists to at least make sure the release is accurate, even if we can't affect the resulting reporting.”

[Real Climate, 4th April 2008, Comment 19](#)

Sadly, there is no reason to suppose that the *Climate Prediction* press release, which led to worldwide coverage of their research is an isolated case.

- 13) There are two more excerpts from *Overselling Climate Change* that may be of assistance to the Inquiry. ...

Simon Cox: We contacted several respected climate scientists and a statistician, and asked them to read both the Nature paper and the press release. All were critical. One of them wrote to us, 'I agree the 11 degrees centigrade figure was unreasonably hyped. It's a difficult line for all scientists to tread, as we need something exciting to have any chance publishing in places such as Nature, and to justify our funding. I do think that in this case they clearly overstepped the line in their presentation of what they had shown'.

[Transcript](#)

And:

Simon Cox: It's true that we journalists have a tendency to simplify and then exaggerate, assuming we understand the science in the first place. The climate scientist Hans von Storch believes there's a process of exaggeration that starts with scientists trying to make their research more interesting to get in popular science journals. It then continues with the press release that strips away many of the caveats and contexts, and ends with journalists focusing only on the extreme scenarios. He's clear where the responsibility lies.

Hans von Storch: It is often my impression that scientists speak to the media in a way that they don't mind if they are misunderstood in a specific way.

And then the scientists can say, 'Well! I never said that, I mean you know how the media are, they are just wanting dramatic stories'. So I think it's very often so that the scientists are making up a story, or indicate what the journalists should say and then the journalists do it. I think that one should definitely not blame the media.

Professor Hans von Storch is an eminent German climate scientist¹² with a distinguished career as both a researcher and a journal editor. Although he has been very critical of both climate science and climate scientists, he is not a climate sceptic.

- 14) There is no reason to suppose that the affair of the *Climate Prediction* press release is an isolated incident.

In February 2007, the parent body of the *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (IPCC), the *United Nations Environment Programme* (UNEP), launched the IPCC Fourth Assessment Report with a press release headed:

Evidence of Human-caused Global Warming "Unequivocal", says IPCC

Paris, 2 February 2007 – The first major global assessment of climate change science in six years has concluded that changes in the atmosphere, the oceans and glaciers and ice caps show unequivocally that the world is warming.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concludes that major advances in climate modelling and the collection and analysis of data now give scientists "very high confidence" (at least a 9 out of 10 chance of being correct) in their understanding of how human activities are causing the world to warm. This level of confidence is much greater than what could be achieved in 2001 when the IPCC issued its last major report.

...

<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?ArticleID=5506&DocumentID=499&l=en>

However, at no point does the assessment report make such a claim. The IPCC report only says that the increase in temperature over the last century is unequivocal. Any human component in this warming over and above natural variation is assessed as 'very likely', signalling that a degree of uncertainty still exists.

An example of the consequences that such misleading press releases can have quickly appeared in the *Sunday Telegraph* with a suitably apocalyptic headline:

THE NEXT FEW YEARS ARE CRITICAL IN THE FIGHT FOR THE CLIMATE

The *Fourth Assessment Report* of the *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (IPCC), which was published on Friday is unequivocal in its conclusion that climate change is happening and that humans are contributing to the changes.

¹² http://www.hzg.de/institute/coastal_research/about_us/head/storch/index.php.en

This article was not the work of some hard-pressed reporter with no experience of science reporting and no time to read more than the first few lines of the press release. The author was Professor Paul Hardaker, Chief executive of the *Royal Meteorological Society*, whose authority would no doubt have carried considerable weight with readers. Apparently he chose to rely on the press release rather than the IPCC's report.

- 15) Given that the press release had licensed journalists to exaggerate by using a term that attached dramatic confidence to an alarming possibility, press coverage worldwide informed the public that man-made global warming was unequivocal.

Drawing a line in the sand

- 16) The SMC's witness statement informs the inquiry that:

The evidence will conclude with a short submission from the University of East Anglia (UEA) regarding media coverage of the 'Climategate' affair, submitted to the Inquiry by the SMC at the request of U EA.

MOD100054261, para 2

We assume that, as the UEA submission forms part of the SMC's witness statement, then Ms Fox endorses and concurs with everything that it says. As the SMC's reference to the Climategate scandal at MOD100054259, para 2 in the witness statement is a summary of the UEA's submission we will generally consider them together.

Our main concern is that evidence in the SMC's witness statement and Ms Fox's oral evidence appears to bear the highly partisan and misleading imprint of the *Outside Organisation*, a public relations consultancy employed by the University in the aftermaths of the Climategate affair.¹³ We set out our reasons below.

- 17) The UEA submission to the Inquiry is dated 29th November 2011 and is apparently the work of the *Head of Communications* at the University, Annie Ogden.

Following the theft of thousands of their private emails in November 2009, University of East Anglia scientists were widely accused in the media of fraudulently doctoring climate data to hoodwink policymakers and the public about the causes and scope of global warming. Even when four independent inquiries cleared them of any scientific malpractice - news that was given far fewer column inches than the original accusations - some journalists continued to make the same, false accusations. One such example was James Delingpole who wrote a series of articles under the Telegraph masthead in November 2010 describing Prof Phil Jones, director of UEA's Climatic Research Unit, as "disgraced, FOI breaching, email-

¹³ UEA press statement about Outside Organisation:

<http://www.uea.ac.uk/mac/comm/media/press/CRUstatements/statements/foi-statement-outside>

deleting, scientific-method abusing" and the university's scientists as "untrustworthy, unreliable and entirely unfit to write the kind of reports on which governments around the world make their economic and environmental decisions". One article referred to the scientists' work as mendacious".

The content was so malicious and unbalanced that the university made a formal complaint to the Press Complaints Commission. This complaint was rejected in March 2011 on the grounds that readers would read the articles in the context of Mr Delingpole's "robust" personal views. As a result, the maligned UEA scientists - indeed the wider science community - were left feeling powerless to correct factual inaccuracies and challenge defamatory comments, while critics in the media felt they had been handed carte blanche to repeat the unfounded slurs.

The emotional toll of the so-called Climategate affair on Prof Jones was revealed in an interview with the Sunday Times when he said he had contemplated suicide several times as a result of the false accusations against him. Comparisons were inevitably made with Dr David Kelly. Prof Jones is, of course, far from the only scientist to be the subject of unfounded accusations and unpleasant comment in parts of the UK media, but his is perhaps the most high-profile recent case.

Christopher Jefferies' evidence to the inquiry on November 28 resonated strongly with Prof Jones and he is willing to give evidence to the inquiry if required.

Annie Ogden, Head of Communications, University of East Anglia

MOD100054270

18) On page 8 of the SMC's witness statement, the UEA's submission is summarised as follows:

There is also the case of Professor Phil Jones from the University of East Anglia who was widely accused by the media of fraudulently doctoring data to mislead the public and policy makers about climate change. Even after four independent inquiries cleared Professor Jones of any scientific malpractice some journalists continue to make the same false allegations (see UEA submission below). The SMC recommends that Phil Jones be called to the Inquiry to provide evidence. His evidence would be every bit as harrowing as that given by many of those in the media spotlight and would serve as a reminder that scientists are human beings and can also suffer enormously.

MOD100054261, para 1

The witness statement provides no evidence to support the allegation about widespread accusations in the media of Professor Jones *'fraudulently doctoring data to mislead the public and policy makers about climate change'*. Indeed although such allegations may have occurred in comments on some less rigorously moderated blogs, we do not recall widespread allegations directed at Professor Jones expressed

in these terms in the UK mainstream media.

The witness statement also claims that four independent inquiries cleared Professor Jones of any scientific malpractice. This is, in our view, quite untrue for the reasons set out below.

Only one of the inquiries that took place after Climategate could lay any claim to addressing scientific malpractice on the part of Professor Jones; the one conducted by Lord Oxburgh¹⁴. Of the other three, the *House of Commons Science and Technology Select Committee's* inquiry into *The disclosure of climate data from the Climatic Research Unit at the University of East Anglia*,¹⁵ which was conducted at breakneck speed in the run-up to the May 2010 election, required the University to investigate such matters, but made no attempt to do so itself. Sir Muir Russell's *Independent Climate Change E-mails Review*¹⁶, which was set up and financed by the University did not have investigation of Professor Jones scientific research as part of its remit. An inquiry that took place in the United States was not concerned with Professor Jones conduct at all, but with that of one of his correspondents, Professor Michael Mann of Pennsylvania State University.

Lord Oxburgh's *Scientific Assessment Panel*, which like Sir Muir Russell's review was a UEA organised and funded project, only considered papers selected by the University and ignored papers criticised by climate sceptics¹⁷. The Inquiry had no written terms of reference¹⁸ and kept no records of its proceedings¹⁹. In July 2010 Lord Oxburgh emailed the climate sceptic blogger Steve McIntyre *Climate Audit* saying, 'the science was not the subject of our study'²⁰. It would appear that in spite of these inquiries doing their best to salvage Professor Jones reputation, no one has yet thoroughly investigated his scientific research. Of the two inquiries that might have been expected to do so, Russell and Oxburgh, both were set up and financed by his employers and their independence is highly questionable.

When the Oxburgh report was published, Lord Willis, who was the chairman of the *House of Commons Science and Technology Select Committee Inquiry*, told the BBC that:

"The whole purpose of having this if you like tripartite approach to the emails scandal as it was, was that Muir Russell would look at the emails, my committee was looking to make sure that there was a proper scrutiny

¹⁴ <http://www.uea.ac.uk/mac/comm/media/press/CRUstatements/SAP> or

[http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/Outside Organisation-UEA.pdf](http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/Outside%20Organisation-UEA.pdf)

¹⁵ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cmsctech/387/387i.pdf> or

http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/Parliament_Climategate_Report.pdf

¹⁶ <http://www.cce-review.org/pdf/FINAL%20REPORT.pdf> or

http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/Russell_Report.pdf

¹⁷ <http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/GW2297.pdf>

¹⁸ Lord Oxburgh evidence to the select committee, Question 9,

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmsctech/uc444-i/uc44401.htm> or

http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/Parliament_HC_444-i.pdf

¹⁹ Emanuel, K. Email to Stephen McIntyre 5 June 2010.

http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/Montford_Climategate-Inquiries.pdf, para 127

²⁰ <http://climateaudit.org/2010/07/01/oxburgh-and-the-jones-admission/#more-11331>

process in place, and of course the Royal Society, headed by Lord Oxburgh, [sic] would look at the rigour of the science.

...

It [*the Oxburgh inquiry*] took us no further down the line at all from what the select committee report did or indeed from what the Muir Russell inquiry will do. I frankly think that there has been a sleight of hand in that the actual terms of reference are not what we were led to believe.²¹

We consider that the claim in the SMC's witness statement that "four independent inquiries cleared Professor Jones of any scientific malpractice" is partisan and unjustified. (see also par 31 below)

- 19) We have nothing to add concerning the University and SMC's accusations against the *Daily Telegraph* columnist and blogger James Delingpole. In her oral evidence, Ms Fox was much exercised²² by the failure of the *Press Complaints Council (PCC)* to find in favour of a complaint made against the *Daily Telegraph* by the University. In response, Mr Jay said:

You did provide us with the ruling of the PCC in relation to the UEA against the *Daily Telegraph* case and Professor Jones. It is quite complex, and if you don't mind I'm not going to go into the detail of it, although I've studied it. I've passed it on to Lord Justice Leveson. Maybe that's something I can take up with the PCC, if there's time.

Fiona Fox Evidence, page 39, line 12 et seq

Lord Leveson has also said to Ms Fox:

As regards the climate change story, presumably there are all sorts of potential remedies open to that particular scientist if he's been defamed.

Fiona Fox Evidence, page 45, line 14 et seq

So far as we are aware, no remedy other than UEA's abortive complaint to the PPC about James Delingpole's column has been sought by either the University or Professor Jones.

- 20) The SMC's evidence to the inquiry includes allegations that Professor Phil Jones, the man at the centre of the Climategate affair, was driven to contemplate suicide because of unacceptable media coverage. However there is no mention in the SMC's evidence of the role played by *Outside Organisation*, a public relations consultancy engaged by Professor Jones' employers, the University of East Anglia (UEA), with the apparent objective of salvaging the reputation of the university and its scientists. This task was spearheaded by the managing director of *Outward*

²¹ <http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/GW2297.pdf>

²² Oral evidence page 38, line 4: <http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Transcript-of-Afternoon-Hearing-24-January-2012.pdf> or [http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/Ton...earing-24-January-2012\[1\].pdf](http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/Ton...earing-24-January-2012[1].pdf)

Organisation, Neill Wallis, who has appeared before the *Leveson Inquiry*²³ and was arrested and bailed in July 2011 in connection with phone hacking.

- 21) When over a thousand emails from a server at the UEA's Climate Research Unit (CRU) appeared on the internet on 17th November 2009, the press treated the story as an *exposé* of bad practice among climate scientists. With emails about inconvenient research findings being hidden; plans to keep sceptics' research out of an IPCC assessment; refusing to make crucial research data available for scrutiny; putting pressure on an academic journal to tow the partisan line of the UEA scientists; deleting emails to thwart Freedom of Information requests, and an expression of jubilation when one of Professor Jones' critics unexpectedly dies of a heart attack, this is hardly surprising.

As Professor Jones later admitted in evidence to the *House of Commons Science and Technology Select Committee*:

I have obviously written some very awful emails and I fully admit that²⁴.

Evidence to Parliament

In spite of this, there is no hint in either the written or oral evidence provided to the Inquiry by the SMC that Professor Jones was in any way culpable. He is presented to this inquiry as a blameless victim of press persecution. An independent or objective observer could not possibly see the Climategate affair in such black and white terms.

- 22) In April 2012, a post on *The Guardian's Environment Blog* by Leo Hickman, a journalist specialising in environmental matters and an enthusiastic advocate of concern about global warming, was critical of UEA's feeble management of the media maelstrom that overwhelmed it in the aftermath of the Climategate revelations. He likens the University to a rabbit caught in the headlights, failing to challenge the accusations being made against their scientists. As Hickman says, all this changed on 4th February 2010 when *Outside Organisation* appeared on the scene. A *Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)* requests by Andrew Montford has revealed that a very successful "fight back" and damage limitation exercise was then launched for which the University, and therefore the taxpayer, paid *Outside Organisation* over £112,000.²⁵

It is an indication of the extent to which the climate debate has become polarised in the mainstream media that Hickman does not reveal in his article that the extent of UEA's expenditure on PR, about which he is obviously concerned, only came to light because of the efforts of a sceptical blogger. (*Mr Hickman has pointed out that his article linked to a copy of a letter from UEA to Graham Stringer MP at the Bishop Hill*

²³ <http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/?s=neill+wallis> or

http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/levesoninquiry_wallis.pdf

²⁴ House of Commons Science and Technology Select Committee, Examination of witnesses, 1st March 2010, reply to Question 102.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cmsctech/387b/38712.htm> or

http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/Minutes_of_Evidence.pdf

²⁵ "University of East Anglia spent £112,870 on 'climategate'". *Guardian Environment Blog* 24th April 2012. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/blog/2012/apr/24/uea-climate-change-email-publicity> or http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/Hickman_Environment_guardian.pdf

website. This disclosed the payment made to Outside Organisation.)

- 23) Montford also obtained some emails between UEA and *Outside Organisation* using another FOIA request.²⁶ These show that news of Professor Jones being driven to contemplate suicide dates from an article placed in the *Sunday Times* by Wallis for publication on 7th February 2010. The copy for this, provided by a reporter called Richard Girling, was emailed by Wallis to Trevor Davies, Pro-Vice Chancellor of UEA and to Professor Jones, the previous day under the heading '*FYI - tomorrow's Sunday Times main spread*²⁷'.
- 24) This coverage arranged by *Outward Organisation*²⁸ included a front-page teaser headlined '*I thought of killing myself, says climate scandal professor*' and the main story on an inside page which is headlined '*The leak was bad. Then came the death threats*'. There is a large picture of Professor Jones looking drawn, soulful and vulnerable against a bleak Norfolk landscape²⁹. We are told that, because of what he has been through, Professor Jones now relies on medication to get through the day; that only the love of his family, and particularly a five-year-old grand-child, has kept him from suicide; that the CRU email server was '*hacked*' by '*thieves*' at a crucial moment when international climate negotiations hung in the balance; that climate sceptics just want to distract the UEA scientists and waste their time so that they cannot undertake climate research; that the predicament of Professor Jones is in some way analogous with that of Dr David Kelly³⁰; that Jones '*remains at risk, still receiving death threats from around the world*³¹'. Also that he is just a scientist with no training in PR, a situation that *Outside Organisation* was about to change radically. (see 28 below).

The sub-heading of the main spread in the print edition of the *Sunday Times* says that Professor Jones '*was provoked into sending the infamous emails and insists his science has been vindicated*'; sympathetic coverage indeed.

- 25) The following day the University's Vice Chancellor, Professor Edward Acton, wrote to Neill Wallis to congratulate and thank him:

I am delighted by the amount achieved. Now we must see how the coverage unfolds. But it seems to me you and Sam [Bowen] have helped us maximise the chances of that elusive line in the sand. Warmest thanks for everything thus far ...³²

²⁶ http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/UEA-Outside_Organisation_Emails_searchable.pdf

²⁷ http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/UEA-Outside_Organisation_Emails_searchable.pdf. Pg 1-2

²⁸ <http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/GW2188.pdf>

²⁹ Different website but same image: <http://static.guim.co.uk/sys-images/Environment/Pix/columnists/2010/7/6/1278432065703/Climate-emails--Professor-006.jpg> or http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/jones_pic.pdf

³⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Kelly_%28weapons_expert%29

³¹ Abusive emails received as a result of the Climategate affair were recently released by UEA under the Freedom of Information Act. Although many of them are extremely unpleasant, it is unlikely that any could be regarded as a genuine threat or are worse than celebrities and politicians receive on a regular basis.

<http://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/116404/response/288373/attach/4/Appendix%20A%20D%20ata%20file%200072.pdf> or http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/Climategate_abusive_emails.pdf

³² http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/UEA-Outside_Organisation_Emails_searchable.pdf, Page 3

Neill Wallis responded:

Thanks.

Lets hope we can continue!

Best,

Neil³³

The substantial sum paid to *Outside Organisation* (see 22 above) suggests that the *Sunday Times* spin on the Climategate affair was just the first step in a continuing and extensive PR campaign.

- 26) From this time onwards, stories began to appear in the media (and the blogosphere) portraying Professor Jones and his fellow climate science researchers as innocent victims of media persecution caused and abetted by climate sceptic *thieves* who had broken into their computers, stolen their *private* emails, and were attempting to disrupt their work³⁴. Before this spin was applied, the media had taken a very different, and arguably more balanced, line on the Climategate affair. Professor Jones and his colleagues were portrayed as having had their dirty laundry washed in public as a result of the email leak and that this had revealed a disquietingly shady side to the activities of some of those engaged in research that has had, and is still having, an immense impact on public policy and all our lives. (see 21 below)
- 27) As only part of UEA's correspondence with *Outside Organisation* was released in response to the FOIA request– the rest is currently being withheld by UEA – it is not possible to definitely link later individual news stories to a successful PR campaign by *Outside Organisation*. However, in addition to Richard Girling's *Sunday Times* story, a number of other articles and editorials more or less sympathetic to the climate scientists, or attacking climate sceptics, appeared at around the same time. As the Climategate story had broken some six weeks earlier, this renewed flurry of media interest can hardly have been a coincidence.

06/02/2010	Fiona Harvey, Financial Times	Scientists feel heat of climate email probe ³⁵
07/02/2010	Independent on Sunday	Editorial: Sceptics have their uses ³⁶
07/02/2010	Independent on Sunday	Think tanks take oil money and use it to fund climate deniers ³⁷
07/02/2010	Observer	Climate Science debate between Robin McKie and Benny Peiser ³⁸
07/02/2012	Observer	Climate scepticism grows among Tories ³⁹
12/02/2012	Roger Harrabin, BBC	Climategate data 'not well organised' ⁴⁰
12/02/2010	Roger Harrabin, BBC	Extensive email interview with Prof. Jones ⁴¹
14/02/2010	Ben Webster, Times Online	Oxburgh report will not appease critics ⁴²

³³ http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/UEA-Outside_Organisation_Emails_searchable.pdf, Page 3

³⁴ <http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/GW2188.pdf>, 07/02/2010

³⁵ <http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/GW2188.pdf>

³⁶ <http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/GW2188.pdf>

³⁷ <http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/GW2190.pdf>

³⁸ <http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/GW2187.pdf>

³⁹ <http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/GW2186.pdf>

⁴⁰ <http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/GW2207.pdf>

⁴¹ <http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/GW2207.pdf>

⁴² <http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/GW2335.pdf>

28) *Outward Organisation's* influence on the Climategate story, and the way in which Professor Jones' activities were likely to be perceived by the public, extended beyond mere representation of the University's point of view in the media. The emails also reveal how *Outside Organisation* groomed Professor Jones and Professor Acton for their appearance before the *House of Commons Science and Technology Select Committee* on 1st March 2010, an event that would obviously put the academics under the spotlight and be very widely reported. On 22nd February 2010, Sam Bowen (one of Neill Wallis' staff) wrote to those involved:

As I believe you know, [REDACTED] will be coming with us on Thursday to look at 'communications impact' (i.e. body language, confidence, approach etc) - this is more about style over content." [REDACTED] works with a number of CEOs prior to AGMs to enhance their approach.

Ideally, he needs 2 hours individually with Edward and Phil, to film them at the beginning and end of his sessions and help their technique in between.

Could we look at the following timings:

10-12: Edward

12-2 - Phil

2-3 Both together as a mock Select Committee (questions from Neil, myself and the UEA team)⁴⁴ [*redactions in the original*]

Later, Alan Preece, UEA's *Director of Marketing and Communications* at UEA tells those involved in preparing for the Parliamentary hearing:

Here is a very long list of questions - broadly grouped by theme - which includes Edward's latest additions.

We can do more work on them tomorrow.⁴⁵

Neill Wallis responds:

Folks,

This is fine (indeed useful) for Edward [*Acton*] and Phil [*Jones*] to peruse and get a feel of the ways in which questions can be asked, but there are now simply so many of them that it would be impossible for either person to answer if we had the rest of the week to do nothing else.

It will be particularly impossible to get those answers, analyse them, then reconsider in the time available. What we need to do is to distil these into priority questions and concentrate on those, in the process working out our core positions and messages are.⁴⁶

⁴³ <http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/GW2335.pdf>

⁴⁴ Page 6, [http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/UEA-Outside Organisation Emails searchable.pdf](http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/UEA-Outside%20Organisation%20Emails%20searchable.pdf)

⁴⁵ Page 8, [http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/UEA-Outside Organisation Emails searchable.pdf](http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/UEA-Outside%20Organisation%20Emails%20searchable.pdf)

⁴⁶ Page 8, [http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/UEA-Outside Organisation Emails searchable.pdf](http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/UEA-Outside%20Organisation%20Emails%20searchable.pdf)

It may be acceptable for public relations consultants to tutor CEOs before their AGMs, but the inquiry may wish to consider whether it is acceptable for witnesses about to give evidence to a Parliamentary inquiry into a major science scandal should be helped to work out their 'core positions and messages' by PR consultants.

Finally, Alan Preece of UEA agrees with *Outside Organisation's* plan that Professor Acton will make a statement after he and Professor Jones have given evidence to the committee, but that he will not be subjected to any questioning by journalists.

Dear Sam [Bowen]

Just to confirm that we will want the film crew for Monday. At c £600+VAT I am happy to agree it. Let me know if that price is about right. We remain with Plan A - Edward coming out of Portcullis House after giving evidence to do a brief statement but no questions.⁴⁷

- 29) All this presents a very different picture of the Climategate affair from that provided to the Inquiry in the SMC's evidences.

Of course there is no reason why a university whose PR department is overwhelmed by media attention should not seek outside assistance. However in this case, where there was abundant circumstantial evidence of bad behaviour by their employees and the university had already announced that it would conduct two inquiries that they claimed would be independent, it does seem strange that they should commit a large sum of money to spin media reports in the scientist's and their own favour before the outcome of the inquiries was even in sight.

- 30) Returning to the submission from the UEA's *Communications Department* included in the SMC's witness statement, we note that this refers to the theft of private emails from the University. This slant on what happened in November 2009 appears to derive from the report placed in the *Sunday Times* by *Outside Organisation*. Although it superficially sounds convincing, in fact nothing was stolen from the University and although the authors of the emails may have wished that their correspondence had remained private, the documents concerned are entirely devoted to their work as university-based researchers and can in no way be considered to be private.

At the time of writing the inquiries being made by Norfolk Police into how the emails became available on the internet are ongoing. It is not known whether this was the result of hacking, of a whistle-blower within the University releasing the documents, or simply of lax security allowing public access.

In any case, the inquiry may wish to consider what its reaction would be if, when the details of MP's expenses claims were published, a witness had described the staff at *The Telegraph* as thieves who stole private information.

We note that the UEA's submission annexed to the SMC's witness statement attempts to draw a parallel between Professor Jones' travails and those of the late Dr David Kelly. This claim also seems to emanate from the *Sunday Times* article

⁴⁷ Page 26, http://cgit.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/UEA-Outside_Organisation_Emails_searchable.pdf

placed by *Outside Organisation* in February 2010. We submit that such a comparison may be excellent PR if the objective is to attract sympathy for Professor Jones, but it is quite unjustified. The only points that the two cases have in common are that both men were in the public eye, for very different reasons, and both happened to be scientists

31) We take no pleasure in the prospect of anyone being put into a frame of mind in which they contemplate suicide, however fleetingly. Determining whether Professor Jones dark thoughts were the result of his own conduct, or that of others, or a combination of the two, is beyond the scope of this submission to the Inquiry. What is certain is that a firm of PR consultants employed at considerable expense by the UEA very successfully used Professor Jones fragile state of mind to manipulate public opinion to the advantage of the University's media agenda. It would appear that the SMC has chosen to do likewise in the evidence that it has been submitted to this Inquiry.

32) The SMC's witness statement includes a special plea on behalf of Professor Jones:

The SMC recommends that Phil Jones be called to the Inquiry to provide evidence. His evidence would be every bit as harrowing as that given by many of those in the media spotlight and would serve as a reminder that scientists are human beings and can also suffer enormously.

MOD100054265, para 1

We fully accept that people caught up in a major news story can be subjected to great pressure as a result of media coverage, and that so far as is compatible with freedom of the press regulation should seek to protect them. However we hope that the *Leveson Inquiry's* recommendations on regulation will do nothing to inhibit press scrutiny of science and scientists, particularly where their publicly funded research and advice has a bearing on public policy.

Is the Science Media Centre Independent?

33) The SMC has provided the inquiry with a witness statement dated 5th December 2011 in which it refers to the alleged independence of this organisation:

This evidence comes from the Science Media Centre (SMC), an independent press office for science established by the scientific community in the wake of media frenzies over BSE, MMR and GM crops, and in response to recommendations in the House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee's 2000 report on science in society. Like everything we do, it is collaboration between the staff at the SMC and the many scientists, science press officers and science journalists that we work alongside.

MOD100054259, para 2

In this context, the term 'independent' seems intended to imply objectivity and detachment, strange qualities to find in a PR organisation. Yet Ms Fox has reiterated the SMC's claim to independence in her oral evidence to the inquiry given on 24th January 2012:

We are an independent press office for science set up by the whole of the scientific community in 2002, and we were set up after stuff that went wrong -- so GM, BSE, MMR -- to be on the kind of front line between the scientific community and the very, very controversial breaking science stories hitting the front pages.

Fiona Fox Evidence, page 18, line 20 et seq

It would seem most unlikely that an organisation set up *'in the wake of media frenzies'* to be on the *'front line'* representing the interests of scientists when *'very controversial stories'* make headlines, can lay any credible claim to independence from the interests of those which it represents. The *'front line'* is no place to find impartiality and it would seem far more likely that the *'scientific community,'* on which the SMC apparently depends for its existence, would quite reasonably expect the organisation to represent it's interests with partisan enthusiasm.

- 34) Visiting the SMC's website, the lead-in paragraph on the home page does nothing to resolve the contradictions in the SMC's evidence:

The Science Media Centre is an independent venture working to promote the voices, stories and views of the scientific community to the national news media when science is in the headlines.⁴⁸

It is very difficult to see how the SMC can be both an independent organisation and *'promote the voices'* of the scientific community effectively.

An *About Us* page on the website describes the SMC's mission in some detail:

The Science Media Centre is first and foremost a press office for science when science hits the headlines. We provide journalists with what they need in the form and time-frame they need it when science is in the news - whether this be accurate information, a scientist to interview or a feature article.

In between these big stories, we are busy building up our database of contacts on the areas of science most likely to feature in the news. This allows us to be pro-active and puts us in a position to facilitate more scientists to engage with the media when their subjects hit the headlines.

We also run a series of longer term activities to improve the interaction between science and media, such as advice guides for scientists talking to the media, background briefings for journalists and 'Science in a Nutshell' cheat sheets for newsdesks.

Our aim is to ensure that when a major science story breaks, we can quickly offer news desks a list of scientists available to comment, a summary of the main scientific points involved and details of which press officers or web sites to go to for further information. The feedback from journalists has been very positive.

⁴⁸ <http://www.sciencemediacentre.org/pages/> or http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/SMC_Homepage_29-06-2012.pdf

...

Aside from being a first port of call for newsdesks when science hits the headlines, the Science Media Centre is also looking at ways to support non-specialists news reporters who are called on to cover complex science stories. We are publishing a series of guides specifically for news journalists to provide simple definitions of some of the complicated scientific terms frequently used by scientists. They will also direct journalists to the best places to go for further information when this subject hits the headlines. Our first Guide, Genetics in a Nutshell, is now available and has received endorsement from a wide range of journalists from The Sun to a number of regional papers.⁴⁹

The Inquiry may wish to consider the extent to which such an organisation can influence the way in which a controversial field of science such as climate research, which is also beset by political and ethical controversy, is reported by the media.

Evidently this supposedly independent organisation aims to provide the media with what they '*need when science is in the news*' by selecting scientists for interview, determining what is or is not '*accurate information*', summarising and explaining difficult scientific issues, recommending particular websites as reliable sources of information and opinion, and generally being '*the first port of call*' for harassed journalists, who may be '*non-specialists [sic] news reporters*' with no background knowledge of complex scientific issues, and who are seeking guidance in a hurry to meet a deadline.

In her witness statement, Ms Fox asserts that 'the public get most of their information about science from the mass media including daily newspapers.'⁵⁰, relying on an Ipsos MORI survey conducted for the Dept. of Business Information and Skills in 2011⁵¹. If the SMC exists to promote science in the way that the scientific community prefers, then its potential for influencing the public's opinion on matters relating to science must be considerable.

The options faced by such an organisation when dealing with a field of scientific research such as climate change – that has become highly politicised and the beneficiary of vast amounts of funding – must be severely limited by the need to retain the support of those with whom they collaborate; '*the many scientists, science press officers and science journalists that we work alongside*'. (see paras 33-35 above)

35) Further doubts about the independence of the SMC are raised by where it has been housed since its was set up in 2002. The *About Us* web page currently on the SMC

⁴⁹ <http://www.sciencemediacentre.org/pages/about/> or [http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/SMC About Us page 29-06-2012.pdf](http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/SMC%20About%20Us%20page%2029-06-2012.pdf)

⁵⁰ SMC Witness statement MOD100054258, para 1

⁵¹ Relied on in SMC witness statement MOD100054258, footnote 1 Public Attitudes to Science 2011 - <http://www.bis.gov.uk/policies/science/science-and-society/public-attitudes-to-science-2011> or [http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/Public Attitudes to Science 2011 Policies BIS.pdf](http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/Public%20Attitudes%20to%20Science%202011%20Policies%20BIS.pdf)

site says:

The Science Media Centre is housed within the Wellcome Trust but independent from it.⁵²

A previous SMC *Home Page* dating from 2010 shows that they were housed in the *Royal Institution's* premises at 21, Albermarle Street, London⁵³. This web page is also copyrighted to the Royal Institution of Great Britain, which suggests a very close association with that organisation indeed. However a contemporary *About Us* web page, also from 2010 says:

The Science Media Centre is housed within the Royal Institution but independent from it⁵⁴.

Maintaining an image of independence is clearly a matter of some importance to the *Science Media Centre*. However the *Royal Institution* and the *Wellcome Trust* are leading institutions at the heart of the science establishment. Both have provided the SMC with a home, and such a relationship must necessarily circumscribe the extent to which the SMC can espouse anything other than the establishment view in any scientific controversy.

The Advocacy role of the Science Media Centre

- 36) We are not aware that this Inquiry has so far taken evidence on science and the media from any source other than the SMC. We are concerned that, although the SMC's evidence has been represented to the Inquiry as 'independent' in their witness statement and the oral evidence, this may not be the case.
- 37) Scientists have their own preoccupations, concerns, prejudices, ambitions, financial problems and political agendas, and these are every bit as capable of conflicting with the public interest – to the extent that this can be determined – as in any other professional grouping. An immediate priority among scientists may be the need to attract attention to their research. In a society where the public is not very well versed in science, and not always interested in what scientists have to say, this is a problem that puts a number of temptations in the way of the scientific community and anyone who is involved in publicising their work.
- 38) Perhaps as a result of the desire to make science seem relevant to all our lives, it is now quite common for scientists to make extravagant claims for the impact that their profession has on society. This is well illustrated by the rather breathless opening words of the SMC's witness statement:

⁵² <http://www.sciencemediacentre.org/pages/about/> or

[http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/SMC About Us page 29-06-2012.pdf](http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/SMC%20About%20Us%20page%2029-06-2012.pdf)

⁵³ <http://web.archive.org/web/20100310062333/http://www.sciencemediacentre.org/pages/about/>
or

[http://web.archive.org/web/20100310062333/http://www.sciencemediacentre.org/pages/about/SMC Homepage 2010 Archived.pdf](http://web.archive.org/web/20100310062333/http://www.sciencemediacentre.org/pages/about/SMC%20Homepage%202010%20Archived.pdf)

⁵⁴ <http://web.archive.org/web/20100310062333/http://www.sciencemediacentre.org/pages/about/>
or [http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/SMC About Us 2010 Archived.pdf](http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/SMC%20About%20Us%202010%20Archived.pdf)

Science is at the heart of almost all the major challenges we face - how to treat incurable diseases that still lay waste to so many lives, how to feed the growing population, how to tackle climate change.

MOD100054258, para 1

This attitude has been promoted in an even more extreme form by none other than Sir Paul Nurse, president of the *Royal Society*. In January 2010, he told viewers of a BBC *Horizon* television programme about climate change entitled *Science Under Attack: 'Science created our modern world'*.⁵⁵

Also in 2010, Professor Brian Cox, a physicist and presenter of blockbuster TV science series, expressed a similar view. In his *Wheldon Lecture*, presented at the Royal Television Society, he said of the peer review system that seeks to verify scientific findings prior to publication, '*This is how science proceeds, and it works. This is the method that has delivered the modern world. It's good*'.⁵⁶

It is hardly surprising that some of those wrapped up in the world of science should have this perspective, but although science has an obviously important role to play in our lives, it will make no contribution to alleviating the present European and global economic crises, bringing peace and stability to the Middle East, preventing a new nuclear arms race spearheaded by North Korea and Iran, or alleviating the poverty caused by political instability and corruption throughout Africa and in other parts of the developing world.

There is a very real danger that enthusiasm for science can spill over into scientism⁵⁷, and this extreme view may be reflected in the coverage of controversial research in the media. There is also a danger both of the general public being dragooned into assuming an undue reverence for science and scientists, and of ordinary people becoming disenchanted with, and distrustful of, what science and scientists tell them because they find the claims that they come across in the media are overblown.

39) In the SMC's witness statement, there is a rallying call to all scientists:

Scientists have also played their part in improving the media coverage of science. The past 10 years have seen more and more researchers emerging from their ivory towers and entering the media fray. The Science Media Centre's philosophy that *The media will 'do' science better when scientists 'do' media better* has been embraced by many researchers who now roll their sleeves up and play the media game rather than shouting from the sidelines.

MOD100054258, para 2

⁵⁵ https://sites.google.com/site/mytranscriptbox/home/20110124_hz or http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/20110124_HZ_Nurse_Science_Under_Attack.pdf

⁵⁶ <http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/cox-lecture-transcript-RTS-Official.doc>

⁵⁷ Oxford English Dictionary: 1. The habit and mode of expression of a man of science. 2. A term applied (freq. in a derogatory manner) to a belief in the omnipotence of scientific knowledge and techniques; also to the view that the methods of study appropriate to physical science can replace those used in other fields such as philosophy and, esp., human behaviour and the social sciences.

We have set out elsewhere in this submission what can happen when scientists 'roll their sleeves up and play the media game'. (see the case of the *Climate Prediction* press release at 7 above). There is no reason to suppose that this is an isolated case. It is just a particularly well-documented example of scientists, and others, playing the media game with rather too much enthusiasm. And the pressures on them to do so are many.

As the SMC's witness statement warns when referring to the MMR scare, there are problems concerning:

... the appetite for a great scare story, the desire to overstate a claim made by one expert in a single small study, the reluctance to put one alarming piece of research into its wider more reassuring context ...

MOD100054258, para 4

If this is the case with an unjustified scare story affecting only a relatively small section of the population – albeit very detrimentally – how much more so is it of an issue such as concern over climate change? This is a problem that affects us all, and there can be few editors who will not welcome a story that proclaims '*The End of the World is Nigh!*', especially when it comes with expert scientific evidence attached.

The SMC hammers home this point, perhaps unintentionally, in Ms Fox's oral evidence :

... when I have spoken to the science journalists, the point they make is: "Our news editors love it. It's controversial. They love it." And maybe we should be scared what we wish for because maybe if it wasn't controversial, it wouldn't get any coverage.

Fiona Fox Evidence, page 42, line 21 et seq

Perhaps the extent of the SMC's advocacy roll is most tellingly revealed by the mention of being 'scared of what we wish for'. This seems to be an acknowledgement that in order for a science story to 'sell' to reporters and editors it must have a certain spice, and that this may not always, or indeed often, be compatible with accurate and impartial reporting. So controversy and alarm must be part and parcel of the strategy of those who want to get science into the media.

In an age when public opinion is shaped by the mass media, it is clearly important for the science community that it should be heard and seen in the media arena. A high profile can have obvious advantages when seeking funding, and what institution is going to be anything but delighted when its employees are publicly associated with ground-breaking research beneath eye-catching headlines?

Over the last decade, there have been far more stories about climate change than about MMR, GM crops, stillbirths, misdiagnosed miscarriages, rapamycin or the contraceptive pill scare. Yet strangely, in the section of the SMC 's witness statement headed '*Case Studies*' these subjects are discussed, but there is no mention of climate change. Perhaps this is because it would not have been possible for the SMC to do so without confronting some most unpalatable issues for an organisation that is '*working to promote the voices, stories and views of the scientific community*'.

- 40) In a reference during oral evidence to whether controversial papers from minority sources should be publicised at all, Ms Fox has this to say:

I think it's very, very relevant because we are not saying that we don't want the media to report on these. I mean, that would be going back 20 years to where science was in a ghetto and wasn't covered. We want all these studies to be reported, we're delighted to see them but we want them on the inside pages. They should not be on the front ...

Fiona Fox Evidence, page 24, line 14 et seq

Although Ms Fox's point about such stories being kept off the front page seems a sound one, her reference to science emerging from the ghetto over the last two decades is quite intriguing. It begs the question of how and why science did emerge from the ghetto, and whether this was because some in the scientific community were prepared to 'roll their sleeves up and play the media game', and to what extent doing so involved embracing the skills of the spin-doctor.

There can be no doubt that in recent years climate change has moved science and scientists into the media spotlight to an extent that is unprecedented. It is hardly surprising that such a radical and rapid transformation should lead to problems, both for the scientific community and the public whom they serve.

Accuracy, Consensus and the Mainstream

- 41) At various points in the SMC's witness statement and oral evidence, there are pleas that science should be reported accurately. Like motherhood and apple pie, accuracy is something that everyone is surely in favour of. But how does accuracy apply to a comparatively new field of research where an immensely complex chaotic system is only partially understood and there are vast areas of lack of knowledge or understanding, together with high levels of uncertainty, and extensive reliance on mathematical models? This is the current situation in climate science⁵⁸.

A plea for accuracy implies that everyone should get their facts right, which is of little help if the facts are precarious, liable to change, or disputed. In such a situation, who decides what the facts are? How can anyone ensure that such a task is undertaken with complete impartiality, particularly if there are political pressures to come up with the 'right' answer? (See 44 below)

- 42) In 2001, the *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's* (IPCC) Third Assessment Report featured the claim that the 1990s had been the warmest decade of the last millennium, and 1998 was the warmest year. This was based on the Mann Bradley and Hughes *Hockey Stick Graph*, and at that time was presented by the IPCC as a fact, in spite of there being scientists who had reservations about the underlying statistics. During the last decade, confidence in this finding has ebbed away; something that would not surprise those who were concerned about this research when it was published. Today's facts have a tendency to become tomorrow's fallen hypotheses, but in the case of the Hockey Stick there were many in the scientific

⁵⁸ <http://royalsociety.org/policy/publications/2010/climate-change-summary-science/> or http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/Climate_Change_Royal_Society.pdf

establishment who continued to defend its integrity long after the tide had turned. A minority do so to this day⁵⁹.

- 43) During Lord May's and Lord Rees's presidencies of the *Royal Society*, the Society's website provided a position paper on climate change, and other documents, that gave the impression that the science underpinning anthropogenic climate change was settled, and disparaging the views of sceptics who challenged this view.

In May 2010 43 fellows of the *Royal Society* 'rebelled' and petitioned the president to remove this material because the claims it made were unscientific and unnecessarily alarmist. They accused the Society of refusing to accept dissenting views on climate change and exaggerating the degree of certainty that man-made emissions are the main cause⁶⁰

Sir Allan Rudge, who led the rebellion, told *The Times*:

I think the Royal Society should be more neutral and welcome credible contributions from both sceptics and alarmists alike. There is a lot of science to be done before we can be certain about climate change and before we impose upon ourselves the huge economic burden of cutting emissions."

One of the reasons people like myself are willing to put our heads above the parapet is that our careers are not at risk from being labelled a denier or flat-Earther because we say the science is not settled. The bullying of people into silence has unfortunately been effective.⁶¹

This was an *ad hoc* group that had no access to the Society's mailing list and came together only as a result of acquaintances contacting each other. It is not known how many of the 1300 fellows of the Society would have joined the protest had they been approached.⁶²

The Royal Society has now formulated a far more cautious position statement⁶³. Facts can change very rapidly, even when they have been published by the world's oldest, and arguably most respected, national academy of science.

- 44) Would it be fair to say that the facts in any field of science can be established by reference to a consensus or by mainstream opinion? It would be most convenient if this was the case, and the words consensus and mainstream both appear in the SMC's evidence. Unfortunately, in the case of climate science, such terms do not seem to be very helpful.

Scientific controversies are not decided by weight of numbers, but by verifiable evidence derived from observations. Furthermore, how is it possible to determine that a consensus really does exist if the researchers are subject to peer pressure, financial pressure and political pressure, to subscribe to one side in the debate and

⁵⁹ A.W. Montford, *The Hockey Stick Illusion: Climategate and the Corruption of Science*

⁶⁰ <http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/GW2417.pdf>

⁶¹ <http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/GW2418.pdf>

⁶² <http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/GW2412.pdf>

⁶³ <http://royalsociety.org/policy/publications/2010/climate-change-summary-science/> or http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/Climate_Change_Royal_Society.pdf

not the other?

How is it possible to find an infallible arbiter of what the facts are in such circumstances? Or even one who can be relied on to get it right most of the time? It is worth noting that of the 43 fellows of the *Royal Society* who rebelled over the misleading climate change statement, only a few were prepared to make their names known publicly. How could this be in such an august body as the Royal Society? Its fellows are scientists who have become leaders in their profession. One might reasonably expect that they would be just the people to have the confidence to voice any doubts openly and without fear. What does the silence of the majority of rebel fellows who preferred to remain anonymous say about the intellectual climate within the society, or about the risks and pressures applying to any scientist, however eminent, who might say 'the wrong thing' about climate change? And why should they be referred to as rebels?

- 45) It might be proposed that the IPCC view, as expressed in its assessment reports, could be taken as an authority from which accuracy can be determined. This again is very questionable.

In the wake of a number of scandals that hit the IPCC after Climategate, the *InterAcademy Council* (IAC) was asked to review the IPCC's procedures. It made a number of recommendations.

In their report, the IAC expressed concern about vested interests within the IPCC. Lead authors and coordinating lead authors were presiding over the drafting of chapters that depended heavily on research papers that they had published themselves, or that had been published by their colleagues and associates. The IAC recommended that this problem should be addressed.

Many of the most dramatic findings in the IPCC assessments are based on expert opinion, rather than formal research. This includes the assertion that it is very likely that there is a human component in the recent increase in global temperatures. The IAC review panel was concerned that the IPCC did not have an 'audit trail' in any of the reports that would reveal how these expert opinions were arrived at, or who was involved in the decisions. The IAC recommended that procedures should be put in place which would make this very important process in the assessments transparent.

Although the IAC report was published in 2010, and the IPCC has agreed to implement their recommendations, it is by no means clear that this will happen before the *Fifth Assessment Report* is published next year.

With this cloud hanging over the IPCC's credibility, could the IPCC *Assessment Reports* reasonably be trusted as a yardstick to determine the accuracy of science reports in the media?

- 46) Finally, and to emphasise how futile and simplistic the quest to define accuracy in reporting climate science may be at this time, it is worth considering another quotation from the SMC's witness statement:

The SMC welcomes vigorous and robust debate on scientific controversies like climate change, but the truth must not be the first casualty of these

debates. If we accept the predictions of mainstream climate scientists this issue is clearly one where the public interest is served by the highest standards of accuracy.

MOD100054264, para 3

Much public concern about global warming derives from computer models that predict climatic conditions as far ahead as the end of this century. However, predictions can never be facts, and their accuracy can only be assessed in retrospect. Yet the inevitability of anthropogenic climate change is frequently treated as a fact by scientists, by politicians, by campaigners, and in science *reportage*.

A mantra that the SMC's evidence shares with Professor Steve Jones' *Review of the impartiality and Accuracy of the BBC's Coverage of Science*⁶⁴ can be summed up as 'You are entitled to your own opinions, but not to your own facts.' The logic of this statement, if there is any, breaks down in a situation where contradictory findings and uncertainty make facts extremely hard to identify. We suggest that this makes determining what is, or is not, accurate reporting of climate science very difficult if not impossible.

- 47) There is no doubt that both sides of the global warming debate can be guilty of misleading reporting of climate science. On the global warming activists' side, this often occurs as bias by omission rather than outright disinformation.

For instance, would it be accurate to report in a newspaper, in the context of global warming, that the extent of Arctic summer sea ice has diminished in recent years and that scientists are predicting that it will disappear altogether within a decade or two? A picture of a wide expanse of open water speckled with ice flows being surveyed by a rather pensive looking polar bear might well accompany such an article.

Can such a report be considered to be accurate if it does not mention that scientists only have just over thirty years of satellite measurements of the ice to base their predictions on; that we have little or no idea of the extent of summer sea ice during the 1930s let alone during the *Medieval Warm Period* when the Vikings farmed parts of Greenland; that earlier still there was a the *Roman Warm Period*, and the *Holocene Optimum* during which temperatures are thought to have been higher than today; that temperature records for the Arctic are somewhat sketchy; that extrapolation from a short data sets is generally considered to be bad science; that even the UK Met Office has expressed concern about scare stories predicting the imminent demise of summer sea ice in the Arctic,⁶⁵ and that sea ice in the Antarctic is bucking the trend by increasing.

This begs the question; is a story accurate if what it tells the reader is true, but information that would enable readers to form a balanced opinion about what is happening is omitted?

⁶⁴ See page 69, http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/BBC_science_impartiality.pdf

⁶⁵ <http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/GW2322.pdf>

Public Policy: when politicians require their own version of the facts

48) The physicist Leo Szilard once announced to his friend Hans Bethe that he was thinking of keeping a diary: 'I don't intend to publish. I am merely going to record the facts for the information of God.' 'Don't you think God knows the facts?' Bethe asked. 'Yes,' said Szilard. 'He knows the facts, but **He does not know this version of the facts.**'⁶⁶

49) As pointed out earlier, Ms Fox has suggested in her oral evidence that:

... you are entitled to your opinions; you are not entitled to your facts ...

Fiona Fox Evidence, page 20, line 2 et seq

But what happens when politicians and policy makers require their own version of the facts to maintain the electorate's support for unpalatable policies in the form of additional taxation, more regulation, increased energy bills, and much more. Where one version of the facts collides with another, the main battlegrounds for the public's hearts and minds will be in the media.

50) Over the past decade the British public has variously been told that anthropogenic climate change is 'a greater threat than international terrorism'⁶⁷ and that 'the debate on climate change is over'⁶⁸. Prime minister Tony Blair has warned of the 'global threat of climate change',⁶⁹ and his successor, Gordon Brown assured us that: 'We already lead the world in many environmental technologies, from offshore wind to environmental instrumentation, and from energy control systems to carbon markets.'⁷⁰ U.N. Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon has warned that climate change is 'the defining challenge of our age'.⁷¹ There is general agreement that one of the turning points of the present prime minister's campaign to 'detoxify' the Conservative Party's image was when in opposition he espoused a green agenda and concern about climate change under the banner 'The Greenest Government Ever'.⁷²

Britain has legislation in place that sets out legal requirements to meet carbon emission reduction targets right through to 2050. We have a *Department of Energy* that is twinned with one for *Climate Change*. There can be no doubt, in spite of media coverage of global warming having waned in recent months, that this is a topic that is still at the very top of the political agenda.

⁶⁶ Hans Christian von Baeyer, *Taming the Atom*. Emphasis in the original which was used on the frontispiece of Bill Bryson's *A Short History of Nearly Everything*.

⁶⁷ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/3381425.stm> or http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/Global_warming_biggest_threat.pdf

⁶⁸ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10178124> or <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/jul/12/ecotowns-green-revolution-climate-change-gordon-brown> or http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/green_revolution_Brown.pdf

⁶⁹ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-411460/Blairs-new-alert-climate-change-threat.html> or http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/Blair_climate_change_threat.pdf

⁷⁰ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/jul/12/ecotowns-green-revolution-climate-change-gordon-brown> or http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/green_revolution_Brown.pdf

⁷¹ <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/18/science/earth/18climateneu.html?> or http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/UN_Chief_More_Climate_Change_Leadership.pdf

⁷² <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2012/apr/04/david-cameron-speech-environment-climate-change> or http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/Cameron_environment_speech.pdf

51) In their witness statement, the SMC mentions the detrimental effect that 'climate porn' can have on getting the authorised message on global warming across to the public. In support of this contention it cites a report published by the *Institute for Public Policy Research* (IPPR) called, *Warm Words: How are we telling the climate story and how can we tell it better*. This document, and the thinking that inspired it, would seem to have had a very real impact on the way that government has communicated climate change to the public. The following extract is particularly revealing:

Many of the existing approaches to climate change communications clearly seem unproductive. And it is not enough simply to produce yet more messages, based on rational argument and top-down persuasion, aimed at convincing people of the reality of climate change and urging them to act. Instead, we need to work in a more shrewd and contemporary way, using subtle techniques of engagement.

To help address the chaotic nature of the climate change discourse in the UK today, interested agencies now need to treat the argument as having been won, at least for popular communications. This means simply behaving as if climate change exists and is real, and that individual actions are effective. The 'facts' need to be treated as being so taken-for-granted that they need not be spoken.⁷³

According to this document, 'the facts' become rather pliable when political considerations, and the need to persuade, moves centre stage. When was a government minister or adviser last heard to express even the most tentative reservation about the evidence underpinning anthropogenic climate change? Yet over the last few years, doubts about what we are being told about climate change have steadily increased among the general public⁷⁴. Clearly it is not in the public interest that anyone should be misled about the robustness of the scientific evidence that underpins concern about climate change.

52) It is reasonable to suppose that there is pressure on the media to report climate change in a politically acceptable way, and that this derives not only from mainstream politics, but also from campaigners in environmental non-governmental organisations (eNGOs), which are now in possession of vast resources.⁷⁵

53) It is worth noting that DECC put up a six-strong team to help Professor Steve Jones when he was preparing his *Review of the impartiality and Accuracy of the BBC's Coverage of Science*.⁷⁶ This included the Director of Communications, Director of Science and Innovation, the Chief Press Officer, and the Head of Editorial Standards

⁷³ http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/r_ippr-spin_warm_words_coms.pdf

⁷⁴ http://www.theregister.co.uk/2012/06/28/climate_survey_usa_uk_canada/ and <http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/GW5029.pdf>

⁷⁵ WWF 2009-10 €524m, Oxfam 2010-11 £367m, Greenpeace over \$200m: all have been major players in the climate debate.

⁷⁶ BBC Trust's *Review of the impartiality and Accuracy of the BBC's Coverage of Science*, http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/our_work/science_impartiality/science_impartiality.pdf or http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/BBC_science_impartiality.pdf

of Corporate Communications⁷⁷.

Recommendations

54) The SMC has recommend that:

New guidelines for the reporting of science – these guidelines would be drawn up by science journalists and used primarily by news editors and general reporters. They could also be used by a newly strengthened PCC to help adjudicate on complaints;

MOD100054266, para 2

We request that the Inquiry should approach such a step with caution.

It seems most unlikely that anyone would seriously suggest that political journalists alone should be entrusted with drawing up guidelines for reporting politics, or that business, finance, sports or any other specialist journalists should be empowered in the same way. The suggestion that guidelines that have been drawn up by what amounts to an interest group should then be used for the purpose of adjudication by a regulatory body, the PCC, would not seem to be in the public interest.

Many science journalists hold strong views on matters relating to their speciality. We are surprised that the SMC has made this recommendation, and suggest that if new guidelines are to be drawn up, then this task should be undertaken with much broader input than merely science journalists, and also that the process should be absolutely transparent.

55) The SMC also recommends that:

The PCC must immediately change the rule that states that only an individual scientist can complain about an inaccurate story. The scientific community must be able to make complaints about inaccurate articles which damage the public interest.

MOD100054266, para 2

We were unable to find any rule specifically relating to scientists on the PCC website, although there does appear to be one saying: 'We normally accept complaints only from those who are directly affected by the matters about which they are complaining'. We assume that this is what the SMC has in mind.

The SMC's recommendation would seem to be saying that, in addition to individuals affected, anyone in 'the scientific community' should be enabled to make complaints about allegedly inaccurate science stories, whether they are directly affected or not. We can see no reason why the scientific community should be singled out for such special treatment.

⁷⁷ See page 94, BBC Trust's *Review of the impartiality and Accuracy of the BBC's Coverage of Science*, http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/our_work/science_impartiality/science_impartiality.pdf or http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/BBC_science_impartiality.pdf

- 56) We consider that if all the recommendations that the SMC has made to the inquiry were to be implemented, then this would put the reporting of science very much in the control of the 'scientific community, which the SMC represents. This could lead to the views of the science establishment becoming, to all intents and purpose, sacrosanct, which we do not consider to be in the public interest, or in the long-term interest of science. Even scientists, like other groups, have vested interests, prejudices, hobbyhorses, and agendas. We ask the inquiry to consider whether the SMC's recommendations would really be in the public interest.
- 57) On our own behalf, we ask that the Leveson inquiry should attempt to discover the extent to which government implemented the recommendations for communicating climate change set out in *Warm Words*. (see 51 above) We consider that it would be in the public interest for the inquiry to be aware of the extent to which government press advisories employing the strategy recommended in this document have influenced the way that this very important field of science has been reported.
- 58) If accurate reporting is to become an enforceable criteria for science stories, as the SMC seems to be proposing, then whoever decides what the facts are will hold the key to how climate science can be communicated to the public via the media. We ask the inquiry to consider whether this type of regulation could be implemented with a reasonable degree of certainty and that, so far as climate science is concerned, adjudication would be carried out equitably, and without fear of political interference.
- 59) We consider that it is at least as important for the public to be well protected against scientists – and organisations that may act as their advocates – who 'hype' research findings, often in the context of alarmism, as it is to protect researchers and the public against misrepresentation of sound science by the media.

We also hope that the *Leveson Inquiry's* will do nothing to inhibit press scrutiny of science and scientists, particularly where their publicly funded research and advice has a bearing on public policy.

OUR EXPERIENCE OF THE MEDIA AND CLIMATE CHANGE

False balance and getting a fair hearing

- 60) The SMC's witness statement relies on the BBC Trust's *Review of the Impartiality and Accuracy of the BBC's Coverage of Science*⁷⁸ when making a plea that critics of what is currently considered to be mainstream scientific opinion should not receive media coverage as this would constitute, in the opinion of the SMC and the author of that review, 'false balance'⁷⁹ and mislead the public. We explain below what

⁷⁸ BBC Trust's *Review of the impartiality and Accuracy of the BBC's Coverage of Science* , http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/our_work/science_impartiality/science_impartiality.pdf or http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/BBC_science_impartiality.pdf

⁷⁹ Although Professor Jones uses this term a number of times in his report, most notably when considering the coverage of climate change, it does not occur in the SMC's witness statement but only in Ms Fox's oral evidence. However the witness statement does make it clear, in other terms, that this is a matter of concern to the SMC.

happened when we attempted to make submission to this review.

61) On 6th January 2010, and in the wake of the Climategate scandal that had engulfed the *University of East Anglia's Climatic Research Unit*, Professor Richard Tait, chairman of the BBC Trust's *Editorial Standards Committee (ESC)* announced that the BBC would conduct a review of impartiality and accuracy of their coverage of science⁸⁰. It seemed to us that if such an exercise was to be useful, then input from the BBC's critics would be essential, therefore we wrote a very constructive joint letter to Professor Tait asking if we could make a submission to the inquiry. This was sent to the ESC's secretary, Bruce Vander, with a request that he would confirm that our letter had been passed to his chairman. (A copy of our letter is posted here: <http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/ProfTait.doc>)

In spite of an extensive correspondence with the *BBC Trust* over a period of four months, we were unable to obtain confirmation that the letter had been delivered to Professor Tait. This correspondence was later published at *Harmless Sky* and it makes astonishing reading.⁸¹

As this correspondence sets the scene for what was to follow, we ask the Inquiry to look at a blog post,⁸² which includes the text of both our letter to Professor Tait and the responses from the *BBC Trust*. The view that we formed was that the last thing the *BBC Trust* wanted for their review of the impartiality and accuracy of its science coverage was any input from critics.

62) Later, Andrew Montford contacted Professor Steve Jones, a geneticist, writer and broadcaster, who the BBC had appointed as the sole author of their review. He agreed to accept a submission from us but gave no indication that our original letter had been passed to him by the *BBC Trust*.

63) We ask that the Inquiry should look at the submission that we then sent to Professor Jones too.
(<http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/Submission to BBC Science Review.pdf>)

In summary, it identifies a rather shadowy organisation called the *Cambridge Media and Environment Programme*, set up and co-directed by the BBC's *Environment Analyst*, Roger Harrabin, and Dr Joe Smith, a lecturer and environmental activist⁸³ from the Open University. We provided evidence that CMEP had been financed by a leading climate research institute, a major environmental NGO and a government department among others.

⁸⁰ <http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/GW2109.pdf>

⁸¹ The correspondence can be found here: <http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/blog/?p=356> or <http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/More about smoke and mirrors.pdf>

⁸² The correspondence can be found here: <http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/blog/?p=356> or <http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/More about smoke and mirrors.pdf>

⁸³ Dr. Joe Smith is Senior Lecturer in Environment at the Open University. He peer-reviewed the media related aspects of one of the complaints to Ofcom on the Swindle programme, and has acted as academic consultant on a number of broadcast projects. He is author / editor of a number of books on environmental issues including (with Andrew Simms) *Do Good Lives Have to Cost the Earth?* Constable Robinson, 2008. <http://www.broadcastnow.co.uk/blog-climate-change-tv-is-risky/1740139.article>

The purpose of CMEP was to organise seminars at which senior BBC staff would be joined by specialists in particular fields relating to environmental matters. CMEP's partners in these ventures were the BBC itself and an environmental lobby origination called the *International Broadcasting Trust*⁸⁴. We provided evidence that these events had a real impact on programming.

We also drew the BBC's attention to a statement in John Bricut's seminal report *From Seesaw to Wagon Wheel: Safeguarding impartiality in the 21st Century*, adopted and published by the *BBC Trust* in 2007 and signed off by Professor Tait. This notes the care that the BBC takes to preserve impartiality in reporting controversial subjects such as climate change by saying:

The BBC has held a high-level seminar with some of the best scientific experts, and has come to the view that the weight of evidence no longer justifies equal space being given to the opponents of the consensus.⁸⁵

This event took place in January 2006 and was organised by CMEP.

In July 2007, Tony Newbery made an FOIA request to the BBC for information about this seminar, including the names and affiliations of the 'best scientific experts' who attended. This was refused by the BBC and is presently, five years later, the subject of an appeal to the *Information Tribunal*. In the meantime, an eyewitness account of the seminar posted at *Harmless Sky*⁸⁶ indicates that the experts advising the BBC at this seminar were in fact climate change activists.

We were aware that although the evidence we were submitting to the BBC was relevant to Professor Jones' review, it was most unlikely to be welcome at the BBC Trust. For this reason we were particularly careful to ensure that all we said was backed up by documentary evidence that could not be ignored. We were wrong in thinking that Professor Jones review could not ignore our submission.

- 64) We had also assumed, naively, that the BBC would choose an impartial expert to author a review that, in the same way that John Bridcut had fearlessly explored some rather dark areas in the BBC's editorial practices in his *Wagon Wheel* report, would consider the BBC's coverage of science warts and all. We were mistaken about this as well.

Between the time when Professor Jones was appointed by the BBC and the publication of his report, he had things to say about climate sceptics in an article for the *Daily Telegraph* headline '*Gods, floods – and Global Warming*':

'Global warming is a myth.' Type that into a search engine and you get thousands of hits – but global warming is not a product of the human imagination; or no more so than any other scientific claims for – like them – it depends on its data, the accuracy of which has been affirmed by the

⁸⁴ http://www.ibt.org.uk/about_us.php or http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/BT_About_Us.pdf

⁸⁵ See page 40, BBC Trust report, *From Seesaw to Wagon Wheel: Safeguarding impartiality in the 21st Century*

⁸⁶ <http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/blog/?p=142>

inquiry into the leaked East Anglia documents. The subject has, alas, become the home of boring rants by obsessives.⁸⁷

This hardly suggests that the professor would be likely give anyone who might question the current dogma on climate change, or the way in which it is reported by the BBC, a fair hearing. Perhaps more worry was the fact that he felt able to publish such a view when he was supposed to be reviewing impartiality of the BBC's coverage of the subject.

Under the circumstances, it should not have come as a surprise to us when we saw the BBC report that Professor Jones uses the term '*climate change denier*' – or its derivatives – repeatedly throughout the relatively short section devoted to the coverage of climate change, which is arguably the most important and challenging science subject that the BBC has been required to deal with in recent years. This is a emotive and insulting term intended to associate anyone who does not fully accept the 'mainstream view' on global warming with holocaust deniers. It has no place in a serious review of impartiality for one of the worlds leading broadcasters.

65) The BBC Review only makes one direct reference to our submission, but seems to touch on it obliquely, and defensively, at three other points.

On page 72:

A submission made to this Review by Andrew Montford and Tony Newbery (both active in the anti-global-warming movement, and the former the author of *The Hockey Stick Illusion: Climategate and the Corruption of Science*) devotes much of its content to criticising not the data on temperatures but the membership of a BBC seminar on the topic in 2006, and to a lengthy discussion as to whether its Environment Analyst was carrying out BBC duties or acting as a freelance during an environment programme at Cambridge University. The factual argument, even for activists, appears to be largely over ...

BBC Science Review, page 72

There seems to be a wilful misrepresentation of our evidence here. How Professor Jones could think that we might even consider writing about the '*data on temperatures*' to a geneticist who is conducting a review of journalism for a broadcaster is a complete mystery to us. That our failure to do so has apparently been construed as evidence that 'The factual argument, [about climate change] even for activists, appears to be largely over ...' is simply absurd. And his reference to '*a lengthy discussion*' of the BBC's Environment Analyst's duties indicates that he had not even bothered to read our submission. We raise no such issue in it.

Earlier in the review, Professor Jones had something to say that appears to refer to our submission and to the 2006 seminar:

News of the Trust's decision to commission this Review was greeted by some anti-global warming enthusiasts as a statement of its desire to haul the Corporation over the coals for supposed failings around this topic.

⁸⁷ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/steve-jones/7887202/Gods-floods-and-global-warming.html>
or http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/Jones_on_rants.pdf

Nothing could be further from the truth: this is one of a regular series of evaluations of its output. I have had a number of communications from the public on this issue and the BBC has received many complaints about alleged weaknesses in its treatment of the subject. Many emerge from an organised response by determined climate-change deniers rather than being objective disagreements with particular programmes.

BBC Science Review, page 66

The review offers no evidence to support this assertion about ‘an organised response’. We have yet to come across any such phenomena in the course of our research or our blogging.

There only appears to be one hint in the report that climate change coverage may have been controversial within the BBC, and this reference proved to be a hostage to fortune:

One of my interviewees described the BBC as having been “scarred” by this controversy [climate change]. I saw no sign that such a term is justified, but the Corporation has certainly put plenty of effort – and resources – into its attempts to be impartial. There have been seminars with high-profile speakers, ...

BBC Science Review, page 67

On page 67 of his report, Professor Jones refers to ‘a drizzle of criticism’ by some newspapers. This was about to become an embarrassing and unnecessary deluge.

The BBC Review was published in July 2011 and in November of the same year, on successive Sundays. *The Sunday Mail* published large spreads⁸⁸ about BBC coverage of climate change which, among other things, highlighted issues that we had raised in our submission. These reports were obviously highly detrimental to the BBC’s reputation for impartiality because they showed, as we had done in our submission, that BBC news gathering and editorial staff had got far too close to environmental activism for impartiality to be preserved. Had Professor Jones given our concerns a fair hearing in his report then much of the damage done by these articles could have been prevented.

Finally, we note that both our names appear in Annex Four of the report (page 100) under the heading, *Organisations and Individuals Responding to Letters of Enquiry*. We did not receive any communications from Professor Jones or the BBC that could possibly be described as a ‘letter of enquiry’. Had we done so, then the outcome of our representations to the BBC Trust’s science review would probably have been very different.

- 66) Over five years after we started to try and discover who the ‘best scientific experts’ that the BBC relied on when it first decided to limit coverage of climate scepticism in its output, we still do not have an answer.

Impartiality is not optional for the BBC, it is a legal requirement of its *Royal Charter and Agreement with the Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport*. The claim

⁸⁸ <http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/GW4781.pdf> and
<http://ccgi.newbery1.plus.com/leveson/GW4788.pdf>

about consulting the 'best scientific experts' at a seminar was made in a major report adopted and published by the BBC Trust, which is the body charged with ensuring that the terms of the Charter are correctly applied by the Corporation. The claim in the *Wagon Wheel* report that *the 'best scientific experts'* were consulted before an important editorial decision was taken is used to demonstrate the lengths that the BBC is prepared to go to in order to preserve impartiality. Yet when the BBC is asked, quite reasonably, who these 'best scientific experts' were, the response is silence and a report commissioned by the BBC Trust to review impartiality and accuracy in just this area of the BBC's operations fails to address this very obvious problem.

Now the SMC has cited the Jones Report in its witness statement when arguing that, in science stories if nowhere else in journalism, giving both sides of a dispute can be the cause of biased reporting. It would seem to us that this view has more to do with scientism⁸⁹ than with science or with the practice of responsible journalism.

CONCLUSION

67) At the end of Ms Fox's oral evidence, Lord Justice Leveson said:

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: I think it's a very interesting area because it seems so easy to fix. ...

Fiona Fox Evidence, page 45, line 1 et seq

If the Inquiry were to rely only on the evidence presented by the SMC, then Lord Leveson's reaction would not be surprising.

68) In this submission we have attempted to draw attention to some of the very complex forces and issues that apply to the reporting of climate research, a field of science that has become heavily influenced by politics, and dogmatic convictions.

Statement of Truth

I believe the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed



Anthony George Foster Newbery

8 September 2012

I believe the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed



Andrew William Montford

8 September 2012

⁸⁹ Oxford English Dictionary: 1. The habit and mode of expression of a man of science. 2. A term applied (freq. in a derogatory manner) to a belief in the omnipotence of scientific knowledge and techniques; also to the view that the methods of study appropriate to physical science can replace those used in other fields such as philosophy and, esp., human behaviour and the social sciences.