

IPCC is to science is what FIFA is to soccer

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Given our deference to experts in these technocratic times, it's troubling how often they get it wrong. Take Matthew England, an expert on global warming, who on the eve of the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference in December 2009 warned that the Antarctic was "losing ice at an alarmingly fast rate."

"There's a net mass loss of such a scale that Antarctica's actually contributing as much today to sea-level rise as the Greenland ice sheet," he told the ABC's *Lateline*.

Antarctica remains stubbornly frozen

Five-and-a-half years later the continent remains stubbornly frozen. The sea-ice record has been broken for the third year running and fuel is being flown to Mawson base by helicopter because the icebreakers can't get through.

England and his colleagues believe they have an explanation. Greenhouse gas has changed the wind pattern and Antarctica is stealing Australia's rain, claims Robert Mulvaney, a co-author with England of a report on the subject last year. "As greenhouse gases continue to rise we'll get fewer storms chased up into Australia," Mulvaney claimed.

Yet when storms hit NSW in April, England saw a sign of things to come. "All around the world we're seeing the return period of storms, heatwaves ... the return periods are shortening," he said.

"It's consistent with what we're seeing with global warming."

This unsettled science

It's on the strength of this unsettled science that Australia and other nations are being asked to channel a trillion dollars a decade to the developing world and cut greenhouse gas emissions by up to 70 per cent. By agreeing to these measures at a conference in Paris later this year, the theory goes, we can limit this century's rise in global temperature to 2C.

As we know, however, the guesstimate is a fickle friend. For two-and-a-half decades, the planet has been defying the experts' expectations. At the 1988 Toronto conference experts warned temperatures would rise by between 1.5C and 4.5C by 2050. With 27 years gone and 35 to go the rise is barely a quarter of a degree. The world had better roll its sleeves up.

Resistant to discordant evidence

The global warming thesis is resistant to discordant evidence. The hockey-stick graph adopted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change as a totem in 2001 has been abandoned; the IPCC's claim that the Himalayan glaciers could melt by 2035 has been declared a mistake; global temperatures have levelled over the past 15 years, a hiatus the IPCC did not predict and cannot explain. Yet the catastrophism will not abate.

No one expects experts to be perfect, but as Robert Watson — a former IPCC chairman — has pointed out, the errors follow a pattern. “The mistakes all appear to have gone in the direction of making it seem like climate change is more serious by overstating the impact,” he said after the failure of the Copenhagen conference. “That is worrying.”

IPCC: bloated, unaccountable and out of touch

The IPCC is to science what FIFA is to soccer: bloated, unaccountable and out of touch. Its reluctance to address the warming pause is “symptomatic of a failure of leadership”, says author Rupert Darwall. “The IPCC is unreformable and the Fifth Assessment Report should be the IPCC’s last.”

Yet both the science and the process have become too big to fail; countless experts have invested their professional reputations in the theory and countless more in the quest for a symbolic international agreement.

We have reached a global warming paradox. “The science is weak but the idea is strong,” writes Darwall. “Global warming’s success in colonising the Western mind and in changing government policies has no precedent.”

Experts and their devilish computer models

The surrender to the experts and their devilish computer models has been compounded by the pusillanimity of the fourth estate. Journalistic impudence should have challenged the theorists from the start, yet journalists, with few exceptions, have been content to go with the flow.

Ordinary people are getting bored with this stuff. Their attitude, like the weather, continues to flout expert predictions. Few of them lost sleep, one imagines, from the failure in Copenhagen. It is reasonable to predict the Paris conference will be greeted with indifference outside the ABC.

Nevertheless, expectation is rising among Tony Abbott’s media critics that the Paris conference will embarrass his government. It won’t. Abbott may lack the purity of soul the environmentalists would wish of a prime minister but his mastery of the politics of global warming got him where he is today.

Kevin Rudd’s “existential challenge”

In the lead-up to Paris the pressure is on Labor, which refuses to repudiate the craziness of 2009 when Kevin Rudd warned temperatures in Australia would rise by 5C by the end of the century unless the world dealt with its “existential challenge”.

On this issue, as on many others, Bill Shorten finds himself caught between the common sense of Australian voters and the presumptions of the *bien pensants*. A price on carbon is popular around the table at inner-city dinner parties, but anathema at the barbecue in the outer suburbs.

It is an issue Labor cannot win; it can match neither the sanctity of the Greens nor the pragmatic disinterest of the Coalition. Shorten might be tempted to out-green Abbott, but history suggests it would be a career-ending move.

Shorten's excruciating dilemma boils down to this: what would he rather save, the planet or the party?

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