

Bureau of Meteorology needs to open its records to audit

By Maurice Newman, The Australian, 1 February 2016

Weather bureaus have changed. They are no longer invisible organisations where avuncular bureaucrats use basic computers to deliver dodgy forecasts. Today's weather bureaucrats are visible, sophisticated and ideological. But, despite a huge investment in supercomputers, their record for accurate forecasts remains dismal.

Their mission has expanded to include climate change advocacy, where agnostics are left in no doubt that significant weather abnormalities are evidence of global warming. They tinker with raw data but give inadequate explanation as to why. Their terrestrial records diverge increasingly with satellite and radiosonde datasets. Confidence in their integrity has been called into question.

Bureaus have become climate change citadels

Today's bureaus have become climate change citadels. Their records are the repository of the Holy Grail. Regardless of doubts about their accuracy, they are protected. Hundreds of billions of dollars annually, including huge international transfer payments and tens of thousands of highly paid jobs, may depend on keeping records away from prying eyes.

Last August, a BBC Radio 4 program called *What's the Point of the Met Office?* detailed the British agency's history of dud predictions and its role as a parliamentary lobbyist. Rather than wait for an official complaint, the BBC issued a full-blown apology for "giving voice to climate-change sceptics" and "for failing to make it clear that they are a minority voice out of step with the scientific consensus". According to program host Quentin Letts, Roger Harrabin, the BBC's environment analyst, "went nuts" that the program was aired. Later, several BBC officials were required to undertake online training with a "substantial scenario on reporting climate-change science".

Across the Atlantic, the US house science committee is conducting an investigation into the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, a \$6 billion-a-year government weather service, seeking access to internal deliberations around a ground-breaking climate change study. Amid allegations that the NOAA attempted to shape and direct the committee's oversight, chairman Lamar Smith demanded to see thousands of emails that he thinks will show that by homogenising temperature records, researchers were able to refute claims that global warming over the past decade had paused. He accused the agency of altering the data to "get the results they needed".

Whistleblower allegations

Whistleblower allegations say the NOAA "rushed to publication over the objections of numerous scientists at the agency". The NOAA has refused to hand over the emails.

Australia has its own concerns with homogenisation. Blogger Joanne Nova has reported on it for years. Scientist Jennifer Marohasy has been persistent in seeking answers to why perfectly good raw data is manipulated to turn a cooling trend into a warming one.

Auditor Ken Stewart studied thousands of Bureau of Meteorology records and demonstrates it has a case to answer. The response is to stonewall and, when information is released, to offer no means of replication. Data is converted into vague probabilities that, when technically

correct, are still often meaningless. Weather agencies stand accused of a culture of “snowing” sceptics.

When then prime minister Tony Abbott wanted to establish a taskforce to investigate the bureau’s temperature dataset and other related records, the cabinet, Environment Minister Greg Hunt and his department all came to the bureau’s aid by watering down the proposal and setting up a panel approved by the BoM to “strengthen governance oversight”.

Hunt said: “In doing this, it is important to note that public trust in the bureau’s data and forecasts, particularly as they relate to bushfires and cyclones, is paramount.”

It is good to have friends in high places

Better not to know that the bank’s books have been fiddled in case the market loses confidence.

At least American taxpayers have a champion in Lamar Smith, who complained to the US Commerce Secretary that the NOAA’s top officials had “obstructed” his committee’s oversight role. He said NOAA had refused voluntarily and under subpoena to hand over critical information. “It is the end product of exchanges between scientists — the detailed understanding of scientific work that underpins the authors’ findings,” he said.

The scientists argue that Smith is setting a dangerous precedent of interfering with independent scientific work.

Australian weather officials seem to share NOAA’s views. They reject full transparency in the face of informed criticism of their work. Stonewalling, and appeals to authority, are the defence. In any other field this would be a scandal.

Taxpayers have a right to know

Is the BoM’s methodology commercial in confidence or do taxpayers, who pay more than \$300 million a year for this agency, have a right to know?

Confidence in weather bureaus will continue to decline until the world is finally satisfied through thorough independent investigation and audit that the vital records over which they exercise monopoly control are the result of a scientifically rigorous, replicable process. Nothing has changed since 2009, when John Theon, retired chief of NASA’s Climate Processes Research Program and responsible for all weather and climate research, testified “scientists have manipulated the observed data to justify their model results”. Complaining about lack of transparency, he said: “It is contrary to the way science is done.”

Memo to Australia’s Auditor General: There is an urgent job to be done.