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GARTH Paltridge was a chief research scientist with the CSIRO's division of atmospheric research before becoming the director of the Institute of Antarctic and Southern Ocean Studies and chief executive of the Antarctic Co-operative Research Centre.

His latest sceptical contribution to the debate on the dangers of carbon dioxide is a book, endearingly titled *The Climate Caper*.

Paltridge gives a crisp summary of the physics and economics of climate change, but I want to focus here on his account of the new green religion. "Perhaps the most interesting question in all this business is how it can be that the scientific community has become so over-the-top in support of its own propaganda about the seriousness and certainty of upcoming drastic climate change. Scientists after all are supposed to be unbiased in their assessment of a problem and are expected to tell it as it is. Over the centuries they have built up the capital of their reputation on just that supposition. And for the last couple of decades they have put that capital very publicly on the line in support of a cause which, to say the least, is overhung by an enormous amount of doubt. So how is it that the rest of the scientific community, uncomfortable as it is with both the science of global warming and the way its politics is being played, continues to let the reputation of science in general be put at considerable risk because of the way the dangers of climate change are being vastly oversold?"

Part of the answer lies in the way institutions find ways to silence their employees. Paltridge himself was involved in setting up the Antarctic research centre in the early 90s with the CSIRO. As he recalls: "I made the error at the time of mentioning in a media interview -- reported extensively in *The Australian* on a slow Easter Sunday -- that there were still lots of doubts about the disaster potential of global warming. Suffice it to say that within a couple of days it was made clear to me from the highest levels of CSIRO that, should I make such public comments again, then it would pull out of the process of forming the new centre." The CSIRO, it turned out, was in the process of trying to extract many millions of dollars for further climate research at the time.

Almost the only scientists at liberty to speak their minds are retirees, such as William Kininmonth and Paltridge himself. He gives an example, Brian Tucker, a former chief of CSIRO's Atmospheric Research Division. Tucker was "a specialist in numerical climate modelling and therefore knew better than most where the bodies are buried in the climate change game. He kept remarkably quiet about his worries on the matter. Then he retired, and for four or five years thereafter was the bane of the global warming establishment

because of his very public stance against many of its sacred cows." Eventually he was marginalised by being described as "one of the usual suspects, who was now out of date and in any event was probably on the payroll of industry".

Another eye-opener is the story of how a committee of the Australian Academy of Science was dissuaded from its plans to respond to the Garnaut Report. Paltridge says: "While the committee was aware of all the 'ifs' and 'buts' of 100-year prediction of rainfall, it was aware too of the delicacy of saying so in an Academy response. But if indeed there is something of the order of a 50-50 chance that the forecasts supplied to Garnaut were nonsense, then it seems reasonable that the fact should be made known in plain English ..." Academy members met Garnaut and "rumour has it that sometime during the meeting Professor Garnaut became very sympathetic to the need for vast new resources to address the need for basic research ... In the end it seems that the idea of a response to the Garnaut Report was dropped altogether."

Eventually the academy came out with a statement of priorities for climate research, which contained a brief reference to the fact that the rainfall projections Garnaut relied on were problematical, but most of the public were none the wiser.

Paltridge says that behind the climate change debate there are two basic truths seldom articulated. "The first is that the scientists pushing the seriousness of global warming are perfectly well aware of the great uncertainty attached to their cause. The difficulty for them is to ensure that the lip service paid to uncertainty is enough to convince governments of the need to continue research funding, but is not enough to cast real doubt on the case for action. The paths of public comment and official advice on the matter have to be trodden very carefully. The second basic truth is that there is a belief among scientific 'global warmers' that they are an under-funded minority among a sea of wicked sceptics who are extensively funded by industry and close to Satan. The difficulty for them is to maintain a belief in their own minority status while insisting in public that the sceptics, at least among the ranks of the scientifically literate, are very few."

The Royal Society did its own reputation a disservice by sending a letter to Exxon-Mobil oil corporation declaring an anathema on dissident climate research. It said: "To be still producing information that misleads people about climate change is unhelpful. The next IPCC report should give the people the final push they need to take action and we can't have people trying to undermine it."

Paltridge says: "The staggering thing is that the society, which in other circumstances would be the first to defend the cause of free inquiry ... seemed not to be able to hear what it was saying."

He takes a gloomy view of the likelihood that the political class will soon come to its senses. "One suspects that a fair amount of the shrillness of the climate message derives from a fear that something will happen to prick the scientific balloon so carefully inflated and overstretched over the last few decades. But the IPCC doesn't really need to worry. The

difficulty for the sceptics is that credible argument against accepted wisdom requires, as did the development of the accepted wisdom itself, large-scale resources which can only be supplied by the research institutions. Without those resources, the sceptic is only an amateur who can quite easily be confined to outer darkness."

In the last chapter, Paltridge lists some hidden agendas. "There are those who, like president (Jacques) Chirac of France, look with favour on the possibility of an international de-carbonisation regime because it would be the first step towards global government. There are those who, like the socialists before them, see international action as a means to force a redistribution of wealth both within and between individual nations. There are those who, like the powerbrokers of the European Union, look upon such action as a basis for legitimacy. There are those who, like bureaucrats the world over, regard the whole business mainly as a path to the sort of power which, until now, has been wielded only by the major religions. More generally, there are those who, like the politically correct everywhere, are driven by a need for public expression of their own virtue."



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