



# CLIMATE: PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING AND ITS POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Written Evidence To The Science And  
Technology Committee

Andrew Montford

**The Global Warming Policy Foundation**  
GWPF Note

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# Climate: Public Understanding And Its Policy Implications

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And Technology Committee

**Andrew Montford**

Andrew Montford is the author of 'The Hockey Stick Illusion: Climategate and the Corruption of Science' (2010) and of the GWPF reports 'The Climategate Inquiries' (2010) and 'Nullius in Verba: The Royal Society and Climate Change' (2012). He writes a blog specialising in climate change issues at [www.bishop-hill.net](http://www.bishop-hill.net) and made many media appearances discussing global warming from a sceptic perspective.

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## **Written evidence submitted by Andrew Montford (CLC004)**

1. I am a writer and editor and I run a widely read discussion blog with a focus on dissenting opinion in the climate and energy debate. I am thus well positioned to inform the committee about dissenters from the climate change 'consensus'. My evidence will focus on those whom politicians and activists seek to persuade of their erroneous beliefs.

2. I derive a small income from my blog and occasional work for the Global Warming Policy Foundation.

### **Terms of reference**

3. The committee's terms of reference state that:

'Foresight cautions that 'should scepticism continue to increase, democratic governments are likely to find it harder to convince voters to support costly environmental policies aimed at mitigation of, or adaptation to, climate change.'

4. The chain of logic from climate science to 'costly environmental policies' is long and fraught with difficulty and the task of persuading the public that each link in the chain is sound is therefore equally problematic.

5. In 2005, government PR consultants Futerra proposed that the way to deal with this problem was to take a short-cut:

'...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.'

6. This approach was adopted in practice but has been an abject failure.

### **What is the current state of public understanding of what is meant by climate change? How has this changed in recent years?**

7. Many come to scepticism because they realise that the climate is a vast complex system and therefore one in which the idea of 'settled science' has no place. They see themselves as being misled.

8. Others realise that the media is only telling them the environmentalist side of the story, which again makes them suspicious. It is notable that the BBC has never allowed a sceptic programme on climate change to be aired. Mainstream media coverage of climate change is almost always by 'environment correspondents',

who accept majority views uncritically and who rarely have expertise in science or economics.

9. The Climategate affair made the public much more suspicious of the climate change message, providing compelling evidence that some scientists were misleading the public and that the academic literature had been 'gamed'. The failure of the inquiries into the affair to investigate the substantive issues have only increased these concerns.

10. Professor Hulme of the Tyndall Centre has recently wondered whether the IPCC should issue a dissenting report, something he believes would help that organisation's credibility. Such a report would certainly deal with some of the concerns raised in the last three paragraphs, but would leave politicians, activists and the scientific establishment with the problem of having to explain what happened to the scientific 'consensus' that they have been trumpeting for the last ten years.

### **Which voices are trusted in public discourse on climate science and policy?**

11. Official voices are all subject to perverse incentives and there are therefore few, if any, that are trusted:

- Few people today are likely to give politicians the benefit of the doubt on any issue. In the climate change debate, where politicians from all parties signed up to the Climate Change Act despite the government's own figures showing that the costs greatly outweighed any plausible benefits, this suspicion is only magnified.
- DECC is viewed (correctly I believe) as closely linked to the environmental movement. Ministers meet only with representatives of industry and environmentalists. Officials are vocal in their support of greenery.
- The Committee on Climate Change is also viewed as a branch of the environmentalist movement. The appointment as chairman of Lord Deben, with his ongoing conflict of interest, has only confirmed suspicions of its trustworthiness.
- Government chief scientific advisers give the impression of being political activists rather than even-handed advisers. They are seen as having brought the office into considerable disrepute.
- The Met Office has similarly been tainted strong and continuing bias. The overwrought nature of its public pronouncements on climate have damaged its credibility.
- As to universities, the standing of climate science and its academic allies has been damaged not only by the Climategate emails but also by the inadequate

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response of the inquiries: the lack of a meaningful investigation into allegations of journal threatening has left a question mark over the integrity of the scientific literature of climate change and the IPCC reviews.

12. Some mainstream scientists are, however, seen as honest brokers. These individuals tend to be low-profile, to speak in nuanced terms, and they do not move in the political circles occupied by the well known scientist-advocates to whom politicians tend to listen.

**What role should Government Departments, scientific advisers to Government and publicly funded scientists have in communicating climate science?**

13. Many individuals and publicly funded organisations have destroyed their credibility in trying to adhere to the objective of convincing the public that the science is settled.

14. Government departments should have no role in communicating climate science; they have little or no expertise in these areas. Science needs to stand aloof from the policy process. To do otherwise risks public trust.

15. Scientific advisers to government again need have no specific expertise in climate. For example, Sir John Beddington is an biologist, Sir David King is a chemist and Lord May a physicist and population biologist.

16. Publicly funded scientists should explain their work – social media is useful for this – but should be reticent to take an active role in promoting it to the public. Science has been damaged by scientists hyping their work with a view to increasing their ‘policy relevance’ and funding.

**How could public understanding of what is meant by climate change be improved? What are the main barriers to this? Does the media have a positive role to play?**

17. The Earth’s climate is an immensely complex non-linear system, as is widely realised. Efforts to speak of scientific consensus, settled science and so on are therefore futile since they send out a clear signal that what is being delivered is propaganda rather than information. Public understanding will be enhanced by explanations of the controversies rather than a foolish pretence that there are none.

18. The media could, if it wished play a part in this. However, this is unlikely to happen in practice. Media outlets that stray outside the bounds of the IPCC consensus are subjected to campaigns of vilification by (often public-funded) green activists. The Press Complaints Commission has been used to discourage the appearance of dissenting views.

19. Many parts of the media are heavily reliant on green-minded advertisers.

20. The BBC views climate change as one of the issues on which it does not need to be evenhanded. Scandals such as accepting free programming from green activists and the '28gate' affair demonstrate that the corporation has failed to treat these issues in a professional way. Over the thirty years of the global warming debate it has almost never allowed dissenting views on the science or economics of climate change to be aired in anything more than brief sound bites.

21. In business, 'red team' reports are common. These involve preparation of a separate, dissenting report that seeks to systematically challenge everything in the official report. Adoption of this approach in public policy would lead to policy makers with a better understanding of the science and a better informed public.

22. The public is tired of being lectured about climate change and is unlikely to be receptive to further admonishments from wealthy environmentalists and green industrialists while the economy remains so fragile.

### **How important is public understanding in developing effective climate change policy?**

23. Wider public understanding of climate science and economics, linked to a more impartial treatment of the issues by scientists, the media and government would strengthen the basis of policy.

### **What evidence is there that public attitude to climate science affects their engagement with energy policies or initiatives?**

24. In my view, the public can be divided into two groups:

- Those who have swallowed the Futerra line – settled science and settled economics – in full and who therefore accept the purported need for far-reaching 'decarbonisation' and policies to bring this about
- Those who do not accept it and may therefore question the science and/or the economics and/or the policy responses.

25. If one is unconvinced by current scientific claims then one will, perhaps be disturbed at the costly and largely futile measures such as wind farms and biofuels targets, that have been adopted by politicians or imposed upon us by the EU Commission.

### **Does the Government have sufficient expertise in social and behavioural sciences to understand the relationship between public understanding of**

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**climate science and the feasibility of relevant public policies?**

26. No response.

**Can lessons about public engagement with climate change policy be learned from other countries?**

27. No response.

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The Global Warming Policy Foundation is an all-party and non-party think tank and a registered educational charity which, while open-minded on the contested science of global warming, is deeply concerned about the costs and other implications of many of the policies currently being advocated.

Our main focus is to analyse global warming policies and their economic and other implications. Our aim is to provide the most robust and reliable economic analysis and advice.

Above all we seek to inform the media, politicians and the public, in a newsworthy way, on the subject in general and on the misinformation to which they are all too frequently being subjected at the present time.

The key to the success of the GWPF is the trust and credibility that we have earned in the eyes of a growing number of policy makers, journalists and the interested public.

The GWPF is funded overwhelmingly by voluntary donations from a number of private individuals and charitable trusts. In order to make clear its complete independence, it does not accept gifts from either energy companies or anyone with a significant interest in an energy company.

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