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Outcast scientist vindicated on environment book

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There has been a series of major setbacks for environmental radicals in recent months.

First, the Kyoto Protocol, a treaty designed to control the world's climate, slipped into a deep coma caused by the refusal of Russia, the US and Australia to ratify it.

Second, the "Hockeystick" theory of unprecedented recent climate change so vigorously promoted by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and global warming advocates has been shot down in flames. More than one study has now convincingly shown that the 20th century was not particularly warm in comparison with other, pre-industrial periods.

Third, latest research on the effect of the sun on climate is so convincing that even greenhouse enthusiasts admit that there is a strong case for solar activity, not human intervention, as the main factor in global warming.

Fourth, Bjorn Lomborg, best selling Danish author of the *The Skeptical Environmentalist* has been formally vindicated.

These are important milestones because they expose glitches in the scientific process. But the Lomborg incident stands out as the most glaring and shameful example.

Dr Lomborg's book, with 1800 bibliographical references and almost 3000 footnotes, published in 2001 by Cambridge University Press, challenged the conventional wisdom of popular views on several of the world's environment problems. It was especially effective in dismissing Kyoto as an unnecessarily costly and ineffective attempt to fix a climate.

The book caused panic within the environmental movement but also within the global warming scientific community, whose future depends on perpetuating global warming catastrophism.

The attacks on Dr Lomborg were vicious in the extreme and appeared in some of the more respected science publications such as *Nature* and *Science*. In January 2002, *Scientific American* magazine published a special section titled "Science Defends Itself Against The Skeptical Environmentalist" that included a series of articles condemning Lomborg's book.

The finishing blow came when a bureaucratic sub-agency made up of 25 scientists within the Danish Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, called none other than the "Danish Committees for Scientific Dishonesty" (DCSD), issued a report in January 2003. It stated that *The Skeptical Environmentalist* "is deemed to fall within the concept of scientific dishonesty" and "clearly contrary to the standards of good scientific practice."

The enthusiasm for this verdict was widespread and it fuelled a vicious anti-Lomborg crusade. The global warmers among climate scientists could not hide their glee.

In 2002, the *Economist* reported that "Dr Lomborg is being called a liar, a fraud and worse. People are refusing to share a platform with him. He turns up in Oxford to talk about this book, and the author ... of a forthcoming study on climate change throws a pie in his face."

Dr Lomborg lodged two formal complaints concerning the DCSD's decision with the Danish Ministry of Science. Last month the ministry finally gave its verdict, which completely vindicated Dr Lomborg. The ministry found the DCSD had not discovered any bias in Dr Lomborg's choice of data and that criticism of his working methods was "completely void of argumentation." The DCSD was accused of using sloppy and emotive language that – perhaps deliberately – obscured that the DCSD had in fact cleared Dr Lomborg of gross negligence and an intent to deceive. The ministry also listed a number of significant errors by DCSD, several of which were considered so grave by its lawyers that any one alone was sufficient to make the committee's decision invalid (details at www.imv.dk/Default.asp?ID=233).

According to Roger Pielke Jr, director of the Center for Science and Technology Policy Research at the University of Colorado writing in the journal *Nature*, the Lomborg affair merits attention "not because of its robust criticism, character assassination and pressure politics – these are nothing new – but because its extremeness could mark a watershed in how science relates to policy and politics."

Mr Pielke said science was "increasingly the battlefield on which political advocates, not to mention lawyers and those with commercial interests, manipulate 'facts' to support their positions. It is urgent that the scientific community changes if it is to prevent science's contribution to effective policy development from being diminished and the practice of science from being compromised."

The Lomborg affair is a sobering reminder that science is not always objective or value free. Scientists have interests to protect: their research funding, scientific status and reputation, and cosy links with environmental bureaucracy, their funders.

It is also a reminder of what Cornell University academic Thomas Gold calls the "herd instinct in science." According to Mr Gold, this has been a disaster as it discourages diversity and openmindedness.

"If a large proportion of the scientific community in one field is guided by the herd instinct, then they cannot adopt another viewpoint since they cannot imagine that the whole herd will swing around at the same time. It is merely the logistics of the situation. Even if everybody were willing to change course, nobody individually will be sure that he will not be outside the herd when he does so. So this inertia-producing effect is a very serious one.

"If support from peers, if moral and financial consequences are at stake, then on the whole staying with the herd is the successful policy for the individual who is depending on these, but it is not the successful policy for the pursuit of science.

"If one departs from the herd, then one will be asked, one will be charged to explain why one has departed from the herd. One has to be able to offer the detailed justifications, and one's understanding of the subject will be criticised. If one stays with the herd, then mostly there is no such charge ... The sheep in the interior of the herd are well protected from the bite in the ankle by the sheep dog."

The herd of global warming scientists have built a general attitude or viewpoint that has become firmly established. Mr Gold believes they have built a superstructure on what may be no foundation. He warns us: "Never judge the strength of the foundation by size of the building."

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