

A Major Deception on Global Warming

Op-Ed by Frederick Seitz *Wall Street Journal*, June 12, 1996

Last week the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a United Nations organization regarded by many as the best source of scientific information about the human impact on the earth's climate, released "The Science of Climate Change 1995," its first new report in five years. The report will surely be hailed as the latest and most authoritative statement on global warming. Policy makers and the press around the world will likely view the report as the basis for critical decisions on energy policy that would have an enormous impact on U.S. oil and gas prices and on the international economy.

This IPCC report, like all others, is held in such high regard largely because it has been peer-reviewed. That is, it has been read, discussed, modified and approved by an international body of experts. These scientists have laid their reputations on the line. But this report is not what it appears to be--it is not the version that was approved by the contributing scientists listed on the title page. In my more than 60 years as a member of the American scientific community, including service as president of both the National Academy of Sciences and the American Physical Society, I have never witnessed a more disturbing corruption of the peer-review process than the events that led to this IPCC report.

A comparison between the report approved by the contributing scientists and the published version reveals that key changes were made after the scientists had met and accepted what they thought was the final peer-reviewed version. The scientists were assuming that the IPCC would obey the IPCC Rules--a body of regulations that is supposed to govern the panel's actions. Nothing in the IPCC Rules permits anyone to change a scientific report after it has been accepted by the panel of scientific contributors and the full IPCC.

The participating scientists accepted "The Science of Climate Change" in Madrid last November; the full IPCC accepted it the following month in Rome. But more than 15 sections in Chapter 8 of the report--the key chapter setting out the scientific evidence for and against a human influence over climate--were changed or deleted after the scientists charged with examining this question had accepted the supposedly final text.

Few of these changes were merely cosmetic; nearly all worked to remove hints of the skepticism with which many scientists regard claims that human activities are having a major impact on climate in general and on global warming in particular.

The following passages are examples of those included in the approved report but deleted from the supposedly peer-reviewed published version:

- "None of the studies cited above has shown clear evidence that we can attribute the observed [climate] changes to the specific cause of increases in greenhouse gases."
- "No study to date has positively attributed all or part [of the climate change observed to date] to anthropogenic [man-made] causes."

- "Any claims of positive detection of significant climate change are likely to remain controversial until uncertainties in the total natural variability of the climate system are reduced."

The reviewing scientists used this original language to keep themselves and the IPCC honest. I am in no position to know who made the major changes in Chapter 8; but the report's lead author, Benjamin D. Santer, must presumably take the major responsibility.

IPCC reports are often called the "consensus" view. If they lead to carbon taxes and restraints on economic growth, they will have a major and almost certainly destructive impact on the economies of the world. Whatever the intent was of those who made these significant changes, their effect is to deceive policy makers and the public into believing that the scientific evidence shows human activities are causing global warming.

If the IPCC is incapable of following its most basic procedures, it would be best to abandon the entire IPCC process, or at least that part that is concerned with the scientific evidence on climate change, and look for more reliable sources of advice to governments on this important question.

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Coverup in the Greenhouse?

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Dr. Seitz, former president of the U. S. National Academy of Sciences, has revealed that a UN-sponsored scientific report promoting global warming has been tampered with for political purposes. Predictably, there have been protests from officials of the IPCC, claiming that the revisions in their report, prior to its publication, did nothing to change its emphasis. They also claim that such unannounced changes of an approved draft do not violate their rules of transparency and open review.

It is good therefore to have on hand an editorial from the international science journal Nature (June 13). Even though the writer openly takes the side of the IPCC in this controversy, impugning the motives of the industry group that first uncovered the alterations in the text, the editorial confirms that:

1. A crucial chapter of the IPCC's report was altered between the time of its formal acceptance and its printing.

2. Whether in accord with IPCC rules or not—still a hotly debated matter—"there is some evidence that the revision process did result in a subtle shift . . . that . . . tended to favour arguments that aligned with the report's broad conclusions." (Critics of the IPCC would have used much stronger words.) The editorial further admits that "phrases that might have been (mis)interpreted as undermining these conclusions have disappeared."
3. "IPCC officials," quoted (but not named) by Nature, claim that the reason for the revisions to the chapter was "to ensure that it conformed to a 'policymakers' summary' of the full report...." Their claim begs the obvious question: Should not a summary conform to the underlying scientific report rather than vice versa?

The IPCC summary itself, a political document, is economical with the truth: It has problems with selective presentation of facts, not the least of which is that it totally ignores global temperature data gathered by weather satellites, which contradict the results of models used to predict a substantial future warming. It seems to me that IPCC officials, having failed to validate the current climate models, are now desperately grasping at straws to buttress their (rather feeble) conclusion that "the balance of evidence suggests a discernible human influence on climate." In this crusade to provide a scientific cover for political action, they are misusing the work of respected scientists who never made extravagant claims about future warming.

It is clear that politicians and activists striving for international controls on energy use (to be discussed in Geneva in July when the parties to the Global Climate Treaty convene) are anxious to stipulate that the science is settled and trying to marginalize the growing number of scientific critics. It is disappointing, however, to find a respected science journal urging in an editorial that "charges . . . that [the IPCC report on global climate change has been 'scientifically cleansed' should not be allowed to undermine efforts to win political support for abatement strategies."

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Further SEPP links to the controversy:
<http://www.sepp.org/Archive/controv/ipcccont/ipcccont.html>