

Global warming and open minds

In recent weeks we have discussed some aspects of the global warming debate in an effort to draw attention to some of the more alarmist claims of the United Nation's intergovernmental panel on climate change. For our pains, we have been rewarded with unkind comments in a letter in today's Letters to the Editor section. It criticises us for "ill-informed scepticism about climate science ... that recycled a mix of cherry-picked, decontextualised science, misinterpretation and contrarian error, much from other journalists who believe they alone have identified fatal flaws in this complex area somehow overlooked by 95 per cent of climate scientists worldwide". The correspondent, Richard Fielding, adds: "Do people honestly believe that all these thousands of scientists worldwide are so utterly, completely wrong, and are making this stuff up for publicity or just to scare politicians in to spending money? Really? If this reflects how our opinion leaders evaluate the world then serious questions must be raised both about their espoused acumen and their mental health." Harsh words presented with the usual breezy condescension that is directed to anyone who deviates from the cause.

The author of the letter, who is not a climate scientist, says we should accept the IPCC findings because thousands of scientists say it is true. Yet there are many distinguished scientists who disagree. Mr Fielding even questions our mental health. Perhaps he has forgotten that, until challenged, the IPCC's 2007 report would have had us believe that the Himalayan glaciers could melt by 2035 and that global temperatures would rise 0.2 degrees Celsius per year for the next 20 years even when it has not changed for the last 17 years. We're accused of cherry picking. The IPCC says "warming of the climate system is unequivocal. And since the 1950s, many of the observed changes are unprecedented over decades to millennia".

But there is literature that shows not only that the warming in the 20th century is not only not unusual, but that there have been more intense warming periods in previous millennia, long before the industrial revolution and the burning of fossil fuels. The climate has been heating and cooling for thousands of years. It is not unreasonable to say that the science on this is not decided. It is important that people question this

so-called consensus and remain open-minded. People also need to be sceptical about the colossal amounts of money being spent by governments on mitigating this perceived problem.+