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Colonial Cringe on Climate Policy

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On 1 February, Financial Secretary John Tsang delivered a 2012-2013 budget for Hong Kong that forecast a HK\$3.4 billion deficit for the year. It is unlikely that Mr Tsang took specific advice or instruction from the World Bank in shaping it.

Of course, deficit budgets are not necessarily a bad thing at times when money is tight yet critical productivity-enhancing infrastructure needs to be supported. But, as for many larger nations, Hong Kong's deficit in part reflects populist and cosmetic spending on futile eco-bling such as tax incentives for inefficient electric-powered vehicles, encouragement of costly impracticalities such as carbon dioxide capture and storage (CDCS) and imposition of productivity-draining bureaucracy and costs by schemes like the Energy Efficiency (Labelling of Products) Ordinance.

Yet judging by the utterances of Secretary for the Environment, Mr Edward Yau, and his representatives, the Hong Kong administration sets these and other policies on climate, aka global warming, on the basis of advice from the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Mr Yau is far from alone in using IPCC advice, for climate ministers in both Australia and New Zealand have also espoused IPCC advice as the reason for their countries introducing carbon dioxide trading systems.

Interestingly however, Australia's trading system is now pledged to be repealed by the current opposition, a Liberal-National coalition that is almost certain to win government at an election next year (over this issue, amongst others), and New Zealand has recently announced that it intends to transmute its current

government-imposed trading system into a direct carbon dioxide tax – an acknowledgement that a global trading scheme is, and will remain, a chimera.

Meanwhile, Canada has withdrawn from the Kyoto Protocol and the US remains as far as ever from implementing emissions trading, making it crystal clear that the high-water mark of global warming hysteria has passed. The smart money is on the move accordingly, and investors slow off the mark have already experienced burnt fingers in advance of the impending collapse of the global warming and “alternative energy” bubbles.

Returning to the IPCC, many senior positions there have over the years been filled with scientists and bureaucrats from the United Kingdom, whose now-discredited Hadley Centre Climatic Research Unit nonetheless continues to provide the IPCC with (flawed) measurements on the global temperature record. UK influence, of course, remains strong also in Hong Kong, and nowhere more so than in the policy area of global warming.

What is it about environmental matters, and global warming in particular, that causes politicians to revert to a 19th century attitude of colonial cringe? Why should Hong Kong citizens be paying climate obeisance to an unelected, unaccountable branch of the UN? Are our own scientists inadequate? Or is it just that Hong Kong has not yet been independent for long enough to manage on its own what is admittedly a highly controversial subject?

Of course, the colonial cringe attitude is even worse than it looks at first sight, for both the British and the IPCC have form.

Created in 1988 under joint oversight of the UN and the World Meteorological Office, the IPCC is tasked to advise governments about, not climate change generally, but specifically the impact of human greenhouse emissions on global warming.

IPCC advice has been known to be politically motivated since publication of its 1995 2nd Assessment Report, in which the wording of the Summary for Policymakers was tampered with after the scientists had signed off on it.

Then, in 2001, the 3rd IPCC Assessment Report took as its leit motif a deeply flawed research paper that depicted Northern Hemisphere temperature over the last 1000 years as having the shape of a horizontal hockey-stick, in which the upturned blade represented alleged dramatic warming in the 20th century; this graphic was later exposed as false, and the result of statistical incompetence.

The hockey-stick affair is, however, but one example of faulty IPCC advice. Equally disturbing is the organisation's failure to acknowledge that the mild late-20th century warming reached its peak during the 1998 El Nino year, since when global temperature has failed to increase at all (figure below) despite an increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide of more than 5%.

Most recently, the 2007 4th IPCC Assessment Report has been subjected to a blizzard of criticism subsequent to the revelations of the Climategate affair (google that word if you need the details), and last year Canadian journalist, Donna Laframboise, described in detail the scientific and political corruption within the IPCC in a best-selling new book.

Meanwhile, a carefully considered alternative interpretation of the science of global warming has been provided by the Non-governmental Panel on Climate Change (NIPCC) in two comprehensive reports that summarize research papers that contain evidence for a mainly natural causation of climate change — papers which are in most cases either ignored or discounted by the IPCC.

In effect, it is now apparent to all that the IPCC represents a political advocacy organisation more than it does the impartial scientific advisory body that its supporters claim. Relying on IPCC recommendations as the sole source of advice for setting Hong Kong's climate policy is therefore clearly unwise.

What is even worse is the lack of due diligence undertaken by the Environment Bureau as to the accuracy of the IPCC's advice. In no other major financial or medical context would such dramatic policy prescriptions be taken as they have been against carbon dioxide emissions without first exposing the expert advice to contestability by seeking a thorough second opinion and audit.

So far as I am aware, no Hong Kong counterpart exists for the series of independent critiques of IPCC advice that has been published in Australia by myself and three other experienced, independent scientists — a group united by its members' deep disturbance that alarmist and inaccurate IPCC advice about global warming continues to be used in an uncontested fashion by governmental agencies.

These audits, which are listed [here](#), and the newest of which dates from early April this year, contain much detailed scientific discussion and argument. The audits show, first, that the IPCC has failed to provide empirical evidence that dangerous global warming is occurring, or is likely to occur; and, second, that IPCC speculation about the baleful influence of carbon dioxide rests on unvalidated computer modelling that

includes unsubstantiated assumptions about the amplification effects of water vapour, clouds and other unverifiable factors.

Drawing on our review of the scientific evidence, our overall conclusions have been:

1. that whilst recent increases in greenhouse gases play a minor radiative role in global climate, no strong evidence exists that human carbon dioxide emissions are causing, or are likely to cause, dangerous global warming;
2. that it is unwise for government environmental policy to be set based upon monopoly advice, and especially so when that monopoly is represented by an international political (not scientific) agency; and
3. that the results of implementing emissions trading legislation will be so costly, troublingly regressive, socially divisive and environmentally ineffective that [the Australian] Parliament should defer consideration of the CPRS bill and institute a fully independent Royal Commission of enquiry into the evidence for and against a dangerous human influence on climate. We add, with respect to (3.), that the scientific community is now so polarised on the controversial issue of dangerous global warming that proper due diligence on the matter can only be achieved where competent scientific witnesses are cross-examined under oath and under strict rules of evidence.

It might be added that the social divisiveness that we predicted has come true in spades. For IPCC-inspired attempts to impose carbon dioxide trading or taxation in Australia have now been involved in the turnover of 2 prime ministers and 3 leaders of the opposition, with a third prime minister (Julia Gillard) almost certain to lose her job at the next election because of her government's introduction of a carbon dioxide tax.

Against this background, the faith displayed in unvalidated global climate models (GCM) by senior IPCC advisers and the politicians who listen to them is astonishing. Witness, for example, the remarkable comment made at a meeting last year in Cambridge by Professor John Mitchell (Principal Research Scientist, U.K. Meteorological Office), who is reported as saying that "People underestimate the power of models. Observational evidence is not very useful. Our approach is not entirely empirical" .

A similar cavalier attitude to the importance of empirical evidence has been apparent for many years in statements issued by the Royal Society of London concerning global warming. Driven by a rebellious group of fellows, in October 2010 the Society was forced to issue a much watered down statement regarding the matter. Just how riven the Society, like the wider scientific community, is on this issue, and how unreliable its advice

therefore is, is explained in [a recent expose by Andrew Montford](#) for the Global Warming Policy Foundation in London.

John Mitchell and the Royal Society's views notwithstanding, science without empiricism becomes sophistry. And the empirical evidence about climate hazard in both Hong Kong and Australia is crystal clear. It is that (leaving aside the faint possibility of mild long-term warming driven by human emissions) climate-related events such as cyclones, floods and bushfires, together with longer term trends such as droughts, are the great natural hazards that politicians need to plan for.

The prudent and most cost-effective national policy, therefore, is to prepare well for all such climate events and change in advance, and then to adapt them when they occur — and continue to occur they most surely will.

But what about the often remarked need to cut carbon dioxide emissions anyway — as a “precautionary principle” approach to perceived dangerous warming?

Well, you can't take specific precautions against an unknown future temperature path, and the currently quiet sun, and slight cooling over the last ten years, has led some solar physicists to predict that enhanced cooling will occur over the next two decades.

In such circumstances it can be argued that precautions now need to be taken against cooling rather than warming. But in reality, and given our inability to predict accurately even the near-term climate future, the only sensible course of action is to strengthen society's resilience against all climate hazards, and to prepare to cope with warmings, coolings and climatic instantaneous or step events — one and all and as they come.

Making careful contingency plans in anticipation of future natural climate hazard is, at the same time, profoundly precautionary against a possible future temperature trend of human causation, should one eventuate and also prove to be dangerous.

Why is it so difficult for policymakers to understand that, despite its demonization by greens and their associated alternative energy rent seekers, carbon dioxide is actually an environmentally beneficial trace gas, and that climate change Policy Plan B needs to be preparation for and adaptation to all climate hazard, irrespective of cause?

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