

The Lipstick on the Pig: Science and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

submission to Commons Energy and Climate Change Committee, UK Parliament

[hyperlinked and footnoted version](#)

December 10, 2013

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INTRODUCTION

1. When I began examining the climate debate as a journalist in 2009, I had the good fortune to discover an online [treasure trove](#) in the form of a 2005 inquiry by the House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee. That committee's final report, supplemented by written submissions and transcripts of verbal testimony, was an important part of my education. I feel honoured, therefore, to have been invited to participate in this new parliamentary inquiry.
2. I am a newly appointed research fellow at the Frontier Centre for Public Policy, and a former *National Post* and *Toronto Star* columnist. I have served on the *National Post*'s editorial board, and been a vice president of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association.
3. As the author of two books about the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), my perspective is grounded in years of research. My first book, [The Delinquent Teenager Who Was Mistaken for the World's Top Climate Expert](#), examines the IPCC as an organization. The second, [Into the Dustbin: Rajendra Pachauri, the Climate Report & the Nobel Peace Prize](#), shines a light on the man who has been the IPCC's chairman since 2002.
4. A pair of questions in this committee's [terms of reference](#) ask: *Is the IPCC process an effective mechanism for assessing scientific knowledge? Or has it focussed on providing a justification for political commitment?*
5. Before we can trust the pronouncements of an expert body, we need to feel reasonably confident that that body bears some resemblance to its official description. The IPCC fails so dramatically in this regard it cannot be considered an effective mechanism for assessing scientific knowledge.

IS THIS SCIENCE?

6. "The IPCC is a scientific body," proclaims the IPCC's [website](#).¹ But is this true? Does the mere fact that scientists are involved make an entity a scientific body? Would we describe a chess club as a scientific body simply because its members were scientists?
7. The IPCC website acknowledges that it "does not conduct any research." Its reports are, instead, massive literature reviews. IPCC personnel survey the scientific literature and, in the course of writing a multi-thousand-page assessment report, make thousands of judgment calls as to what that literature tells us about climate change, humanity, and the relationship between the two.
8. Judgment calls are not science. They are influenced by an individual's assumptions, breadth and depth of experience, cultural and spiritual values, economic and political analyses, and so forth.
9. IPCC personnel can be compared to members of a jury. Evidence is evaluated. Decisions are made as to what conclusions are warranted. No one considers a jury a scientific body - even when forensic science provides much of the evidence.

¹ A screen capture, with relevant sections highlighted, [is here](#).

10. So where does science happen at the IPCC? On what basis does this entity loftily describe itself as a *scientific body*?

FIT FOR JURY DUTY?

11. The IPCC's website says it produces "objective" reports.² When a criminal trial is held, systematic attempts are made to ensure that members of the jury are genuinely unbiased. Potential jurors are quizzed about personal and professional connections that might colour their perspective in one direction or another. Those with strongly-held opinions relevant to the issues at hand are disqualified.
12. An individual who has been quoted in the press declaring that big business is evil would never be permitted to sit on a jury determining the guilt or innocence of a large corporation. Yet numerous individuals who publicly declare that humanity is responsible for dangerous climate change participate in IPCC literature reviews that are supposed to dispassionately determine whether there's sufficient evidence to support precisely that conclusion.
13. The IPCC's judgment calls are not being made by individuals with scrupulously open minds. Documented links to activist organizations - entities whose fundraising depends on the view that humanity is destabilizing the environment - do not disqualify individuals from IPCC participation.
14. Astrophysicist Michael Oppenheimer, who spent two decades on the payroll of the Environmental Defense Fund, a US pressure group,³ is the head of an AR5 chapter.⁴ Marine biologist Ove Hoegh-Guldberg, who has a [long history](#) of writing reports for both Greenpeace and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), leads another chapter. Alistair Woodward, a New Zealand medical doctor, is in charge of a third - despite his [nakedly activist worldview](#). For example, a [2009 paper](#) he co-authored urges doctors to "Educate and encourage patients...in climate change action" and to "Make Green Prescriptions."
15. Among AR5's review editors (a position that is supposed to ensure that the IPCC considers a wide range of perspectives), we find Jennifer Morgan - a career activist who used to be the WWF's [chief climate change spokesperson](#). Another AR5 review editor is Richard Moss, a [longtime IPCC participant](#) who used to be employed as a [WWF vice president](#).
16. Anyone can claim to be objective. The question is whether they behave that way. Rajendra Pachauri, the IPCC's chairman, writes forewords for Greenpeace publications.⁵ He has [accepted](#) a "[green crusader](#)" award, and urges students to be "the torch bearers of the green campaign."⁶ In his home country of India, media outlets routinely describe Pachauri as an "environmentalist."⁷ A 2007 [profile](#) published in *Nature* tells us that he "feels very passionately about what he refers to constantly as 'the cause'."
17. The IPCC says it is a scientific body producing objective assessments. In fact, it has been led for 11 of its 25 years by a man who, by any reasonable definition, is an environmental activist.

² See the second sentence in the third paragraph [here](#).

³ This is acknowledged in the second paragraph of his [online Princeton bio](#) - which tells us "He continues to serve as a science advisor to EDF."

⁴ See [this list](#) of AR5 personnel.

⁵ See page 3 of this [Feb. 2007 report](#) and pages 4-5 of this [Oct. 2008 report](#).

⁶ See [this press release](#), halfway down, the line beginning: "Dr. RK Pachauri, Chancellor, TERI University..."

⁷ He is described [here](#) as "an active environmentalist" and [here](#) as a "Noted Indian environmentalist." [This source](#) lists "environmentalist" as his "profession." He is also called an "environmentalist" [here](#) and in the last paragraph [here](#). Similarly, on this [speakers' bureau profile page](#), the headline describes him as a "Nobel Peace Prize-Winning Environmentalist."

18. If a verdict is to be respected by the public the trial must *look* fair. Justice must not only be done, it must be seen to be done. But such considerations aren't even on the IPCC's radar.

POLICY NEUTRAL?

19. The IPCC's [website](#) further claims that it is a "policy-neutral, never policy-prescriptive" organization.⁸ But that is not how its senior personnel behave. These people are not models of decorum who present their findings and then step back so that the rest of us may examine all of our options.

20. It needs to be said that one possible response to climate change is to do nothing. Persuasive arguments can be made for any of the following:

- climate science is immature,⁹ thus the conclusions of its practitioners may be mistaken
- science overall appears to be in crisis, with growing evidence that many scientific findings cannot be replicated¹⁰
- since the global average surface temperature hasn't increased during the past 16 years,¹¹ waiting to see what happens over the next decade may be prudent
- helping the developing world gain access to electricity, sanitation, and health care today is more humane than pursuing measures intended to benefit future generations¹²

21. Yet the option of doing nothing is not one the IPCC's leadership is prepared to entertain. Climate modeler Thomas Stocker heads Working Group 1, which has just produced the "hard science" section of AR5. In a 2009 [interview](#) with the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation, he all but declared that members of the public have no right to make their own climate change decisions.

22. According to him, emissions reduction must be undertaken by "every country" and "all societies." In his words, "We *need* to devise a plan where *all sectors* of society contribute to the *grand goal* of de-carbonizing society" (italics here and below added). In another [interview](#), published on a Swiss government website, Stocker declares that "measures *must be taken* if we want to keep climate change under control." In his opinion:

Innovative technologies *must be used* in [developing] countries to prevent them going down the path of inefficient products, as we have done. If the majority of the population insist on driving a car, countries like India and China *should start* from the outset with a two-litre car.

23. In a truly policy-neutral organization, those in leadership positions would not be making these sorts of public pronouncements. They would not be using words such as *must*, *need*, and *should*.

⁸ Screen capture, with highlighting, available [here](#).

⁹ Toward the end of [this blog post](#), Judith Curry observes that, "as recently as two decades ago, few scientists would have referred to themselves as a 'climate scientist'." Relatively speaking, climatology is a new a field of study. Physics, in contrast, has been studied for [centuries](#).

¹⁰ See [Science has lost its way](#), which reports that only 6 of 53 studies could be validated in one instance. In another, only 25% could be validated. The *Economist's* story, [How science goes wrong](#), discusses the shortcomings of the peer-review process. On that topic, the appendix to [this report](#) at pages 126-160, is also helpful (I've commented on the appendix [here](#)). See also [Nobel winner declares boycott of top science journals](#), and the following statement, which appears toward the end of [this 2009 article](#): "It is simply no longer possible to believe much of the clinical research that is published, or to rely on the judgment of trusted physicians or authoritative medical guidelines. I take no pleasure in this conclusion, which I reached slowly and reluctantly over my two decades as an editor of *The New England Journal of Medicine*."

¹¹ In [this blog post](#), Judith Curry makes it clear she considers the 16-year claim accurate. She cites others in her field who agree, and challenges those still contesting this point "to communicate honestly with the public."

¹² I recently made this argument in an [op-ed](#) published in Canada's *National Post* newspaper.

24. Similarly, Belgian physicist Jean-Pascal van Ypersele is an IPCC vice chairman - one step down from chairman Pachauri on the IPCC org chart. In March 2009, he delivered a [talk](#) with a decidedly non-neutral title at the European Parliament: *Climate Change: We Cannot Afford Business as Usual*.
25. Several months later, he gave a speech in Ireland titled *A few things a climate scientist would like to tell policymakers ahead of Copenhagen* - a reference to the then upcoming UN-sponsored climate treaty negotiations, known in the industry as COP15. Since the first slide of his [presentation](#) informs us of his IPCC position, van Ypersele isn't speaking as a private citizen. Slide number three declares that "Deep emissions reductions are needed" and that "A deal in Copenhagen is essential."¹³
26. An official with a policy-neutral organization should not be ruling out one particular policy option (business as usual). Nor should he be giving presentations that discuss what is *needed* and what is *essential*.
27. For his part, IPCC chairman Pachauri has a track record of promoting a long list of policy measures. [According](#) to him, nothing less than a "new ethos and a new set of values" is required on the part of the public. He [says](#) that air conditioning and heating in private residences should be set to a level in which we "feel some degree of discomfort," that we "need to use public transport much more," that air travel should be [taxed](#) heavily enough to discourage us from flying, and that hotels should bill us [separately](#) for our energy use.
28. Traditionally, only medical personnel and religious leaders have presumed to tell others what they should eat, but Pachauri [is not known for his discretion](#):

I'm not asking people to become vegetarian. I'm telling them to eat less meat. There are huge benefits in eating less meat, and I tell everyone that you will be healthier, and so will be the planet. There are some societies in this world that are consuming excessive quantities of meat. That's not desirable.
29. In late 2009, Pachauri issued a [joint statement](#) with musician Paul McCartney and an official of the European Parliament. Municipalities were urged to "adopt the principle of a meat-free day [per week] for their employees," while members of the public were implored "to change their diet to one meat-free day as the most effective way to combat global warming." At the top of the statement, Pachauri was identified as the chairman of the IPCC.
30. Also in 2009, Pachauri [declared](#) that the emissions targets of incoming President Barack Obama "need to be strengthened," while a [news article](#) was accorded the headline: *Obama 'ought to do a lot more' on climate: Pachauri*.
31. When someone decries the public's values, rebukes democratically elected leaders, and advocates a long list of measures that would add expense and inconvenience to ordinary people's lives, they are not being policy neutral. Rather, they are exhibiting an enthusiasm for remaking the world from top to bottom.
32. What kind of organization permits such flagrant impropriety? IPCC leaders have demonstrated no ability to conduct themselves in a "policy-neutral, never policy-prescriptive" manner. It is surely foolish to believe that, when it comes to interpreting climate science, these same people are utterly circumspect.

¹³ When he delivered a [similar talk](#) in Paris a few weeks earlier, the same statements appeared on page 2.

SCIENTISTS ARE THE LIPSTICK ON THE PIG

33. In early 2013, I released onto the Internet the complete contents of three internal [IPCC data sticks](#) that were leaked to me by an IPCC whistleblower. They reveal that scientists recruited to write IPCC reports have a startling lack of authority.¹⁴
34. In a document that IPCC personnel were assured would never be made public,¹⁵ I discovered a discussion about the title of Chapter 4 from AR5's Working Group 2 report - *Terrestrial and Inland Water Systems*. External reviewers advised the IPCC that this title is confusing and misleading. They said the problem could be fixed easily by changing the word "systems" to "ecosystems." The review editors for Chapter 4 acknowledged that the reviewers had a point, but explained that implementing a change this minor would be a bureaucratic nightmare:
- The comments appear to be valid, but if followed through would require the thorny path of changing a plenary approved formulation. Yet the authors need to reflect and make a proposal that will allow the needed steps by all IPCC actors and bodies, up to the plenary if necessary, to become involved to resolve this issue as felt appropriate by the author team.
35. In plain English, this means that the scientists whose names will be identified forever with Chapter 4 were actually powerless to add three characters to its title. Chapter titles were decided years ago and then carved in stone via an IPCC plenary meeting. Because the IPCC is a bureaucracy, several "IPCC actors and bodies" would need to be consulted and lobbied before a change as small as this one could be made.
36. (I am the recipient of a subsequent leak which reveals that the Working Group 2 report scheduled to be released by the IPCC in March 2014 retains [the original Chapter 4 title](#) - the one that has been described as misleading. One interpretation is that the authors of Chapter 4 decided that trying to navigate the bureaucracy wasn't worth the hassle.)
37. When we're advised that the IPCC is a "scientific body" we naively imagine that scientists are the ones making the important decisions. But that isn't the case. Instead, they're told what to write about – there has to be a section on X, and another section on Y. They're told how many pages they must say it in. According to the data stick documents, they're also urged not to say anything that contradicts earlier IPCC reports – or that contradicts what's being said in other chapters of the report to which they are contributing.¹⁶
38. The IPCC is not about free inquiry. This process has nothing to do with the pursuit of scientific knowledge. Years in advance, IPCC officials predetermine what topics the next report will explore – and what topics it will ignore. Like pizza, IPCC "science" is ordered and delivered.
39. The IPCC is a bureaucracy. A bureaucracy that adds a scientific gloss to its own agenda by recruiting and then circumscribing the energies of certain scientific personnel.

INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

40. IPCC authors spent years writing the 14 chapters that comprise AR5's Working Group 1 report. Sixty-five of those authors were then selected (by the bureaucracy) to write a précis. Needless to say, reducing 14 chapters of material to 31 pages involves a great deal of fallible human judgment.
41. If the IPCC was even a facsimile of a scientific body, matters would have ended there. The [31-page précis](#) - called the *Summary for Policymakers* - would have been released to the public. But that's not what happened. Instead, those 31 pages were merely a draft. The final version of the document only emerged

¹⁴ More info on the material discussed in paragraphs 33-39, including hyperlinks and multiple quotes, is available here: [Cogs in the Climate Machine](#)

¹⁵ See the first paragraph of [this document](#) from the data sticks. Additional info and context [available here](#).

¹⁶ See [Cogs in the Climate Machine](#) for specifics.

after a four-day meeting in which the political significance of every sentence had been thoroughly dissected.¹⁷

42. Delegations from more than 100 countries were involved in the four-day, behind-closed-doors, barred-to-the-media meeting. Politicians, diplomats, and bureaucrats argued about phrasing - and about which tables, graphs, and illustrations should be included. When they were done, the *Summary for Policymakers* was five pages longer than the draft but contained 700 fewer words.
43. At a press conference in late September 2013, the IPCC released its [new improved version](#) of the summary. This is the only AR5 document most policymakers and journalists are ever likely to read. Rather than being the unadorned words of IPCC scientists, this statement reflects a politically-negotiated view of reality.
44. Shortly afterward, the IPCC released a document titled [Changes to the Underlying Scientific/Technical Assessment](#). It includes 10 pages of "corrections" the IPCC intends to make to AR5's first 14 chapters. Turning normal procedure on its head, the IPCC doesn't expect its summary to be consistent with the underlying report. Rather, this organization has a long history¹⁸ of adjusting its reports so that they accord with its politically-negotiated summaries.
45. In the words of the first paragraph of this document, IPCC personnel "have identified some changes to the underlying report *to ensure consistency with the language used in the approved Summary for Policymakers*" (italics added).
46. Directly following this quote, we are assured that these changes "do not alter any substantive findings." Since these are the same people who insist the IPCC is a scientific body, that it writes objective reports, and is "never policy-prescriptive," such a claim should be taken with a grain of salt.

CONCLUSION

47. The IPCC was not established - and is not controlled - by science academies. Rather, it is a child of one of the most politically riven bodies known to humanity, the United Nations.
48. As a UN entity, the IPCC's primary purpose isn't to further scientific knowledge but to provide scientific justification for another UN entity - the 1992 treaty known as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change ([UNFCCC](#)).
49. Evidence of this is in plain sight. At a 2008 event celebrating the IPCC's 20th anniversary, chairman Pachauri [told a group of IPCC insiders](#): "The UNFCCC is our main customer."
50. Similarly a [2011 presentation](#) by vice chair van Ypersele ends this way: "Conclusion: IPCC is eager to continue serving the UNFCCC process."
51. An international treaty is a political instrument. This makes it impossible for any reasonable person to conclude that the IPCC is about science for science sake.
52. This is science for politics sake.

¹⁷ When IPCC insiders answered an InterAcademy Council questionnaire in 2010, they spoke candidly about what goes on at such meetings - [see here](#).

¹⁸ See the end of this 2007 [news report](#), under the heading "Publication Delay." Highlights of the relevant sections [appear here](#).