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## Climate experts' forum: Should climate sceptics have a greater voice at Copenhagen?

December 9, 2009 9:45 pm by Kate Mackenzie

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FT Energy Source is posting a daily question for our panel of expert commentators. Below are responses from panel members Bjørn Lomborg, Kyoto Protocol carbon trading architect Graciela Chichilnisky, Robert Stavins of Harvard, Jeremy Leggett of Solarcentury, Vivienne Cox of Climate Change Capital, David Jones of Havas and Julian Morris of The International Policy Network.

### Should sceptics be given a greater voice at the Copenhagen conference, given that recent polls, particularly in the US, show widespread doubts that climate change is manmade?

**Robert Stavins:** The key question is not whether particular views are represented at the Copenhagen conference and other climate negotiations, but whether access to the various events is made available to people with diverse views. In terms of the negotiating teams, the views of members are presumably representative of the respective governments, and there is – to put it mildly – a considerable diversity of perspectives across the negotiating teams, if not in regard to basic science, then surely in regard to issues of economics and policy.

The real opportunity for diverse perspectives, including those which go against the grain and depart from any conventional wisdoms, is among the numerous stakeholder groups which populate the hallways, offering side events and a variety of meetings. Institutions with a variety of views – from academia, private industry, and the NGO world – can all register to become accredited observer organizations. And as far as I know, the process does not preclude organizations with particular perspectives on climate change science, economics, or policy, but if this is not the case, it would indeed be a problem that ought to be addressed.

**Vivienne Cox:** It is worth pointing out how the scientific consensus has come about. It has been hard won through disagreement. All climate scientists are sceptics. We do not have believers on one hand and sceptics on the other. The scientific method demands proof in the face of opposition. In the consensus there is a wide range of views. The small group of scientists who have become known as “sceptics” are balanced by a group who think that things are much worse than the consensus.

Those of us who believe that the risk of climate change is such that we need to take action must be careful not to exaggerate the risk because this gives ammunition to the sceptics. But, as one commentator put it recently, if there was a 100-1 chance of a plane crashing would you put your daughter on it? The global warming risk is much greater than that – but you get the point.

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The sceptics can have their say but let them not dominate and slow down the process. From a business point of view – and transforming the economies of the world is going to need vast amounts of capital – every delay will cost more. Acting early will reduce the cost of mitigation and adaptation measures and give technology the chance to be developed to solve the problem.

So the succinct answer to the question is a polite, but firm, no.

*Vivienne Cox is chairman of Climate Change Capital*

**Bjørn Lomborg:** Climate realists certainly need a greater voice. Copenhagen delegates are single-mindedly pursuing a response to global warming that has failed for nearly twenty years: negotiating an international treaty on carbon emission reductions. In Rio de Janeiro in 1992, politicians from wealthy countries promised to cut emissions by 2000, but did no such thing. In Kyoto in 1997, leaders promised even stricter reductions by 2010, yet emissions kept increasing unabated.

In Copenhagen, delegates are zealously pursuing this strategy, but they are shutting their eyes to some unpleasant realities. They are not acknowledging that cutting carbon is and will remain incredibly expensive because non-carbon based energy alternatives are far from ready to take up the slack. They are applauding politicians for making carbon cut promises that are technically, financially and politically impossible for them to fulfil.

Never has there been a more urgent need to throw open the debate. Today, the term ‘sceptic’ is often used as an insult to denote anybody who questions any aspect of the orthodoxy of the Kyoto approach. I consider myself a climate realist. Climate change is a problem, and one caused by humanity – I noted that back when I wrote *The Skeptical Environmentalist*. But I believe that the policy response on the table in Copenhagen is an incredibly ineffective, lousy response to this challenge.

Discussion on the policy response to global warming needs to be broad and it needs to be reasoned. Repeated efforts – including terrifying advertisements and overheated suggestions that global warming will be worse than scientists expect – have failed to convince people to accept expensive, ineffective carbon cuts. Surely, rather than continued attempts to ‘fix the public’, there needs to be a more sensible dialogue about how best to fix the climate.

*Bjørn Lomborg is an author, political scientist and director of the Copenhagen Consensus Center*

**Graciela Chichilnisky:** Yes, sceptics should be given a greater voice in Copenhagen because they are right – nobody can be absolutely sure about climate change – the science is new and uncertain – but at the same time we need to make clear that the issue here in Copenhagen is not about scientific certainty – the issue is the management of a catastrophic risk.

This is what Copenhagen is all about. We buy expensive insurance to protect against the risk of our homes burning – with much less certainty that the house will burn. Closing one’s eyes and crossing the street may not lead to a sure death – but it is the wrong thing to do. In my new book *Saving Kyoto* we present data showing that the worldwide cost of insuring catastrophes – typhoons, floods, tsunamis, tornadoes – is roughly 2.5 per cent of the value of the asset. We are at Copenhagen because we have a global catastrophic risk – whether or not it will happen is not known yet as nobody knows the future. What we are talking about here in Copenhagen is done everyday in the world – manage a catastrophic risk. The largest global catastrophic risk we we ever aware of. Scientific certainty about what will occur is not the issue.

*Graciela Chichilnisky is the architect of the carbon market of the Kyoto Protocol and the co-author of Saving Kyoto.*

**Jeremy Leggett:** Knowing I would find time for one book at most from my unread

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backlog while in Copenhagen, I found myself putting *Finest Years* by Max Hastings into the suitcase. Somehow this history of Churchill between 1940 and 1945 struck me as appropriate. In seven days here, I am still on the first chapter, but in it Neville Chamberlain speaks to Parliament as the Wehrmacht swarms west. "I do not think the people of this country yet realize the extent or the imminence of the threat which is impending against us", he says.

An MP then calls out: "We said that five years ago."

In the case of climate change, a threat no less severe than an invading Nazi army, the warnings began twenty years ago. I watched Mrs Thatcher give her first press conference on climate change in May 1990, the day after the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change had completed the first of its four scientific assessments. The next day, the front-page headline in the Daily Express read "Race to Save Our World: Britain takes lead in crusade against greenhouse effect." The other dailies all bore front page headlines of this ilk. And the scientific evidence of risk has tightened considerably in the two decades since then, whatever a few stolen e-mails might infer to those desperate for a more comforting narrative.

Winston Churchill took over from Chamberlain after that speech in May 1940. He did not allow the appeasers of the day representation in his campaign to save Britain. There were a good few of them: folk who would have been prepared to gamble that we could reach a rapprochement with the Nazis, meanwhile watching less fortunate neighbours put to the sword.

I write these words having just heard the delegation for the Pacific nation of Kiribati literally plead for their future in a special session at Copenhagen. These people have had plenty of time to study the science. They see the writing on the wall, just like the vast majority of the 15,000 people here.

FT correspondents covering the rag bag of 100 contrarians who assembled for their own conference in Copenhagen wrote of the unpleasantness of the right-wing sentiment on display. Climate change negotiations should be left for the true conservatives: people who want to conserve their homelands, and their planet. People unwilling to gamble their sovereignty on some minority scientific concoction, purveyed often by people in the pay of oil and coal interests, in the grip of libertarian extremists, or delusional attention-seeking professors blind to the risk their iconoclastic theories would expose the world to.

Keep the appeasers out, I say. We all need to think a lot more like Winston.

*Jeremy Leggett is an author, chairman of Solarcentury, and ambassador to the Global Observatory at Copenhagen*

**Julian Morris:** While there is considerable discussion and debate in the academic literature over which policy is most appropriate to address climate change, the public discourse is currently dominated by a single policy: the imposition of restrictions on carbon emissions in the near-term. Copenhagen reflects this public discourse. Many economists are highly sceptical of the desirability of such near-term restrictions.

[Plausibly, Copenhagen would be more likely to reach a successful conclusion if such scepticism were recognised and alternative policy options considered.](#)

*Julian Morris is an economist, author and director of The International Policy Network.*

**David Jones:** Tempting as it is to say no, I think any healthy debate includes all points of views.

The benefit of having sceptics is two-fold. Firstly, they ensure that a huge amount of discipline and rigour is brought to proving the scientific case that climate change is a real and genuine threat and something we need to act on. Secondly, they motivate

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the vast majority of the population who believe in and understand the threat this key issues poses for the planet to act. The fact that we have over 10 million people who have signed up as supporters of tck tck tck and that there isn't a similar movement of people who have signed up to say they think it's a non-issue speaks volumes.

So I say let the sceptics speak. Even if they were right, and I don't believe too many people without an agenda are suggesting they are, then the worst case scenario is that we take some action whose impact on the planet is neutral. And if they are wrong we have protected the future of the planet.

But the fact that so many of the world's leaders are now heading to Copenhagen means that very few governments are listening to the sceptics. And my message to the sceptics would be simple. When you live in the developed world, it's a lot easier to be a sceptical. But travel to Africa and see the 300,000 deaths a year that are taking place as a direct result of climate change and you may find your point of view is changed.

*David Jones is global chief executive of Havas Worldwide*

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**matt\_1977** | December 10 9:47am | [Permalink](#)

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I think you are thinking how scientists normally behave which isn't the case here.

It has been shown beyond reasonable doubt they tried to suppress any dissenting voice from the leaked emails.

We must hide the decline and it's a travesty we can't account for the lack of warming at the moment speak volumes about their dishonest means of promoting climate change formerly called global warming. Why has the name changed? because global warming isn't happening now and now they can say any extreme weather event is caused by co2 which Piers Corbyn can predict using the sun. See [www.weatheraction.com](http://www.weatheraction.com).

The question is very simple.

Where is the observational evidence to back up the theory?

Ice core data etc over hundreds of thousands of years shows no correlation between co2 and temperature, the way around suggested.

It seems that co2 has been much higher in the past naturally and still with no driving effect on temperature.

Ask yourselves why these graphs are not produced.

Claims that it warmed quickly in the last 20 years don't mean anything in the long tapestry of time. They could well do the opposite in the next 20 years and you're back to square one.

Weren't we separated from France by a huge ice cap melt about 10,000 years ago without there being cars and planes?

I think the defence to that is, yes it was an ice age before.

If that had happened now they would be crowing over the alleged fact it was co2 related.

Co2 probably doesn't have much effect because it's proportionately so small and the growing plants that need to feed off the co2 cause a transpirational cooling to offset any greenhouse effect.

Anyway, the important thing is the observational evidence refutes the theory and so the theory should be discarded instead of the facts being discarded.

**reipost** | December 10 1:07pm | [Permalink](#)

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Of course!

AI debates should and must be open debates

What's annoying is that skeptics are rebuffed as "flat earth believers" etc,  
by

"So you don't believe global warming is happening!"

"Look at the polar ice caps Dude"

-and similar...

The point is of course whether CO2 emission reduction measures are worthwhile, not whether climate change is taking place or not!

OK:

even assuming the need for action to reduce CO2,

that should be done by acting on emissions themselves rather than on consumers

"We must all cut down and save" is wrong.

There is no energy shortage:

(given renewable/nuclear development possibilities, with CO2 emission limits set as deemed necessary)

and consumers – not politicians – PAY for energy and how they wish to use it.

Notice: If there WAS an energy shortage, its price rise would

– limit people using it anyway, and make renewable energy more attractive

– make energy efficient products more attractive to buy.

No need to legislate for it.

Also:

Since when do Light Bulbs, TV sets etc give out any CO2 gas?

Power stations might.

And most cars do.

Yet cars are taxed.

RATHER than energy efficiency, fuel efficiency, or emission regulations on buildings, cars, light bulbs etc

which gives governments zero income and limits consumer choice,

government could of course relevantly tax those products instead, and

lower the tax on energy

efficient or low emitting alternatives - so people aren't just hit by taxes.

Governments make money on the reduced sales which helps pay pay for CO2

emission processing and renewable energy, and consumers keep choice.

Taxation can be lifted when enough low emission energy is in place.

Yes, taxes are unjustified, but better for all sides, if energy

efficiency based bans are the only alternative.

Some people think "everyone wins by only allowing energy efficient products"

Wrong again:

See <http://www.ceolas.net/#cc2x>

Energy efficient lights may be slower to come on, bulkier, less bright, mercury containing.

Energy efficient buildings are often sealed buildings - not always what users want.

Energy efficient cars tend to be unsafe (light in build and weight) and slower

- and so on.

Few seem to know about the industrial profit politics behind the

supposedly environmentally justified Light Bulb and other bans

<http://www.ceolas.net/#i1ax>

**graphicconception** | December 10 8:28pm | [Permalink](#)

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"... the worst case scenario is that we take some action whose impact on the planet is neutral.

And if they are wrong we have protected the future of the planet."

The planetary impact could be much worse than neutral. The bio-fuels fiasco was just a suggestion of how things could work out..

Also, the financial cost could be prohibitive and I have yet to see a convincing cost/benefit analysis. Then if it turned out that GW is natural after all we could have spent all the money on CO2 reduction and still need to spend a similar amount on mitigation.

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