

# After 11 years, is there anyone who *hasn't* been a 'senior Liberal advisor'?

Matt Brown reviews

## *High and Dry*

by Guy Pearse

(Penguin, 2007, 496 pages)

The US State Department's website provides some useful information about misinformation. It notes, 'Does the story claim that vast, powerful, evil forces are secretly manipulating events? If so, this fits the profile of a conspiracy theory'.

Self-dubbed climate change martyr Guy Pearse ticks all those boxes and more in his recent polemic, *High and Dry*.

Pearse's claims to be a 'Howard government adviser' and a 'ministerial minder' were recently exposed when it was revealed that he had been employed for a total of five weeks by a Parliamentary Secretary, but had never been employed by a Minister. Obviously after eleven years in office, the 'Howard government insider' tag has become somewhat devalued.

Strangely enough, the ABC was prepared to send a journalist half-way around the world to challenge the credibility of global warming sceptic Martin Durkin, but has given Pearse a clear run to spruik his anti-Howard credo on numerous occasions.

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tions, embellishments and factual errors, all aimed at sustaining a flimsy conspiracy theory.

*High and Dry* casts Australia as the climate change villain led by an evil Prime Minister who has become 'captured by a small cabal of powerful greenhouse polluters'. Conveniently, this cabal also controls pretty much anyone who questions the existence of global warming.

Of course, no self-respecting conspiracy theory would be complete without a starring role for George W. Bush.

Pearse contends that 'a crucial discussion' between Bush and Howard in Washington on the eve of the September

11 attacks set Howard on a path to opposing the ratification of Kyoto, using the lack of targets for developing nations as his excuse to bail out. This culminated, according to Pearse, on World Environment Day, 5 June 2002, when 'John Howard announced to the Parliament that Australia would not ratify the Kyoto Protocol because it would harm the Australian economy and because it did not require large emitters like China to reduce their emissions'.

Pearse then uses the pretence of this 'announcement' to claim that 'the decision not to ratify Kyoto was made unilaterally by the Prime Minister, not by his cabinet'.

The only problem is: Howard didn't 'announce' anything.

In Howard's words—not directly quoted by Pearse—Australia would 'continue to oppose ratification ... [because] ... the arrangements currently exclude both developing countries and the United States'.

Howard was simply re-stating his Government's very public position—a position determined by Cabinet almost a year before Pearse's alleged 'crucial discussion' between Bush and Howard, and almost two years before the so-called 'announcement' to the Parliament.

The Minister for the Environment and Heritage at the time, Senator Robert Hill had been just as blunt about not ratifying the protocol without US involvement.

In a speech to the Pew Centre in Washington, five months before the Howard-Bush meeting, Hill said 'It is our view, however, that it is not possible to have an effective Protocol without the United States of America. If the United States has therefore determined that the

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Protocol is unacceptable ... then we will want to explore with the United States its views on the international architecture which can deliver an optimal global response'.

Hill had made similar statements as far back as 1998. Pearse even refers to one in *High and Dry*, but still promotes the myth that this was all decided unilaterally by Howard some four years later.

Many of Pearse's other claims only serve to confirm just how detached he was from the reality of climate change politics pre-Kyoto.

For example, he claims of an incident in March 1997, 'as far as I knew ... the government was preparing for a binding emission target following the Kyoto conference'.

The fact is that Australia refused to commit to the concept of binding targets right up until the Kyoto conference itself. At COP-2 in Geneva in July 1996, Hill went so far as to dissociate Australia from the Ministerial declaration, saying: 'Australia does not endorse the aspect of the statement which commits the Parties to include in the final instrument legally binding targets'.

Australia was attacked constantly for arguing the need for differentiated targets while at the same time refusing to say whether, if we were granted such a target, we would then commit to it being legally binding.

Apart from numerous mistakes, Pearse is continually forced to contradict himself to sustain his 'Australia is the bad guy' position.

On the one hand, Australian industry should be forced to reduce its emissions at source and not be allowed to buy cheap offsets from overseas. But Pearse defends the EU countries who are failing dismally on their Kyoto commitments, saying that they will achieve their targets

by buying cheap overseas offsets through the Clean Development Mechanism.

But perhaps the most outrageous aspect of *High and Dry* is Pearse's sanctimonious admonitions of the Liberal Party, and John Howard in particular, for not tolerating dissent and debate.

Global warming zealots such as Pearse, his mentor Clive Hamilton and his idol Al Gore are in no position to preach to anyone about tolerating dissent.

Pearse and his fellow-travellers have a simple approach to anyone—qualified or otherwise—who wishes to dissent from, or engage in debate about, the science behind global warming: smear them. Label them and their work as 'polluter funded'. That, apparently, wins the argument. And under no circumstances engage with them on the detail of their position.

In Pearse's mind, tagging these groups as 'polluter-funded' then relieves him of the responsibility actually to challenge the factual basis of the arguments their contributors have put forward.

Pearse makes numerous references to the 'polluter-funded Energy Futures Forum' (a group coordinated by the CSIRO) and lists the fossil fuel companies involved. Hidden in the fine print of the endnotes at the back of the book are the Forum's other members: Pacific Hydro, Hydro Tasmania, Westpac, the Australian Automobile Association, WWF, the ACTU, ACOSS and the Public Interest Advocacy Centre—hardly a 'Who's Who' of climate change bad guys.

Pearse glibly refers to 'self-appointed experts with little or no qualification in any relevant field' who have had their work questioning global warming published. Such a charge could be equally applied to Clive Hamilton, Al Gore, Tim Flannery—all of whom he quotes

repeatedly—and even Pearse himself. And that's before we get to his other 'reputable' sources such as Bianca Jagger, Anthony Albanese, Peter Garrett, Bob Brown and so on.

Perhaps the most ridiculous and offensive of Pearse's smears is his 'Carbon Club Honours List'—a list of more than 40 people who have received honours 'since John Howard was elected' and who Pearse insinuates have been rewarded for their 'campaign to deny the science and/or delay emissions cuts by Australia'. Pearse notes that 'most of the committee approving such awards, including its chair, are appointed on the advice of John Howard' and that this was 'the tip of the iceberg'.

So these people haven't been rewarded for their years of service to industry, the community or politics—they received their gongs from a grateful PM for being climate change sceptics. Pearse expanded the list to 61 on his website, but apparently was forced to take it down after one of the people he named threatened legal action. To understand how absurd this list is, one need only consider that, since the election of the Howard Government, more than 28,000 honours have been awarded. Finding 61 people with tenuous links to industries affected by the greenhouse debate would appear to be stretching a loopy conspiracy theory to the limit.

Unfortunately there appears to be little in the way of truth in *High and Dry*—convenient or otherwise.

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