

From the Editor

MIKE NAHAN

THE DEMISE OF SCIENCE

Without science we would be lost. We would be unable to separate fact from fiction or faith. Our capacity to innovate, understand and question would wane and our ability to provide both a decent quality of life for mankind and a sustainable natural environment would end.

Although science reigns supreme in many areas of Western life, in others, in particular the natural environment, we are sinking into darkness. The belief in environmental Armageddon and the inherent destructiveness of Man is displacing science, humanism and evidence-based management.

Although much has been written on this process, I believe it has been best expressed by Professor Bjørn Lomborg. As described in his article in this edition ('How Do We Prioritize Our Resources?' pages 3–7), using the best peer-reviewed evidence, Lomborg has systematically tested the many claims of environmental disasters—from the population bomb to global warming. While he found environmental challenges—such as particle pollution in some cities—he also found that, in most areas in the wealthy West, the environment was actually getting better. He then goes on to explore what he called the litany—a long list of claims of impending environmental doom and gloom which tend to be uncritically repeated by scientists, journalists and NGO activists.

While journalists play an essential role in publicizing this litany, and NGOs are key players in funding and crafting the advertising campaigns, the role of scientists is pivotal. They provide the credibility and expertise that the journalists and activists lack.

The question is: why have so many scientists also succumbed to being myth-makers? One answer is money. Shock and horror not only sells papers



and generates donations for NGOs, it also generates funding for research. And as Professor Bob Carter discusses in 'Science is Not Consensus' (pages 11–13) changes to the funding of science in recent years have increased the incentive for scientists to join in the doom and gloom.

There has been a discernible decline in the willingness of scientists to stand up for truth and against the populist misuse of science. To be fair, it is not easy being unpopular, particularly when it may entail being accused of not defending something that you have spent a lifetime studying and caring for dearly. For example, Professor Stephen Hall, Director of the Australian Institute of Marine Science recently stated on ABC Radio in respect of the impact of farming on the Great Barrier Reef: '... irrespective of whether there is indeed an environmental effect, you really have to assume there is. Because if the perception is out there that your environmental performance is below par, that can have very dramatic consequences for your industry'.

In short, the person in charge of managing research into what is arguably Australia's most important environmental asset, the Great Barrier Reef, is suggesting that industries should no longer take their cue from science but from public perceptions.

From whom do the public get their ideas? Well, WWF and the other litanists. Importantly, the perception helps assure generous funding grants to Stephen Hall's organization.

When Professor Lomborg was in Australia, he participated in a debate with Professor Ian Lowe from Griffith University. During the debate, Professor Lowe surprisingly admitted that the environment might be getting better overseas, but claimed that this was not true 'Down Under', citing the Australian Bureau of Statistic's (ABS) 2002 report *Measuring Australia's Progress*.

In 'How Useful are Australia's Official Environmental Statistics?' (pages 8–10) Dr Jennifer Marohasy takes up Professor Lowe's implicit challenge and examines the methodology behind the ABS's Report. It is an understatement to say that she finds it seriously deficient; indeed it has all the hallmarks of the litany—data selectively presented to create the image of disaster.

Not surprisingly the ABS's 'expert panel' for the Report includes Clive Hamilton of the Australia Institute and Dr Denis Saunders of WWF—two prominent promulgators of the environmental litany.

The upshot is that an essential database, collected and funded by governments, upon which the public needs to rely so as to form its perceptions, has been doctored to conform with the environmental litany of doom and gloom. As such, in Australia we cannot even do a Lomborg and expose it for what it is. True environmentalists should be outraged.

On a positive note, there is a growing awareness in rural Australia that science is being abandoned for propaganda—and the bush is beginning to fight back.

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