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**TITLE: Debating Lord Monckton**

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If your doctor told you that you had cancer and Lord Christopher Monckton told you to ignore their advice would you listen to him? What if he told you not to immunise your children or drink fluoridated water?

It's interesting how many people are unlikely to trust him for personal advice but who seem willing to trust him for planetary advice.

In preparing to debate the world's most vocal climate change sceptic many of his opponents appear to underestimate his communications ability and overestimate his scientific knowledge. In turn they enter the debate keen to set the scientific record straight when the debate format means the cards are stacked against them.

Let's face it, if the House of Lords can't convince him that he is not a member of that house then what hope does a sincere scientist have of convincing him, or the audience, that the complex science is right and the entertaining guy with some tricky questions is wrong.

The problem for the scientists is that while it only takes a minute to start a bushfire it can take a week to put one out. Monckton's rapid fire crazy questions and his demand for more and more specific details are a simple, but effective, device to ensure that scientists look anything but relaxed and comfortable.

And why, from the conspiracy theorists point of view, don't they look relaxed? Because they have something to hide!

According to NASA, the CSIRO and the international academies of science climate change is already happening, is caused by humans, and is going to get a lot worse. It's possible that they are all wrong and Lord Monckton is right. It is possible that it is all part of some giant conspiracy, but if it is one, it is a far bigger conspiracy than the sceptics usually acknowledge.

John Howard accepts the science of climate change and while he was adamant that he wouldn't ratify the Kyoto protocol he proposed the introduction of an emissions trading scheme in the lead up to the 2007 election. Warmist.

Ralph Hillman, the head of the Coal Association, Mitch Hooke, the head of the Minerals Council accept it and Marius Cloppers, the head of BHP not only supports the science of climate change, he supports the introduction of a carbon tax. Warmists.

The framing of climate change in Australia as a left-wing issue is as unhelpful as it is inexplicable. Around the world conservative governments have accepted both the science of climate change and the need to act. Most of them support the idea that a carbon price is an essential element of an efficient plan to do so.

Conservative governments in Australia have been obsessed with the need to repay public debt, ostensibly in order to leave a better future for our children. In order to repay such debts it is inevitable that societies must make some sacrifices today in order to deliver benefits in the future. But somehow, conservatives in Australia manage to argue that it would be unfair to ask today's taxpayers to pick up the tab for protecting tomorrow's environment.

It gets worse. Conservatives are, as a rule, conservative by nature. They don't like to take big risks. They insure their cars, they insure their homes and they insure their health. When they don't crash their cars or their house doesn't burn down they usually focus on the peace of mind they purchased rather than the money they wasted.

When it comes to national defence the same applies. We spend more than \$20 billion per year on defence. We are currently planning to spend \$50 billion to buy 12 new submarines. That is more than the cost of the National Broadband Network that the Coalition is so worried about. But where is the debate about our need for 12 new subs?

When it comes to national security, or protecting our homes, most people tend towards the 'better safe than sorry' frame of reference. But unfortunately in Australia it seems we are willing to bet our house that Lord Monckton is right.

Another argument against acting on climate change favoured by Australian conservatives is that we should wait because we can't save the world by ourselves. Lord Monckton, of course, goes so far as to estimate what he says is the tiny impact on the world's temperature associated with Australia reducing our greenhouse gas emissions. Such an argument is an obvious nonsense.

When John Howard committed a small number of Australian troops to the war in Iraq he obviously didn't believe that even if we only provided less than 1 per cent of the troops we couldn't really make a difference. Indeed, rather than wait for the sanction of the UN John Howard pursued the course of action that he felt was right. Given the imagined threat of weapons of mass destruction, delay, we were told, was not an option.

As for Lord Monckton's mathematical modelling of the impact of Australia's emissions on the world's temperature, suffice it to say that it falls at the first hurdle of 'garbage in garbage out'. The underlying premise of Lord Monckton's 'modelling' is that if Australia is the only country to act, how much would our actions achieve. Given that his own country has recently announced their intention to reduce emissions by 50 per cent by 2027 his 'results' are obviously irrelevant.

The world's leading scientific bodies tell us that the world is warming, that it is caused by our pollution and that unless we reduce those emissions the world will get a lot hotter in the next century. Just as a cancer patient could shop around until they found a doctor who assured them they were well, so too can we trawl the internet to find the conspiratorial claims of Lord Monckton.

There is of course a chance that Lord Monckton is right. Maybe NASA, CSIRO, BHP and John Howard are wrong. Maybe, as Lord Monckton suggests, scientists are simply motivated by grant funding to find evidence of climate change. Or maybe Lord Monckton is wrong.

The question for us as citizens is do we accept the diagnosis of climate change and the prescription of emission reductions. Or do we trawl the internet for a conspiracy theory and the global equivalent of a herbal remedy for cancer? Do we bet our houses and our children's future that Lord Monckton is right, or do we take out some carbon price insurance in case he is wrong?

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