

Environmentalism and scientific truth

A top-level scientific committee has condemned Bjorn Lomborg's book *The Skeptical Environmentalist* as 'clearly contrary to the standards of good scientific practice'. Rejecting the work as systematically biased, the committee concluded that the publication is subject to the accusation of 'scientific dishonesty'.

The Danish Committee on Scientific Dishonesty, which assessed Lomborg's book, was established by the Danish Research Agency in the Ministry of Research.

It is of serious concern that several Australian commentators have accepted Lomborg's arguments uncritically and have used them to attack Australian and international environmental scientists.

Below we reproduce the key conclusions of the Danish Committee on Scientific Dishonesty along with comments on Lomborg by Miranda Devine and Alan Wood, two of the commentators who praised Lomborg's work most lavishly.

Miranda Devine

"Garrett's aggressive incoherence on the *60 Minutes* debate, in the face of Lomborg's cool analysis, marked a kind of turning point in Australia for logic over emotion, which bodes well for the future. ...

The West may even be on the brink of a 'New Enlightenment', of which Lomborg, 37, is the best example.

His book demolishes, with statistics, the myths which form the basis of the green pseudo-religion. ...

Lomborg is a quintessential Vulcan – named after *Star Trek*'s alien race which relies purely on logic, not emotion, to make decisions. Vulcans rely on empirical evidence and established facts to prove their arguments. They believe there is such a thing as absolute truth."

'Vulcans are defeating the loony greens', *Sydney Morning Herald*, Thursday November 21, 2002

Alan Wood

"But according to environmental doomsayers, species extinction is accelerating at an astonishing rate and there is a commonly accepted figure that the rate of extinctions is about 40,000 a year. No, it isn't. Danish statistician Bjorn Lomborg in his powerful book *The Skeptical Environmentalist* suggests after a careful survey of available evidence, that a reasonable figure is an extinction rate of 0.7 per cent during the next 50 years, not 35 per cent or 50 per cent as claimed by environmental scaremongers. ...

However, environmentalists, teachers and the media are often no more than the dupes of political and ideological causes dressed up as impartial science. This has been exposed in Lomborg's book and in the reaction to it. So far Lomborg's critics have done more to raise serious doubts about their own objectivity and the credibility of the science they quote than expose any serious errors in his analysis."

'Chicken Little greenies harm their own cause', *The Australian*, Tuesday March 5, 2002

Danish Committee on Scientific Dishonesty

"On the basis of the material adduced by the complainants, and particularly the assessment in Scientific American, DCSD deems it to have been adequately substantiated that the defendant, who has himself insisted on presenting his publication in scientific form and not allowing the book to assume the appearance of a provocative debate-generating paper, based on customary scientific standards and in light of his systematic onesidedness in the choice of data and line of argument, has clearly acted at variance with good scientific practice.

Subject to the proviso that the book is to be evaluated as science, there has been such perversion of the scientific message in the form of systematically biased representation that the objective criteria for upholding scientific dishonesty – cf. Danish Order No. 533 of 15 December 1998 – have been met. In consideration of the extraordinarily wide-ranging scientific topics dealt with by the defendant without having any special scientific expertise, however, DCSD has not found – or felt able to procure – sufficient grounds to deem that the defendant has misled his readers *deliberately or with gross negligence*.

In accordance herewith and subject to the proviso that the book under review is to be evaluated as science, DCSD has arrived at the following

Ruling:

Objectively speaking, the publication of the work under consideration is deemed to fall within the concept of scientific dishonesty.

In view of the subjective requirements made in terms of intent or gross negligence, however, Bjørn Lomborg's publication cannot fall within the bounds of this characterization. Conversely, the publication is deemed clearly contrary to the standards of good scientific practice.

'Decision regarding complaints against Bjorn Lomborg',
http://www.forsk.dk/uvvu/nyt/udtaldebat/bl_decision.htm

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