

Thesis We Need a Climate Audit Office



We globally invest billions of euros and dollars in CO₂ reduction, as there are strong indications that our industrial and consumptive CO₂ emissions are causing rapid global warming. This implies risks for humanity: more precipitation, hurricanes, rising sea level. So the government tells us. International climate policies are largely shaped by the so-called Kyoto Protocol, an agreement which is itself largely based on part of the report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). This part is called the ‘Summary for Policymakers’. Science determines climate policy here. This summary states that the past decade was the hottest in the previous thousand years. Conclusion: humans are responsible for this. This statement is supported by a graph produced by climate researcher Michael Mann *et al*, which gained him global fame. Nobody has ever investigated exactly how Mann produced this famous hockey stick graph.

This is bizarre. The two articles, first in *Nature* and later in *Geophysical Research Letters*, were peer reviewed. This evaluation by (often anonymous) colleagues does not guarantee scientific integrity, as the Jan Hendrik Schön affair a few years ago also demonstrated: he was able to conduct pseudo-science with fictional measurements for years without being punished. Mann is not guilty of this, but his statistical procedures are not valid, and nobody has ever checked this.

Two Canadian researchers, Stephen McIntyre and Ross McKittrick, now have – as if they were ‘forensic accountants’ – conducted an audit. They have hunted down the data and procedures, and are the first to replicate Mann’s research. Every company wanting to invest billions through external financing can expect such a merciless

audit. As part of the *checks and balances*, a careless or partisan accountant can be held accountable for any damage. For example, the Enron affair meant the demise of Arthur Andersen.

McIntyre and McKittrick are ‘just’ unpaid volunteers, but they did find a crucial error in the hockey stick study. For a long time, they were not taken seriously. At about the same time as the publication of this issue of *Natuurwetenschap & Techniek*, McIntyre and McKittrick will publish their critique of the hockey stick in the scientific journal *Geophysical Research Letters*, the same journal which published Mann *et al*’s second article.

So, they finally passed the peer review of a major scientific journal, and thus will shatter the ‘consensus’ often mentioned and appealed to by Mann and others. We now know that consensus does not guarantee scientific validity. As McIntyre and McKittrick state themselves, for something as important as the climate, an *audit* is necessary in which the research is replicated by a third party, as a devil’s advocate.

This is a criticism which should greatly concern the IPCC. Mann himself was actually the lead author of the IPCC chapter on climate reconstructions, in which his hockey stick featured prominently. Why would he critically evaluate his own study? “You need a pair of fresh eyes,” McIntyre says about these incestuous practices.

The Mann affair also reveals a weakness of the IPCC. The corrupting influence of a lack of independent checks was shown all too clearly in affairs such as Enron and Ahold, but also in the pharmaceutical industry, where undesired information on anti-depression medicines was held back.

In the latter arena there is at least the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as ultimate watchdog, which has forced medicine producers to reveal all their data and trial results.

Governments base far-reaching policies, which have enormous economic consequences, on IPCC conclusions. The creation of an independent Climate Audit Office to check the IPCC is therefore long overdue. There is simply too much at stake.

Marcel Crok

Editor

mccrok@natutech.nl