# Steve Jones tells the BBC: don't give 'denialists' so much air-time

## In his report for the BBC Trust, Steve Jones actually attacks the BBC for having too little global-warming bias.

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By any measure it has been one of the most momentous stories of our time. For nearly 20 years the belief that the earth was facing catastrophe from human emissions of CO2 and other greenhouse gases seemed to carry all before it.

Nothing gave more credibility to this belief than the reports of the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), relying on computer models programmed to show that, as CO2 levels rose, global temperatures would inevitably follow.

The IPCC used no more conspicuous piece of evidence to support its case than the famous “hockey stick” graph, purporting to show that by 1998 temperatures were soaring to by far their highest level in 1,000 years.

The politicians founds all this so convincing that there were high hopes they would sign a treaty in Copenhagen, in 2009, committing the world to massive cuts in emissions – thus presenting mankind with by far the biggest bill in history.

But from 2007 onwards this whole belief system began to go off the rails. The evidence of what was actually happening to temperatures showed that the IPCC’s computer models had got it seriously wrong.

More and more scientists around the world, many of them distinguished in their fields, challenged the theory, arguing that the factors influencing climate were far more complex, most notably changes in radiation from the sun and shifts in the world’s ocean currents.

By the time the Copenhagen conference collapsed without a treaty, the “hockey stick” graph, which was at the centre of the “Climategate” emails scandal, had been shown to be no more than the result of statistical manipulation based on flawed data. The most alarming predictions of the IPCC’s last major report in 2007 turned out to be based, not on proper science, but on scare stories from environmental activists.

Yet just when this astonishing story called for serious reporting, the scientific establishment’s long-time allies in the media –above all the BBC – leapt to its defence. Indeed, the BBC’s support for the embattled orthodoxy has been so one-sided that it came to be seen as a scandal in its own right.

Finally, in a bid to justify its conduct, the BBC Trust commissioned one of the BBC’s regular contributors, the geneticist Professor Steve Jones, to review its science coverage, notably on climate change.

Many people must have fallen off their chairs last week when they saw the advance publicity for Prof Jones’s report, under such headlines as: “Climate change sceptics get too much air-time, BBC told”. In the section of his report devoted to climate change, Prof Jones makes his chosen line clear.

Astonishingly, rather than merely defending the BBC’s coverage, he also launches an attack on it for giving too much publicity to “deniers” or “denialists” – pejorative terms that he uses no less than nine times in seven pages – whom he lumps in with astrologers, enthusiasts for alternative medicine and even the conspiracy-addicts who believe the Twin Towers were brought down by the CIA.

It seems that Jones knows remarkably little about the BBC’s coverage of this story. He mentions by name only a handful of programmes, all for giving publicity to “deniers” – the Climate Wars series in 2008, for instance, and last January’s Horizon presented by Sir Paul Nurse, President of the Royal Society.

He seems unaware that each of these was designed as a hatchet job on the sceptics, by showing them only in brief, carefully edited clips to make them look ridiculous.

Climate Wars in particular was designed as an answer to Channel Four’s The Great Global Warming Swindle, in which a range of eminent scientists had for the first time been shown at length questioning the orthodoxy.

The BBC’s riposte was notorious for its propagandist use of the “hockey stick’”, without any mention of the statistical experts – Steve McIntyre and Ross McKitrick – who had exposed the computer trickery that created this graph.

Jones also seems to know little about the complexities of climate science, as shown by his reference to “feedbacks” – factors that affect the amount of solar heat retained by the atmosphere. Bizarrely, he lists these as “melting ice, rising seas, dying plants”.

But these are not the “feedbacks” that the debate has been about. It has centred on whether the feedback effect of water vapour – by far the most significant greenhouse gas – is positive, causing temperatures to rise (as the IPCC’s models assume) or negative, causing them to fall. Not the least of the IPCC’s many distortions of the debate over the years has been its attempts to downplay all evidence that clouds and water vapour in fact have a cooling effect.

Jones also falls for the long-discredited statistic that “97 per cent of climate scientists believe in man-made global warming”. This was shown to have originated in a master’s degree thesis and was based on a sample of just 77 climate specialists who volunteered their views in an online survey.

In recycling various familiar propaganda points beloved by upholders of the orthodoxy, Jones seems not to have engaged with the subject in any way. But he is not the first eminent scientist to fall flat on his face when he has stepped out of his own field of expertise to act as a cheerleader for the warmist cause.

His fellow geneticist Sir Paul Nurse fronted an extraordinarily shoddy BBC programme which was not only dishonest in its caricatures of the views of sceptics, such as the distinguished US astrophysicist Dr Fred Singer, but endorsed various scientific howlers, such as a claim that human activity contributes seven times more CO2 to the atmosphere than natural causes (when the true figure is just 3 per cent).

Similarly, the former chief scientific adviser to the government, Sir David King, showed himself way out of his depth when he was stoking up alarm over warming for Tony Blair in 2004.

Sir David, a surface chemist, perpetrated the nonsensical claim that the last mass extinction, “55 million years ago”, was caused by soaring CO2. The extinction of the dinosaurs came at the end of the Cretaceous, 65 million years ago, and no one, apart from Sir David, has blamed it on CO2.

His successor, Sir John Beddington, an applied population biologist, is only the latest of those held up as “scientists” to pronounce on climate. Yet, outside their own specialism, these scientists have no more authority than the proverbial man in the pub.

The real scandal of the BBC’s coverage of climate issues is that, journalistically, it has been so unprofessional. The little group of environmental correspondents most obviously responsible for pushing the BBC line inhabit a bubble in which they only report what they are told by other supporters of the orthodoxy.

To anything outside that increasingly claustrophic bubble they remain oblivious, and thus have missed out on one of the most important scientific stories of our time. In this way they reinforce the folly of our politicians, bent on policies so misconceived and so costly that they threaten the country with an unprecedented act of economic self-destruction.

The BBC will doubtless use Prof Jones’s report to justify its betrayal of the core principles both of science and of responsible journalism. On the day it was published, one newspaper carried the headline: “The BBC’s bias has been one of the most shaming aspects of this entire sorry saga”.

In fact, the article turned out to be about the coverage of “Murdoch-gate”. That headline would have fitted the Corporation’s approach to several of its pet obsessions, though – such as the euro – but none more so than global warming, which the BBC party line has got so spectacularly wrong.