

Scientists urged to make a stand on climate change

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Scientists must work harder at making the public aware of the stark difference between good science and "denialist spin".

That's the call from Professor Barry Brook, Director of the Research Institute for Climate Change and Sustainability at the University of Adelaide, Australia.

In an opinion piece published today in the May issue of 'Australasian Science', Professor Brook has urged scientists to stand up to those who deny climate change, and do more to push "good science".

"In climate science and policy, those few apparently well-educated people who continue to deny the now vast body of scientific knowledge and analysis on the causes and consequences of global warming are variously called sceptics, denialists, contrarians, delayers or delusionists. Whatever the label you attach to them, they are all cut of the same anti-intellectual cloth," Professor Brook writes.

"Their business is the dissemination of disinformation, doubt and unscientific nonsense. One of their most regular ploys is to leverage the widespread lack of public appreciation of how science operates."

Professor Brook says that because science is inherently complex and often technical, climate change deniers are often able to present a plausible case to a general audience.

"Some people will attempt to hijack science for political or ideological reasons and in doing so besmirch science's public image. They are good at doing this, and they often exert a disproportionate influence on policy. Some will simply argue that the Earth is flat because 'it looks flat'," he writes.

"Groups with vested interests in business-as-usual (such as tobacco spokespeople or fossil fuel lobbyists) will attempt to push so-called 'scientific evidence' to support their claims. In fact they are at best drawing selectively on a small part of the evidence, or at worst relying on 'junk' science – that is, outdated, discredited or fabricated data and ideas.

"If confronted with good science, deniers sidestep valid critiques and ignore counter-evidence (or dismiss it by deferring to other discredited ideas). They are hard to pin down because they don't want a serious scientific debate.

"Active and forthright public communication of science is not only an obligation of scientists, but a critical necessity. This is especially true for climate change and environmental sustainability, where we are perilously close to running out of time."

Source: University of Adelaide

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