

# One third of Australia's newspapers still biased on climate change

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602 articles in 10 Australian newspapers were analysed for the report.

Australian print media outlets produce a substantial amount of journalism that is sceptical about evidence of human-induced climate change, despite very high levels of scientific certainty, according to a new report published by the Australian Centre for Independent Journalism (ACIJ) at UTS.

The report, "Sceptical Climate: Climate Science in Australian Newspapers," is the largest and most detailed report to date on how Australian journalists report [climate](#) science, and follows the ACIJ's first report on climate change reporting published in 2011.

"If you believe that the main obligation of journalists is to the public's right to know, the results of this study are truly alarming," said Tom Morton, Associate Professor of Journalism at UTS and ACIJ director.

"This report clearly demonstrates that important and influential sections of the Australian media are failing in their responsibility to provide their audience with information they need to make informed choices on a matter of vital public interest.

"Thus they are failing to fulfill one of the most important roles of a free press in a liberal democracy," Dr Morton said.

The [report](#)'s author, investigative journalist and researcher Professor Wendy Bacon, said along with previous research the findings of this study suggest that Australia may have the highest concentration of scepticism in its media in the world.

"Our analyses of three months of coverage in ten major Australian newspapers revealed a decline of 20 per cent in coverage of climate science between February to April 2011 and the same period in 2012. More disturbing was the finding that the overall coverage became decidedly more sceptical in 2012," Professor Bacon said.

Nearly all of the scepticism is produced by News Corporation, which owns more than two-thirds of Australia's print media. Fairfax Media's *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* accept the consensus position on anthropogenic climate change yet published only 9 and 6 articles respectively in the same period, which might suggest to readers that the

consensus position was in doubt.

"Such high levels of scepticism should be a matter of concern to the Australian public, governments, the scientific community and journalists," Professor Bacon said.

### Summary of key findings

- Content analysis finds decline of 20% in coverage of climate science in three month period between February to April 2011 and the same period in 2012.
- 32% of coverage (of 602 articles) did not accept the scientific consensus that human beings are major contributors to global warming; this figure was greater in 2012 (36% did not accept).
- Nearly all of the scepticism is produced by News Corp, which owns 70% of Australia's print [media](#).
- The most sceptical publications were The Daily Telegraph, the Herald Sun, and The Australian.
- The Australian published the most articles (24% of 602 articles) followed by the Sydney Morning Herald (15%) and The Age (12%).
- Of all news articles (41% or 244) that made significant mention of climate science, 25% (or 61) were less than 150 words long.
- Only 11% of all words in articles about climate science were dedicated to articles that explicitly referenced peer-reviewed climate science.
- 31% of articles were commentary about [climate science](#), most of which did not accept the consensus position.
- Findings highlight the significant role assigned by editors to opinion writers.
- The biggest drop (50%) in articles between 2011 and 2012 was in the biggest circulation publication, the Herald Sun in Melbourne.
- The Herald Sun had the highest proportion of commentary (65%

of articles and 81% of word count) and the lowest levels of news (27% of articles and 11% of words).

- 97% of comment pieces in the Herald Sun either questioned or rejected the consensus position about anthropogenic [climate change](#).

Provided by University of Technology, Sydney

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