

# EXILE FOR NON-BELIEVERS

An example of a scientific association behaving like a teenage school-girl:  
repeating baseless assumptions, and spurning colleagues who disagree.

*by Joanne Nova*



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# EXILE FOR NON-BELIEVERS

by Joanne Nova | September 21, 2009

The price for speaking out against global warming is exile from your peers, even if you are at the top of your field. What follows is an example of a scientific group that not only stopped a leading researcher from attending a meeting, but then—without discussing the evidence—applauds the IPCC and recommends urgent policies to reduce greenhouse gases. What has science been reduced to if bear biologists feel they can effectively issue ad hoc recommendations on worldwide energy use? How low have standards sunk if informed opinion is censored, while uninformed opinion is elevated to official policy? If a leading researcher can't speak his mind without punishment by exile, what chance would any up-and-coming researcher have? As Mitchell Taylor points out *"It's a good way to maintain consensus"*.

And so it is. But it's *not* science.

Mitchell Taylor is a Polar Bear researcher who has caught more polar bears and worked on more polar bear groups than any other, but he was effectively ostracized from the Polar Bear Specialist Group (PBSG) specifically because he has publicly expressed doubts that there is a crisis due to carbon dioxide emissions.

Dr Andy Derocher, the outgoing chairman of the PSBG and Professor at the University of Alberta, wrote to inform Taylor that he was not welcome at the 2009 meeting of the PBSG. Keep in mind as you read his comments (below) that Taylor had arranged funding to attend the meeting in Copenhagen, and has been at every meeting of this group since 1981<sup>1</sup>. With 30 years of experience in polar bear research, it goes without saying that he has something to contribute to any discussion about polar bear conservation.

This is the original email from Derocher to Taylor explaining why he was not invited:

Hi Mitch,

The world is a political place and for polar bears, more so now than ever before. I have no problem with dissenting views as long as they are supportable by logic, scientific reasoning, and the literature.

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As Mitchell Taylor points out *"It's a good way to maintain consensus"*.

I do believe, as do many PBSG members, that for the sake of polar bear conservation, views that run counter to human induced climate change are extremely unhelpful. In this vein, your positions and statements in the Manhattan Declaration, the Frontier Institute, and the Science and Public Policy Institute are inconsistent with positions taken by the PBSG.

I too was not surprised by the members not endorsing an invitation.

Nothing I heard had to do with your science on harvesting or your research on polar bears - it was the positions you've taken on global warming that brought opposition.

Time will tell who is correct but the scientific literature is not on the side of those arguing against human induced climate change.

I look forward to having someone else chair the PBSG.

Best regards,  
Andy (Derocher)

So in polar bear research, your opinion on climate change is more important than your knowledge about polar bears. (Time to add *Science* to the *Threatened Species List*.)

While Mitchell Taylor was ousted, three participants were added to the meeting from groups whose main activities are political lobbying and education rather than science. While the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and Polar Bears International (PBI) do fund some minor research, their main output is press releases, rather than scientific papers. Taylor has published some 59 peer reviewed papers. But none of the three new representatives appears to have published a single scientific paper related to polar bears. If they managed large research programs it would be understandable, but PBI's budget is apparently barely enough to cover one full time researcher<sup>2</sup> and yet they effectively had three representatives at the PBSG meeting (including Derocher who is a scientific advisor for the PBI).

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So there were three spaces for people from institutions whose funds depend on there being a “crisis”, but no space for one of the most published researchers in the field?

If Exxon funding is supposed to affect scientists’ announcements, how could we expect “Green” funding from groups who hold a very strong position on climate change not to influence people, or at least to attract job applicants who share their views? Imagine the scandal if Exxon had funded a representative without a single paper to his name and he replaced one of the most experienced in the field?

People assume scientific associations to make pronouncements that mean something, but scientific associations are not *scientific* so much as *political*. Committees change. Their decrees are unaudited, and the media do little investigation or critical analysis and mostly just repeat their press releases.

One of the few who did note the incident was Christopher Booker<sup>3</sup>. In response, blogger Tim Lambert in (known as “Deltoid”) weighed in to give Derocher a chance to answer the critics<sup>4</sup>.

So what does Derocher have to say for himself? He comes up with reasonable sounding excuses to justify his actions, but none of them change the original email. His post hoc efforts are just that: post hoc. Worse, they are wrong too. He clutches at straws declaring that Mitchell Taylor is retired—which is evidently news to Mitchell, who has two current contracts, and is a faculty member at Lakehead University with an active teaching program. Taylor has also been out in the field since the last PSBG meeting, and what a “field” it must be. Trekking through snow and looking for predators that weigh half a ton doesn’t sound like much of a hobby for senior citizens. Derocher comically repeats the “retirement theme” in his email reply to my question about evidence. *“What the media and Mitch Taylor have failed to note, is that Dr Taylor moved into early retirement last year.”*

Derocher is correct that Mitchell Taylor had retired from the Nunavut Government position, but Taylor is obviously still involved in research. Defending himself, Derocher points out that it was only a brief personal email, and that there were many factors he left out. But it obviously wasn’t an email *about personal matters*, and while there may have been other reasons not to invite Taylor, the point here is about the way the decision was reached and conveyed. There was no equivocation in the email. It is obvious that the message for Taylor was that *... if you had believed in man-made climate change we would have invited you*. Like a Masonic handshake, kowtowing to climate change has become the password for entry.

In the heated world of climate change ‘debate’ Lambert throws unsubstantiated smears. Without any basis he refers to Booker as having ‘concocted’ the story. (And if Lambert were important enough, presumably Booker would bother suing him for libel.) The email above was clearly what Booker described. Derocher didn’t deny that he sent it. His “suppression” of Taylor is in writing for all to see.

The PSBG scientists have strayed far from their passion for understanding the biology of bears. Like many scientific committees and associations they have a “position” on climate-

science, even though none of the members of the committee are involved in climate research, and have probably never reviewed the atmospheric physics, or even read what dissenting scientists say on the topic.

Mitchell Taylor agrees:

“I don't believe any right-thinking polar bear biologist has ever critically reviewed the climatology that their status concerns are based on. They would argue that the material is institutionally accepted, peer-reviewed, and too technical for a mere biologist to penetrate. I think that they just find the information so useful on so many levels that they don't want to know anything that could disrupt what they have written, the profile they are enjoying, and the funding that all of this has generated.”

Mitchell Taylor

Dr Derocher suggested that dissenting views were fine *as long as they were backed up with evidence* (implying that Taylor's views were not). Yet when I pointed out to Derocher that this applies equally towards "consensus" views, and I asked him if he could back up the PBSG's position on climate change with empirical evidence, he replied exactly as Taylor had predicted he would, claiming he was not a climate scientist and assuming the IPCC are right:

“I am not a climate scientist. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the primary literature are the basis from which I take my information on the issue.”

Dr Andrew Derocher

Argument from authority is fine for scientists discussing topics that are outside their specialty at cocktails after work. But when argument from authority is used to stifle debate, censor opinions or ostracize colleagues, the foundations of science are rattled.

And when scientific associations have official positions on any topic, it seems a bare minimum to insist that they have considered the relevant empirical evidence. If they merely rubber stamp pronouncements of another association or bureaucratic committee, they act as mindless cheerleaders—not scientists.

Derocher let slip in his email reply: “*climate change discussions were not part of our Copenhagen Meeting*” that Taylor had been refused entry to, which makes it all the more absurd that Taylor was denied access to a meeting on polar bear biology because of his views on the climate.



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It also makes the *Resolutions* from the Copenhagen meeting a parody of science: the topic they “didn’t discuss” sits right there in their first set of recommendations.

The PSBG<sup>5</sup> recognize “the IPCC conclusions” about greenhouse gases, and recommends that “Urgent global actions be taken to significantly reduce atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations”.

So now we have a group of biologists, who effectively make recommendations about global energy sources without considering the evidence, the criticisms, or allowing anyone to speak in opposition.

This is the state of modern “science”, and it is not the pinnacle of critical thinking that we are led to believe.

Derocher also belatedly claimed that Taylor had agreed to “*The issues pertaining to global warming*” at their 2005 meeting, and thus had since contradicted these points publicly, making him difficult to work with. Derocher claimed the unanimous agreement was written into the minutes. But in the 198 page report issued from that meeting there is not one reference to carbon dioxide or to greenhouse gases. Like many others, Derocher mixes up greenhouse gas induced warming with other causes of warming. While there has been some recent warming in the Arctic, it doesn’t necessarily follow that carbon dioxide caused the warming.

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Science will surely lose its hard-won credibility with the public as many “Scientific Associations” get caught with their pants down: supporting an international unelected, unaudited committee, without any evidence.

If it were just this one group doing mindless cheerleading it wouldn’t matter much, but the IPCC assertions are repeated in scientific organizations around the world. For example: The American Society for Microbiology<sup>6</sup>, The Australian Coral Reef Society<sup>7</sup>, The Institute of Biology<sup>8</sup>, The American Geophysical Union<sup>9</sup>, The American Public Health Association<sup>10</sup>, The American Association of Wildlife Veterinarians<sup>11</sup>, The European Federation of Geologists<sup>12</sup> and the list goes on.<sup>13</sup> Thus

the public repeatedly hears of press releases issued by groups with scientific cachet, that support policies and opinions that the issuers have never assessed, which are published by journalists who parrot the PR.

There is no reason that biologists, psychologists, or any scientific group can't hold an informed opinion on greenhouse warming, *but who needs their uninformed views?* If they have not considered the evidence, they do science a disservice making public pronouncements. Science will surely lose its hard-won credibility with the public as many "Scientific Associations" get caught with their pants down: supporting an international unelected, unaudited committee, without any evidence.

The PSBG deserve a shellacking for their unscientific attitude and censorship of debate, but they are just one of many who ought to be exposed.

A growing wave of scientists are objecting to this kind of unprofessional rubber stamping and unscientific censorship. Recently scientists from the American Chemical Society (ACS) startled their Editor In Chief with their outcry calling for his removal for his use of the word "denier" in their journal editorial and his claims that on AGW\*, the "science is settled".<sup>14</sup> Recently 54 prominent physicists of The American Physical Society petitioned for the society to revise its global warming "position".<sup>15</sup>

The incidents with the Polar Bear Specialist Group and the ACS are a call for scientists everywhere to write to our associations for the sake of our profession. We need to ask them to provide empirical evidence for their positions. If the IPCC can't do it with all its resources, how will The Australian Coral Reef Association, or the Polar Bear Specialists Group?

What is left of science if there is no debate about the evidence?



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