

UWA backs away from climate change debate

By TRAVIS KING

AGRICULTURAL consultants have expressed disappointment at the University of Western Australia's (UWA) attitude towards a planned debate on global warming.

After hearing predictions of the impact that global warming could have on WA farming, Bill Crabtree and David Falconer approached UWA to hold a debate representing both sides of the global warming argument.

They said after getting the initial go-ahead from UWA's vice-chancellor Alan Robson they were told that no speakers could be found for the pro-global warming side and that the speakers the pair had organised to speak against global warming were not credible enough to speak at a debate on UWA grounds.

Mr Crabtree said the speakers that had been approached to question the degree of climate change were credible and included mathematician and engineer David Evans, who between 1999 to 2005 worked full-time for the Australian Greenhouse Office (now the Department of Climate Change) modelling Australia's carbon in plants, debris, mulch, soils, and forestry and agricultural products.

William Kinnimoth, among other things, worked with the

Australian Bureau of Meteorology for 38 years in weather forecasting, research and applied studies.

For 12 years until 1998 he was head of its National Climate Centre.

Mr Crabtree said he had heard predictions of a four degree celsius temperature increase and a reduction of 70mm rainfall for the WA agricultural region.

"If this prediction is true then it would have massive implications for farming in WA," Mr Crabtree said.

"These assertions are concerning but they need to be tested.

"This debate was to be part of that due diligence.

"I have clients that are concerned about climate change or global warming but are also confused about the science behind it and how these conclusions are reached.

"I wanted to organise a debate where we could discuss these assertions with scientists who are pro-global warming and those who are skeptical of it."

Mr Crabtree, a UWA graduate, said after initially agreeing to the debate, Prof Robson then suggested it be turned into a 90-minute discussion with two speakers on each side.

"It then became a no show," he said.

Mr Crabtree said he was

willing to be convinced that the degree of global warming could have a major impact on agriculture in WA.

"At the start of this process I was open minded to the idea of Anthropogenic Global Warming (AGW), but this process has turned me into a genuine skeptic, it will take a lot of careful and respectful science to win me over now," he said.

"When I was a UWA student I was taught by Prof Robson to test everything with all the evidence.

"One of the ways scientists like to test the validity of their arguments is in public debates.

"As an experienced debater I cannot see why a defender of truth would not engage - unless they are hiding something?"

"There seems to be a lot of mud-slinging by the pro-Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change (IPCC) scientists calling those with a different view deniers (of science) and skeptics.

"The leaked Climategate emails showed how editors of journals are pressured into bias.

"(Well known climate change sceptic) Lord Munkton was accused of having offensive science, yet in his YouTube videos he quotes paper after paper, describing their scientific contents accurately and I checked the accuracy of these papers online myself.

"The scientists I tried to persuade to discuss warming and climate sensitivity for this event said the debate should be in the scientific literature of which they now have control of.

"The issue at heart here is - how much is the CO₂ causing warming? And how much warming is caused by other natural factors? In other words climate sensitivity."

David Falconer's disappointment that the debate could not be organised was also evident.

"The cancellation is extremely disappointing as I thought a discussion would make a positive contribution to an issue surrounded in confusion," Mr Falconer said.

"Good science should involve robust discussion not secrecy or an unwillingness to participate. Agriculture deserves better."

Prof Robson said he was more than open to the idea of holding a debate or a discussion on global warming.

"One of the difficulties with this area is it is very difficult to get clear data across but I think there is a lot of clear data available out there so I was keen to run a debate or to give a platform to people who were more on the skeptical side about the degree to which climate change is taking place," Prof Robson said.

"It is one thing to know that

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CO₂ levels are rising and one thing to know that sea levels are rising and that temperature levels are rising but what is going to be the impact of this on climate.

“But I just couldn’t get (a debate) to work. I am open to the idea but getting speakers lined up that were credible on both sides was difficult.

“It is very hard to line up speakers on either side that were credible and that is why I decided to pull the pin on it because I just couldn’t see that we were going to get very high quality speakers.

“Some of those people that Bill Crabtree suggested, if I had invited them into the university there would be an enormous uproar, because they had shared platforms with people such as Lord Munckton.

“There was also a difficulty in getting people on the side of the IPCC.

“Those people don’t want to

get involved in a debate.”

Prof Robson said a scientist gained credibility when they were published in peer review journals on their field of expertise.

Prof Robson admitted there was still a lot of confusion in regard to what the true impact of climate change could be.

“I remember people talking about climate change in the late 1980s,” he said.

“It has been an ongoing thing and it is contested and I don’t mind things being contested but in a university you have to argue science against science and you have to have credibility in terms of participating in the scientific study of it.”

When questioned on the difficulty that some scientists had in getting “unpopular” views published, Prof Robson said there generally were outlets to getting published if you had a different view.



Bill Crabtree said predictions of a four degree celsius temperature increase and a reduction of 70mm rainfall for the WA agricultural region needed to be tested.

And what of the massive amount of funding that goes towards climate change research, does that provide a grey area in scientists going against the theory?

“We all rely on funding at some point or the other to do research but at the end of the day you have your credibility as

a scientist and we have a peer review system,” he said.

“Peer review mightn’t be perfect but it is like democracy, it’s miles better than the next best thing.

“People have to subject their work to peer review – an argument has got to be based around data.”

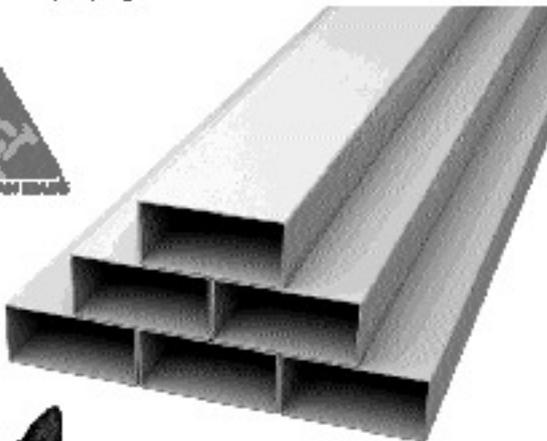
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