

The Causes of Climate Change

Open Letter to Channel 4 Head of production of "The Global Warming Swindle."

By [Prof Carl Wunsch](#)

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Mr. Steven Green
Head of Production Wag TV
2D Leroy House
436 Essex Road London N1 3QP

10 March 2007

Dear Mr. Green:

I am writing to record what I told you on the telephone yesterday about your Channel 4 film "The Global Warming Swindle." Fundamentally, I am the one who was swindled—please read the email below that was sent to me (and re-sent by you). Based upon this email and subsequent telephone conversations, and discussions with the Director, Martin Durkin, I thought I was being asked to appear in a film that would discuss in a balanced way the complicated elements of understanding of climate change—in the best traditions of British television. Is there any indication in the email evident to an outsider that the product would be so tendentious, so unbalanced?

I was approached, as explained to me on the telephone, because I was known to have been unhappy with some of the more excitable climate-change stories in the British media, most conspicuously the notion that the Gulf Stream could disappear, among others. When a journalist approaches me suggesting a "critical approach" to a technical subject, as the email states, my inference is that we are to discuss which elements are contentious, why they are contentious, and what the arguments are on all sides. To a scientist, "critical" does not mean a hatchet job—it means a thorough-going examination of the science. The scientific subjects described in the email, and in the previous and subsequent telephone conversations, are complicated, worthy of exploration, debate, and an educational effort with the public. Hence my willingness to participate. Had the words "polemic", or "swindle" appeared in these preliminary discussions, I would have instantly declined to be involved.

I spent hours in the interview describing many of the problems of understanding the ocean in climate change, and the ways in which some of the more dramatic elements get exaggerated in the media relative to more realistic, potentially truly catastrophic issues, such as the implications of the oncoming sea level rise. As I made clear, both in the preliminary discussions, and in the interview itself, I believe that global warming is a very serious threat that needs equally serious discussion and no one seeing this film could possibly deduce that.

What we now have is an out-and-out propaganda piece, in which there is not even a gesture toward balance or explanation of why many of the extended inferences drawn in the film are not widely accepted by the scientific community. There are so many examples, it's hard to know where to begin, so I will cite only one: a speaker asserts, as is true, that carbon dioxide is only a small fraction of the atmospheric mass. The viewer is left to infer that means it couldn't really matter. But even a beginning meteorology student could tell you that the relative masses of gases are irrelevant to their effects on radiative balance. A director not intending to produce pure propaganda would have tried to eliminate that piece of disinformation.

An example where my own discussion was grossly distorted by context: I am shown explaining that a warming ocean could expel more carbon dioxide than it absorbs — thus exacerbating the greenhouse gas buildup in the atmosphere and hence worrisome. It was used in the film, through its context, to imply that CO2 is all natural, coming from the ocean, and that therefore the human element is irrelevant. This use of my remarks, which are literally what I said, comes close to fraud.

I have some experience in dealing with TV and print reporters and do understand something of the ways in which one can be misquoted, quoted out of context, or otherwise misinterpreted. Some of that is inevitable in the press of time or space or in discussions of complicated issues. Never before, however, have I had an experience like this one. My appearance in the “Global Warming Swindle” is deeply embarrassing, and my professional reputation has been damaged. I was duped—an uncomfortable position in which to be.

At a minimum, I ask that the film should never be seen again publicly with my participation included. Channel 4 surely owes an apology to its viewers, and perhaps WAGTV owes something to Channel 4. I will be taking advice as to whether I should proceed to make some more formal protest.

Sincerely,

Carl Wunsch

Cecil and Ida Green Professor of Physical Oceanography

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