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The global warming paradox

Ben McNeil
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As a climate change scientist, I must thank Martin Durkin for making *The Great Global Warming Swindle*. Thanks, also, to the ABC for screening it last night. Both actions unwittingly make it far more likely that my colleagues and I will be better funded.

Let me explain, because I'm pretty sure the film was intended to have the opposite effect. It's all about one of the film's central assertions, that scientists have conspired en masse to say global warming is occurring and the principal cause is human activity - to selfishly garner more research funding.

In all the great scientific challenges of our time, funding is allocated towards diagnosis or cure. The two are strongly independent of one another. Propagating scientific uncertainty leads to more funding towards diagnosing a problem rather than developing cures - such as clean energy technologies or a carbon emissions trading schemes. This is not a hypothetical argument. All over the world, climate science funding is correlated to how sceptical governments are.

When the notable climate change sceptic George Bush took office in the US, he quickly formed the Climate Change Research Initiative. This new initiative specifically aimed to "reduce the uncertainties of climate change science". The Bush Administration has spent nearly \$US1billion on this initiative, which instead could have gone towards funding greenhouse solutions.

In Europe, where governments have more readily accepted the scientific diagnosis, developing clean energy is the priority.

The lesson climate scientists could take from this if they wanted to act in their interests is that exaggerating uncertainties will be far more fruitful for their careers - and yet they are urging that funding be found for climate solutions.

Remember the debate about the ozone hole? Scientists in the 1980s crystallised world attention by measuring a widening hole in the ozone layer. Through more diagnostic research it was found that chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) used in refrigerators were the cause.

At the peak of that debate, sceptics rallied around the conspiracy flag, suggesting ozone scientists were out to boost their research coffers. Yet those same scientists were urging support for the Montreal Protocol banning the use of CFCs as refrigerants. As a result, CFCs were phased out. The refrigerant industry evolved with little economic effect by using an alternative compound. Those hurt the most were the ozone scientists - no more government funding for them because the problem was solved.

For me, the real swindle of the documentary screened last night was Durkin's resort to playing the man, not the ball, by demonising scientists themselves.

Just as cancer researchers want government programs to lower the smoking rate, climate scientists want strong solutions on greenhouse emissions. This may not be acting in our immediate professional self-interest, but it does make it more likely that our livelihood - and that of documentary makers - will have a future.

Dr Ben McNeil is a senior fellow at the Climate Change Research Centre at the University of NSW.

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