

Submission to the Senate Inquiry on Academic Freedom

In Britain the Education Act (No 2) 1986, and the Education Act 1996, prohibit the political indoctrination of children at school.

For the Ministers who developed these Acts, their overriding objective was that the educational system itself should not attempt to transmit a particular political viewpoint, in any direction, on any subject, to pupils. The proposals enacted in 1986 were designed to ensure that a line was drawn between political discussion, which was lawful as long as it was balanced, and political indoctrination, which involved the use of prejudice, compulsion or deception to promote or even to glorify a particular political viewpoint, or to heap peer-pressure-inflaming scorn on a less fashionable viewpoint, or both. . Ministers regarded it as crucial that pupils at school, whose youth, idealism and inexperience render them particularly vulnerable to indoctrination, should not be subjected to political propaganda calculated to influence them towards or against a particular political viewpoint.

Those responsible for education of schoolchildren must resist pressures from vested-interest groups which might not be inclined to provide a full and objective picture to their audience. In particular, it was essential that governmental authorities should resist all partisanship or one-sidedness in the framing and promulgation of school curricula.

As it was necessary in Britain to enact such legislation, so it has become necessary in Australia.

In this submission, I use the example of the current indoctrination that is underway in many schools in all States on the issue of Anthropogenic Global Warming, (AGW) at times referred to as ‘Climate Change’.

I refer particularly to the pressure placed on school students of all ages to accept the theory that any current change in global climate (warming) is anthropogenic.

In illustration, I will present two particular examples:

1. Focus unit 5 in the **Queensland Geography syllabus for yr 11 and 12 students.**
2. The program ‘**Thinking About Climate Change: A Guide for Teachers and Students**’

1. Focus unit 5 in the Queensland Geography syllabus for yr 11 and 12 students.

The issue of whether or not climatic changes are natural or anthropogenic is very contentious at present. Essentially it is an issue of science, that, because of the way it is presented and its possible implications, has become highly emotionally and politically charged, with wide ranging opinions on both sides of the debate. Some say there is a scientific consensus and the science is settled, but large and growing numbers of scientists are expressing disagreement with the basic hypothesis itself and certainly, therefore, with the implications.

There are even disagreements about the basic indicators of such change: some say that global temperatures continue to rise, but others say the earth has been cooling for up to the last 10 years. Thus it is just a hypothesis that is really still under scientific investigation. The physical processes by which increasing CO₂ resulting from human activity is directly causing global warming, are not agreed on or fully explained and have certainly not achieved the status of a physical law. In this situation, the inclusion of this topic may be suitable for a senior physics class to research and discuss, but it not suitable for a class in geography.

As the Unit is written, it requires students to accept the idea that ‘climate change’ is caused by human activity, to look at the indicators of change, and to consider solutions in terms of human adaptation. The ‘climate change’ referred to is global warming and the indicators referred to are those whose change was predicted by the IPCC. There is little scope in the curriculum to question this thesis, and, in fact if a student did not agree with the idea

of future excessive warming and the resulting predicted problems for mankind, there would be little in this unit that they could address in a geographical sense. It is therefore difficult to see how a dissenting student could pass. Thus this Focus unit is inaccurate, poorly researched, and does not allow students the freedom of academic dissent.

Attached: The appropriate section of the syllabus document

A point by point account of the inaccuracies in Focus Unit 5 of the syllabus

2. Thinking About Climate Change: A Guide for Teachers and Students'

(Topic 2 is out of range of the Inquiry as it is to be taught in grades 8 to 10, but illustrates that perhaps the Inquiry should be extended to include all children at school.)

The above arguments related to the questioning of a consensus on the issue of whether or not global warming is anthropogenic apply here also. In view of the variations in interpretation of the temperature data, there does not appear to be agreement that the earth is currently warming at all, and is thought by many to have been cooling for most of this century.

'Thinking About Climate Change: A Guide for Teachers and Students' assumes climate change (warming) is happening and is anthropogenic. This is to be taught as fact to students in grades 8 to 10, not only to those perhaps taking a SOSE elective, but to students in Maths, IT and Science classes. Therefore, what of the students who do not agree with the belief? Will it effect their results in many of their classes, or will they have to ideologically conform in order to succeed. At that age, many will not have thought through the issue of climate and its political implications and may well just reflect the attitudes of their families. To subject such young children to issues as emotionally and politically charged as global warming in an atmosphere where it would be very difficult and perhaps not socially acceptable for them to express disagreement could be argued as attempting to exercise undue influence.

As discussed above, many scientists do not agree with the Dr. Flannery on many of his beliefs. He also uses superficial, inaccurate terms such as 'Carbon Pollution' without any explanation as to why he has subtracted the O₂ from the molecule. This is a rather lay term, and hardly fitting to be used by a scientist who claims to be an expert in the area.

Basically students should not be taught beliefs or theories as facts. Particularly, they should not be taught as fact, contentious material based on advanced science and mathematical models that they are quite unable to understand or refute. AGW cannot be taught as something the students can research or debate, because essentially it is a problem of science that can only be debated by qualified scientists capable of understanding the physics. Further, it is unlikely in this program, that students would even be told that it is still an issue of debate and of the large and growing numbers of scientists worldwide who disagree.

If such theory is to be presented, the only academically honest way to do it would be to present both sides of the debate, which, of course would not be understood by the children. They should at least be informed of the numbers of scientists who disagree. If it is taught with the emotional overtones with which it is presented by the media and some politicians, to disagree would not seem to be socially acceptable to many students. These lessons could be seen to be akin to those in religious education in past times when it was heresy to question the teachings. Much of the dire projections thought to result from AGW are presented in an alarmist manner which can be quite frightening to children.

We are reminded here of the Judge's findings in the High Court in London where he found 9 errors(and he stopped counting at that point) in the Al Gore movie 'An Inconvenient Truth' and made it compulsory for any showing of the movie in schools in Britain to be preceded by statements informing students of all the mistakes, as well as alerting them to be prepared for the alarmist nature of the production.

General Comments:

In example 1, it may be that Geography teachers are themselves poorly informed about the scientific basis of AGW, and have not fully researched it. Therefore they should not be teaching it. Notably there is a conference of the Australian Geography Teachers' Association on the Sunshine Coast in late September/early October where 3 papers are to be presented on the issue of AGW (climate change) all from the point of view of acceptance of the theory, the associated problems of adaptation to a warming world, and reducing 'carbon' emissions.

Final Statement:

I submit that the Queensland Senior Geography Syllabus, Focus Unit 5, is ideologically based, poorly researched and inaccurate. There is no scope for dissenting students to successfully complete this section (1 semester) of the Senior Geography course as described in the Syllabus Document (2007).

Yours Sincerely

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