



Written by [William F. Jasper](#) on May 21, 2013

Global Warming “Consensus”: Cooking the Books

“Ninety-seven percent of scientists agree: #climate change is real, man-made and dangerous,” President Barack Obama tweeted last Thursday, May 16.

The president was cheering on the media-drawn bandwagon for the latest round of global warming “consensus” puffery. John Cook, an Australian blogger/global warming activist, has President Obama and all the usual climate alarmists in academia, the media, and the Big Green NGOs twitterpated over his latest “research,” which purports to prove that the scientific world is virtually unanimous in declaring that anthropogenic global warming (AGW) — that is, human-caused global warming — is a dire and imminent existential threat.



Certainly “97% of scientists” is an impressive-sounding claim. But is it accurate? As we shall see, this supposed near unanimity of science evaporates like H₂O over a Bunsen burner as soon as it is subjected to scrutiny.

“Quantifying the consensus on anthropogenic global warming in the scientific literature” by John Cook and his team at the Global Change Institute, was published in *Environmental Research Letters*. Many of the headlines pointing to this study in newspapers, television news broadcasts, and Internet websites led with the same 97 percent claim, same as President Obama. Some of them were a bit more careful than others to qualify that figure based on what the study said, but it would still take a careful reader to recognize that they weren’t saying the same thing as the occupant of the White House.

The story by Rik Myslewski of the British newspaper *The Register* is a typical example. *The Register’s* main headline read: [“Climate scientists agree: Humans cause global warming.”](#) But sub-headline immediately beneath says: “Of those who have an opinion, over 97% say we’re to blame.”

The crucial point here is the qualifying clause, “of those who have an opinion.” In other words, even the highly questionable Cook study doesn’t actually claim, as President Obama does, that “Ninety-seven percent of scientists agree.” In fact, when examined closely, one finds that *the study says only one-third of the authors of the published research papers they examined expressed an opinion* that the Cook team interpreted as either an implicit or explicit endorsement of AGW. So now its 97 percent of one-third of selected scientists in a sampling of research papers. That’s a far cry from the 97 percent of all scientists claimed by President Obama and many of the media stories. And, as we will show below, even this admitted dramatically lower consensus claimed by the study is fraught with problems and falls apart further under examination.

The Consensus Con Game

The Cook study has already been taken apart and refuted in a number of blogs and articles. One of the



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critical scientists to take an early look at Cook's suspicious claims was Dutch chemist and science journalist Marcel Crok, who points out many of the problems — [here](#) — concerning the Cook study's misleading selection, categorizations, and descriptions of alleged endorsers of AGW.

A major reason for the supposed importance of the Cook study is that it claims to be based on surveying abstracts of "over 12,000 peer-reviewed climate science papers," published in the period 1991-2011, which would be an impressive sampling. But it turns out not to be so striking after all. Firstly, even most of the climate catastrophe skeptics readily concede that human production of CO₂, along with other human activities, may have *some impact* on global temperatures. The question is how significant is the human contribution.

Only 65 (!) Abstracts in Cook Study of 12,000 Strongly Endorse AGW!

On that question there is a wide divergence of opinion in the realist/skeptic community — just as there is also a similarly wide divergence among the AGW believer scientists. Blogger Brandon Shollenberger appears to have been the first to have uncovered the Big Secret of the Cook charade: When stripped down to the bare truth, the actual number of studies in the Cook sampling that can be said to endorse the position that human activity is responsible for most of the experienced global warming is — get ready for this (drum roll ...) — sixty-five. Yes, 65, or around half a percent, not 97 percent! And this miniscule number of strong endorsers is *actually less* than the number of skeptical scientific papers included in the Cook study.

One of the issues that has dogged many of the leading purveyors of AGW alarmism in recent years is the accusation that they have refused to provide the public, other scientists, or even the government oversight agencies responsible for their funding, with the alleged research on which they base their extreme predictions. With far-reaching public policy at stake, including hundreds of billions (even trillions) of dollars, the circle of critics has become larger, more vocal, and insistent that the taxpayer-funded alarmist researchers supply this data. The lame excuses given by the likes of Michael Mann, Phil Jones, James Hansen, and the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) for failure to make their research available has embarrassed and outraged even many of the alarmists' supporters.

To his credit, Cook posted the results of his study, including his source material and an interactive feature allowing researchers to check his work. Perhaps he thought no one would actually make use of the opportunity, or if they did so they wouldn't figure out the scam. When it comes to the vast majority of "science writers" in Big Media, Cook's gamble paid off like a slot machine rigged for a bonanza payout. But independent scientists and analysts quickly saw through the cooked books. Shollenberger notes that Cook's Skeptical Science website "recently invited people to rate the 12,000+ abstracts via Skeptical Science's interactive rating system so people could 'measure the climate consensus' themselves. An additional feature of the system allows users to view the abstracts, as well as the ratings given by the people behind the paper."

Shollenberger continues:

The guidelines for rating these abstracts show only the highest rating value blames the majority of global warming on humans. No other rating says how much humans contribute to global warming. The only time an abstract is rated as saying how much humans contribute to global warming is if it mentions:

that human activity is a dominant influence or has caused most of recent climate change (>50%).



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Shollenberger goes on:

If we use the system's search feature for abstracts that meet this requirement, we get 65 results. That is 65, out of the 12,000+ examined abstracts. Not only is that value incredibly small, it is smaller than another value listed in the paper:

Reject AGW 0.7% (78)

Remembering AGW stands for anthropogenic global warming, or global warming caused by humans, take a minute to let that sink in. This study done by John Cook and others, praised by the President of the United States, found more scientific publications whose abstracts reject global warming than say humans are primarily to blame for it.

The "consensus" they're promoting says it is more likely humans have a negligible impact on the planet's warming than a large one.

Shollenberger's discovery, as important as it is, is far from being the only major problem with the celebrated Cook study. Australian researcher/blogger Jo Nova, as usual, provides a very incisive column, ["The twelve clues that good science journalists ought to notice,"](#) that fairly eviscerates Cook — and the media mavens who unquestioningly accepted his deceptive offering.

One of the important points made by Nova is that the research methodology used by the Cook team to select abstracts for review was flawed from the start. Cook, et al, used the key words "global climate change" or "global warming" in searching the data base to assemble their sampling of research papers. But Nova pointed out:

Keywords searches may miss the most important skeptical papers.

Keyword searches are more likely to turn up "consensus" papers. Many skeptical papers don't use the terms "global warming" or "global climate change": eg Svensmark (1998), Douglass (2007), Christy (2010), Loehle (2009), and Spencer (2011). Were they included? Perhaps they were, but they don't appear to match the search terms in the methods. These are just a few seminal skeptical papers that might have been missed.

As it turns out, Nova was spot on. In a [subsequent post](#), she reported that other researchers had confirmed that all of the important skeptical studies she had cited were indeed "missed" by Cook and his vaunted research team. Hardly a sound endorsement of Cook's dependability. "I randomly checked my top list of major skeptical articles and had no difficulty coming up with those 6 papers," says Nova. "I could have come up with many more if I bothered to keep opening papers and searching for keywords. He has missed many skeptical articles. And that would matter if the study was worth doing in the first place."

Special mention should be made of the proper trashing of the Cook AGW propaganda by *Spiegel Online*, the German flagship news magazine, one of the few exceptions in the Big Media to subject Cook's claims to critical examination, rather than merely regurgitating and amplifying his talking points.

Spiegel reporter [Axel Bojanowski](#) hit on a number of key points, including another study by the University of Mainz in Germany that surveyed climate scientists and came up with decidedly different results than Cook. According to the Mainz survey, reports Bojanowski, "Only 59% of the scientists said the 'climate development of the last 50 years was mostly influenced by man's activity. One quarter of those surveyed said that human and natural factors played an equal role.'"

Moreover, as Bojanowski notes, scientific skepticism is even far more widespread when it comes to the



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reliability of the computer models that are being used to predict climate change. “Only 10% said climate models are ‘sufficiently accurate’ and only 15% said that ‘climatic processes are understood enough’ to allow climate to be calculated,” Bojanowski reported.

The Media Should Have Been Skeptical

The so-called mainstream media *should have been skeptical* of the Cook study from the start. John Cook is well known for cooking the books when it comes to climate issues. Cook runs the blog site SkepticalScience, a deceptive misnomer, since he fanatically endorses and practices AGW alarmism and has failed to express the slightest skepticism regarding even the most outlandish catastrophic climate predictions. While not a climate scientist himself, Cook very unscientifically and unprofessionally disparages distinguished climate scientists who are skeptical of claims of catastrophic climate change. He calls the skeptics “deniers” and “denialists.” In 2011, Cook co-authored *Climate Change Denial: Heads in the Sand* with Haydn Washington. The “denier” label is a particularly vicious form of character assassination, attempting to link scientific AGW skepticism with Nazi Holocaust denial. The Cook book also claims that the scientists who disagree with AGW alarmism are part of the corrupt “denial industry funded by the fossil fuel companies that literally denies the science, and seeks to confuse the public.”

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