

Senator 'abused' review process

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SCIENCE Minister Kim Carr has defended himself against an accusation that he abused the system of peer review.

Clive Spash, an environmental economist who left the CSIRO after a dispute over a paper on the politically charged subject of carbon trading, said Senator Carr had used a reviewer's report in parliament to "pour derision" on his work.

"For a senator to make excerpts of a confidential academic journal referee's report public is a clear abuse and violation of the scientific peer review process," he said.

Yesterday, Senator Carr dismissed Dr Spash's objections, saying: "I make no apology for doing my duty as Minister and reassuring myself of the integrity of CSIRO processes."

In November, Dr Spash complained the CSIRO was trying to suppress his paper, *The Brave New World of Carbon Trading*. The agency denies this.

The paper was critical of emission trading systems trading at a time when the government was proposing just such a system.

It had been accepted for publication by the journal *New Political Economy* after peer review.

In Senate estimates last month, after a Liberal Senator had raised the case, Senator Carr quoted from the report of a reviewer who agreed with Dr Spash's critique of carbon trading but faulted his presentation of the argument.

Excerpts cited by Senator Carr included: "many of the objections raised [against carbon trading] apply to other forms of environmental regulation too"; "the structure is a major problem"; "too much of the paper reads like weak polemical journalism"; and "journal articles should be aimed at the neutral or even hostile reader, rather than hectoring them, or preaching to the converted".

Senator Carr said: "This is a clear case of CSIRO defending the brand name of this organisation and has absolutely nothing to do with the personal political opinions of the author of this paper".

But Dr Spash said the reviewer's report related to his draft paper, which he had reworked to take account of the criticisms.

"It was the rewritten paper of June 2009 that was accepted for publication and subsequently banned by CSIRO managers," he said. "Rewriting work in light of the referee's comments is exactly why we have a peer review process."

Also present during estimates was the chief executive of the CSIRO, Megan Clark, who said: "We have published many papers on the ETS and other mechanisms. This was always an issue of quality.

"We worked with Dr Spash, we looked at addressing the issues with him and we encouraged him to publish the paper."

But Dr Spash said: "The accusation of poor quality did not appear until after I refused to accept the CSIRO management version of my paper in late November (some five months after the initial ban)."