

*More than the number of senators required by the standing orders having risen in their places—*

**The PRESIDENT**—I understand that informal arrangements have been made to allocate specific times to each of the speakers in today's debate. With the concurrence of the Senate, I shall ask the clerks to set the clock accordingly.

**Senator ABETZ** (Tasmania) (4.59 pm)—Make no mistake: the Rudd government's censorship of the CSIRO is a matter of public importance. The CSIRO is a very proud institution in this country. It has a great history and it is relied upon by the Australian people to give scientific advice to our community without fear or favour. We on this side of the chamber are particularly proud of the CSIRO, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, because it was in fact the Stanley Bruce government that started off the CSIRO all those years ago.

The reason the coalition has moved this motion is that there is no doubt that the Rudd government is now censoring the CSIRO. On coming to opposition in December 2007 we became aware of the fact that any press release coming out of the CSIRO, ANSTO and other scientific organisations within the Commonwealth had to go over the desk of one Senator Kim Carr. When exposed in December 2007, he rushed out in January 2008—just before Senate estimates—with a press release 'Charter to protect scientific debate'. It is a classic example of spin over substance. George Orwell would have been proud of this classic case of doublespeak. Listen to this:

Senator Kim Carr, Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, today announced that the integrity and independence of public research institutions, and the right of their researchers to contribute to public debate on their areas of expertise, will be protected by new charters.

## MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

### **Censorship of the Commonwealth Scientific Industrial Research Organisation**

**The PRESIDENT**—I have received a letter from Senator Parry proposing that a definite matter of public importance be submitted to the Senate for discussion, namely:

The Rudd government's censorship of the Commonwealth Scientific Industrial Research Organisation.

I call upon those senators who approve of the proposed discussion to rise in their places.

‘Australia needs the best scientific advice it can get to tackle the many issues we face as a nation,’ Senator Carr said.

‘Public research institutions, and the dedicated professionals working within them, have a right as well as a responsibility to represent the findings of their work and to actively participate in public debate.

‘The value of scientific endeavour and importance of vigorous and transparent public debate—  
And here is the kicker—

unfettered by political interference but subject to peer review, is something I have advocated for my entire public life.

Ask Dr Spash of the CSIRO what has happened to his research paper which just happens to have been subjected to peer review and accepted by peer review. But guess what? It has been fettered by political interference. As a result I had to part with \$30 of my hard earned money in a cheque to the Collector of Public Monies seeking a copy of the unaltered report from Dr Spash under an FOI request.

Where are these high sounding principles that Senator Carr espoused on 16 January 2008? Out the window—that is where those principles are. Like with everything this Rudd government does you get the spin and you get the doublespeak, but when you look at the substance and the reality it is so, so different. What is so breathtakingly objectionable is that Senator Carr had the audacity to say in his press release:

The Howard Government was subject to repeated accusations of political interference with scientific research, especially on controversial issues,’ he said.

It is often in matters of contention and sharp debate that the knowledge and expertise of the scientific community is most valuable. This is why it is so important to protect the right of scientists to speak out about their research and discoveries.’

Going back to that topic of—what was it?—matters of contention, guess what? We have a Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme being considered by the parliament as we speak—somewhat contentious—and guess what Dr Spash was writing about? The Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. So by the very test that Senator Carr puts down, he nevertheless puts the censor’s pen through and says, ‘No, we don’t want to hear in any unfettered way what Dr Spash might have to offer not only the government but also the Australian people to help inform them in their debate.’ We do not get the full and detailed treasury modelling on matters to do with the government’s legislation in recent times; we do not get the whole story out of this government.

When you have an institution as proud as the CSIRO being muzzled in this way in the face of a minister who claims that he has been an advocate his whole public life for ‘vigorous and transparent public debate unfettered by political interference’, when you have a minister who says that but then does the exact opposite, you know why he is a cabinet minister in the Rudd government. He fits the mould. That is what the Labor cabinet ministers do: they say one thing, promise one thing and then do another.

What we have here is the political censorship of some research. I do not know what the research says. I might happen to agree or disagree with it. But that is not the point and that is not the test. This may well be our little mini version of the University of East Anglia Climate Research Unit scandal.

*Senator Hurley interjecting—*

**Senator ABETZ**—Senator Hurley, you can laugh but, given all this evidence has now come out where scientific research has been doctored and manipulated for a particular outcome and other people have been sat upon and told not to include certain things in their report because they do not suit a pre-

conceived conclusion, that is not science, that is not research endeavour and that is not how you develop an innovative country. Australia cannot be up there with the top countries of the world in research if you start muzzling scientists.

It might make good sense to have certain protocols in place in relation to public research. I have never condemned that, but what I do condemn is the gross hypocrisy here. The Howard government is condemned for what it did. We then saw a high and mighty charter of rights for these scientific people. Then, at the very first hurdle when the government thinks there might be a report that may be critical of one of its policy areas, in goes the fix, in goes the censor's pen, in go on Senator Carr and the Labor government. I am sure those opposite will tell us the minister had nothing to do with the censorship. It was that nasty CEO of CSIRO, undoubtedly, who made the decision. I do not think she is nasty. I think she does a very wonderful job. But they will try and blame somebody else. The problem is this government has created the culture in which the CSIRO believes it has to behave in this way. A charter, like the charter of rights currently being discussed, is worth nothing unless the culture is right, and the culture with this government is wrong. That is why the CSIRO is being censored and that is why we seek to condemn the government.