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BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation

CHAIR—I welcome the CSIRO. Dr Clark, do you have an opening statement you would like to make?

Dr Clark—I do have a short opening statement. The CSIRO ranks as one of the world's leading research and development organisations. I think that is something all Australians are proud of. I know I am particularly proud of it. We are in the top one per cent of R&D labs in the world in 14 out of 22 of our research fields and in three areas the CSIRO ranks in the top 10 institutions in the world. We produce around 5,000 scientific papers and book chapters each year. Our citation rates, which form one of our measures of quality, are the highest of any large research institution in Australia—80 years of research and efforts by our 6,500 staff go online every single time we publish a scientific paper. So we always need to ask ourselves: is the scientific evidence verified, is it communicated clearly and does the scientific evidence presented support the conclusions that have been drawn?

We have a clearly defined process of internal peer review of our science and an approval process for our publications. This occurs before papers are submitted for publication and is in addition to the editorial review that journals themselves undertake. Science will continue to be questioned. That is the inherent nature of science and it is a very good thing. Without continually challenging the scientific findings we simply cannot have confidence in what we find. In leading the officers that appear before you today, at a time when there are

significant discussions in this country and elsewhere on the integrity of science I wanted to make it very clear to the members of this committee that I have confidence in the robustness of the science that the CSIRO undertakes. My team and I uphold that value that underpins the CSIRO and has been part of our foundation. That value is the integrity of our excellent science.

CHAIR—Senator Eggleston has questions.

Senator EGGLESTON—It is not an unrelated question: this organisation is called the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation. Do you, therefore, say that you adhere to the scientific method and all that implies—

Dr Clark—We do.

Senator EGGLESTON—in terms of the free and unrestricted publication of the results of research, and the conclusions that can be drawn from those results?

Dr Clark—We have our processes for the publication, which are very robust, to preserve that scientific integrity. We have internal processes for approval and, of course, peer reviewed journals. The publication of our science is peer reviewed as well—robust peer review. So under those very strict guidelines for maintaining our integrity we absolutely encourage research and the publication of it. As I mentioned there are some 5,000 papers and book chapters every year, so it is a very rigorous process for us.

Mr Whelan—I add that the framework that the chief executive has just reported to you is, in fact, embodied in a public research agency charter that the organisation has with the minister. It clearly sets out the requirements of CSIRO to communicate the best research, any new knowledge, factually based discussions and the criticality of doing so on an evidence base.

Senator EGGLESTON—That is very interesting. Last time we met in estimates there was an issue about Dr Spash, a scientist who said that he was being suppressed in publishing his research which was critical of cap and trade emissions trading schemes. I have read a book called *The Climate Caper* by Dr Garth Paltridge,

who was head of the climatology department of CSIRO. It is a very small book of 115 pages and in it he talks about the intimidation of CSIRO scientists who did not toe the line on climate change views. That is very interesting in terms of what you have just said because it would seem to be totally at odds with what you have claimed to be your position on the scientific method and the publication of results, an opinion or a conclusion based on outcomes. I notice that in the *Australian*—which, of course, Senator Carr will regard as being a rather undesirable publication, but nevertheless is regarded with great respect within most circles in Australia—there was an article on 5 November in relation to the episode when Dr Spash had been disciplined. It said:

The move comes amid a crackdown by the CSIRO on public comments by scientists in their personal capacity. The organisation began rolling out a new public comment policy three weeks ago that limits what scientists can say publicly about issues within their area of expertise.

Can you tell us about the new rules which govern what scientists can say about their research?

Dr Clark—As Dr Whelan said, we have a charter as well as our internal processes. That charter in fact was developed with full engagement by our staff and our unions, and it is a very robust charter. It protects one of the most fundamental aspects for CSIRO, and that is, making sure that we can provide comment that is not caught up in the political system. We do not make comment either for or against the policies of governments or oppositions. That is very important for us because it maintains our integrity and our position as a trusted advisor.

The issue that you referred to with regard to Dr Spash, we always encouraged publication of the paper. We have published many papers on the ETS and other mechanisms. This was always an issue of quality; it was always an issue of maintaining the standards of the organisation. We always encouraged Dr Spash to publish the paper. I personally encouraged him to do so.

Senator EGGLESTON—Really? That all sounds very interesting considering that he resigned in the end because he felt he was not able to speak about the conclusions he drew from his research. It certainly does not square with the views of Dr Garth Paltridge in his book, *The Climate Caper*, in which he said there was systematic intimidation of scientists within CSIRO who did not agree with the views being put forward about the human causes of climate change. They are a little bit hard to square away, Dr Clark, those two views. You say you are committed to the scientific method and all that that implies, but it appears that your version of it is a little bit more Orwellian.

Dr Clark—I do not detract from that at all. I certainly reinforce that we need to maintain those standards. It is interesting; we have seen in the public debate recently what happens to public confidence when those standards are breached. And so it is something that we uphold and we ask all of our scientists to maintain this integrity. It is really unfortunate when we have a scientist who cannot meet those standards.

Senator EGGLESTON—I do agree with you that public confidence has been breached in recent times over these sorts of issues and refer specifically to the International Panel on Climate Change, so much of whose commentary appears to be fraudulent. That has certainly destroyed public confidence in what they have had to say. But we come back to the issue of Dr Spash and the remarks of the former director of your department of climatology, Dr Paltridge. We have all heard political doublespeak before, Dr Clark, and we would like to see the CSIRO actually adhere to the principles which it says it stands for.

Dr Clark—Absolutely, and I hold those principles very dear. It is certainly why we absolutely maintain our integrity. It is an area that neither I nor the team that I lead would compromise. I do not think that the community wants to see us compromise on the integrity of excellent science.

Senator EGGLESTON—How do you square that and explain then the resignation of Dr Spash?

Dr Clark—We worked with Dr Spash, we looked at addressing the issues with him and we encouraged him to publish the paper. It is very unfortunate that that was not the case and that we could not move forward.

Senator EGGLESTON—What Dr Spash did, of course, was critique the benefits of emissions trading schemes. Surely that was just a general issue which he was entitled to do based on his research. If you put a political interpretation on it then surely that is a breach of your commitment to the scientific method?

Senator Carr—What Dr Clark has indicated to you is this has nothing to do with the commentary of the CSIRO employee in terms of his personal political opinions, nothing whatsoever.

Senator EGGLESTON—It is not political; it is scientific.

Senator Carr—I will just indicate to you that there was a statement issued by CSIRO, which I tabled in the parliament, which outlined the procedure. I trust you have read that, Senator. It outlined the position that the CSIRO took on this matter. That was tabled in response to the return to order. This was Dr Megan Clark, 26 November 2009. The paper had been published as proceedings of the conference. All the carry-on about it not being published was obviously misplaced because the document already had been published.

I have here commentary from the external reviewer with regard to this paper. This is a reviewer that supports Dr Spash's position in that he does not agree with the ETS. This is not a person that is trying to defend the ETS. He points out that he agrees with most of the comments that Dr Spash is making about what he regards as the appalling failings of the ETS in practice. I quote:

Nonetheless the paper is weak as it stands. It could be so much better.

And I quote again:

... a fundamental weakness of its critique of ETS is that many of the objections raised apply to other forms of environmental regulation too. ... The structure is a major problem.

I quote again:

In my view sections 3 and 4 should be substantially re-written: the rewrite could be much shorter and have more focus and impact without leaving anything important out.

I quote again:

I see the link between the psychology and ethics ...

It is not about climate change science as such—it was for publication in a journal on political economy and so there were views put in regard to broader issues in relation to other branches of the humanities. I quote:

More generally the exposition of theory is often thin and not linked to empirical discussion.

I quote again:

Too much of the paper reads like weak polemical journalism. I write this even though I largely agree with every piece of these polemic assertions (or at least the ones I understand). In my view, journal articles should be aimed at the neutral or even hostile reader, rather than hectoring them, or preaching to the converted.

Senator, this is the paper you are defending against CSIRO's claim that their issue went to the question of quality assurance. In my judgment, 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.

Senator EGGLESTON—Thank you, Senator Carr. I take on board what you say. However, it does not change the similar views of Dr Paltridge, who in his book talks about the systemic intimidation of people within CSIRO who took alternative views. Another article by Nicola Berkovic in the *Australian* says that the initial decision to gag the paper involved the head of CSIRO's environment group, Andrew Johnson—who is here today—who is a member of the organisation's executive and reports to Dr Clark. The article goes on to say that following a meeting with Dr Spash and Mr Popovski, Dr Clark said the paper would be amended to comply with the CSIRO charter. That is a very interesting use of words isn't it: 'to comply with CSIRO's charter' on what should be said. When you put that together with the comments of Dr Paltridge it still seems to me that the CSIRO is not honouring the spirit and meaning of the scientific method, and that this is a matter of political manipulation of a report and an outcome by one of its scientists.

The fact that this occurred in a general sense is backed up by Dr Paltridge in his book. I think this is a matter which is very reprehensible and I really feel that the organisation should examine itself and where it stands on this issue.

Dr Clark—Dr Paltridge has not worked for us for some 15 years. I think Dr Johnson will have further detail of the timeframe, but I make no apologies at all for maintaining the standards of CSIRO and the standards of our publications. It is something that we simply will not compromise. It is important to every single scientist in the organisation, and I simply make no apologies for it.

Senator EGGLESTON—Thank you, Dr Clark. As I said previously, it sounds a little Orwellian to me.

CHAIR—Dr Clark, had you finished?

Dr Clark—Let me be clear: in terms of encouraging the publication of this, the work of that group in that area of ETS policies is something we comment on. We have had several papers. We always encourage our scientists to publish their work—I have personally done this—with a number of changes. In this case, the scientist was not prepared to make those changes to meet the quality. But there was always the encouragement to publish this work and to get it out there into the arena with the quality changes that we required. So they are entirely consistent.

Senator COLBECK—I understand it is a very fine balance, because I have seen circumstances where an organisation has looked to protect itself in the past, in conflict with an individual, and you see it in a whole range of institutions and organisations. We do not need to go down that track. I understand it is a very fine balance. From my perspective, I am just looking to see a consistent approach so that I can be confident in what is coming out on behalf of the organisation. My concern was that I just did not hear that this morning.

Senator Carr—I believe there is a consistent approach, Senator. I would invite you, given that the document was tabled in the Senate –

Senator COLBECK—I did take note of your comments, Senator Carr.

Senator Carr—Okay, but it was previously published—

Senator COLBECK—I am not disputing anything that has been put on the table.

Senator Carr—No, I understand the point. I would urge people who have taken this issue to heart to read the paper. When I read the paper—and I did not intervene in the process—I must say I was really surprised. As a former schoolteacher, I really wondered whether or not this was the sort of thing we would be employing people to write on behalf of the CSIRO. The quality just was not there. What I read out to you was an internal—

Senator COLBECK—Minister, I do not need to go into that because I am not disputing any of that.

Senator Carr—I just encourage you to read the paper and see whether or not you can substantively disagree with what I am saying to you.

Dr Clark—Our processes are very consistent across all of our scientists in terms of working with them to make sure they are published in the most appropriate journals, making sure that the science is robust, making sure that the conclusions can be drawn upon that science. It is a completely consistent process that we use with all of our scientists and all of our applications, and it goes absolutely hand in hand with encouraging them to publish.