

Senate Standing Committee on Economics
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education Portfolio
Additional Estimates Hearing 2011-12
15 February 2012

AGENCY/DEPARTMENT: COMMONWEALTH SCIENTIFIC AND INDUSTRIAL RESEARCH ORGANISATION

TOPIC: CSIRO Publishing

REFERENCE: Question on Notice (Hansard, 15 February 2012, pages 6-7)

QUESTION No.: AI-1

Senator MASON: Again, this is prior to my time, but I understand that these are important issues. I want to ask some questions about Dr Spash, who resigned apparently with some fanfare from the CSIRO a few years ago. I understand that Dr Spash wrote a paper entitled *The brave new world of carbon trading*, in which he argued against, apparently, a cap and trade and for a carbon tax, against the government's then policy. At the last estimates, I think Senator Colbeck was told that the paper was knocked back at least in part because the paper was also viewed as offering opinions on matters of government policy. I have been on the CSIRO's publishing website and found a book entitled, *The Case for a Carbon Tax: Getting Past Our Hang-ups to Effective Climate Policy*. This book, I understand, advocates the imposition of a carbon tax, which is very much in accordance with the government's policy. With that preamble, my question is this: Dr Spash resigned because he felt he was being censored by the CSIRO upon advocating a carbon tax, which was not then government policy, and now the CSIRO is selling a book which appears to be doing the same thing, and that is in accordance with government policy. Can you understand that many people have a perception that these two actions might be inconsistent?

Mr M Whelan: CSIRO Publishing is a part of the CSIRO and operates an independent editorial publishing service on behalf of the science community. One of the functions of the CSIRO under the act is to disseminate information about science and technology more generally and not just science and technology from the CSIRO. So CSIRO Publishing publishes books on behalf of a range of institutions, and I am reasonably certain that the authors of the book that you are referring to are not CSIRO officers.

Senator MASON: I think that that is correct. But there is some editorialising on the webpage. Let me quote from it.

Hsu—

who is the author—

deftly explores the social and political factors that prevent us from embracing this commonsense approach. And he shows why we must get past our hang-ups if we are to avert a global crisis.

That clearly trespasses on public policy. It does not seem to be in accord with what we discussed before, Dr Clark, about the CSIRO's code of conduct. Mr Whelan, at the last estimates, you were quoted as saying that the organisation needs to:

... ensure that we were not associated, and that officers were not in a position to be seen to be advocating for or against the pricing of carbon or a carbon tax.

That is correct, isn't it?

Mr M Whelan: That is correct.

Senator MASON: That strikes me as advocacy.

Mr M Whelan: I will have to take on notice whose comments they are. If they are the comments of the editor of the book or of the authors of the book, I would have to take that on notice to see whether they were CSIRO officers. If they were CSIRO officers, I think we would have to look at the basis of those statements.

Senator MASON: So you will have a look at it? Okay.

ANSWER

CSIRO Publishing sells books from Island Press and other publishers. All books are routinely assessed for relevance to the broad CSIRO Publishing science readership.

The book, *The Case for a Carbon Tax: Getting Past Our Hang-ups to Effective Climate Policy*, was published in the United States by Island Press. The author, Professor Shi-Ling Hsu, is from the University of British Columbia. The CSIRO Publishing webpage for the book records the affiliation of the author (University of British Columbia) and the publisher and country of origin of the book (Island Press, USA)

The excerpt quoted by Senator Mason is from the marketing material of Island Press. It was not written by a CSIRO officer.

A CSIRO officer, following normal practice, did review the marketing material prior to posting it on the CSIRO Publishing website. The officer inserted the phrase "...from a North American perspective." to make clear that the book was not an Australian viewpoint.