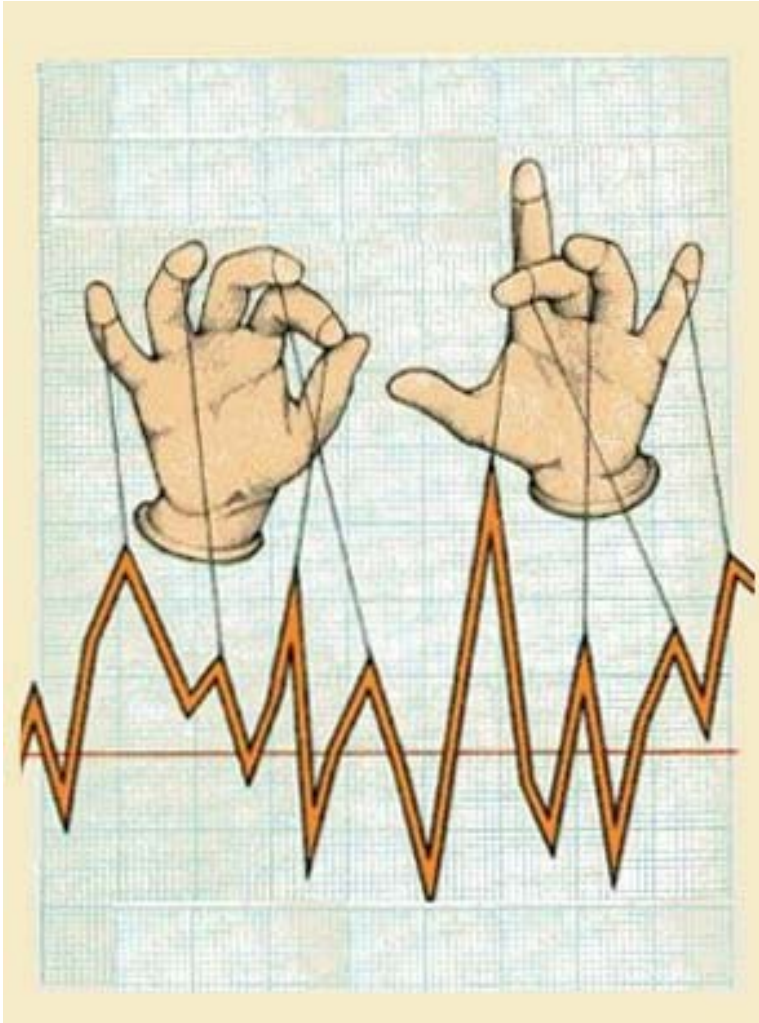


## The Statistics of a Consensus by William Shepherd <sup>1</sup>

Dr Benny Peiser is a social anthropologist at *Liverpool John Moores University*.<sup>2</sup> His research focuses on the effects of environmental change and catastrophic events on contemporary thought and societal evolution.

In my 17<sup>th</sup> May 2006 blog...posted to my climate blog as [Majority Against Orthodoxy](#)...I mentioned Dr. Peiser's analysis of scientific papers on *Climate Change* which Dr Dennis Bray of the *German-based GKSS National Research Centre* checked out and endorsed.

The *Peiser Analysis* concluded that dissenters were in a healthy majority. Here is my edited version of the letter Peiser sent to *Science Magazine* for publication.



“On December 3rd 2004, only days before the start of the 10<sup>th</sup> UN Conference on Climate Change, *Science Magazine* published the results of a study by Naomi Oreskes.

For the first time, empirical evidence was presented that appeared to show a unanimous scientific consensus on the anthropogenic causes of recent *Global Warming*.

Oreskes claims to have analysed 928 abstracts she found listed on the *ISI Database* using the keywords ‘climate change’.

However, a search on the *ISI Database* using the keywords ‘climate change’ for the years 1993-2003 reveals that almost 12 000 papers were published during the decade in question.

What happened to the countless research papers that show that global temperatures were similar or even higher during the *Holocene Climate Optimum* and the *Medieval Warm Period* when atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> levels were much lower than today; that *Solar Variability* is a key driver of recent climate change; and that *Climate Modelling* is highly uncertain?

These objections were put to Oreskes by science writer David Appell. On

15 December 2004 she admitted that there was indeed a serious mistake in her *Science* essay.

According to Oreskes her study was not based on the keywords ‘climate change’ but on ‘global climate change’. Her use of three keywords instead of two reduced the list of peer reviewed publications by one order of magnitude.

On the *UK ISI Databank* the keyword search ‘global climate change’ comes up with 1247 documents. Since the results looked questionable I replicated the *Oreskes Study* by analysing all abstracts listed on the *ISI Databank* for 1993 to 2003 using Oreskes’ keywords.

1117 of the 1247 documents listed included abstracts...130 listed only titles, author’ details and keywords. The 1117 abstracts analysed were divided into Oreskes’ six categories plus two which I added. Here are the eight categories I used in my analysis:

<sup>1</sup> First published as [weblog three hundred and sixteen](#) on Sunday 12th November 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Peiser is also director of the [Global Warming Policy Foundation](#), the founder and editor of the *Cambridge Conference Network*, and co-editor of *Energy and Environment*. He is a regular contributor to *Canada’s National Post*. Peiser’s results are discussed in greater detail in [Consensus & Statistics](#) on the [Shepherd on Climate blog](#). [Comment July 2011].

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. explicit endorsement of the consensus position | 5. paleoclimate analysis                                 |
| 2. evaluation of impacts                          | 6. rejection of the consensus position                   |
| 3. mitigation proposals                           | 7. natural factors of global climate change              |
| 4. methods  | 8. unrelated to the recent global climate change issues. |

My results contradict Oreskes' findings and essentially falsify her study. Here they are:

- Only 13 (1%) of the 1117 abstracts explicitly endorse the *Consensus View*.
- 322 abstracts (29%) implicitly accept the *Consensus View* but mainly focus on impact assessments of envisaged global climate change.
- 89 (less than 10%) focus on mitigation;
- 67 on methodological questions;
- 87 deal exclusively with paleo-climatological research unrelated to recent climate change;
- 34 reject or doubt the view that human activities are the main drivers of the 'the observed warming over the last 50 years' and
- 44 focus on natural factors of global climate change.
- 470 abstracts (42%) include the keywords 'global climate change' but do not include links or reference to greenhouse gas emissions or anthropogenic forcing of recent climate change.

According to Oreskes, 695 of the 928 abstracts (75%) 'either explicitly or implicitly accepting the *Consensus View*'. This claim is incorrect on two counts.

Only 424 abstracts...less than a third...fall into Categories 1 to 3 and many abstracts on 'evaluation of impact' and 'mitigation' do not discuss the drivers of global climate change but concern themselves with the effects of elevated CO<sub>2</sub> levels on plant growth and vegetation.

Many do not include any implicit endorsement of the *Consensus View* but discuss hypothetical impact assessments or mitigation strategies.

Quite a number of papers emphasise that *Natural Factors* play a major if not the key role in recent climate change. There are almost three times as many abstracts that are sceptical of the notion of anthropogenic climate change as explicitly endorse it. In fact, the explicit and implicit rejection of the *Consensus View* includes distinguished scientific organisations.

This is not to deny that a majority of publications go along with the view of anthropogenic climate change and apply models based on its basic assumptions.

Yet it is beyond doubt that a sound and unbiased analysis of the full *ISI Databank* will find hundreds of papers...many by the world's leading experts in the field...that have raised serious reservations and outright rejection of the concept of a *Scientific Consensus* on climate change."

On 18th February 2005 Peiser received the following reply from Etta Kavanagh, *Associate Letters Editor* at *Science Magazine*.

'Dear Dr. Peiser, a couple of weeks ago you submitted a *Letter to the Editor* on Naomi Oreskes' Essay *The Scientific Consensus on Climate Change*. In its current form it is too long for a letter but we would consider a shorter version if you are willing to edit it. It should be 500 words or less, not counting the references. A correction dealing with the mistake in the search terms 'global climate change' vs. 'climate change' was published in our Jan. 14 issue.'

Well that's all right then.

My tip is to sell shares in companies trading in [Carbon Emissions](#)...or bet on their collapse.

[more from Shepherd on Climate](#)