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Muzzling the Greenhouse Debate

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ABC *4 Corners* program and especially its reporter, Janine Cohen, should be congratulated on highlighting an undemocratic practice that has been going on for decades: the muzzling of CSIRO scientists from participating in public debate about greenhouse response strategies and energy alternatives. The program also revealed the intimate links between the big greenhouse gas producing industries, the Federal Government and public officials.

The *4 Corners* program is entirely consistent with previous exposés and my personal experience as a former Principal Research Scientist in CSIRO. As I see it, there is a consistent pattern of collusion to promote fossil fuels and suppress renewable energy, by public officials, government, those who control CSIRO and the coal, aluminium, oil, electricity generation and motor industries.

In 2004 the ABC's Investigative Unit obtained leaked meeting minutes, emails and memos which suggest that, behind the scenes, the fossil fuels industry influenced strongly the content of the Federal Government's Energy White Paper. The ABC reported that the Industry Minister had formed a secret advisory group of 12 companies, known as the Lower Emissions Technical Advisory Group (LETAG), to assist him on the development of policy.

The group worked directly with the Government to develop the energy plan. It was something that the Government was not keen to publicise. According to notes taken by one of the executives during a LETAG meeting, the Minister stressed the need for absolute confidentiality, saying that if the renewable energy industry found out, there would be a huge outcry.

The ABC also obtained the minutes of a LETAG meeting during which the General Manager of the Energy Futures Branch of Federal Government's Department of the Industry stated that the government was seeking to adjust policy so that it supports and accommodates industry's direction. All this information was broadcast on ABC national radio on 7 September 2004 and the transcript is still available on www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2004/s1194166.htm.

In the 1990s I was one of the representatives of the environmental NGOs on a group convened by the Australian Government to (nominally) advise on the development of a macro-economic model of greenhouse response called MEGABARE. Our advice was ignored and the structure of the completed model and the presentation of the results of the modelling were biased so that it exaggerated the costs of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and ignored the benefits.

MEGABARE was used widely by the Australian Government in international forums, for example during negotiations on the Kyoto Protocol, to support the government's position in opposition to international greenhouse abatement targets. In particular, MEGABARE and its successor GIGABARE were used as a basis for special pleading by the Australian Government that, as a 'fossil fuel dependent country', Australia's target should involve an increase in emissions.

