

# A distorted picture of glaciers and Climate Change

by Ross G.

For many of us, the iconic image of climate change is those before-and-after pictures of shrinking glaciers we have seen in National Geographic, on the Al Gore documentary, or in TV programmes.

So doubtless those who follow the mass Murdoch *Australian* will have been stunned to read a series of major articles reporting the “UN’s blunder on glaciers exposed”.

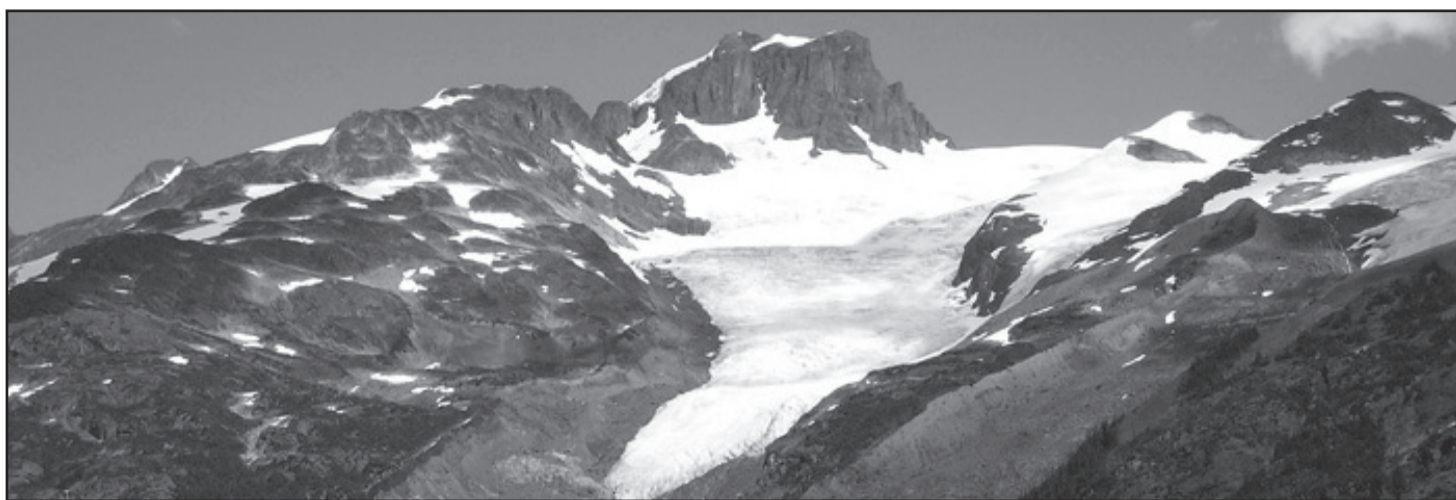
The articles point out that a claim in the latest 2007 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report on climate change regarding the possible disappearance of Himalayan glaciers by 2035, (attributed it to a World Wildlife Fund report) is based on speculations that are wildly incorrect, and will be retracted by the IPCC in its next report.

These articles, and the spate of letters accompanying them, paint a picture of another embarrassing turnaround for the UN body, following on from the email scandal of last November.

The paper emphasises how critical this claim was to the IPCC report, and how this latest “glacier-gate” will feed growing scepticism about the reality of human induced global warming.

The facts of the case tell a very different story.

Firstly, the *Australian* did not discover this case. Rather, glaciologists have been aware of the issue since 2006 when the report was written, and the worldwide earth science community discussed it at their annual conference in California last November, where the



incorrect claim and corrections to it were aired in a major press conference at the time.

At the same press conference, scientists were very careful to also point out that this mistake in no way alters their conclusions that glaciers have been gradually shrinking over the past 100 years, and that for the past 30 years this shrinkage has probably been due to human-induced warming of the planet.

Secondly, the incorrect claim was in no way a key part of the IPCC report, as readers can judge for themselves from examining the evidence below.

The IPCC has three working groups, the first looks at the “physical basis of climate change” – basically what is happening, and why. The second looks at impacts around the world, and the third on ways of mitigating climate change.

The “physical basis” group has a detailed report which summarises hundreds of research papers, and

includes a section on glaciers worldwide. The consistent analysis of these scientists is that whilst there are very complex conditions in each region, in general glaciers have been retreating for more than 100 years. Glaciers advance or retreat based on both the amount of snow which feeds them, and the average temperatures in their region. The general consensus of glaciologists is that since the 1970s the majority of glaciers worldwide have been shrinking, partly as a result of increased global temperatures. To read this report, see Section 4.5 in [http://www.ipcc.ch/publications\\_and\\_data/ar4/wg1/en/contents.html](http://www.ipcc.ch/publications_and_data/ar4/wg1/en/contents.html)

The “impacts” report has a small 3 paragraph section (10.6.2) discussing the retreat of Himalayan glaciers and the impact this will have on the river systems they feed into. None of this analysis is under question - indeed, the glaciologists who authored the “physical basis” report detail the shrinking of most glaciers worldwide, including in

the Himalayas. However, this section does contain one sentence asserting that these Himalayan glaciers will disappear by 2035 – a speculation which is vastly at odds with the measured rate of shrinking of the glaciers. This incorrect sentence plays no significant part in the message of the section on Himalayan glaciers, let alone on the overall message of the report. It was not used in the “summary for policy makers” which heads up the whole IPCC report. To read this second working group report yourself, see [http://www.ipcc.ch/publications\\_and\\_data/ar4/wg2/en/contents.html](http://www.ipcc.ch/publications_and_data/ar4/wg2/en/contents.html)

Rather than reporting on the views of glaciologists both in Australia and worldwide, about the retreat of glaciers and the complex conditions that bring this about, the *Australian* chose to focus instead on a single error which has no special significance to the UN report. This episode says a lot more about the role of the monopoly media in Australia, than it does about our understanding of climate science.

## As technology advances, the screws only tighten

by Jack D.

**Being with some old folk the other day, the subject of technology came up; its effect on society, and the ramifications it has on people generally.**

In the lifetime of the oldies born before WW2, they have seen changes that were unlike anything seen since the iniquitous factory system of England in the 1700s. After the advent of steam engines, capitalists very soon discovered the idea of powering great factories and getting “the poors” to operate these machines. Great workhouses came into being where workers laboured long hours under appalling conditions, six days a week. Many were forced to work 16 or more hours a day for a wage that paid less than subsistence.

The oldies we were with told of how in the 1930s, those dreary depression years, workers were treated very badly. They told how through the 1940s, during

and just after WW2, the technology levels were still horse and cart. Sure, there were telephones and cars, but most workers did not own either.

The Australian manufacturing industry was much bigger than now, with huge factories where much of Australia’s needs were manufactured and where workers worked a 44 hour week, generally speaking. Then, in the late 1940s, the 40 hour week was won. Working Saturday mornings until noon was then much less common, as it was paid overtime.

Gradually, the horse-drawn lorries and carts were replaced, as the motor industry picked up. Milk was no longer delivered from a can on the milk cart, but was in a bottle. The ice delivery man, with his cart and bag-covered blocks of ice under his arm, disappeared. People had refrigerators instead. Many increases in technology were occurring and bit by bit these small but very

significant changes were implemented.

By the late 1960s the government was spruiking about a new fangled “computer technology” that would make everybody so much more productive. “It will eventually make us all so productive that we will have to teach children in schools how to use their leisure time, as we will only need to work a 25 or 20 hour week. People will have much more leisure time and family time”

And so says the ass! Hey folks, we live under the heel of capitalist dictatorship, thus who do you think will reap the main benefit of all this new technology?

Today, with computer aided design of things, computer aided manufacture of things, the manufacturing industries in Australia are being dismantled. Great multinational concerns are dominating the show and are moving to countries where labour is cheaper, less organised

and less able to struggle, countries where regulations on pollution, worker health and safety, compensation for workplace injury and such are minimal.

Even so, workers still have to toil for 8, 10 or 12 hours a day to produce more goods than it took the same number of workers a month to produce back in 1960.

Where is the capitalist utopia and the “trickle-down” benefits of capitalism? Has it led to a 25 or 20 hour week? We produce much more wealth than the capitalists of the late 1960s ever envisaged, so the wealth is there. But where is it? That’s what we old farts want to know. We don’t have it, we don’t get any significant benefit from it, and today’s workers don’t have it. It seems only the filthy rich companies, their fat-arsed executives and a few other con-men and shysters have wealth. And Kevin Rudd reckons we should be even more productive for the bosses!