

[Sure, experts should do their expert things](#) [1]

Written by [Tim Worstall](#) [2] | Sunday 2 September 2012

Apologies for this extensive quote from The Guardian. It might shock the eyes of those who generally avoid that [particular paper](#) [3]:

One more thing is required of academia: to play its role right at the heart of democracy. Being adequately informed is a democratic duty, just as the vote is a democratic right. A misinformed electorate, voting without knowledge, is not a true democracy. Society needs the expertise of academics in the most important issues: climate science above all. A democracy then needs the press to disseminate academia's knowledge and to do so with integrity. But the media's ambition to be entertaining and provocative too often overrules its respect for intellectual rigour.

Journalists cannot hold degrees in every subject they report on, but their job is not to claim they know the science better than the experts, or to practise that consummate deception of pretending there is controversy when the consensus is overwhelming. But a controversy is more fun, and the media ? skedaddling towards infotainment ? is losing sight of the core purpose of its activity: to be a truthful messenger, in this case between the world of academia and the public. I would propose a system of certification for media articles in which there is a clear issue of social responsibility ? a kitemark of quality assurance. It would be awarded by teams of academics, and be given to the article, not the journalist, recognising the facts, not the sometimes spurious credibility of being a "personality".

It would be awarded when the article is accurate, using reliable sources and peer reviewed studies. There already exists the Climate Science Rapid Response Team, which answers journalists' questions to help them achieve accuracy. The formality of certification is necessary, though, for the reader to know whether to trust an article. Accuracy must not only be achieved, but be seen to have been achieved.

Now note that this is voluntary. We're in favour of voluntary cooperative action around here so let us applaud this idea.

However, let us also insist that this be carried over into the realm of what we do about climate change assuming it exists. For there are experts there just as there are in whether it exists. And we call those experts "economists". Those who study how human beings respond to the incentives in their lives. These are the correct experts to be using of course, for assuming that climate change does exist, is a problem we want to do something about and is amenable to human action (as you all know, generally my own view), then it is indeed changing what humans do that will be the solution. Which, in turn, means changing the incentives humans face.

So, entirely happy to support the idea of a "kitemark" scheme, an entirely voluntary one, for articles on the science of whether climate change is happening and how. But that same scheme also needs to extend to cover those articles which discuss what we should do about it. Something which, I assure you, will be

much more entertaining.

For absolutely nothing from nef, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, Action Aid, CAFOD, Oxfam or any of the other NGOs will manage to pass such a test. Certainly nothing put forward by Jonathan Porritt, George Monbiot, Bill McKibben would achieve the badge of sensible and factually based policy. Most of the output of the various scientific institutes, even of our own government's Chief Scientific Officer would go unlaurelled. In fact, it's a reasonable certainty that articles by the Ministers involved, laying out their policies would fail, as would Green and White papers as proposals for legislation.

For the truth is that economists are in general of one mind about what we should do about climate change, assuming that it is happening, is amenable and so on. We should either have a carbon tax or a cap and trade system. And that's all we need. Set the incentives, get the prices right, and let that only calculating engine that we have capable of solving for a solution, the market, get on with its job.

The disagreements are more trivial. Should we tax now and hard now (Stern) or lightly now and more heavily in the future (Nordhaus)? Should the actions attempt to prevent a 20C rise or not (Tol often enough)? Should it be a tax or would cap and trade allowing the idiot politicians to meddle more be even worse (erm, me, who is not an economist)?

I would certainly support a scheme which asked for an verified scientific accuracy in articles about climate change. For I know very well that almost all articles suggesting what we should do about it will fail such a test. Which would be, don't you think, just so hugely, hugely, entertaining? As well as educational.

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