

Hundreds of Australian climate-change science jobs to be axed

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The announcement earlier this month that the federally-funded Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) plans to sack up to 350 climate scientists has been condemned by scientists in Australia and internationally. The decision is a major blow to scientific research into ocean temperatures, greenhouse gas levels and other indices that provide a deeper understanding of climate change.

Almost 200 positions will be cut from the Oceans and Atmosphere (O&A) division, with the remaining jobs eliminated from the Land and Water division. The O&A monitors atmospheric and ocean carbon dioxide levels from Cape Grim, a rocky outpost on the northwestern tip of Tasmania.

An O&A scientist told the science journal *Nature*: “More than 80 percent of our climate scientists will be cut. This is not about myself, it’s about my people and the capability we spent 40 years to build. It will be going overnight.”

CSIRO chief Larry Marshall informed staff about the cuts via email. There was no longer any need to “prove” that climate change was real, he wrote. “[T]hat question has been answered” and so it was now necessary to move from research on climate change to the sort of products that could supposedly cope with the environmental consequences.

Marshall—a former Silicon Valley venture capitalist—was appointed by the Liberal-National Coalition government in late 2014 as part of a deliberate strategy to transform the CSIRO into a profit-driven enterprise. This month Marshall told the *Australian Financial Review* that the “CSIRO is too often ‘science push’ than ‘market pull.’”

This short-sighted, profit-driven approach ignores the fact that the changes to climate are ongoing, complex

and have far-reaching consequences for humanity as a whole. The planned sacking of the CSIRO scientists will have ramifications for climate research around the world.

Australian climate research programs have provided a quarter of the world’s ocean observing capacity in the Southern Hemisphere. Data on the temperature and salinity of the upper 2,000 metres of the ocean is collected by 3,000 drifting floats.

A protest letter signed by 3,000 scientists from nearly 60 nations declared: “The decision to decimate a vibrant and world-leading research program shows a lack of insight, and a misunderstanding of the importance of the depth and significance of Australian contributions to global and regional climate research.”

The World Climate Research Program issued a statement warning that the proposed cuts risked severing “vital linkages with Australian colleagues and to essential southern hemisphere data sources, linkages that connect Australia to Britain, the US, New Zealand, Japan, China and beyond.”

On Monday, the Climate Council of Australia issued a 22-page report entitled *Flying Blind: Navigating Climate Change without the CSIRO*. It pointed out that research and data collected by CSIRO was vital to “predict changes in the climate and building preparedness for our worsening extreme weather events. Further cuts to model development will leave us dangerously exposed to the escalating risks of climate change.”

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull claimed to have been ‘blindsided’ by the CSIRO’s announcement about the job destruction. A spokesman for Science Minister Christopher Pyne told the media that the cuts were not the responsibility of the Turnbull government but “an operational decision of the CSIRO.”

These claims are a fraud. Last year the federal government slashed \$115 million or 16 percent of CSIRO's annual funding, which led to the elimination of over 1,000 jobs. Successive Coalition and Labor governments have systematically reduced CSIRO's budget over the past two decades, resulting in the agency losing some 30 percent of its staff.

Climate-change science and research has been particularly targeted by the Coalition government, previously headed by Tony Abbott, whose backers downplayed or outright denied climate change. Turnbull deposed Abbott last September, but the government as a whole has close connections to the coal and other fossil fuel industries. Turnbull has also made clear that climate-change funding must be tied to "innovation"—that is, it must have commercial value.

The overall funding for the CSIRO's climate-monitoring sites are miniscule compared to other areas of government spending. This year's funding for Cape Grim would be \$226,246, with the Bureau of Meteorology contributing another \$458,500. The overall government budget for CSIRO for 2015 was \$181 million, a small fraction of the \$31.8 billion spent on the military.

The importance of the work of climate scientists is underscored by the fact that eight of the ten warmest years recorded since 1860, when instrumental records began, have been in the past decade. The causes of such developments are due to a complex interaction of long-term changes to the atmosphere and oceans.

Climate models are carefully developed from the years of information gathered by scientists such as those being cut at the CSIRO. Future modelling is vital, not only to predict major changes in weather patterns but to assist work in the field of natural disasters and how to possibly prevent them.

The CSIRO cuts are another indication of the inability of the capitalist profit system to address, let alone avert, a looming ecological disaster. The technical means to halt climate change exist, but can be implemented only on a rational basis under a globally planned socialist economy.



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