

The primary paper that is often trotted out in support of the notion of “97% consensus” was written by John Cook and his merry band of climate extremists. Published in 2013, it is the most widely referenced work on the subject of climate consensus and has been downloaded more than 1.3 million times.

Cook runs a climate website that is a smorgasbord of climate fear rhetoric, specialising in attacks – often personal and spiteful in tone – on all who have proven effective in leading others to stray from the dogma of impending climate doom.

The project was self-described as “a ‘citizen science’ project by volunteers contributing to the website.” The team consisted of 12 climate activists who did not leave their climate prejudices at home. These volunteers, many of whom had no training in the sciences, said they had “reviewed” abstracts from 11,944 peer-reviewed papers related to climate change or global warming, published over the 21 years 1991 – 2011, to assess the extent to which they supported the “consensus view” on climate change. As Cook’s paper said:

“We analysed a large sample of the scientific literature on global CC [climate change], published over a 21-year period, in order to determine the level of scientific consensus that human activity is very likely causing most of the current GW (anthropogenic global warming, or AGW).”

The paper concluded:

“Among abstracts that expressed a position on AGW [anthropogenic global warming], 97.1% endorsed the scientific consensus. ... Among papers expressing a position on AGW, an overwhelming percentage (97.2% based on self-ratings, 97.1% based on abstract ratings) endorses the scientific consensus on AGW.”

The paper asserted – falsely, as it turned out – that 97% of the papers the reviewers examined had explicitly endorsed the opinion that humans are causing the majority of the warming of the last 150 years.

When one looks at the data, one finds that 7,930 of the papers took no position at all on the subject and were arbitrarily excluded from the count on this ground. If we simply add back all of the papers reviewed, the 97% claimed by Cook and his co-authors falls to 32.6%.

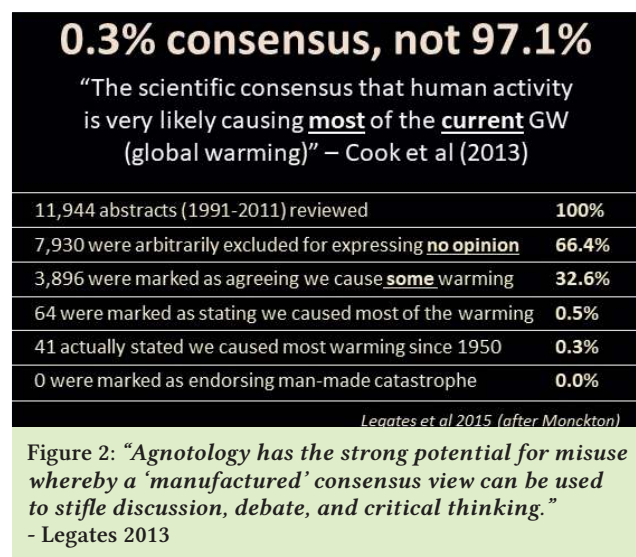
A closer look at the paper reveals that the so-called “97%” included three categories of endorsement of human-caused climate change (Figure 1). Only the first category amounted to an explicit statement that humans are the primary cause of recent warming. The second and third categories would include most sceptics of catastrophic anthropogenic warming, including the scientists of the CO2 Coalition, who accept that increasing CO2 is probably causing some, probably modest, amount of warming; an amount that is likely rendered insignificant by natural causes of warmer weather. Only by casting a wide net could Cook conclude that there is any type of “consensus.”

Level of endorsement	Description
(1) Explicit endorsement with quantification	Explicitly states that humans are the primary cause of recent global warming
(2) Explicit endorsement without quantification	Explicitly states that humans are causing global warming or refers to anthropogenic global warming/climate change as a known fact
(3) Implicit endorsement	Implies humans are causing global warming. E. g. research assumes greenhouse gas emissions cause warming without explicitly stating humans are the cause

Figure 1: Categories of endorsement – Cook 2013

Agnotology is defined as “the study of how ignorance arises via circulation of misinformation calculated to mislead.” This is how David Legates and his co-authors (2015) describe the Cook paper and similar attempts falsely to promote the notion of broad scientific consensus surrounding the subject of a looming, man-made, climate apocalypse.

They reviewed the actual papers used by Cook and found that only 0.3% of the 11,944 abstracts and 1.6% of the smaller sample that excluded those papers expressing no opinion endorsed man-made global warming as they defined it. Remarkably, they found that Cook and his assistants had themselves marked only 64 papers – or 0.5% of the 11,944 they said they had reviewed – as explicitly stating that recent warming was mostly man-made (Figure 2). Yet they stated, both in the paper itself and subsequently, that they had found a “97% consensus” explicitly stating that recent warming was mostly man-made.



It appears that Cook and his co-authors manipulated the data to present an altogether untrue narrative of overwhelming support for catastrophic human-caused warming.

Note that the official “consensus” position – supported though it was by just 0.3% of the 11,944 papers reviewed – says nothing more than recent warming was mostly man-made. Even if that were the case – and the overwhelming majority of scientists take no view on that question, for it is beyond our present knowledge to answer – it would not indicate that global warming is dangerous.

“If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it.” – Joseph Goebbels

From the information we have just reviewed, the percentage of scientists who agree with the notion of man-made catastrophic global warming is significantly less than advertised. Several unbiased attempts have been made to assess what the actual number might be. One of the largest petitions concerning climate change was the Oregon Petition signed by more than 31,000 American scientists, including 9,029 holding PhDs, disputing the notion of anthropogenic climate alarmism (Figure 3).

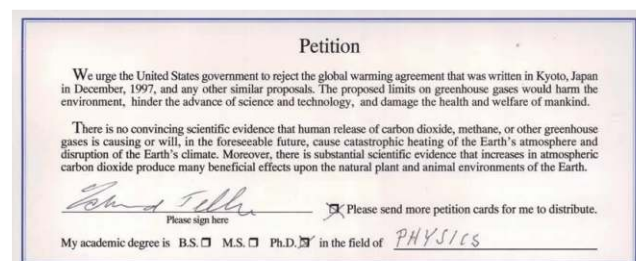


Figure 3: Edward Teller’s signature at www.petitionproject.org

More recently, in 2016, George Mason University (Maibach 2016) surveyed more than 4,000 members of the American Meteorological Society and found that 33% believed that climate change was not occurring, was at most half man-made, was mostly natural, or they did not know. Significantly, only 18% believed that a large amount – or all – of additional climate change could be averted.

Science does not advance through consensus, and the claim of consensus has no place in any rational scientific debate. We ask: What do the data tell us? What does it mean? Can we reproduce the

results? If those promoting man-made climate fear need to resort to an obviously flawed consensus opinion, rather than argue the merits of the science, haven’t they already conceded that their argument cannot be won through open debate?

“Cook’s 97% nonsense [sic] paper shows that the climate community still has a long way to go in weeding out bad research and bad behaviour. If you want to believe that climate researchers are incompetent, biased and secretive, Cook’s paper is an excellent case in point.” - Professor Richard Tol

“Let’s be clear: the work of science has nothing whatever to do with consensus. Consensus is the business of politics. Science, on the contrary, requires only one investigator who happens to be right, which means that he or she has results that are verifiable by reference to the real world. In science consensus is irrelevant. What is relevant is reproducible results. The greatest scientists in history are great precisely because they broke with the consensus.”

There is no such thing as consensus science. If it’s consensus, it isn’t science. If it’s science, it isn’t consensus. Period.” - Michael Crichton

