



CSIRO staff lash out at 'politically motivated attacks' on scientists

CLIMATE DEBATE

By Rosslyn Beeby

Science and Environment Reporter

The CSIRO Staff Association has accused the Opposition of using Senate estimates to wage a political campaign to discredit the national science agency's climate change research.

"Our scientists are being subjected to inappropriate, politically motivated attacks during these public hearings," association president Michael Borgas said.

Dr Borgas also dismissed as "political opportunism gone mad" recent Opposition claims that CSIRO censored and suppressed a paper by environmental economist Clive Spash because it criticised the Rudd Government's carbon trading scheme.

Dr Spash has since left CSIRO to take up a post at a university in Norway.

"There was no great conspiracy of suppression. It is absolute rubbish for the Opposition to say that, and staff are pretty pissed off about it," Dr Borgas said.

These outspoken comments follow a recent Senate estimates hearing in

which Liberal senator Julian McGauran told CSIRO chief executive Megan Clark the research agency's reputation "was iconic until the climate change debate" occurred. "Along comes the climate change debate and it has to be said that, at least in the community perception, the CSIRO has been – to put it mildly – compromised," Senator McGauran said.

Liberal senator Alan Eggleston quoted reports claiming "systematic intimidation" of CSIRO scientists – including Dr Spash – had occurred because they "did not toe the line on climate change views." He dismissed Dr Clark's explanation that Dr Spash's paper had not met CSIRO publication quality guidelines as "Orwellian".

Federal Science Minister Kim Carr tabled a report during estimates, quoting a peer review of Dr Spash's paper which suggested sections should be rewritten because their argument was weak.

"This is a clear case of CSIRO defending the brand name of this

organisation and has absolutely nothing to do with the personal political opinions of the author of this paper," Senator Carr said.

Visiting Canberra yesterday for the annual Science Meets Parliament briefings, Dr Borgas called for bipartisan political support for open debate and diversity in government science.

"There is a worrying level of confusion amongst our politicians and within the community about the role of government science. In our view, this much confusion is the direct result of the politicisation of science that has sprung up around the climate change debate."

Staff in CSIRO and other government science agencies were at the forefront of providing "independent and rigorous advice to government," he said.

"We need to support scientific charters of independence and not use government science for cheap, short-term political advantage."