

The President,
Statistical Society of Australia, Inc.
PO Box 5111
Braddon
ACT 2612

Date 29/04/08



Dear Professor Dunsmuir,

A request that the SSAI evaluate a crucial claim about climate change

Your Society is right to say, on its website, that professional statisticians make crucial contributions to good decision-making in private and public spheres. I am writing to ask the Society to make such a contribution to the Garnaut Review of Australia's policy on the mitigation of climate change. There is a specific matter that the the Society is well-placed to clarify and that has a potential cost (or benefit) of many billions of dollars for our country and possibly for other countries.

I am writing to propose that the Society arrange for an evaluation by Accredited Statisticians of the conclusions drawn in a recent one-page paper¹ by Prof. Stefan Rahmstorf and others on trends in global warming.

You will be aware of Professor Garnaut's mandate from the Australian Government to recommend possible future carbon emissions controls and means of economically implementing them. The Garnaut Review's interim report has already indicated that the enquiry intends to recommend stringent carbon emission controls because it considers that, 'on the balance of probabilities', recent scientific evidence points to an alarming rate of global warming, exceeding even some of the most worrying projections of the UN IPCC. The interim report bases this judgement explicitly on the conclusions of the Rahmstorf et al. paper citing the trends it illustrates as an argument for bold—and probably very expensive—steps to reduce carbon emissions.

These 'overshooting' trends do not, however, emerge from a naive review of recent temperature anomalies. More significantly, Dr David Stockwell of [Niche Modelling](#) says² the Rahmstorf et al. paper contains serious errors of statistical method and judgment. If this is true, it is crucial that the authors be given an opportunity to reconsider conclusions

¹ Stefan Rahmstorf, Anny Cazenave, John A. Church, James E. Hansen, Ralph F. Keeling, David E. Parker, Richard C. J. Somerville *Recent Climate Observations Compared to Projections* **Science** Vol. 316, May 2007. Available from: http://pubs.giss.nasa.gov/docs/2007/2007_Rahmstorf_etal.pdf

² <http://landshape.org/enm/rahmstorf-et-al-2007-ipcc-error/>

that have had such a persuasive effect on the direction of the Garnaut enquiry. But Professor Rahmstorf, in an open [reply to Dr Stockwell](#)³, has declined to address the criticism.

The doubt that hangs over these claims and counter-claims leaves the public-interest the loser. Very few of us are qualified to decide for ourselves whether the claims accepted by the Garnaut Review stand up to professional statistical scrutiny or not. Yet each of us has a direct interest in the best possible decision on emission controls and climate change mitigation strategies.

Would the Australian Statistical Society, as a public service, evaluate the soundness of the methods and conclusions of the brief Rahmstorf et al. paper from a statistical viewpoint? An authoritative review would help non-statisticians to take a responsible decision on whether we should rely on the trends it describes and the conclusions it reaches.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter W Gallagher', written in a cursive style.

Peter W Gallagher

³ <http://landshape.org/enm/rahmstorf-et-al-2007-ipcc-error/%23comment-112214>