

# MICHAEL CRICHTON ON “GLOBAL WARMING”

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Occasionally I am asked to write book reviews (most recently, of Dr. Paul Strangio’s biography of the late Dr. Jim Cairns, *Keeper of the Faith*).<sup>1</sup> Less frequently I may submit for publication an article reviewing some book which has caught my attention, and which I have thought sufficiently important to be worth drawing to the attention of a wider audience. Books in that rare category have invariably been serious non-fiction works of one kind or another, such as William Coleman’s and Alf Hagger’s excellent book, *Exasperating Calculators*.<sup>2</sup> I cannot however recall when I last chose to review a work of fiction.

*State of Fear*,<sup>3</sup> by Michael Crichton, is in fact much more than a work of fiction. Larded throughout the 567 pages of the novel proper (there are another 36 pages I shall come to later)

are several serious messages which reverberate with me so strongly that I think it worth drawing to the attention of *National Observer* readers.

I should say that I am not a particular fan of Crichton’s. I do not read much science fiction, although I would readily acknowledge that at its best (for example, John Wyndham’s *The Day of the Triffids*) it can be enthralling. Viewed purely as a literary stylist, Crichton would not, in my respectful judgment, score highly (unlike John Wyndham). His real strength lies in his capacity to combine the characteristics of a fast-paced, action-packed thriller (the sort of thing you pick up at the airport bookshop to engage your attention, but not your mind, on a long overseas flight) with a strong command of real scientific knowledge of the kind required for his books.

1. *Economic Record*, June, 2004.

2. “Rational Thought on Rationalism”, in *The Australian Financial Review*, 16 May, 2001.

3. Harper Collins, London, 2004. Printed in Australia by Griffin Press, 603 pages, \$26.95.

It was that combination of qualities which, years ago, sustained me in reading an earlier Crichton work, *The Andromeda Strain* (1969), a science fiction novel about a new and deadly biological agent threatening the world with a latter day Black Death. And although I have neither read the book nor viewed the subsequent movie, it was no doubt that combination of qualities which endowed Crichton's best-known work, *Jurassic Park*, with its best-seller status and subsequent enormous box office success.

As that latter reference may indicate, Crichton has become a hugely successful author and, at the age of 62, doubtless a very rich man. Beginning life with a Harvard degree in anthropology, he then graduated from Harvard Medical School, and was about to take up a doctoral fellowship at the Salk Institute for Biological Science when the best-seller success of *The Andromeda Strain* led him, at the age of 27, to focus on a career as a writer, and a writer of science fiction in particular. I mention these facts not merely to illustrate his admirable versatility, but also to suggest that his scientific training equips him to address scientific and technological issues going well beyond the competence of most members of the literati.

A prefatory note to *State of Fear* says that it "is a work of fiction . . . Characters, corporations, institutions, and organisations . . . are the products of the author's imagination or, if real, *are used fictitiously without any*

*attempt to describe their actual conduct*". This disclaimer, and particularly that part of it I have italicised, would seem to have been particularly necessary (even in the United States, where the defamation laws are much less hostile to free speech than in Australia) given the harshness of Crichton's condemnations of some U.S. individuals and institutions who are, apparently, readily recognisable.

The plot, and some of the principal characters, may perhaps be best described as falling within the James Bond category. That is, on any cool post-reading analysis they are (like much science fiction) far-fetched, but the pace of the story and the ease of reading combine to engender a sufficient suspension of disbelief to get over that hurdle while actually reading. In other words, like all good airport bookshop thrillers, once embarked upon it is hard to put down.

Ranged on one side are the villains, chief among them the National Environmental Resource Fund (N.E.R.F.). (This, it seems, is a thinly disguised stand-in for a real-life U.S. institution, the Natural Resources Defense Council, which within days of the novel appearing published an *ad hominem* review consigning it to perdition for all right-minded people.) N.E.R.F. promotes itself, and the personal fortunes of its chief operatives, through unprincipled but technically skilful manipulation of an ever-willing-to-be-credulous-where-good-environmental-causes-are-concerned media. And

through its links with the much more violently sinister Environmental Liberation Front, it seeks to initiate a series of climatic or other environmentally-related events (a massive hurricane in the West Indies; an enormous flash flood in Arizona; breaking off a massive iceberg from the Ross Ice Shelf in Antarctica). The last such event involves triggering a huge tsunami off the Solomons whose wave, racing across the Pacific, will be timed to strike the shores of California just as N.E.R.F.'s latest huge conference on "abrupt climate change", directed to whipping up more media hysteria about the damage Man is doing to Planet Earth, is winding up in Los Angeles.

The objectives of all this manipulation, of course, are money and power. Both objectives drive the actions of the lawyers, politicians and media magnates who combine to give N.E.R.F. and its allies their clout in the world. After all, the more laws there are to stop people doing things (always, you understand, in the name of a good cause — think, for example, in Victoria, of those anti-racial hatred laws), the more fees there will be for lawyers. The more power and patronage there will also be for politicians, and the more commercial opportunities there will be for those industrialists who are quickest to supply the latest fad (for example, motor vehicle companies moving to supply the market created in California by ludicrous laws seeking to phase out petrol-driven motor

vehicles in that State). And the more fear can be created in the world, the more the media will thrive. Nothing, after all, sells more newspapers, or provides more gripping television footage, than a really good natural disaster, as the recent Indian Ocean tsunami (right on cue for Crichton's novel, as it happened) has amply demonstrated. No wonder, then, that media magnates need more of them.

Ranged against these villains are the good guys who, you will not be surprised to learn, do ultimately prevail. Much more interesting, however, than those James Bond-like characters are the two people who, beginning as what Lenin called "useful idiots" (well-meaning people such as, in his case, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, who can be persuaded to support the most malign causes so long as they are dressed up in sufficiently do-gooding descriptions), evolve into much better informed and harder-headed characters who move, as a consequence, from siding with the villains to siding with the goodies.

The first of these, George Morton, is a rich Californian philanthropist who, having been taken in by the N.E.R.F. spielsters, has initially been persuaded to finance a \$10 million lawsuit which N.E.R.F. is proposing to mount on behalf of the nation (sic) of Vanutu (read, in reality, the equally risible nation (sic) of Tuvalu). The suit is to be brought against the government of the United States, "the world's greatest polluter" and hence (you

guessed it) the country chiefly responsible for the prospective “inevitable” submergence of tiny Vanutu beneath what the global warming hysterics claim will be the rising sea levels of the South Pacific. (The fact that the “pollution” referred to is principally nothing more than carbon dioxide, the basic “food” for all plant life, continues to escape the notice of most journalists referring to the topic.) The trouble is that, in the novel as in real life, the research team of oceanographers and others whom N.E.R.F.’s lawyers are employing to assemble the factual basis for their case cannot actually find any convincing evidence which would do so.

The reaction of the top N.E.R.F. executives to this unfortunate confrontation with reality is two-fold: first, keep it dark, and particularly do not tell George Morton; and second, get the latter signed up as soon as possible to a legally binding deed whereby he assigns the \$10 million to N.E.R.F. for the law suit, with a contingency clause that “in the unlikely event” that the action against the United States does not proceed, N.E.R.F. may still retain the money and apply it to equally good (sic) environmental causes of its own choosing (including the high salaries and other perks of its senior executives). Unfortunately, George, who did not become rich by being totally stupid, becomes aware of N.E.R.F.’s designs to exploit him, and sets out to foil them.

Peter Evans, the second convert on

the road to a more sceptical Damascus, is a lawyer employed by the firm having N.E.R.F. as one of its best-paying clients. Starting out with all the non-scientifically-informed opinions about environmental causes which so generally prevail these days among people who have been subjected to a university course in the so-called humanities (and increasingly, in the soft “sciences” also), he gradually comes to see that he has been comprehensively duped. His move across the spectrum of belief, from bleeding heart environmentalist patsy to much better informed and much more sceptical thinker for himself, is the central feature of the book.

So why is all this good, clean but not seriously memorable fun worth recommending to all *National Observer* readers? One reason is because, even among those relatively well-informed people, there may be some (though I am sure not many) who, like Peter Evans initially, take seriously all the blather they read these days about global warming and many other prominent “environmental” causes, and for whom *State of Fear* would therefore constitute a quick, enjoyable and entirely easy course in appropriate scepticism.

In recent weeks in particular, with the coming into force of the much trumpeted *Kyoto Protocol* on global warming, which the Howard Government has refused to ratify, we have been subjected to a veritable barrage of lies, half truths and assertions from

the national and international environmental lobbies on that matter. For example, on 12 February 2005 *The Age*, which used to describe itself as Australia's quality newspaper, published a passionate and almost laughably inaccurate diatribe headlined *Wake up. This is Serious*, in which it declaimed on the coming environmental Armageddon, and on the wickedness of the Howard Government in refusing to acknowledge it (formally at any rate) by ratifying this international treaty.<sup>4</sup>

I say "formally at any rate" because it is not altogether clear in this area whether the Howard Government does actually refuse to acknowledge the scientific fraud which, basically, underlies the threats of the global warming doomsayers. While the government has, to its considerable credit, refused to ratify the treaty, its previous Minister for the Environment, Dr. David Kemp, was thoroughly snowed on the subject by his Department, while his rather new successor, Senator Ian Campbell, has been at least equally equivocal on the topic. Returning recently, for example, from the latest international environmental gabfest in Buenos Aires, he delivered himself of some very strange statements indeed. (Now if only *that* gathering could have been struck by the kind of towering tsunami which those *State of Fear* villains hoped to

generate, think how much saner a world we would now all be living in!)

That prefatory note from which, in part, I quoted earlier goes on to say:

"However, references to real people, institutions, and organisations that are documented in footnotes are accurate. Footnotes are real."

Now it would be an understatement to say that when embarking upon a novel (particularly one of the airport bookshop variety), one does not expect to encounter footnotes. Nevertheless, in *State of Fear*, footnotes there are (42 of them by my quick count). Most are provided to back up statements by one or other of the goodies during the process of re-educating (more precisely, educating for the first time) Peter Evans. Some of them relate to the 40 graphs which also, again unexpectedly, find a place in Crichton's text, such as the one showing temperature readings from the weather station at Punta Arenas in southern Chile (the closest city to Antarctica in the world) over the period 1888-2004, during which time average temperature has *fallen* by approximately 0.6 degrees Celsius.

How can this be? Is not the ice in Antarctica "generally known" to be steadily melting? Well no, actually. "One relatively small area, called the Antarctic Peninsula, is melting and calving huge icebergs. That is what

4. This effusion from *The Age* was the subject of a merciless analysis in *The Herald-Sun* by Andrew Bolt, *Age of No Reason*, 18 February 2005.

gets reported each year. But the continent as a whole is getting colder, and the ice is getting thicker.” And since Antarctica accounts for 90 per cent of all the ice in the world (all those glaciers whose frightening melting we keep reading about account for less than 6 per cent), that puts rather a different complexion on all those horror stories about rising sea levels and the like. Indeed, if this keeps on, *The New York Times* (among others), which these days carries on about global warming but which, as recently as August 1975 was publishing articles pointing to the possibility that “Earth may be heading for another Ice Age”, may prove to have been right the first time.

Both footnotes and graphs are drawn from serious professional studies by reputable scientists. I say “reputable” scientists to distinguish them from those “scientists” who, to a greater or less degree, have been prepared to sell their professional reputations for the admittedly attractive messes not of pottage but of the United Nations international conference circuit, and the research grants which tend to come in its train. What, to note one particularly notorious ex-

ample, can one make of a man, Sir David King, Chief Scientific Adviser to Her Majesty’s United Kingdom Government, who has opined that global warming represents a greater threat to the future of our world today than international terrorism?<sup>5</sup>

*State of Fear*, then, is not merely a good airport bookshop thriller, but also — and indeed more importantly — a tract conveying some serious messages for our media-driven times. To render the themes of that tract even clearer, Crichton includes, as five of those additional thirty-six pages to which I referred earlier, an Author’s Message so that the reader may know “where, exactly, the author stands on these issues”. Space precludes its reproduction, but a few points from it may illustrate his broad conclusions:

- “We know astonishingly little about every aspect of the environment . . .”

- “Atmospheric carbon dioxide is increasing, and human activity is the probable cause”. [This, I may interpolate, is probably the only statement about which the global warming zealots and their critics agree; and even then, note that penultimate word

5. At the conclusion of a seminar in Moscow arranged by the Russian Academy of Sciences last July, the then Chief Economic Adviser to President Putin, Andrei Illarionov, was scathing in his description of the behaviour and general deportment of the British delegation led by King. Based on that seminar, Illarionov concluded that: “Basically, none of the assertions made in the *Kyoto Protocol* and the ‘scientific’ theory on which the *Kyoto Protocol* is based have been borne out by actual data.” See the transcript (The Federal News Service, 9 July 2004) of the Press Conference on the results of the Climate Change and *Kyoto Protocol* Seminar, Moscow, 8 July 2004.

"probable". The question of whether an increasing level of carbon dioxide poses any threat whatsoever to mankind is of course an entirely separate matter.]

- "We are also in the midst of a natural warming trend that began about 1850, as we emerged from a 400 year cold spell . . ."

- "Nobody knows how much of the present warming trend might be a natural phenomenon."

- "We have not the foggiest notion how to preserve what we term 'wilderness' . . ."

- "I am certain there is too much certainty in the world".

Let me note a good example of the kind of thing Crichton is getting at. Among the many reference works cited in the 21-page bibliography is Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), one of the most influential books to have been published in the 20th Century, and one which perfectly illustrates his point about the dangers of pursuing seemingly good environmental causes without thinking through the costs (in the broadest sense of that term) of doing so. In retrospect, it is now possible to say quite unequivocally that Carson's book has been responsible for killing more people than *Mein Kampf*. It is true that, unlike Adolf Hitler, Carson did not set out to kill people. Nevertheless, the road to the malarial Hell which was paved with her doubtless good intentions in demanding the banning of the

use of D.D.T. (previously widely and effectively used for control of the malarial mosquito) has been just as deadly for the two million people — more than half of them children — who these days die from malaria each year in her name.

So far throughout this article I have used the term "global warming" when referring to the United Nations-driven operation which, in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, resulted in the promulgation of the *United Nations International Framework Convention on Climate Change*, under whose auspices the *Kyoto Protocol* was then initiated in 1996. But as one of N.E.R.F.'s chief executives remarks, "the trouble with global warming is that nobody believes in it". "That's the advantage", he says, "of shifting to abrupt climate change . . . Whatever kind of weather occurs, it always confirms your message." Sure enough, while one still sees references to "global warming", the environmentalists have indeed now shifted for the most part to speaking of "climate change" or "abrupt climate change". This allows them to more effectively propagate the myth that almost any climatic event these days, whether tornadoes in Florida or droughts in Australia, results from man-made changes to Earth's atmosphere. This is despite the fact that scientific study after scientific study has shown that there has been no change in the statistical frequency with which such events are occurring.

As readers will be well aware, Aus-

tralia (along with the Great Satan, the United States) has been harshly criticised from many quarters, not least our media, for its refusal to ratify the *Kyoto Protocol*. So far has this become a hallmark of Political Correctness that even the Business Council of Australia, the body comprising our most prominent corporate chief executives, has been unable to determine a position on the matter, thus lending renewed force to Lenin's adage that capitalists are generally so venal that they would sell you the rope with which you proposed to hang them.

Let me now note that my own views on the *Kyoto Protocol* nonsense have been coloured by two personal experiences.

In 1973, as Deputy Secretary (Economic) of the Commonwealth Treasury, I participated in writing, and was responsible for final editing, of a Treasury document entitled *Economic Growth: Is it Worth Having?*<sup>6</sup> Among other things, that document set out to examine the intellectual credentials of an earlier environmental movement then sweeping all before it, financed by some of the world's most prominent and richest industrialists (such as the then heads of Volkswagen and Fiat) in a grouping known as the Club of Rome, and backed up by ostensibly impressive "studies" employing what were also then claimed to be the most

sophisticated computer models. Sound familiar?

Based on all this prestigious activity by (self-proclaimed) high-minded people, it was claimed that:<sup>7</sup>

"the rations on 'spaceship Earth' will soon be running low and that only urgent and drastic action can avert ecological catastrophe. Internationally, the most widely-publicised of such predictions have been those contained in *The Limits to Growth*, a study sponsored by the Club of Rome and conducted by a team at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology which was published in March 1972. This concluded that there was an urgent need to bring about a deliberate, controlled end to growth; the Executive Committee of the Club of Rome commented that 'only the conviction that there is no other avenue to survival can liberate the moral, intellectual, and creative forces required to initiate this unprecedented human undertaking'."

It is a matter of historical record that the scare campaign mounted by the Club of Rome did not prevail. Looking back, it is nevertheless instructive to consider the confident predictions of *Limits to Growth* that, if world economic growth were to be maintained at then existing rates (we have, since then, grown faster), Earth's

6. Treasury Economic Paper No. 2, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, June, 1973.

7. *Ibid.*, page 2.



mineral resources would be exhausted within a few decades (roughly, by now). As the Treasury's critique pointed out at the time, and as has been shown over the intervening years, this was nonsense. So far from becoming exhausted, by 2002 the real (inflation adjusted) price of virtually every mineral in the world had *fallen* since 1972, the most conclusive possible proof that supplies of those minerals had continued to outstrip demand for them. Even today, at a time when a new economic giant, China, and another less advanced but potentially equally important one, India, are emerging and placing heavy additional demands upon supplies of raw materials, the nonsense remains just as nonsensical in anything but the short-to-medium-term. The reasons for that were cogently set out in that Treasury Economic Paper thirty years ago, and remain equally valid today.

We would be unwise, however, to assume that it was solely the power of intellectual argument, such as that mounted in that Treasury paper, which prevailed over the Club of Rome's scare-mongering. It may also have been that the latter simply got their timing wrong. After all, in 1973 the world was locked in the Cold War between the two super-powers and their allies. There was, so to speak, quite enough fear in the world already to meet the needs of those (like

Crichton's N.E.R.F. and the world's media) for whom fear is the key to power and pelf.

However that may be, the second of those two personal experiences referred to above came in 1990-91 when, after returning to Melbourne following my brief sojourn in Queensland (and the Senate) I was again employed as a Senior Fellow at the Institute of Public Affairs. My first task there was to produce a survey publication covering various environmental topics. Duly published in 1991, it addressed, among other issues, the then growing clamour about "global warming".<sup>8</sup>

It was my first serious encounter with that topic. The much publicised first (1990) report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a United Nations body comprising U.N. bureaucrats and selected scientists working under their control, had just appeared. Its alarmist suggestions (subsequently hardened, in its 1995 and 2000 reports, to actual predictions) that the world was facing a steady, and inevitably catastrophic, increase in atmospheric temperatures, were all the rage in our media. My reaction, after reading all I could on the subject, was at that time one of scepticism but not one of absolute rejection. It was, I said, a fascinating intellectual hypothesis, but it was, at that time, no more than an hypothesis. Like all scientific hypotheses, it would

8. *The Environment in Perspective: Selected Articles with a Commentary* by John Stone, Institute of Public Affairs, Melbourne, 1991.

need to be exposed to wide-ranging criticism from other scientists and tested against experimental data.

Since that time I have maintained an interest in the global warming topic. The result is that, the more I have seen of it, the more sceptical (at first) and dismissive (today) I have become. So although the environmental issues in *State of Fear* are by no means confined to global warming, on that issue at least I found myself already wholly in sympathy with Crichton.

As one whose first venture into

academia was an Honours degree in Mathematical Physics, I have always retained an interest in scientific debates even though it is over fifty years since I last laboured in that vineyard. The feature therefore of the global warming controversy which I have long considered most important is well summed up in the final component of those thirty-six additional pages of Crichton's book, namely his Appendix entitled *Why Politicized Science is so Dangerous*. He is right. It is: and for that Appendix alone, *State of Fear* is worth reading.