**Title:** Whose facts and which values? democratizing climate science through rethinking relationships between science and society

Jacqueline de Chazal  
Resource Management in Asia-Pacific Program  
Crawford School of Economics and Government  
Australian National University  
Canberra ACT 0200, Australia

**Abstract**

This presentation reflects on the recent ANU Democratizing Climate Governance conference that I attended. I was particularly interested in what I informally observed as an apparent disciplinary tension between the sciences and the humanities. This was most evident at the closing plenary where I got the impression that some participants left feeling that science and its implications were not being taken seriously enough. I found this particularly intriguing as a scientist who presented material that could be on first glance conceived as challenging science. In that sense I became one of those who could be conceived as not understanding.

I will present the talk I gave as well as some reflections on the conference. My reading of the conference mood became somewhat of a microcosm for the argument I was presenting. I will also reflect on how one might evidence what I understand as the cultural setting(s) of science – how one might collect data in this typically unspoken and interpretative setting.

The abstract for my talk follows.

This presentation examines democracy as it relates to the science of climate change. As a starting point I present two observations concerning relationships between facts and values drawn from social science. I then use these relationships to explain aspects of the current public debate on climate change. I then offer an alternative view on relationships between science and society that aspires to be more democratic.

The first observation is that values can influence what are deemed to be facts and vice versa. Leaving aside debates concerning whether there can be independent observation, scientific and social uncertainties associated with climate change science provide a particularly conducive environment to players making conscious or unconscious selective choices concerning what constitutes convincing evidence relating to human-induced climate change.

The second observation is that values strongly determine belief in climate change and what are considered as reasonable and appropriate adaptation responses. This observation is particularly pertinent given the present public framing of climate change in terms of ‘believers’, and ‘skeptics’ or ‘disbelievers’.

I see the following playing out as a consequence of not taking these observations into account.

First is the diminishment of public confidence in the science of climate change and the apparent shift from understanding climate change as a matter decided by science to a matter of belief. I propose that this diminishment has largely occurred because science is erroneously assumed to represent an objective and final voice. As a consequence the public feel let down by recent events (e.g. uncertainties variously packaged as certainties or disbelief), and instead see the situation as a case where scientific truths are being distorted to suit particular ideological positions.

Second are attempts by scientists to restore public confidence in climate change science, often explicitly emphasising the objectivity and settled nature of the facts. I propose that all this does is reinforce this false perception of science both to the public, as well as within science.
The third is an often apparent unconscious shift by scientists from presenting facts about climate change to making (implicit) value statements about how society ought to act. Irrespective of the uncertainties surrounding climate change science and other values implicated in the scientific process, science in itself has no role in prescribing courses of action.

Amongst the advocates of rethinking relationships between science and society, calls for better treatment of uncertainty, values and value conflict, and accommodation of processes that encourage democratic openness, deliberation and transparency are common. I expand on a means that accommodates these aspects, in particular the use of deliberative processes. Questions such as who might represent the ‘extended peer community’ and how differently deemed facts concerning climate change and associated considered appropriate responses might be deliberated in order to reach an outcome will be explored.

Bio

Jacqui has a science degree and a PhD in ecology from the ANU. A long standing interest in the role that value judgements play in determining assessments of ecosystem change has led her to widen an initial science focus to include the social sciences, in particular philosophy of science and the sociology of scientific knowledge. Her research involves examining the complex relationships between facts and values in global environmental change and developing conceptual models and practical methods for working with multiple and shifting perspectives on assessments of ecosystem change in Australia and international contexts. A major concern of her work has been to highlight what she views as the inescapable role of value judgements in any characterisation of environment (or “nature” as is typically conceived) and its dynamics. She has only recently returned to the ANU after 5 years overseas, working in France, Belgium, the U.K. and Africa.