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CSIRO bid to gag emissions trading scheme policy attack

- EXCLUSIVE: Nicola Berkovic
- From: [The Australian](#)
- November 02, 2009 12:00AM

THE nation's peak science agency has tried to gag the publication of a paper by one of its senior environmental economists attacking the Rudd government's climate change policies.

The paper, by the CSIRO's Clive Spash, argues the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme is an ineffective way to cut emissions, and instead direct legislation or a tax on carbon is needed.

The paper was accepted for publication by the journal *New Political Economy* after being internationally peer-reviewed.

But Dr Spash told the Australia New Zealand Society for Ecological Economics conference that the CSIRO had since June tried to block its publication.

In the paper, Dr Spash argues the economic theory underpinning emissions trading schemes is "far removed" from the reality of permit markets. "While carbon trading and offset schemes seem set to spread, they so far appear ineffective in terms of actually reducing GHGs (greenhouse gases)," he says. "Despite this apparent failure, ETS remain politically popular amongst the industrialised polluters.

"The public appearance is that action is being undertaken. The reality is that GHGs are increasing and society is avoiding the need for substantive proposals to address the problem of behavioural and structural change."

Dr Spash said trading schemes did not efficiently allocate emission cuts because their design was manipulated by vested interests. For example, in Australia, large polluters would be compensated with free permits while smaller, more competitive firms would have to buy theirs at auction. The schemes were also flawed because: global warming was caused by gases other than carbon; emissions were difficult to measure; carbon offsets bought from other countries were of dubious value; and the schemes "crowded out" voluntary action by individuals. He concludes that more direct measures, such as a carbon tax, regulations or new infrastructure would be simpler, more effective and less open to manipulation.

Dr Spash could not be contacted by *The Australian*.

However, his presentation to the ANZSEE conference in Darwin last Wednesday stated: "The CSIRO is currently maintaining they have the right to ban the written version of this paper

from publication by myself as a representative of the organisation and by myself as a private citizen."

Dr Spash said CSIRO managers had written to the journal's editor demanding the paper not be published.

CSIRO spokesman Huw Morgan said the publication of Dr Spash's paper was an internal matter and was being reviewed by the chief executive's office.

However, he said that under the agency's charter scientists were forbidden from commenting on matters of government or opposition policy.

The CSIRO charter, introduced last year, was trumpeted by Science Minister Kim Carr as a way to guarantee freedom of expression for scientists.

Senator Carr said he was seeking a briefing from the CSIRO.

Opposition science spokesman Eric Abetz accused the government of empty spin.

Julian Cribb, adjunct professor of science communication at the University of Technology, Sydney, said gagging scientists deprived the public of scientific knowledge they had funded.

ANZSEE president Wendy Proctor said if Dr Spash's research questioned current orthodoxy, it should be made public to inform debate.

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