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CSIRO scientist faces punishment

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By Crystal Ja

The CSIRO will punish one of its scientists after he published a paper on climate change that criticised the government's emissions trading scheme.

It has accused Dr Clive Spash of breaching protocol by releasing the paper before it was vetted by the peak science body.

"These breaches of fundamental CSIRO standards will be dealt with through appropriate line management," CSIRO boss Megan Clark wrote in a letter to federal Science Minister Kim Carr.

But facing accusations of censorship, it has released the paper officially - stressing it is not linked to the CSIRO in any way.

Dr Spash accused his employer of gagging him after it refused to formally release his report under the CSIRO banner earlier this month.

The paper, *The Brave New World of Carbon Trading*, is critical of cap and trade systems - like the one the government is introducing - as well as the compensation given to industry.

He recommends a direct tax on carbon.

The CSIRO - which has guidelines restricting its scientists from commenting on public policy - has repeatedly denied suggestions it is censoring criticism of the government.

"This has never been an issue of gagging or stifling debate on ETS policies," Dr Clark wrote.

"The key issues at play here are the quality of science and how it is communicated.

"CSIRO has a nationally recognised role as a trusted advisor on matters of science and as such it is important that all our staff are able to fulfil their duties in an apolitical, impartial and professional manner."

She said CSIRO had processes in place to ensure its reputation in science and development is maintained.

Dr Clark was critical of Dr Spash's approach to the issue, saying he had not met his responsibilities as a CSIRO scientist.

He will be punished for releasing his paper during a conference in Darwin in October.

Although he released it without mentioning his link to CSIRO, the science body said he was meant to have gotten formal approval.

"His behaviour has been manifestly inconsistent with the expectations and obligations that apply to all CSIRO staff," Dr Clark said in the letter.

The CSIRO, which headhunted the leading scientist, had tried to get Dr Spash to amend the report so it could be published with CSIRO linkage, but he declined to change it.

The unamended report has been tabled in parliament.

<http://news.ninensn.com.au/technology/976536/csiro-scientist-faces-punishment>