

COMMENTARY:

Different views ensure IPCC balance

Ottmar Edenhofer

The accusation that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has produced a report that is biased by a conflict of interest is unfounded.

Following its recent publication of the *Special Report on Renewable Energy Sources and Climate Change Mitigation* (SRREN), the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was criticized for setting the political agenda beyond its mandate. Specifically, it was suggested that the IPCC endorses an 80% deployment rate of renewables — allegedly following a scenario carried out by Greenpeace. Also, one of the lead authors in the scenario chapter, Sven Teske, is an employee of Greenpeace. Critics say that this is in breach of the IPCC's new conflict-of-interest policy.

What are the facts? The 'Summary for Policymakers' (SPM), released in May, is balanced and scientifically sound. In it, the IPCC does not endorse a specific deployment level of renewables. It is the press release that has provoked misunderstanding and sparked some debate, not the SPM or the underlying report. Even though the press release starts with a statement about the upper-end scenario of renewables deployment that could be achieved, it also puts the 80% figure into perspective: "Over 160 existing scientific scenarios on the possible

penetration of renewables by 2050, alongside environmental and social implications, have been reviewed with four analysed in-depth. ... The most optimistic of the four, projects renewable energy accounting for as much as 77 per cent of the world's energy demand by 2050. ... Each of the scenarios is underpinned by a range of variables such as changes in energy efficiency, population growth and per capita consumption. These lead to varying levels of total primary energy supply in 2050, with the lowest of the four scenarios seeing renewable energy accounting for a share of 15 per cent in 2050."

Given the great variety of estimates of possible deployment levels for renewables, the mandate of the IPCC is to evaluate the full range of scenarios, including those with very low as well as those with very high penetration. Neither the SPM nor the press release endorses any single scenario. They live up to the IPCC's mandate of providing policy-relevant information without being policy prescriptive.

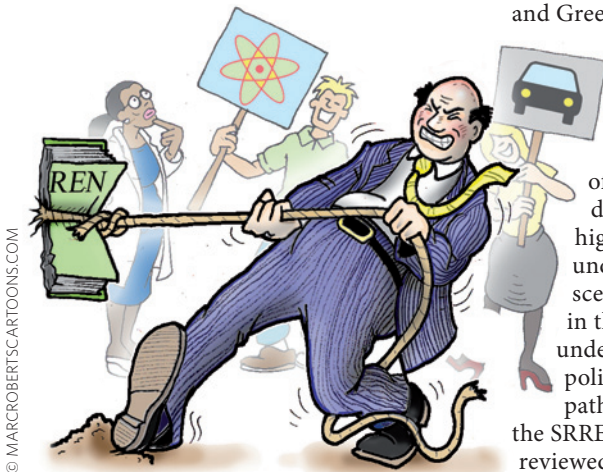
Although a high-penetration scenario was commissioned by the environmental organization Greenpeace, and Greenpeace employee Sven Teske was involved in its development, the underlying study was carried out by the German Aerospace Center (DLR). The scenario is an example of a high share of renewable deployment in conjunction with high energy-efficiency gains. The underlying assumptions of this scenario have been made explicit in the SRREN to allow for a clear understanding of the technical and political requirements for such a pathway. The scenario assessed in the SRREN was published in the peer-reviewed journal *Energy Efficiency*¹. The

related Greenpeace report was not part of this assessment.

Does the inclusion of Teske in the author team evaluating the scenarios now pose an unacceptable conflict of interest? It does not. For all IPCC assessments, teams of leading experts consider large bodies of literature. These will often include some of their own work, as leading experts in an area will have contributed to the relevant literature. The US National Academy of Sciences rules that reviewing one's own work is not generally a conflict of interest when that work is just part of the wider body of material that serves as the basis for the review². This view is also shared by the IPCC. The disputed energy scenario was one of 164 evaluated in the SRREN. The decision to analyse it in greater depth, as one of four, was made by the team, not by any single author. The composition of the chapter teams, the design of the report structure, and the IPCC review, revision and approval processes ensure a balanced assessment and avoid bias.

Is it then inappropriate to include experts from non-governmental organizations or industry in the assessment process? On the contrary, it is one of the fundamental responsibilities of the IPCC to reflect the wide range of scientifically credible views on each of the topics it assesses. Therefore, governments are explicitly invited to nominate authors from a variety of backgrounds. In the case of the SRREN, experts from academia, business and industry, as well as from non-governmental organizations, were involved. The structure of author teams and the writing and review process prevent viewpoints of any single author from dominating the assessment.

The IPCC has throughout its existence taken care to avoid conflict of interest in the selection of its authors. Nonetheless,



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following the publication of its fourth assessment report in 2007, the IPCC recognized the value of formalizing a conflict-of-interest policy for its fifth assessment cycle. Until the conflict-of-interest policy is implemented, the IPCC Working Groups I and II have established interim guidelines, and Working Group III is in the process of doing so. This is a proactive response to the panel's decision to implement the recommendation from the InterAcademy Council's review of the IPCC policies and procedures that "the IPCC should develop and adopt a rigorous conflict-of-interest policy." In May, the IPCC plenary

approved a formal conflict-of-interest policy and extended the mandate of the Task Group on Conflict of Interest Policy to develop an implementation and disclosure form².

Over the past 20 years, the IPCC has successfully established a science/policy interface based on transparency of authors' affiliations, careful criteria for assessment and a balance of perspectives. The accusation that Working Group III has violated any of these principles and carried out a biased special report is ungrounded and has no basis in evidence. The IPCC published the institutional affiliations of all authors at the same time as the SPM. The

SRREN is balanced, unbiased and based on rigorous science. □

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