

# Exposed: climate change doubter with PhD only in spin



**JOHN GIBBONS**

## OPINION

How a high-profile climate change denier was exposed as an unscientific bluffer

**L**OOKING TO a statistician or economist for expert guidance on complex scientific matters makes about as much sense as consulting a neurosurgeon or a hairdresser for advice on investing in derivatives.

However, when it comes to climate science, this is exactly what has been happening. A small band of people operating entirely beyond their training or competence have, largely thanks to their skill in playing the media, emerged as international experts, advising politicians and shaping policy, with jargon glossing over a hard core of ideology.

The best known is Bjorn Lomborg, the Danish academic who has cleverly pitched himself

as the hip “alternative voice” to the stuffy scientists and environmental doomsayers. Since the publication in 2001 of his superbly disingenuous book, *The Skeptical Environmentalist*, Lomborg is widely perceived as the most plausible, articulate voice telling us to ignore the ever more urgent warnings from the scientific community on the need to stabilise our climate system.

Lomborg reportedly spent 18 months producing a book, which, taken at face value, overturns almost everything we know about earth sciences, from biodiversity to soil erosion, atmospheric physics, hydrology, ice dynamics and ocean circulation.

Quite an achievement for

someone without even an undergraduate degree in a physical science. That Lomborg has developed such an inflated view of his own expertise would, in normal circumstances, make him a harmless figure of fun.

Lomborg’s actual genius lies not in science, but in theatre. He realised that if he could look and sound science-y, almost no one would know the difference, since few in the media or politics have any idea how science actually works. His book was denounced as shoddy by scientists and academics, but his inclusion of hundreds of references made it look, to the untrained eye, like a tremendous work of scholarship.

Like its author, the book was

an unqualified success. The media had a new star, a breezy antidote to the gloomy “consensus”. The telegenic, bike-riding vegetarian with the salesman’s smile masquerading as an environmentalist fitted the bill as the “rational voice” speaking out against alarmism. Lomborg and fellow denialists claimed to be the “middle ground”. It was an audacious coup, in which spin trumped science. The now widespread fallacy that global warming has been hyped up by scientists owes much to Lomborg and the credulity of the media in repeating and amplifying his assertions. Without Lomborg’s meticulous preparatory work, the “Climategate” red herring – since

debunked – might have not been so eagerly swallowed.

Lomborg’s lucrative nine-year free ride may be at an end. Investigative author Howard Friel’s *The Lomborg Deception* (Yale University Press) peels away the pseudo-scholarship that has shielded Lomborg from scrutiny.

Lomborg’s *modus operandi* involves ruthlessly excluding all evidence that doesn’t match his sweeping assertions while smearing scientists’ integrity. A critical reason why Lomborg has escaped more intensive media scrutiny is that he gives the impression of accepting that global warming is occurring.

However, his “smart solutions” (arrived at using classic voodoo

economics models) involve continuing to burn fossil fuels like there is no tomorrow, throwing a token few dollars at facile exercises like buying mosquito nets. Ironically, Lomborg claims to accept the bona fides of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, yet his business-as-usual injunction would lock us into calamitous global average temperature rises.

In the real world, the climatic chaos triggered by such severe heating would most likely sweep away much of human civilisation. Alarming? Yes. Alarmist? No.

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