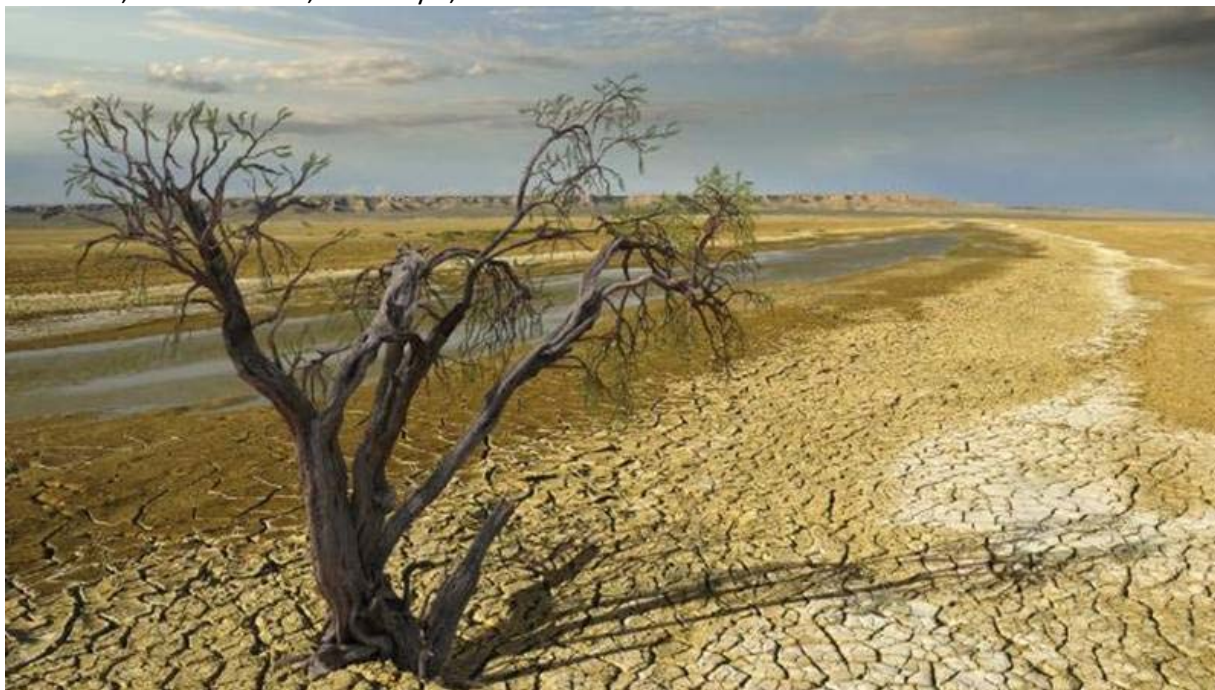


World 'to follow' CSIRO on climate change research focus

John Ross, The Australian, February 6, 2016



The CSIRO has decided to redirect some of its climate measuring activities towards adaptation and mitigation.

Climate scientists and agencies around the world will follow CSIRO's lead in redirecting their research from modelling, according to outspoken US climatologist Judith Curry. Professor Curry said climate modelling had reached the point of "diminishing returns", triggering an inevitable redirection of funding from science towards policy. "Now that the UN's community of nations has accepted consensus climate science to drive international energy and carbon policy, what is the point of heavy government funding of climate research, particularly global climate modelling?" she said.

Professor Curry's comments, posted in her blog Climate Etc, were triggered by the CSIRO's decision to redirect some of its climate measuring activities towards adaptation and mitigation. The announcement, which will affect up to 350 jobs at the national science agency, has sparked a chorus of outrage from top researchers across the country.

Scientists not renowned for strong language described the move as "disastrous", "ludicrous" and "jaw-droppingly shocking". "There seems no appreciation of how much this science underpins our nation's interests," said Matthew England of the University of NSW.

The Australian Academy of Science said the government needed to urgently find another agency to continue CSIRO's comprehensive national climate research. "Realistically, no other countries in the southern hemisphere (can) do what we do," said academy president Andrew Holmes. "We have a singular contribution to make towards global and regional climate knowledge."

Professor Curry, who has been branded a heretic for highlighting uncertainties in climate models, said the CSIRO had been a "world leader" in atmospheric research and monitoring. But she said the agency's global remit had been at the expense of its own backyard.

"One has to wonder whether the health of climate science in Australia would be better if (CSIRO) hadn't bothered with global climate modelling and playing the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change games, but rather focused on local climate issues and the climate dynamics of the southern hemisphere," she said.

Peter Tangney, a lecturer in science policy and communication at Adelaide's Flinders University, said climate science had proven "largely unhelpful" in informing policy makers because the models were too broad scale. "An awful lot of adaptation science can be done without climate change models. At this point in the game, those models are less helpful than other scientific research," he said. Overseas experts warned that the CSIRO move could prove irreversible. "If the realisation dawns that we need continuous accurate scientific measurements for the world to follow through on (its) commitments, it might be too late to regain that expertise in Australia," said Malte Meinshausen of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research in Germany.

Paul Durack, of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California, said opportunities at CSIRO had "dwindled" over the past decade. "This may lead to a key and proud Australian research capacity leaving Australian shores for good."