

Press release ☒

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Strong criticism of DCSD ruling

Today, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation published its assessment of the DCSD's (Danish Committees on Scientific Dishonesty) ruling on Bjørn Lomborg's book "The Skeptical Environmentalist". The assessment contains strong criticism of the DCSD ruling. On 6 January 2003, the DCSD ruled that Mr Lomborg's book was "objectively" dishonest and "clearly contrary to the standards of good scientific practice".

The DCSD ruling is flunked by the Ministry's lawyers. Most importantly, the Ministry emphasises that the DCSD ruling is "not documented" and "completely void of argumentation" for the claims of dishonesty and lack of good scientific practice.

The Ministry characterises the DCSD's treatment of the case as "dissatisfactory", "open to criticism" and "emotional" and points out a number of significant errors in the DCSD's treatment of Mr Lomborg's case.

"It has been almost two years since the beginning of the DCSD case against my book. It has been hard, but I am happy that we now have confirmation that there is freedom of speech – even in the environmental debate. Let us now concentrate our efforts on what is important, namely how to prioritise best our efforts for the environment", says Bjørn Lomborg.

"The DCSD ruling could not stand closer scrutiny. Already when the ruling came in January, it was clear that it had no substance. This was pointed out by commentators from leading Danish newspapers, and almost 300 scientists signed a protest against the ruling."

"Unfortunately, the DCSD ruling came at an opportune time for many people, who wanted to criticize my work and that of the EAI. The case was infected from the beginning. The complaints about my book were not based on science, but rather on a wish to stop my appointment as the Director of the EAI."

"The DCSD case has had great significance for the working environment at the EAI. With the scathing assessment of the DCSD ruling, it has now been established that if someone wants to criticise the Institute or my book – and anyone is welcome to do so – mudslinging is not enough. You have to use solid arguments."

Appendices to this press release:

Overview of the Ministry's criticism

Overview of the course of the DCSD case against Bjørn Lomborg's book

Further information:

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Main points of the criticism of the DCSD ruling (points in brackets refer to paragraphs in the Ministry's assessment)

A number of points include serious criticism of the DCSD:

The DCSD has not substantiated its ruling. Mr Lomborg has not been told exactly where he has, allegedly, made mistakes. This is a case of "significant neglect in case processing by the DCSD". "Here the Ministry must point out that the DCSD has not documented where the respondent (BL) has allegedly been biased in his choice of data and in his argumentation, and that the ruling is completely void of argumentation for why the DCSD find that the complainants are right in their criticisms of BL's working methods." (point 6.1.)

The DCSD's division into objective and subjective dishonesty in its ruling on Mr Lomborg's book "could present a misleading picture of the actual conclusion". This has been the case to a great extent. The actual conclusion is that "there is no scientific dishonesty". This is not the picture presented to the public by the DCSD ruling. (point 5.1.3.)

In its ruling, the DCSD emphasises that scientific work should go through "peer review". Nevertheless, the DCSD omits to examine whether this has happened in the case of Mr Lomborg's book. The Ministry describes this as "dissatisfactory". Mr Lomborg's book was accepted at the Cambridge University Press after a thorough peer review by four recognised scientists. (point 6.5.)

The DCSD's choice of language "does not meet the linguistic standards of good administrative practice". The Ministry writes that the DCSD should be able to refer to the content of a criticism without using condescending or emotional language. (point 6.7.)

The DCSD decided to bring Mr Lomborg's case before three scientific committees instead of the usual one committee. The procedure for this decision was not correct. (point 5.1.4.)

The people who have complained about Mr Lomborg have been incorrectly treated as "parties" to the case. This means that they have been heard to an extent they have not been entitled to. (point 6.2.)

Criticism of the fact that the chairman of the sub-committee in the case of Mr Lomborg came from the health sciences and not from the social sciences, which is Mr Lomborg's field. (point 6.6.1.)

It was "clearly wrong" that Mr Lomborg was not heard before public disclosure of the DCSD ruling. (points 6.6.2. and 6.8.)

The DCSD has not taken a position on whether the complaint regarding Mr Lomborg's reader's letters in the press should have been dismissed. This "was a mistake". (point 6.3.)

In its ruling, the DCSD cannot take a position on whether Mr Lomborg's book is contrary to good scientific practice. (point 5.1.2.)

Since Mr Lomborg's book was published outside Denmark, it is doubtful if the DCSD has the competence to try the case. The DCSD ought to have checked this. (point 5.1.5.)

The DCSD did not check whether Mr Lomborg's book fell within the field covered by the DCSD's competence, ie. if the book was a scientific work rather than a debate book. (point 6.4.)

Several points are so serious that, according to the Ministry, each point individually leads to remission of the case to the DCSD.☐☐

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