

Is the Global Warming Policy Foundation complying with Charity Commission rules?

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Bob Ward recently registered a complaint with the Charity Commission concerning the Global Warming Policy Foundation, a climate sceptic think tank founded by former Chancellor Nigel Lawson. In this article, he argues that the Foundation has persistently breached the Commission's guidance on campaigning and political activity in a number of ways.



On 12 June 2013, I completed an online form on the website of the Charity Commission to raise a concern about the Global Warming Policy Foundation. Here are my reasons for doing so.

The Foundation was officially registered as a charity on 1 September 2009, with the following charitable objectives: “to advance the public understanding of global warming and of its possible consequences, and also of the measures taken or proposed to be taken in response to it, including by means of the dissemination of the results of the study of, and research into (a.) the sciences relevant to global warming; (b.) its impact upon the environment, economies and society; (c.) and the above-mentioned measures; and also by the promotion of study and research in those subjects.”

The Foundation was publicly launched on 23 November 2009 by its chair, Lord Lawson of Blaby. In a truly astonishing coincidence, this was just a few days after the publication of [e-mails that had been hacked](#) from the Climatic Research Unit (CRU) at the University of East Anglia. Lord Lawson used the so-called ‘Climategate’ e-mails as an opportunity to promote his Foundation in [an article](#) in *The Times* while stating his opposition to efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. He also claimed that global warming had stopped, denied there was a scientific consensus, and accused the CRU researchers of “manipulating the raw temperature figures to show a relentlessly rising global warming trend” and other serious misconduct.

The [official inquiry](#) into the CRU e-mails concluded that “on the specific allegations made against the behaviour of CRU scientists, we find that their rigour and honesty as scientists are not in doubt”. But instead of withdrawing the serious allegations against the CRU scientists, the Foundation’s Director, Dr Benny Peiser, [rejected the inquiry’s findings](#). This episode illustrates how the Foundation has pursued its “charitable objectives” over the past three and a half years: oppose policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; attack mainstream climate researchers; and cast doubt on the scientific evidence about the causes and consequences of global warming. When the new Coalition Government entered office in May 2010, the Foundation issued a [press release](#) calling for the abandonment of policies to decarbonise the UK economy.

The Charity Commission’s ‘Speaking out guidance on campaigning and political activity by charities’ [states](#): “To be a charity an organisation must be established for charitable purposes only, which are for the public benefit. An organisation will not be charitable if its purposes are political.” But it also points out that “Campaigning and political activity can be legitimate and valuable activities for charities to undertake”.

Given the Foundation’s activities, I think it is pretty clear that its primary purpose is political. However, my reason for raising a concern with the Charity Commission was not for this breach of the rules, but instead because it has executed its political campaign by continually disseminating inaccurate and misleading information in such a way that it represents “serious non-compliance in a charity that damages or has the potential to damage its reputation and/or the reputation of charities generally”.

The Charity Commission’s guidance states: “A charity can campaign using emotive or controversial material, where this is lawful and justifiable in the context of the campaign. Such material must be factually accurate and have a

legitimate evidence base.” The Foundation has persistently breached this guidance in a number of ways. First, Lord Lawson, as Chair of the Foundation, has made [numerous statements](#) to the media that are inaccurate and misleading. For instance, in December 2011 he wrote [an article](#) for the ‘Radio Times’ which attacked David Attenborough for his narrative in the ‘Frozen Planet’ series. But Lord Lawson’s criticisms were based on an [inaccurate account](#) of the impacts that climate change is having on polar regions.

Second, Lord Lawson, has delivered public speeches, including in Parliament, which include inaccurate and misleading statements about the science and economics of climate change. For instance, in April 2011 he gave [a lecture](#) at the National Theatre that featured numerous erroneous claims about the scientific evidence.

Third, the Foundation has published a number of pamphlets which have criticised mainstream climate research using inaccurate and misleading information. For instance, in October 2012, the Foundation disseminated [a document](#) by Rt Hon Peter Lilley MP, Vice-Chairman of Tethys Petroleum, which attacked the 2006 report on ‘The Economics of Climate Change’ by Nicholas Stern, now chair of the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment at London School of Economics and Political Science. But Mr Lilley’s polemic was filled with serious [errors and inaccuracies](#).

Fourth, the Foundation has used its website to misrepresent newspaper and magazine articles about climate change, inserting false headlines in order to promote its own political agenda. For instance, the Foundation reproduced an article from the website of ‘The Economist’ on 21 June 2013 which was published under the headline ‘[A Cooling Consensus](#)’. The Foundation inserted a fake [sub-heading](#) stating “The public has been systematically deceived by climate alarmists”.

Fifth, the Foundation used its website to disseminate inaccurate and misleading commentary by its staff. For instance, on 2 February 2011, the Foundation [published a web page](#) by its ‘science editor’, Dr David Whitehouse, which purported to analyse information about ‘the temperature of 2010’. It is [riddled with mistakes](#).

I have submitted all of this evidence to the Charity Commission for it to consider. It has indicated that it will respond within three weeks. I look forward to the verdict.

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the British Politics and Policy blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please read our [comments policy](#) before posting.

About the Author

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