“Climate change and the failure of our democratic institutions”

Emeritus Professor Philip Cocks

Institute of Agriculture
The University of Western Australia

Food and Agriculture Lecture

Monday, 28 April 2008
5.15 – 6.15 pm

Molecular & Chemical Sciences
Lecture Theatre (G.33), UWA
(Fairway, Entrance No. 4, Car Park 14 and 21)

Summary: Perhaps the greatest environmental problem of our time is the increase in greenhouse gases leading to global warming and massive climate change. The causes are known, solutions are available, most citizens believe that there must be action and indeed many national governments agree on what measures should be taken. Yet, some key developed nations seem oblivious to the problem. In his seminar Emeritus Professor Phil Cocks will briefly examine the nature of western democracies and how decisions are supposedly based on reasoned debate. It will reflect on the scientific method itself and how climate science is not as rigorous as experimental science. It will examine how our institutions have, until recently, failed to comprehend the gravity and nature of climate change. It will consider the value systems that are behind the ways we look at the exploitation of natural resources and will conclude with a discussion on how our democratic institutions must change at national and international levels.

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Biography: Phil Cocks graduated with the Masters and PhD degrees from the University of Adelaide. He served in the South Australian Department of Agriculture at Kybbybolite Research Centre, in the Naracoorte District Office and later at the Northfield Research Centre in Adelaide. During this period his research focused on the ecology and productivity of subterranean clover. He later became Principal Research Officer for the Central Region where he was responsible for the oversight of all aspects of research.

In the late 1970s he formed part of the South Australian team sent to northern Iraq to examine the possibilities of introducing ley farming to that region. This led to an appointment with the International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), in Aleppo, Syria, where he led the Livestock Program, whose main aim was to increase the availability of feed for sheep in the Mediterranean basin. He also took the opportunity to study the ecology and aspects of the productivity of medic pastures and played an important part in introducing a farming systems approach to ICARDA research.

On his return to Australia Phil accepted the position of head of the Plant Sciences group at the University of Western Australia. He later became Deputy Executive Dean and was appointed a member of the western panel of the Grains Research & Development Corporation. In 2000 he led the successful bid for the CRC for Plant-based Management of Dryland Salinity (now the Future Farms CRC), of which he became CEO until his retirement in 2004.

Phil is the author of nearly 100 refereed scientific papers and many more technical articles in the agricultural and popular press. In 2005 he was elected a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering and in 2006 was awarded the Chancellors Medal at UWA. In 2008 he was awarded the Farrer Memorial Medal for his research in natural resource management.