



**FINANCIAL  
TIMES**



## **ADJUDICATION**

by

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**EDITORIAL COMPLAINTS COMMISSIONER**

**Financial Times Limited**

1. This is an Adjudication of a complaint by Bob Ward, the Policy & Communications Director for the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment at the London School of Economics. Mr Ward has complained about a book review in the *Financial Times*, where Jonathan Ford reviewed two books which purport to challenge environmentalist ‘alarmism’:
  - a. *False Alarm: How Climate Change Panic Costs Us Trillions, Hurts the Poor and Fails to Fix the Planet* by Dr Bjorn Lomborg; and
  - b. *Apocalypse Never: Why Environmental Alarmism Hurts Us All*.
2. The headline of the book review was “*Are cooler heads needed on climate change?*” and the article remains online on FT.com (albeit in slightly amended form) at the URL: <https://www.ft.com/content/319089f8-9779-11e5-95c7-d47aa298f769> . Significantly, for the purposes of this Adjudication, not only did the article appear online, it also appeared on page 10 of the ‘Life & Arts’ section of the print edition of *FT Weekend* on Saturday, 19 September 2020.
3. The complaint was handled at first instance by Suzanne Blomson and Hugh Carnegie. The complaint correspondence through October and early November 2020 suggests a co-operative, if somewhat iterative, approach to reaching a position with which the complainant was broadly satisfied, at least in substance.
4. The complaint was brought under Clause 1 of the IPSO Code (Inaccuracy) which is annexed to the FT Editorial Code of Practice. The seven elements of the original complaint were in the following terms (numbering added):

“(1) *The third paragraph states: “There was no real evidence that polar bear numbers were collapsing. According to estimates compiled by the Polar Bear Specialist Group, part of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, bear numbers have actually been going up — from roughly 15,000 in 1970 to about 26,500 today.” This is inaccurate. The IUCN has not compiled estimates of global population size in 1970. Lomborg has apparently trawled through past documents and made his own estimates. His book draws attention to a paper published in 1985 which stated: “Estimates of world population size varied between ca 17000 to 19000 (Scott et al. 1959), and 5000 to 8000 (Uspensky 1965). The great differences in the population estimates illustrated the lack of adequate surveys, and the consequent great uncertainties with regard to polar bear numbers in different areas.” The statement can be found on page 63 here:*

<https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/1986-020.pdf> The estimate of 15,000 is Lomborg's, not the IUCN's.

(2) The seventh paragraph states: "As well as polar bear populations, Lomborg challenges other frequent claims such as the one that wildfires are massively increasing, pointing to satellite data showing that the amount of land burnt has fallen by a quarter in the past two decades." This is incorrect. The estimate of 25 per cent is based on total area burned by fire, not just wildfires but also those that were deliberately started to clear land for agriculture. Here is a link to a page on the NASA website on this: <https://www.nasa.gov/feature/goddard/2017/nasa-detects-drop-in-global-fires>

(3) The ninth paragraph states: "Take New Zealand's 2007 promise to go carbon-free by 2020." This is untrue. New Zealand has never had a target to be carbon neutral by 2020. Lomborg's book cites an inaccurate magazine article that made such a claim but it is untrue.

(4) The ninth paragraph states: "Not only was the goal missed; the country's emissions actually went up." This is incorrect. The target never existed, and the latest figures show that New Zealand's net annual emissions of greenhouse gases (including land use, land-use change and forestry) decreased from 57,523,645 tonnes in 2007 to 55,468,215 tonnes in 2018. The data are available here: <https://www.mfe.govt.nz/publications/climate-change/new-zealands-greenhouse-gas-inventory-1990-2018>

(5) The ninth paragraph also states: "Lomborg estimates that it will cost New Zealand between 16 and 32 per cent of GDP annually to hit its declared net-zero target in 2050 — or \$12,800 for each citizen." This is inaccurate. Lomborg actually estimates that the cost of reaching net zero could be 16 per cent of GDP by 2050, not annually, based on the mean of model outputs calculated by the New Zealand Government which omitted the economic benefits of avoided climate change and local air pollution. Lomborg speculated that the costs could be twice those calculated by the New Zealand Government. The New Zealand Government's study can be accessed here: <https://www.mfe.govt.nz/sites/default/files/media/Climate%20Change/Zero-Carbon-Bill-Economic-Analysis-Report-FINAL.pdf>

(6) The ninth paragraph states: "And all that to deliver a reduction of 0.004 degrees Fahrenheit in global temperatures in 2100, according to the standard estimate by the UN climate panel." This is misleading. This calculation was made by Dr Lomborg, and is not based on any estimate by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

(7) The twelfth paragraph states: "Citing research from the Nobel Prize winning economist William Nordhaus, Lomborg suggests that a temperature rise of 4C is possible — more than twice the 1.5C targeted in the 2015 UN Paris climate arrangement — while shedding only 2.9 per cent of global GDP relative to where it otherwise would have been." This is misleading. Lomborg's estimate is derived from a paper by Nordhaus and Moffat published in 2017, which omitted unquantified impacts of climate

*change. The authors recognised this and suggested the unquantified costs could add about 25 per cent more. Lomborg also acknowledged that this would increase the costs to 3.64 per cent of GDP. The original paper can be found here:*

*<https://cowles.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/pub/d20/d2096.pdf>*

5. The upshot of the first-instance resolution of the complaint was, in summary, as follows:

a. The FT did publish a correction online (which is still available to view at: <https://www.ft.com/content/d2cdcd78-41f7-41d9-ba12-90683b4939b7> ) on 6 November 2020 in relation to the fifth element, in the following terms:

***“Correction: cost of New Zealand’s net-zero carbon emissions target.***

*In his book False Alarm, Bjorn Lomborg estimates that hitting its declared net-zero carbon emissions target in 2050 will cost New Zealand between 16 and 32 per cent of annual GDP, not between 16 and 32 per cent of GDP annually as wrongly stated in a book review on September 19.”*

b. This Correction was included in the print edition of the *FT Weekend* on Saturday, 7 November 2020. Hugh Carney emailed Mr Ward to alert him to this print correction on the day it was published online: 6 November 2020.

c. In respect of the remaining six elements, Hugh Carney did not consider that there was a significant inaccuracy requiring a Correction. However, certain clarificatory tweaks (discussed below) were made to the language of the Book Review in respect of the first, second, third, fourth and sixth elements of the complaint. Although the Book Review itself makes mention of these – saying at the foot of the online version of the article *“This article has been amended since publication to clarify details about polar bear numbers, wildfires and New Zealand’s emissions”* – these elements of the complaint have not seen any correction in the print edition of *FT Weekend*.

6. On 5 November 2020 (the day before Mr Ward was alerted to any print correction being made), he exercised his right of appeal to me in the following terms:

*“I am writing to complain about an article that was published in the print edition of the Financial Times on 19-20 September. The article appeared under the headline ‘Are cooler heads needed on climate change’ in the books section on page 10 of ‘Life & Arts’. The article contains a number of inaccurate and misleading statements that represent breaches of Clause 1.1 of the IPSO Editors’ Code of Practice. I have corresponded with the Hugh Carnegie (please see email exchange below) who has very diligently amended the online version of the article (<https://www.ft.com/content/93d6353c-9ab1-4bd9-86bb-7d77aab44dde>). However, he has refused my request for a correction to the printed version of the article. As such, I believe the FT is in breach of Clause 1.2 of the Editors’ Code of Practice.”*

7. I do not understand Mr Ward to be appealing the outright refusal of his complaints in respect of the seventh element of his complaint. For completeness, had it been appealed, I would have rejected it for the same reasons given by Hugh Carnegie in his correspondence: the Book Review accurately summarises Lomborg’s citation of Nordhaus. The complaint primarily seeks to challenge the correctness of Lomborg’s view, not the FT’s summary of what Lomborg says. I would have been in absolutely no doubt whatsoever that the twelfth paragraph was not ‘misleading’.
8. The complaint is thus a narrow one. In respect of the clarificatory tweaks made to the online article (in respect of the first to fourth and sixth elements), excepting the correction in reference to the fifth element which has already been corrected both in print and online, is a correction *in print* required by Clause 1.2 of the IPSO Code?
9. Clause 1.2 provides that:

*“A significant inaccuracy, misleading statement or distortion must be corrected, promptly and with due prominence, and - where appropriate - an apology published.  
In cases involving IPSO, due prominence should be as required by the regulator”*

[the reference here to IPSO must instead be read as a reference to me]

10. I have opined on the proper construction of Clause 1 (which has two parts: Clause 1.1 and Clause 1.2) many times in previous Adjudications, which are available on FT.com (see in particular the *Berkeley Adjudication* at [8], the *Portes Adjudication* at [24]-[26], the *Wessendorff Adjudication* at [7]-[22], and the *Chandler Adjudication* at [8]).
11. Broadly speaking Clause 1.1 imposes an obligation *prior to publication* to “take care” against publishing any (1) inaccurate; (2) misleading; or (3) distorted information, and a freestanding obligation to ensure headlines reflect the full text of the article.
12. By contrast, Clause 1.2 imposes a *post-publication* obligation where a ‘significant’ inaccuracy has been published (whether in breach of Clause 1.1 or not) to correct it. This correction, assuming there is no need for an apology or the intervention of the regulator, must be (a) prompt; and (b) with due prominence.
13. It follows that not every single inaccuracy in a newspaper needs to be corrected. Only those that are ‘significant’ must be corrected under Clause 1.2 at all, and that could (in the case of an online-only article) include merely correcting the text of the article (which should automatically cause a footer to be added indicating the text has changed since publication). Whether there is a need for a further remedy of an entry in the Corrections Column (online and/or in print on the Letters Page) will depend on a number of factors discussed below.
14. There is no complaint here about promptness: rightly so, given the subtlety of the complaints, the considerable effort required to ascertain the correct position, and the iterative nature of the first-instance resolution. The two questions that must both be answered in Mr Ward’s favour on appeal are thus:
  - a. Did the first-to-fourth and sixth elements of his complaint (or any of them) identify a “significant inaccuracy”?
  - b. If so, was that inaccuracy so significant that “due prominence” required not only the correction be noted online, but a correction in the print edition?

15. Hugh Carnegie did not accept that any of the tweaked elements constituted a “significant inaccuracy” at all: the clarifications of language were made, from the FT’s perspective, gratuitously. The tweaks were as follows (strike-out indicates text deleted, underline indicates text added):

First element: *“~~According~~ With reference to estimates compiled by the Polar Bear Specialist Group, part of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, Lomborg estimates that bear numbers have actually been going up — from roughly 15,000 in 1970 to about 26,500 today...”*

Second element: *“Lomborg challenges other frequent claims such as the one that wildfires are massively increasing, pointing to satellite data showing that the amount of land burnt has fallen by a quarter in the past two decades. That estimate relates to the total area burnt by fire, not just wildfires.”*

Third element: *“Take New Zealand’s 2007 promise to go carbon-neutral ~~free~~ by 2020”*

Fifth element: *“Lomborg estimates that it will cost New Zealand between 16 and 32 per cent of annual GDP ~~annually~~”*

Fourth element: *“~~Not only was the goal missed. [T]he country’s emissions actually went up. Nor are its latest set of promises certain to fare much better.~~”*

Sixth element: *“... to deliver a reduction of 0.004 degrees Fahrenheit in global temperatures in 2100, according to his calculation using the standard estimate model used by the UN climate panel”*

16. The fifth element of the complaint I think was a ‘significant inaccuracy’, and the decision to publish a correction both online and in print cannot be impugned, although I stop short of saying it was strictly necessary.

17. As to the remaining elements of the complaint:

- a. I consider the third element (like the fifth element) was a ‘significant inaccuracy’ in that “carbon-neutral” is very different to “carbon-free” (albeit this was not the focus of Mr Ward’s complaint).
- b. The first and sixth elements are both technical inaccuracies – the estimates were Dr Lomborg’s calculations based on international organisations’ data, not estimates wholly created by those bodies themselves – but it would be truly exacting to describe these inaccuracies as ‘significant’ in the context of a Book Review, where the purpose is to give a flavour of the book’s thesis, not as a warranty of the authority of its contents;
- c. I don’t consider the second and fourth elements were inaccurate or misleading at all. The clarifications were truly gratuitous.

18. Giving Mr Ward the benefit of the doubt, I will consider the question of “due prominence” in relation to the first, third and sixth element of his complaint, even if I doubt that any but the third was truly a “significant inaccuracy”.

19. The only time I have previously had to consider the “due prominence” provision of Clause 1.2 was in the *Chandler Adjudication*, which concerned an assertion (which was true) that the complainant had successfully applied for a Maltese (i.e. EU) passport. The implication was that his application had been submitted *since* the Brexit referendum, when in fact he had applied beforehand. The clarification was published in the Corrections Column on the Letters Page, even though the article had been ‘trailed’ on the front page of the newspaper.

20. In my Adjudication I said:

- “32. ... *The only question on Clause 1.2 is therefore whether the Clarification was sufficiently prominent and made promptly.*
33. *I am aware that veterans of the press regulation wars over the last few years include in their numbers a faction for whom only the strictest congruence - a like-for-like correction - is acceptable. Their doctrine is that if an error appears on the front page, then the*

*correction must grace the front page, as large as the original story, in the same typeface.*

34. *I do not agree with that view: corrections and clarifications I have directed in the print edition have always been on the Letters Page, which I have been told by editors is the second most-read page. It is also where my contact details appear, and is where I consider most readers would look for a correction. I am satisfied, in spite of the front page Trailer, that the Clarification on the Letters Page and appended to the online article, is adequate in terms of due prominence. It was made within a week of complaint: that is 'promptly'."*

21. Print corrections, with a specific short piece published in the Corrections Column on the Letters Page, is appropriate for a very significant inaccuracy, being one that radically changes the way a reader will have appreciated the story (or the particular facts within the story) or one that has a marked impact on an individual or a company (whether by way of their reputation or otherwise). It is, as I noted in the *Chandler Adjudication*, prime real estate: the second-best-read page in the print edition of the newspaper. It is not to be given over to correcting typos from previous print editions: it is reserved for corrections that must be brought to the attention of every reader of the print edition.
22. Taking Mr Ward's complaint at its highest, it is obviously important that no-one be misinformed by inaccurate information by FT.com, and the decision to correct the first, third and sixth elements (and clarify the second and fourth) in the online edition will prevent anyone in the future making incorrect references based on the FT's Book Review. Had the article already caused a maelstrom of misinformation and erroneous citation by others, I might have considered it necessary that a Corrections Column clarification be made.
23. However, absent that factor, the online article has been clarified with a footer to indicate amendments. There has been no reputational harm, or infringement of any person's rights, by the lack of clarity. The errors were minor, even marginal to the central thrust of the article *which was a Book Review*, and even assuming in Mr Ward's favour that all three were 'significant inaccuracies', I am wholly satisfied that 'due prominence' in Clause 1.2 does not require print corrections to be published in the Corrections Column on the Letters Page in addition. That would be excessive, even if it could be done sensibly and elegantly in print (which I doubt).

24. For these reasons, the appeal is dismissed.

## **POSTSCRIPT**

25. Although I have not taken it into account in reaching my decision, I would not want it thought that I was entirely ignorant of the fact that Mr Ward and Dr Lomborg have a history of differences of opinion, including in the pages of the *Financial Times* itself (see Mr Ward's letter of 2 December 2015 criticising Dr Lomborg's article, and Dr Lomborg's letter in response published 6 December 2015).

26. Similarly, I am more than aware that Mr Ward has made several complaints in recent years to IPSO, including:

- a. 01032-17 *Ward v Mail on Sunday* – breach of Clause 1
- b. 18693-17 *Ward v Mail on Sunday* – not upheld
- c. 01570-18 *Ward v Sunday Telegraph* – not upheld
- d. 05555-18 *Ward v Daily Mail* – not upheld.

This is to be expected of someone whose professional role is as a Policy & Communications Director, who clearly cares passionately about accuracy of information in the fraught policy arguments over climate change.

27. I make absolutely no criticism of Mr Ward whatsoever in making his complaint to editorial. Quite the contrary: save for the seventh element, each element of it led to revisions (albeit relatively minor clarifications). The efforts of readers (and editorial) in ridding the FT of even the slightest error is to be encouraged.

28. However, those clarifications having been secured, I do rather question the value to anyone of this full Adjudication. Both Mr Ward and Dr Lomborg enjoy their own platforms, and both are clearly able to secure space on the Letters Page by writing letters when circumstances require it.

29. The FT complaints process exists to hold FT editorial to account for either making editorial errors in breach of its ethical Code. I would be loathe to see the FT complaints process become used as merely a forum for professional antagonists to settle their otherwise-irreconcilable differences.

30. In circumstances where several edits were made (gratuitously) and a print correction was made for one element (albeit notified the day after the appeal was filed), the system worked very well at first instance without my intervention, as Mr Ward fairly acknowledged. While I hope this Adjudication might prove useful to editorial and future complainants in calibrating what is meant by “due prominence” in Clause 1.2, I am left with a feeling of wondering whether – at least in respect of the appeal – this game really was worth the candle.

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*Financial Times*  
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