Preface

It is one of the distinguishing features of the scientific debate over climate change that those who contest the prevailing orthodoxy of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) are often called ‘sceptics’, and this is meant to be a pejorative term. Scepticism, however, has long been central to the scientific endeavour.

We have written this book out of a commitment to scepticism. We are sceptical for two reasons: after decades of observing environmental policy and politics, we are convinced that effective policy cannot be made against the interests of nations and people, especially businesses and employees – ironically, interests least represented when multilateral environmental agreements are negotiated, but all too apparent at the level of the nation-state. Second, we question the claim that international environmental treaties can be based on ‘consensus’ science as long as fundamental research questions remain unresolved, which may be for a very long time. When knowledge remains fundamentally incomplete, precautionary policy in particular will tend to drive policy towards the interests of short-term winners, ultimately enhancing global conflict unless there is genuine sharing. Consensus policy is one thing, but an ‘underpinning’ consensus among selected scientists and sciences funded by policy-makers is quite another. In arguing that science remains too uncertain and interests too diverse to justify the Kyoto Protocol as envisaged by its advocates, we have adopted an unpopular stand against a large amount of scientific, social scientific and legal literature, which will certainly not be welcomed by environmentalists. We still consider ourselves as supporters of environmental protection, but as politically unlikely to be achieved by use of ‘green’ rhetoric and selectivity. The green ‘movement’, if it wants to remain effective, needs to become politically more sophisticated.

In taking our stand we have been helped by many people in research and government, only some of whom we can mention. Sonja Boehmer-Christiansen owes much to all the IPCC scientists she was able to interview and observe during the early 1990s, including Sir John Houghton and Robert Watson. She has acted as a reviewer for its Working Group III, the experts with the solutions, since the mid 1990s. On the sceptical science side, she learnt from the astrophysics and space physics communities to which her late husband Dr Peter James Christiansen belonged, and more recently benefited from discussions with critical
Russian environmental scientists, especially Professor Kirill Ya Kondratyev. As editor of *Energy & Environment*, she has published many of the critical voices, not because she knows them to be right or highly ‘acclaimed’ by their peers, but because she felt that official journals in Europe in particular were ignoring critics. Our confidence in scientific scepticism is maintained not only by personal belief but also by contact with an informal global e-mail network that included a few IPCC authors and supporters and a self-selected group of sceptics, including well known IPCC critics such as Fred Singer, John Daly, Richard Courtney and Nigel Calder, as well as a number of German, Scandinavian and Australian scientists from several disciplines. Few have changed sides; the debate continues with little financial help for sceptics and their fundamental objections to ‘climate prediction’ by simple mathematical computations. However, no single hypothesis to counter the IPCC ‘consensus’ has so far emerged, nor is it being funded.

The seeds of doubt about climate models as policy tools were sowed early in our minds, but sprouted well while living with research communities that included not only fusion and plasma physics but, increasingly and more directly, the social and natural sciences. Sonja benefited from two UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) grants which allowed her to study the IPPC during its early years, and then observe how the climate threat was picked up for aid and trade purposes by international financial institutions. The Leverhulme Trust helped to fund a visit to Australia in 1998, and the Mawson Centre of the Geography Department (University of Adelaide) is thanked deeply for providing a friendly base for the study of Australia’s climate policy. The Lavoisier Group of the Australian Parliament is thanked for funding her travel to and in Australia in 2000 to discuss climate policy with policy-makers and stakeholders. Aynsley Kellow wishes to thank Stuart Harris for inviting him (on behalf of the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia) to present a paper to a Joint Academies Forum on Climate Change in 1997, and thus draw out his interest in climate change. David Robertson and Alan Oxley subsequently extended similar invitations. Meg McDonald and Howard Bamsey, both former Ambassadors for the Environment in Australia, provided valuable insights into the Kyoto process. Aynsley also learned much about the impact of climate change policy while acting as a consultant to Sinclair Knight Merz on compliance with Kyoto. In the end, however, taxpayers must be thanked most. It is primarily in their interest that this book is written.

Observing the behaviour of the UK government and the European Union (EU) on climate policy has remained a major research interest since the late 1980s. In this context Sonja would also like to thank Gavin Watson, once closely involved in European environmental policy-making, for valuable insights. Few ‘outsiders’ realize how effectively a small, dedicated number of unelected civil servants and their scientists ‘on tap’ are able translate their common visions
and interests into a policy option ‘sold’ as ethical-scientific imperative. At least in the UK during the 1990s, funding ‘the environment’ became increasingly controlled by public servants seeking, apparently, policy-relevant knowledge and de facto diverting the academic community from studying other problems. Scientists working for governments institutions would often talk only in confidence, itself an indication that climate change debates were being (self-) censored for political reasons. Many thanks must therefore go to many unnamed colleagues and friends in several countries who have discussed ‘climate change’ research and policy with us. Many keep their doubts strategically to themselves; even more are by now believers.