

# Bjørn Lomborg

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Bjørn Lomborg

**Bjørn Lomborg** (born [January 6, 1965](#)) is an Adjunct Professor at the [Copenhagen Business School](#) and a former director of the [Environmental Assessment Institute](#) in [Copenhagen](#). He became internationally-known for his best-selling and [controversial book](#) *[The Skeptical Environmentalist](#)*. After the book's publication, members of the Danish scientific community accused Lomborg of scientific dishonesty. These allegations were investigated by appropriate arms of the Danish government and in the end, no official charges were left standing. However, many scientists — including the majority of [climatologists](#) — remain critical of Lomborg's work.

In [2002](#), Lomborg and the Environmental Assessment Institute founded the [Copenhagen Consensus](#), which sought to establish priorities for advancing [global](#) welfare using methodologies based on the theory of [welfare economics](#).

## Contents

- [1 Academic career](#)
- [2 The Skeptical Environmentalist](#)
- [3 Accusations of scientific dishonesty](#)
  - [3.1 DCSD investigation](#)
  - [3.2 MSTI review](#)
  - [3.3 DCSD response](#)
  - [3.4 Response of the scientific community](#)
- [4 Appointment to Environmental Assessment Institute](#)
- [5 Copenhagen Consensus](#)
- [6 Recognitions and awards](#)
- [7 Discussions in the media](#)
- [8 Trivia](#)
- [9 References](#)
- [10 See also](#)
- [11 External links](#)

## Academic career

Bjørn Lomborg spent a year as an [undergraduate](#) at the [University of Georgia](#), earned a [Master's degree](#) in political science at the [University of Aarhus](#) in [1991](#), and a [Ph.D.](#) at the Department of Political Science, [University of Copenhagen](#) in [1994](#).

He lectured in [statistics](#) in the Department of Political Science at the University of Aarhus, as an [assistant professor](#) (1994–1996) and [associate professor](#) (1997–2005). He left the University of Aarhus in February 2005 and in May of that year, became an [Adjunct Professor](#) at [Copenhagen Business School](#).

In 1996, Lomborg's paper, "Nucleus and Shield: Evolution of Social Structure in the Iterated Prisoner's Dilemma", was published in the [academic journal](#), *[American Sociological Review](#)* (vol. 61(2):278-307). This was followed by his most famous book, *The Skeptical Environmentalist*, whose English translation was published as a peer-reviewed work in environmental economics by

Cambridge University Press in 2001. He later edited *Global Crises, Global Solutions*, which presented the first conclusions of the Copenhagen Consensus, published in 2004 by the Cambridge University Press.

His professional areas of interest include: the simulation of strategies in collective action dilemmas, simulation of party behavior in proportional voting systems, use of surveys in public administration, and use of statistics in the environmental arena.

## ***The Skeptical Environmentalist***

*Main article: [The Skeptical Environmentalist](#)*

In 1998, Lomborg published four articles about the state of the environment in the leading Danish newspaper *Politiken*, which according to him "resulted in a firestorm debate spanning over 400 articles in major metropolitan newspapers."<sup>[1]</sup>

In 2001, he attained significant attention by publishing *The Skeptical Environmentalist*, a controversial book whose main thesis is that many of the most-publicized claims and predictions of environmentalists are exaggerated.

He has in this context claimed to have been a supporter of Greenpeace. When challenged that Greenpeace had no record of him ever being a member or supporter, he stated that he had given money to Greenpeace collectors. Greenpeace has no card carrying membership.

## **Accusations of scientific dishonesty**

After the publication of *The Skeptical Environmentalist*, Lomborg was accused of scientific misconduct. Several environmental scientists brought a total of three complaints against Lomborg to the Danish Committees on Scientific Dishonesty (DCSD), a body under Denmark's Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation. The charges claimed that *The Skeptical Environmentalist* contained deliberately misleading data and flawed conclusions. Due to the similarity of the complaints, the DCSD decided to proceed on the three cases under one investigation.

## DCSD investigation

On [January 6, 2003](#) the DCSD reached a decision on the complaints. The ruling was a mixed message, deciding the book to be scientifically dishonest, but Lomborg himself not guilty because of lack of expertise in the fields in question<sup>[2]</sup>:

*Objectively speaking, the publication of the work under consideration is deemed to fall within the concept of scientific dishonesty. ...In view of the subjective requirements made in terms of intent or gross negligence, however, Bjørn Lomborg's publication cannot fall within the bounds of this characterization. Conversely, the publication is deemed clearly contrary to the standards of good scientific practice.*

The DCSD cited *The Skeptical Environmentalist* for:

1. Fabrication of data;
2. Selective discarding of unwanted results (selective citation);
3. Deliberately misleading use of statistical methods;
4. Distorted interpretation of conclusions;
5. Plagiarism;
6. Deliberate misinterpretation of others' results.

## MSTI review

On [February 13, 2003](#), Lomborg filed a complaint against the DCSD's decision, with the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, which has oversight over the DSCD.

On [December 17, 2003](#), the Ministry found that the DCSD had made a number of procedural errors, including:

- The DCSD did not use a precise standard for deciding "good scientific practice" in the social sciences;
- The DCSD's definition of "objective scientific dishonesty" was not clear about whether "distortion of statistical data" had to be deliberate or not;
- The DCSD had not properly documented that *The Skeptical Environmentalist* was a scientific publication on which they had the right to intervene in the first place;
- The DCSD did not provide specific statements on actual errors.

The Ministry remitted the case to the DCSD. In doing so the Ministry indicated that it regarded the DCSD's previous findings of scientific dishonesty in regard to the book as invalid <sup>[2][3]</sup>. The Ministry also instructed the DCSD to decide whether to reinvestigate.

## DCSD response

On March 12, 2004, the Committee formally decided not to act further on the complaints, reasoning that renewed scrutiny would, in all likelihood, result in the same conclusion <sup>[4]</sup>. Two days later a complaint was issued by **Kåre Fog**, an ecologist who maintains an anti-Lomborg website; Fog reported that this complaint was rejected on 27th Dec. 2004. <sup>[3]</sup>

## Response of the scientific community

The original DCSD decision about Lomborg provoked a petition <sup>[4]</sup> among Danish academics. 308 scientists, many of them from the social sciences, criticised the DCSD's methods in the case. A Dutch think tank, Heidelberg Appeal the Netherlands, published a report in which they claimed 25 out of 27 accusations against Lomborg to be unsubstantiated or not to the point. <sup>[5]</sup>

Another group of Danish scientists collected signatures in support of the DCSD. The 640 signatures in this second petition came almost exclusively from the medical and natural sciences, and included Jens Christian Skou (a Nobel laureate for chemistry), former university rector **Kjeld Møllgård**, and professor **Poul Harremoës** from the Technical University of Denmark. <sup>[6]</sup>

## Appointment to Environmental Assessment Institute

In March 2002, the newly elected center-right prime minister, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, appointed Lomborg to run Denmark's new Environmental Assessment Institute (EAI). On June 22 2004, Lomborg announced his decision to resign from this post to go back to the University of Aarhus, saying his work at the Institute was done and that he could better serve the public debate from the academic sector.

## Copenhagen Consensus

*Main article: [Copenhagen Consensus](#)*

In [2002](#), Lomborg and the Environmental Assessment Institute founded the Copenhagen Consensus, which sought to establish priorities for advancing [global](#) welfare using methodologies based on the theory of [welfare economics](#). A panel of prominent [economists](#) was assembled to evaluate and rank a series of problems. The project was funded largely by the Danish government, and co-sponsored by *The Economist*. A book summarizing the conclusions, *Global Crises, Global Solutions*, edited by Lomborg, was published in October 2004 by [Cambridge University Press](#).

## Recognitions and awards

In November 2001, Lomborg was selected "Global Leader for Tomorrow" by the [World Economic Forum](#). In June 2002, [BusinessWeek](#) named Lomborg one of the "50 Stars of Europe" (June 17), in the category of Agenda Setters. The magazine noted, "No matter what they think of his views, nobody denies that Bjorn Lomborg has shaken the environmental movement to its core."<sup>[7]</sup> Lomborg was selected as one of *TIME* magazine's 100 most influential people of 2004.

## Discussions in the media

After the release of *The Skeptical Environmentalist* in 2001, Lomborg was subjected to intense scrutiny and criticism in the [media](#), where his scientific qualifications and integrity were both attacked and defended. The verdict of the Danish Committees for Scientific Dishonesty fueled this debate and brought it into the spotlight of international [mass media](#). By the end of 2003 Lomborg had become an international celebrity, with frequent appearances on radio, TV and print media around the world.<sup>[8]</sup>

- *Scientific American* published strong criticism of Lomborg's book. Lomborg rebutted on his own [website](#), quoting the article at such length that *Scientific American* threatened to sue for copyright infringement. Lomborg eventually removed the rebuttal from his website; it was later published in [PDF](#) format on *Scientific American's* site.<sup>[9]</sup> The magazine also printed a response to the rebuttal.<sup>[10]</sup>

- *The Economist* defended Lomborg, claiming the panel of experts that had criticised Lomborg in *Scientific American* was both biased and did not actually counter Lomborg's book. *The Economist* argued that the panel's opinion had come under no scrutiny at all, and that Lomborg's responses had not been reported.<sup>[11]</sup>
- *Penn & Teller: Bullshit!* - the US *Showtime* program featured an episode entitled "Environmental Hysteria" in which Lomborg criticised what he claimed was environmentalists' refusal to accept a *cost-benefit analysis* of environmental questions, and stressed the need to prioritise some issues above others.<sup>[12]</sup> *Rolling Stone* stated, "Lomborg pulls off the remarkable feat of welding the techno-optimism of the Internet age with a lefty's concern for the fate of the planet."<sup>[13]</sup>
- The *Union of Concerned Scientists* strongly criticised *The Skeptical Environmentalist*, claiming it to be "seriously flawed and fail[ing] to meet basic standards of credible scientific analysis", accusing Lomborg of presenting data in a fraudulent way, using flawed logic and selectively citing non-peer-reviewed literature.<sup>[14]</sup> Lomborg countered that some of the scientists involved in this report were also named and criticised in *The Skeptical Environmentalist*, and thus had a *vested interest* in discrediting it and its author.

## Trivia

According to an interview published in 2005 by the *San Francisco Examiner*, the book he would most liked to have written is *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Society*, by *Jared Diamond*.

## References

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- ↑ [1]. www.lomborg-errors.dk. Retrieved 26-Feb-2006.
- ↑ *"Underskriftsindsamling i protest mod afgørelsen om Bjørn Lomborg fra - Udvalgene Vedrørende Videnskabelig Uredelighed"*. Retrieved 26-Feb-2006.
- ↑ Rörsch, Arthur, et al. *"A Critical Consideration of the Verdict of the Danish Committee on Scientific Dishonesty on the Book by Bjorn Lomborg 'The Skeptical Environmentalist'"*. Heidelberg Appeal the Netherlands, 4-April-2003. Retrieved 26-Feb-2006.
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11. <sup>^</sup> Lomborg, Bjorn. "Thought control". *The Economist*, 9-Jan-2003. Retrieved 26-Feb-2006.
12. <sup>^</sup> Bullshit, "Environmental Hysteria". Showtime.
13. <sup>^</sup> "Early Praise for The Skeptical Environmentalist: Measuring the Real State of the World". Cambridge University Press. Retrieved 26-Feb-2006.
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- Stephen Schneider, John P. Holdren, John Bongaarts, Thomas Lovejoy: "Misleading Math about the Earth". *Scientific American*, January 2002.

## See also

- *The Skeptical Environmentalist*
- Environmentalism
- Environmental skepticism
- Global warming
- Systemic bias

## External links

- Lomborg's personal website, with own articles, links to related broadcasts on radio and TV, and Lomborg's opinion on the issues with the Danish Committees on Scientific Dishonesty.
- Lomborg discusses, *Global Crisis, Global Solutions*, at the Carnegie Council
- Kåre Fog's "Lomborg errors" website contains a catalogue of claims of errors in Lomborg's *The Skeptical Environmentalist*, Fog's opinion on Lomborg and his career.
- Wired magazine interviews Lomborg, June 2004, regarding the Copenhagen Consensus.

- [Article on Bjørn Lomborg](#) in the online edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. The article was written by **Michael Allaby**, author of [many \(although not peer-reviewed\) books](#) on climate, who had previously expressed ideas similar to Lomborg. If you cannot access the full text, click the first link in [this Google search](#).
- [Grist magazine article](#) Rebuttals from scientists working in the various fields his book makes claims about.
- [HAN investigation of complaints made by Lomborg critics](#), by a number of Dutch scientists of the complaints made by Lomborg critics.
- [Article about Bjørn Lomborg](#) on [Sourcewatch](#), a project similar to [Wikipedia](#).
- [Correcting myths from Bjørn Lomborg](#), extensive collection of criticisms of Lomborg, with replies.
- [Skeptical About \*The Skeptical Environmentalist\*](#), Richard M. Fisher's review of *The Skeptical Environmentalist*, in "[The Skeptical Inquirer](#)".
- [Letter in Support of Lomborg in \*Scientific American\*](#), a defense of Lomborg's work, from the eminent geneticist [Matt Ridley](#), former editor of *The Economist*.

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