



# INDEPENDENT

## **NOAA chief scientist fired for asking new Trump hires to recognize scientific integrity policy**

*His replacement regularly criticizes 'climate alarmists' and tough policy measures to tackle the global crisis*

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The acting chief scientist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) was fired by the agency's chief of staff after he asked Trump's newest appointees to NOAA to recognise the scientific integrity policy, according to a report from the New York Times.

Craig McLean, NOAA's acting chief scientist, emailed the new staff members in September asking them to acknowledge the agency's rules on scientific conduct and code of ethics, which among other things requires that employees make decisions based on the science and without political influence.

According to *The Times*, Dr Erik Noble, NOAA chief of staff and former White House policy advisor, fired back: "Respectfully, by what authority are you sending this to me?"

McLean, a founding director of NOAA's Office of Ocean Exploration and a 25-year veteran of NOAA's Commissioned Corps, responded that it was his job to oversee ethics at the agency.

Noble wrote the next day: "You no longer serve as the acting chief scientist for NOAA. Thank you for your service," *The Times* reported.

In his place, Noble has hired Ryan Maue, a meteorologist and former adjunct scholar at the Cato Institute, a think-tank co-founded by billionaire Charles Koch, who has made a fortune in the fossil fuel industry.

While Dr Maue acknowledges that human activities have contributed to climate change, on social media and in op-eds, he regularly criticizes "climate alarmists" and tough policy measures to tackle the global crisis.

*The Independent* has contacted NOAA for comment and sought interviews with Mr McLean, Dr Noble and Dr Maue but did not receive a response at the time of publication.

Ahead of next week's election, the Trump administration is pushing through its agenda on climate change, which the president has repeatedly called a hoax, and the environment.

According to a tally by the Brookings Institute, the Trump administration has rolled back dozens of rules and policies to address the climate crisis and pollution, including this week removing protections from Alaska's Tongass National Forest, one of the world's largest temperate rainforests, to allow for logging and development.

If the president loses next week's election, the changes made at NOAA could be undone.

The role of chief scientist at NOAA, one of the country's leading federal climate research agencies, is consequential. The chief scientist oversees climate issues but also water, satellites and modeling. Weather is another issue on the agenda - bringing expertise in matters of tropical cyclones and hurricanes.

However climate scientists expressed concerns that the political appointment would "advance the agenda of climate deniers" in an administration which has been notoriously anti-science.

Michael Mann, a distinguished professor of atmospheric sciences at Penn State and National Academy of Sciences member, last month told *The Independent*: "At a time when we are witnessing the devastating impacts of climate change-amplified extreme weather events, including wildfires out west and a record hurricane season here back east, it would have previously seemed unimaginable that an administration would appoint an individual with a record of denying and downplaying these impacts to a position of leadership at the very agency tasked with assessing the risks we face from extreme weather events.

"But this we have come to expect from the Trump administration. Science denial is deadly, whether it's over COVID-19 or climate change. This is yet another stark reminder about why we must turn out to vote in this upcoming election and elect policymakers who embrace, rather than reject, the lessons of science."

Andrew Dessler, professor of Atmospheric Sciences and climate scientist at Texas A&M, tweeted: "Normally, when people are chosen for high-profile positions relating to climate change, I've heard of them.

"I have no idea who this person is. ... I suspect that he has the one and only necessary qualification for the job: A willingness to advance the agenda of climate deniers."

Dr Maue penned an op-ed for the Wall Street Journal in 2018 with Patrick J. Michaels, a member of the CO2 Coalition, a pro-fossil fuel nonprofit with close ties to the Trump administration.

In the piece, they claimed that testimony given by NASA climate scientist James Hansen, who warned a Senate committee more than 30 years ago about the dangers of climate change, had not borne out in reality.

"On the 30th anniversary of Mr. Hansen's galvanizing testimony, it's time to acknowledge that the rapid warming he predicted isn't happening. Climate researchers and policy makers should adopt the more modest forecasts that are consistent with observed temperatures," Maue and Michaels wrote in the WSJ.

"That would be a lukewarm policy, consistent with a lukewarming planet."

However Dr Hansen's projections, which have faced peer review, have stood up. And according to the 2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) Special Report, major policy shifts must be made this decade to curb global warming to 1.5C as beyond which, scientists believe, many changes to earth systems will be irreversible.

Dr Maue has also shown that he's not afraid to wade into politics on social media (although a number of tweets now appear to have been deleted from his Twitter feed and since disabled in cache mode).

He tweeted in September: "Biden hits Trump on climate: Western fires foreshadow 'unending barrage of tragedies' Shameless but it's their political strategy to blame Trump for all natural disasters past, present, and future."

But he's also shared critiques, albeit more measured, of Mr Trump. Last year, the president displayed a forecast map for Hurricane Dorian with what appeared to be a hand-drawn, half-circle that extended over a swath of Alabama after Mr Trump erroneously tweeted that the storm would "hit (much) harder than anticipated" in the state.

Following the bizarre incident, now known as "Sharpiegate", Dr Maue told AP that it was important for the president's tweets to be accurate if he wants to provide helpful information to the public facing a potential emergency.

He said the problem with the president's tweet came from sending out stale information.

"If he's going to be a provider of up-to-date information, he needs to be up to date," he said.