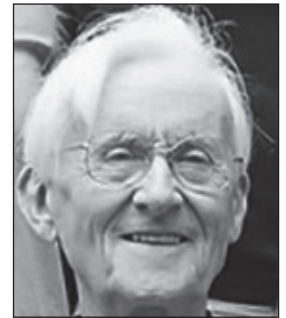


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## Tribute

# Vincent Richard Gray (1922–2018)

Vincent Richard Gray, a member of the New Zealand Association of Scientists until his death, and a Council member from 1998 to 2010, passed away on 19 June at the age of 96 years. His wife of 69 years, Mary, passed away 15 days later, aged 94 years.



Vince was born in South London in 1922. He showed considerable academic ability as a boy and won a scholarship to study chemistry, physics and mathematics at Cambridge University, graduating in 1942 with a first-class honours degree in chemistry. Later he completed a PhD in chemistry, also from Cambridge, and enjoyed a short career as a research chemist in the Colloid Science department, where he assisted with the war effort on explosives production. Early in the war, he joined the communist party in support of the Russian initiative against Nazi Germany, a principled move that dogged future employment prospects. In 1970, Vince and family emigrated to New Zealand where he became the first director of the Building Research Association of New Zealand (BRANZ). Later he worked as a chemist for the NZ Coal Research Association in Wellington until his retirement, after which he spent five years in China pursuing coal research.

Vince was well known among scientific circles in New Zealand and internationally as a climate change sceptic – for his opposition to the notion that anthropogenic carbon emissions lead to global warming. Vince believed that much, if not all, of the science that underpins the idea of human contribution to global warming, was flawed, often describing the underlying science as ‘fraudulent’. He contended that there is no association between carbon dioxide emissions and global temperature changes, and worked tirelessly in opposition to the growing influence of the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and its regular reports, to expose what he considered to be a bandwagon based on flawed science. For the 4th Assessment Report of the IPCC published in 2007, Vince held the record for the most review comments submitted by any individual world-wide. Challenging the many assumptions made by the IPCC, the quality of data collected, and the accuracy of modelling used to predict human and agricultural contributions to global warming, was central to his strategy on climate change science, and these approaches were underpinned by Popperian science philosophy. Ironically, Vince became quite evangelical about his own cause and may not always have applied the same level of critical scrutiny to his own beliefs. From eulogies presented by his four children and four grandchildren at a celebration-of-life gathering at St Andrews-on-the-Terrace, known for its secular community support, it became quite clear that it was impossible to win an argument with Vince because of his sharp memory, his ability to assemble ‘facts’ in support of his views on virtually any issue, and his fearsome approach to debating.

His opposition to anthropogenic climate change was legendary. He circulated some 350 NZ Climate Change Newsletters, the vast majority of them written and emailed between 2004 and the time of a debilitating stroke in 2015. One of the reasons why Vince joined the New Zealand Association of Scientists was to use the Association as a vehicle to promote his views. Eventually, Vince resigned from Council of the New Zealand Association of Scientists when he found that his position on climate change was not supported by the Association. His parting shot was a motion of no confidence in the President, James Renwick, climate scientist and IPCC author, at the AGM in 2009.

Looking more broadly at his life, Vince was a larger than life character with energy to burn and a job to be done. Both Vincent and Mary were music lovers and they brought some 40 musical instruments with them when they shifted to New Zealand. In Wellington, Vincent played in the Valley Stompers Jazz Band for more than 15 years, and the band farewelled him at St Andrews-on-the-Terrace, along with musical presentations by family members. The large gathering was entertained, not only with music, but also with eloquent and sometimes emotional eulogies from his children and grandchildren, each detailing their personal interface with Vince and recognising distinctive aspects of their characters that they owed to him.

Though members of the New Zealand Association of Scientists often made their disagreement with Vince’s position on climate change apparent, Vince was well-liked and even admired for his forthright and outspoken views. He was a lightning rod for action on issues that he chose to pursue that were close to his heart, and was in his own way a sociable and loyal friend, with a network that spanned the globe. He will be remembered by family, friends and colleagues, and by the New Zealand Association of Scientists as a principled and passionate person who was prepared to back his own views to the end in order to change the world.

**Mike Berridge**  
**David Lillis**  
**James Renwick**

NZAS Past-Presidents who held the reins during parts of Vincent Gray’s Council membership.

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\*Vince’s Life Story can be found at <https://www.stuff.co.nz/life-style/105746754/Mary-and-Vincent-Gray-couple-die-15-days-apart>