

Emails show scientists discussed masking their involvement in key journal letter on Covid origins

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EcoHealth Alliance President Peter Daszak, the head of an organization involved in research that genetically manipulates coronaviruses, discussed hiding his role in a [statement published last year in *The Lancet*](#) that condemned as “conspiracy theories” concerns that the COVID-19 virus may have originated in a research lab, emails obtained by US Right to Know show.

The *Lancet* statement, signed by 27 prominent scientists, has been influential in tamping down suspicions by some scientists that COVID-19 could have ties to China’s Wuhan Institute of Virology, which has a research affiliation to the EcoHealth Alliance.

Daszak drafted the statement and circulated it to other scientists to sign. But the [emails](#) reveal that Daszak and two other EcoHealth-affiliated scientists thought they should not sign the statement so as to mask their involvement in it. Leaving their names off the statement would give it “some distance from us and therefore doesn’t work in a counterproductive way,” Daszak wrote.

Daszak noted that he could “send it round” to other scientists to sign. “We’ll then put it out in a way that doesn’t link it back to our collaboration so we maximize an independent voice,” he wrote.

The two scientists Daszak wrote to about the need to make the paper appear independent of EcoHealth, are coronavirus experts Ralph Baric and Linfa Wang.

In the emails, Baric agreed with Daszak’s suggestion not to sign *The Lancet* statement, writing “Otherwise it looks self-serving, and we lose impact.”

Daszak did ultimately sign the statement himself, but he was not identified as its lead author or coordinator of the effort.

The emails are part of a tranche of documents obtained by US Right to Know that show Daszak has been working since at least early last year to undermine [the hypothesis](#) that SARS-CoV-2 may have leaked from the [Wuhan Institute](#).

The first reported outbreak of COVID-19 was in the city of Wuhan.

U.S. Right to Know [previously](#) reported that Daszak drafted the statement for *The Lancet*, and orchestrated it to “not be identifiable as coming from any one organization or person” but rather to be seen as “simply a letter from leading scientists”.

EcoHealth Alliance is a New York-based nonprofit that has received millions of dollars of U.S. taxpayer funding to genetically manipulate coronaviruses, including with scientists at the Wuhan Institute.

Notably, Daszak has emerged as a central figure in official investigations of SARS-CoV-2’s origins. He is a member of [the World Health Organization’s](#) team of experts tracing the novel coronavirus’s origins, and [The Lancet COVID 19 Commission](#).

See our previous reporting on this topic:

- [New emails show scientists’ deliberations on how to discuss SARS-CoV-2 origins](#) (12.14.20)
- [Scientist with conflict of interest leading Lancet COVID-19 Commission task force on virus origins](#) (11.24.20)
- [EcoHealth Alliance orchestrated key scientists’ statement on “natural origin” of SARS-CoV-2](#) (11.18.21)

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