

Just Comment

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Debunking Myths about Climate Change

MYTH: Only "Greenies" are worried about climate change.

REALITY: Leading scientists from all over the world agree that climate change is a pressing global issue.

The World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Environment Program, appointed 1000 expert scientists to the 'Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change' (IPCC). Since 1996, it has been examining research results from around the world and found 'new and stronger evidence that most of the observed warming over the last 50 years is attributable to human activities.'¹

In Australia, the CSIRO, through research on Antarctic ice cores, has found that the global concentration of Carbon dioxide is approximately 30 per cent greater than it was in the 18th century and has warned of likely world-wide changes in weather and climate.²

Business interests and governments are now beginning to find scientific projections convincing. The only uncertainties are when, where and to what degree further climate changes will occur.

MYTH 2: Climate Change is natural.

REALITY: Climate changes due to global warming are occurring in addition to natural fluctuations.

According to the American Geophysical Union which represents over 41,000 scientists from 130 countries, '...natural influences cannot explain the rapid increase in global near-surface temperatures observed during the second half of the 20th century.'³

Since 1900, there has been an increase in heat waves, fewer frosts, warming of the lower atmosphere and deep oceans, retreat of glaciers and sea-ice, a rise in sea-level of 10-20 cm and increased heavy rainfall in many regions. Many species of plants and animals have changed their location or the timing of their seasonal responses in ways that also provide evidence of global warming.⁴

MYTH: Climate Change will not affect us in our lifetime.

REALITY: Climate change has already begun to affect us.

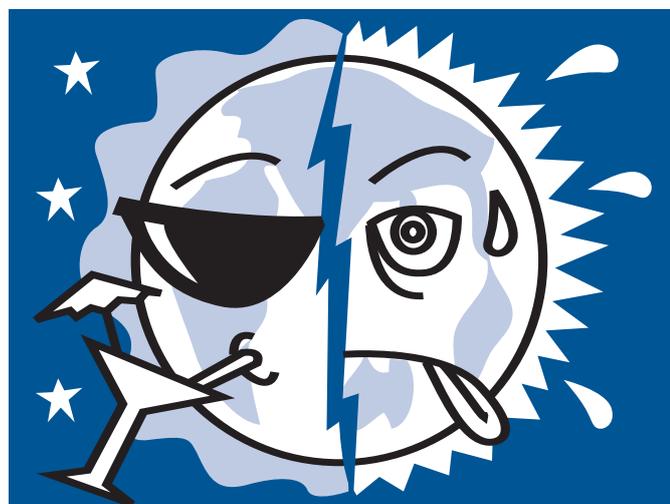
1998 was the warmest year and the 1990s the warmest decade globally since the record began in 1861.⁵ Scientists estimate that the last decade has been the warmest in the last 2000 years.

CSIRO research shows that both coastal and inland areas of Australia have already been significantly affected by climate change.⁶ Dr Tim Flannery, Director of the South Australian Museum and a leading environmental scientist points out, "Perth, for example, has lost two thirds of its surface water supply since 1975."⁷

MYTH : Australia will not be affected.

REALITY: The CSIRO has estimated future changes in Australia's temperature, rainfall and evaporation.

They have predicted large changes in the number of extremely hot and extremely cold days, an overall decrease in available moisture leading to more droughts, coastal storms and tropical cyclone wind speeds increasing by 5-20%.⁸



Stream flows in the Murray-Darling basin may decline by up to 20 per cent by 2030 and 45 per cent by 2070. This is nearly a halving of water in a river system already under severe stress and has huge implications for both the environment and for agriculture. The dairy industry, can expect annual milk losses of 60 to 90 litres per cow by 2030.⁹

MYTH: The developing world is responsible for Climate Change.

REALITY: The US is responsible for almost half the growth in the world's CO₂ emissions since 1990.¹⁰

An analysis by the Australia Institute in September 2001 showed that Australia with an emission of 27.6 tonnes per person in 2001, had the highest emissions per person in the world.¹¹ The 2003 Australian Green House Office report showed an increase to 27.8 tonnes per person.¹² The energy sector which includes transport, coal and oil accounts for 68% of the emissions. The United States

and Canada follow closely behind. Their emissions per person are more than six times those of China and 13 times those of India.¹³

While industrialized countries are driving climate change it is the developing world that will suffer most from its effects. Poverty and underdevelopment mean that they are least able to cope with extreme weather events. According to the IPCC, Africa is the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change.¹⁴

MYTH: The Australian Government is already doing enough.

REALITY: The only members of the 'Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change' who have refused to ratify the Kyoto protocol are Australia and the US.

Their refusal has undermined this first step towards a global approach to the problem and missed an opportunity to participate in the development of alternative energy technology and a multi-million dollar carbon emission trading scheme.

The "Asia-Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate" signed by Australia, the USA, Japan, China, India and South Korea will lead to the development of new, clean energy technology and encourage its transfer. While this is a significant agreement it does not replace Kyoto as it sets no targets for reducing emissions and does not increase the Mandatory Renewable Energy Target, which at 2% lags behind world standards.¹⁵ It fails to address Australia's consumption of, and trade in, oil and gas.

Susan Jeanes from Renewable Energy Australia has suggested that the Government is listening to the loud and powerful voices from the coal and gas industry, rather than the advice of internationally respected scientists from the IPCC.¹⁶

MYTH: The global economy will suffer if we reduce Carbon dioxide emissions.

REALITY: Economists for some time have been expressing their concerns about the environment.

In 1997, American economists from Stanford, Harvard, MIT and Yale

Universities released the 'Economists' Statement on Climate Change.' This declaration was signed by 2500 leading economists, including 8 Nobel Laureates and affirms that 'global climate change carries with it significant environmental, economic, social, and geopolitical risks, and that preventive steps are economically justified.'

These economists realise that doing nothing to address climate change will have a far more devastating effect on the global economy in the future compared to meeting the challenge now.

Insurance companies estimate that the mounting costs of climate change will equal the entire world's GDP by 2065. This does not account for the human health costs of global warming, conservatively estimated as multiple hundreds of millions.

MYTH: Reducing emissions will harm Australian industry and Australian jobs.

REALITY: Companies that have pursued cleaner production practices have already found they yield financial and environmental benefits.

Fuel efficiency is linked to economic efficiency: when fuel is cleanly processed, it decreases overall energy costs. Energy efficiency upgrades pay for themselves in four to five years because they substantially reduce overall fuel costs. Jobs in sustainable agriculture, forestry, tourism, renewable energy, geothermal energy and fisheries are long-term, unlike jobs in fossil fuel production which will only produce a quarter the number of jobs as investments in energy efficiency. More significantly, companies that invest in the development of renewable sources of energy can be sure of a continued market.

Climate change, not emission reduction, will cause key Australian industries, particularly tourism, to suffer in the coming years. Fishing and tourism at the Great Barrier Reef will die with the coral, because according to scientists, "catastrophic" bleaching of reefs (similar to those that occurred in 1998 and 2002) will occur every year from 2050 onwards if the global temperature continues to rise. Snow-based tourism may be elimi-

nated entirely in Australia's Alpine environments by 2070, by which time it is estimated that climate change will have eliminated 96 percent of snow cover. The severity and frequency of major weather events such as bushfires, droughts and floods, will increase, causing devastating effects on Australian agriculture.

MYTH: There is nothing I can do to stop climate change

REALITY: There are many things that individuals can do for change:

- Write letters to community leaders calling for funding for research into renewable energy sources
- Use public transport or car pool.
- At home and in the office; recycle, save water and use insulation.

Check out:

ACF: www.acfonline.org.au/asp/pages/home.asp

NSW Govt: www.energysmart.com.au

[1] www.ipcc.ch

[2] 'The Greenhouse Effect information sheet' www.csiro.au (more precisely www.csiro.au/index.asp?type=faq&id=GreenhouseEffect&stylesheet=sectorInformationSheet)

[3] www.agu.org/sci_soc/policy/climate_change_position.html

[4] CSIRO atmospheric research, www.dar.csiro.au/publications/gh_faq.htm#gh15

[5] CSIRO atmospheric research, www.dar.csiro.au/publications/gh_faq.htm#gh15

[6] www.dar.csiro.au/publications/gh_faq.htm#gh13

[7] Experts assess Fed Govt energy statement, The World Today – Tuesday, 15 June, 2004, www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2004/s1132207.htm

[8] www.dar.csiro.au/publications/projections2pp.pdf

[9] 'Climate Change and Australia' (2002) www.dar.csiro.au/publications

[10] www.thecornerhouse.org.uk/pdf/briefing/24carboc.pdf

[11] Comprehensive emissions per capita for industrialised countries, Hal Turton and Clive Hamilton, The Australia Institute, 2001

[12] www.greenhouse.gov.au/inventory/2003/facts/pubs/overview.pdf

[13] p. 10, Pew Climate Change Report

[14] www.ipcc.ch

[15] Experts assess Fed Govt energy statement, The World Today – Tuesday, 15 June, 2004, www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2004/s1132207.htm

[16] Experts assess Fed Govt energy statement, The World Today – Tuesday, 15 June, 2004, www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2004/s1132207.htm



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