

UN Climate Panel Reports: A Reliable Risk Assessment?

In September 2013 the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Changes (IPCC) published its Fifth Assessment Report (AR5). However there are many media misconceptions about IPCC. I hope this brief guide can help to a more accurate reporting.

Myth 1: Scientists calculated that with 95 percent probability most of the warming was manmade.

The number 95 is not a result of any calculation or measurement. It is a feeling (“expert judgment”) agreed upon by government representatives at a UN meeting, behind closed doors. Politicians approve the “Summary for Policymakers” word-for-word in a meeting, which takes several days. At 2 A.M. the sleepy people are willing to nod to anything so they could finally go to bed. It is a pity that this hilarious late night haggling is not broadcasted on TV live. (Seitz 1996, New Scientist 2001)

Myth 2: Human influence on climate is clear. Our understanding is getting more precise. 97% of scientists have a consensus.

Yes, there is a consensus, that we have “some” influence on climate. But nobody knows the “climate sensitivity”. If the atmospheric CO₂ concentration doubles, will it lead to a warming by 1°C or 6°C? These estimates have remained this vague for decades.

Myth 3: Climate models have improved.

In the recent 15 years there has been no global warming and the models do not know why. The growing gap between models and observations was admitted in the editorial “Final Assessment” in Nature. As well as in AR5 Summary. The models underestimate natural forcings (Shapiro 2011), therefore they cannot predict climate 15 years ahead. Yet we are asked to believe, what they predict will happen in 100 years?

Myth 4: IPCC are the “world’s top experts“

The IPCC chairman Pachauri is a railway engineer. Many times students or Greenpeace activists were hired instead of senior scientists (Laframboise 2006). Even the lucky selected Lead Authors do not know, why or how they were selected. IPCC scientists themselves complain, that many of their colleagues are appointed only to meet the gender and race quota, but they are unqualified to do their job (IAC Questionnaire 2010).

Myth 5: IPCC objectively assesses the peer-reviewed scientific literature

A third of IPCC’s Fourth Report’s sources were not scientific literature, but “grey literature” (Citizen Audit 2010). Though this “Chinese Whispers” principle caused

several glaring errors such as Glaciergate, IPCC decided to keep using “grey literature” anyway (Scientific American, 2012).

IPCC likes to hire an author to review his own work (a self-review). Eight years after publication Michael Mann boasted (WSJ 2005), he would not reveal how he had created his famous Hockeystick Graph. After years, the Climategate scandal showed, why the secrecy. The graph was created with a “trick”.

Myth 6: Scientists calculated we must keep global warming under 2°C

This 2°C objective was selected by EU governments in 1996 before the negotiations of the Kyoto Protocol. There is no scientific reason, why exactly at 2°C any disaster should happen.

Myth 7: Experts calculated that the longer we wait, the more costly global warming will be.

IPCC (AR4) adopted this idea from the Stern Review. But Stern’s calculations are an economic nonsense, because they ignore that old cars are cheaper than new cars. Stern used a zero discount rate, though the whole insurance industry uses a ca 3% discount rate (Mendelsohn 2011).

IPCC (TAR, WG2, chap.8, fig. 8-1) uses scary graphs of rising natural disaster losses. However the insurance industry uses “normalisation” to compensate for the fact, that we have more people and the people are richer. In fact there is no increase in natural disasters. Only more people in harm’s way. But IPCC does not even mention “normalisation” (see also: Pielke 2007).

What is worse, the IPCC scenarios are based on computer models, while ignoring historic climatology. In fact, Warm Climate Optimum is not a risk, which must be mitigated. Warmer climate means longer growing season and better harvests (Zhou et al. 2011). On the other hand, cooling periods such as Bond Events, DO Events or Heinrich Events have always punctuated human history with crises. Such as the fall of the Mayan Empire (Gill 2003). The last Bond Event, the Little Ice Age, seriously damaged farming in Europe (Zhang 2011). There is no historic evidence for IPCC’s claim that cooler climate is better.

Recommendations

For those who are not satisfied with the work of IPCC, there is an alternative – Nongovernmental International Panel on Climate Change (NIPCC).

Unlike the government funded UN panel, NIPCC is sponsored by NGOs. Its latest 1000-pages long report “Climate Change Reconsidered II” was published in September 2013 (see <http://climatechangereconsidered.org/>).

References:

- Armstrong, Karen. The Great Transformation. (Alfred A. Knopf 2006)
- Climate Change Reconsidered II (NIPCC 2013)
- Climate Panel Adopts Controversial „Grey“ Evidence (Scientific American 26.6.2012)
- Gill, Richardson B. The Great Maya Droughts: Water, Life, and Death. (2003)
- Hot warning (New Scientist 22.1.2001)
- IAC Questionnaire Responses. Review of the IPCC. (InterAcademyCouncil 2010)
- In Climate Debate, Hockey Stick Leads to a Face Off (Wall Street Journal, 14 Feb 2005)
- Laframboise, Donna et al. Citizen Audit. (Noconsensus.org 2010)
- Laframboise, Donna. Stern Review Scandal (Noconsensus.org 24 April 2010)
- Laframboise, Donna. The Delinquent Teenager Who Was Mistaken for the Worlds Top Climate Expert (Ivy Avenue Press 2011)
- Mendelsohn R., Saher, G. The global impact of climate change on extreme events. (World Bank, Working Paper, February 2011)
- Pielke, Jr., R. A. Mistreatment of the economic impacts of extreme events in the Stern Review Report on the Economics of Climate Change (Global Environmental Change, Vol. 17, 2007)
- Seitz, Frederick. Major Deception on Global Warming. (Wall Street Journal. 25.6. 1996)
- Shapiro, A. et al. A new approach to the long-term reconstruction of the solar irradiance leads to large historical solar forcing (A&A, 529, 2011)
- Summary for Policymakers. Fifth Assessment Report: The Physical Science (IPCC 2013)
- The Final Assessment (Nature 18.9.2013)
- Zhang David D. et al. The causality analysis of climate change and large-scale human crisis (PNAS 2011)
- Zhou, L. et al. Variations in northern vegetation activity inferred from satellite data of vegetation index during 1981 to 1999 (J. Geophys. Res 2011)

About the Author: Mgr. Vítězslav Kremlík (*1976)

Environmental journalist, translator. M.A. degree in history from the Palacký University in Olomouc. Specialises in historical climatology and the sociology of science. In 2010 one of panellists in a climate panel chaired by the President of the Slovak Academy of Science. Appeared on climate related programmes in the Czech TV several times.