



THE IPCC'S ROLE IN EXACERBATING CLIMATE CHANGE

KYLE KIMBALL

- MASTERS CANDIDATE AT VREI UNIVERSITEIT
- RECENT GRADUATE FROM TALLINN TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY WITH A DEGREE IN EUROPEAN LAW



SUMMARY

The assumption that the IPCC gathers the most recent peer reviewed science on climate change and reports that out to the world on an objective basis is, unfortunately, misguided. Once scientists volunteering to help the institution have collected peer reviewed science, it gets filtered through the lead authors of the report, many of whom have ideological blinders or obvious conflicts of interest, the most flagrant of these violations of public trust being Dr. Richard Tol, a known climate denier who nonetheless operated as a lead author for the IPCC. Once the science has been sufficiently pruned and shaped into a report, it enters the plenary session, where each line of text is deliberated on and individual delegates can vote to strike any language that goes against their national interests in, for example, the continued use of oil.

The structural biases are perhaps even more revealing of the deeply troubling state of the IPCC. Approximately 45% of all countries have never had a single participant on the IPCC, with Europeans and North Americans representing 75% of all contributors. In addition to the systematic exclusion of voices from the global south, female voices are dramatically underrepresented, in large part due to institutional barriers inherent to academia, which the IPCC does not take into account or make any attempt to correct for.



SUMMARY CONTD

The flaws with the IPCC's reporting of the physical science are no less serious. A few key errors in their methodology include:

- mistakenly showing a global warming hiatus
- failing to actually calculate total global coverage for temperature rise
- not beginning models at a pre-industrial stage, including a blend of sea surface and surface air temperatures
- perhaps most significantly: overestimating allowable emissions by 40%

In addition to these errors, the IPCC consistently fails to include positive, amplifying feedback loops such as permafrost melt, methane release mechanisms, rapid decreases in carbon sink efficacy, and accelerating ice shelf melt: each of which could contribute to runaway global heating. Any prudent, and precautionous, scientific report should at least pay lip service to these legitimate concerns, something the IPCC has consistently failed to do.

Issues with data selection have consistently led to underestimations in the severity of global heating. For example, it is known that in 2007 the runaway melting of the arctic began in earnest. Despite this knowledge, the 2014 AR ignored this development and used a historical model ending in 2005. The result was that what this model suggested as an unlikely scenario for melting had already been surpassed with a near complete loss of Arctic summer ice in 2012. Other observational data has consistently met or exceeded the IPCC's worst case projections.

Looking beyond methodological issues, the major blind spot of the IPCC has to do with its reliance upon neoclassical economic assumptions. A 1991 paper by Dr. William Nordhaus posited that any industry which took place inside or underground would be unaffected by global heating, suggesting that a merciful 90% of the economy would be spared from the ravages of climate change. This blatantly incorrect position was espoused by the IPCC as recently as 2014 when working group 2 of the 5th Assessment Report asserted that the effects of climate change on economic activity will be negligible (although it must be noted that the lead coordinating author of WG2 was the notorious climate change denier Dr. Tol).





SUMMARY CONT'D

Three primary models are used by the IPCC to predict the damages and effects of climate change on the economy. This presentation focused on the Dynamic Integrated Climate Model (DICE) developed by Dr. Nordhaus as it occupies a special place in the IPCC. This model has several serious blind spots, including: modeling damage as a quadratic function of temperature change, discounting tipping points, overly simplifying the damage function to be symmetrical, suggesting that climate damages would be the same if the climate warmed by 4° or fell by 4°, and finding that the "optimal" balance between temperature rise and economic impact would occur at a temperature of 3.5° Celsius over pre-industrial temperature. As a brief reminder, the last time the earth was at a 3.5°C temperature rise was during the Pliocene era when sea level was 6 to 20 meters higher than it is today.

The foundation of the Integrated Assessment Models is not climate science, but rather neoclassical economics. That mode of thinking holds that the economy is a network of interdependent markets wherein the forces of supply and demand ultimately lead to an equilibrium in prices. In order for climate change to factor in, a social cost of carbon estimating the economic impacts following the emissions of one additional ton of carbon dioxide is needed; all three of the primary integrated assessment models used by the IPCC to measure the economic effects of climate change (DICE/FUND/HadCrut4) are based on social cost of carbon calculations. This is problematic, as the social cost of carbon doesn't properly take into account uninhabitability, human mortality, or the likelihood of runaway climate change scenarios. The models also place a special emphasis on carbon capture and sequestration technologies drawing down vast quantities of CO₂, a process which many scientists describe as an exercise in magical thinking.

The errors described in the IPCC's process do a disservice to those who are horrified at the effects of climate change lying in wait in the decades to come. When taking a critical perspective on the limitations imposed on the IPCC, it becomes evident that these constraints function as a way to manufacture consent, quell contradictory voices, and pave the way for the continuation of an unsustainable economic model predicated on unlimited resource extraction and environmental pollution.



MEER COMMUNITY QUESTIONS



- What prompted you to start studying this subject?
 - A: Worries about the climate crisis and antipathy towards the architects of our extinction.
- All models are wrong, but some are useful. Does the IPCC still offer some utility for policymakers?
 - A: IPCC reports aren't especially instrumental in the U.S. They are more impactful in Europe, however, which pulls directly from the assessment reports for things like the European Green Deal. As far as whether or not there is useful information, the most useful information is what is omitted (e.g. not properly including human mortality as a cost).
- Can the IPCC become an ethical organization?
 - A: Growth-focused ideology is fundamentally opposed to what would be needed to become an ethical organization. It is an organization that operates largely at the behest of rich nations, and there must be a way to divorce from their influence, if it ever to truly accomplish this goal. Mr. Kimball recently talked to a member of the 6th assessment report who described choosing papers and working hard only to watch it get filtered through a corporate mouthpiece that promotes fossil fuels; they don't plan on participating again.
- Could a new organization emerge?
 - A: Nothing really exists, because even at the university level, a lot of programs are funded by fossil fuels. Consequently, it is necessary to go to the source to find the proper voices, which is challenging, but possible.
- The IPCC specifically defines climate mitigation very narrowly, requiring that any mitigation strategy must be predicated on the reduction or removal of GHGs. Did you find any other voices that criticize defining it in such a narrow way?
 - A: Absolutely, we need a multiplicity of solutions, from degrowth to what MEER does.





LIVE AUDIENCE QUESTIONS

- What would an institution look like that was taking meaningful action?
 - A: Institutions that are free of state-oriented solvency tools, for example community-oriented approaches.
- Who has the final say of what is released from the IPCC? Don't nations have veto power?
 - A: Yes, that is what the plenary sessions are for. Scientists select research to build their case, then it goes through the lead authors and finally the plenary sessions.
- Are economic assumptions generally overlooked when critical assessments of the IPCC are made?
 - A: Yes, they have been overlooked.
- What are your thoughts on working with federal and state agencies and sharing data, particularly as it relates to indigenous communities?
 - A: At the end of the day, you have to cooperate with the federal government, since that is where the money comes from. There is nothing wrong with sharing data, but one must stay centered and keep clear eyes.

