

## **The Truth about Global Warming: Science and Distortion. Stephen Schneider**

In 1970s, there was a scientific consensus emerging on two themes:

- 1) the carbon dioxide that humans were adding through fossil fuel combustion would cause warming. But exact outcomes were not known.
- 2) we could no longer use the global atmosphere as an unpriced, free dump for air pollutants.

These two messages were disseminated to government officials, discussed in scientific conferences. Why were these two messages not successful?

- it is a complex systems problem
- with such problems, rarely do we know everything, and rarely do we know nothing
- thus needs to be broken down into well-established components that are settled
- the disconnect comes as special interests pull out just material that is consistent with their ideology or position. With global warming, you end up with either:
  1. “it’s the end of the world”, or,
  2. “its good for you”
- but these two are the lowest probability outcomes

Systems scientists winnow out the relative probability of the various outcomes.

- arguing these multiple outcomes as “yes or no” is silly
- IPCC report reviewed by 1000s of scientists, all of whom are specialists
- but then a few special interest PhDs (maybe working for an oil company), generally not climate specialists, get equal time on media...this is “utter distortion.”
- the general public generally does not sort this out

### Value Judgements

-What to do about that spot on your lung?...There is no single correct answer.

-Fire risk: 1-2% of homes damaged, yet we insure. We don't need 95% certainty that there will be a fire to insure.

-But people say that until the exceptions to the conventional wisdom are solved, it would be premature to act.

Special interest blabber: we heard this kind of approach earlier from the American Tobacco Institute. Yes is is true, that still today we do not know the precise biophysical link between smoking and cancer, but death rates are much higher for smokers. "Therefore its premature to act" is a value judgement. (and probably a poor one)

We do not need absolute certainty in every detail in order to act.

### Tipping points

Greenland ice is melting at an unprecedented rate on top. If water makes it to bottom it will cause unstoppable movement/melting. We don't know how many degrees of melting would touch off this tipping point. But what I do know with certainty is that the more we keep adding unprecedented levels of warming to the system, the more the number of tipping points there will be. We know they are there, we don't know for sure where they are.

The worst thing about Greenland is that we will probably not know when we have crossed the tipping point until perhaps 50 years after it happens. Our behavior in the next generation may precondition globe for next 100 years. A morally daunting prospect!

Paraphrase of last commenter: Will the benefits of energy use gained by our generation be exceeded by global scale problems that may last for more than 1000 years?