

The IPCC assessment

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The IPCC is an assessment of the state of knowledge about climate change. Such an assessment is primarily based on peer reviewed literature. But it is not a review of the literature. Of course the literature is reviewed but the assessment process means that conflicting claims and conclusions have to be reconciled to the extent possible. This means examining the methods, assumptions, and data used, and the logic behind the conclusions.

The IPCC is convened by the United Nations jointly under the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). Its mandate is to provide policymakers with an objective assessment of the scientific and technical information available about climate change, its environmental and socio-economic impacts, and possible response options. The IPCC reports on the science of global climate change and the effects of human activities on climate. It does not do or manage research. It has provided policymakers assessment reports since 1990, and the Fourth Assessment Report (AR4) was released in 2007. Each IPCC report reviews all the published literature over the previous 5 years or so, and assesses the state of knowledge, while trying to reconcile disparate claims, resolve discrepancies and document uncertainties. The IPCC assessments are produced through a very open and inclusive process. The volunteer authorship of the AR4 in Working Group I (WGI) includes 152 lead authors and over 400 contributing authors from over 130 countries. In addition, there were more than 30,000 comments from over 600 reviewers, as well as formal coordinated reviews by dozens of world governments, including the U.S. All review comments must be addressed, and review editors are in place for each chapter of the report to ensure that this is done in a satisfactory and appropriate manner.

The literature is enormous. To help assess it all we used 66 contributing authors in Chapter 3. Even restricting it to the literature since the last IPCC report, over the past 6 or 7 years, it is a huge volume. If it were all to be cited or placed into a bibliography, it could well occupy the entire space allocated for the assessment in each chapter. Many papers make small incremental advances and are often subsumed by subsequent work. Some papers have severe flaws, but still get published. These can relate to the data used, how it was processed, or leaps of faith that were not justified. In our chapter drafts, deliberate edits were made to cull references. As it stands our chapter was the longest of all and we have 17 pages of references in fine print. I would guess this is about half or fewer of the references we could have included had there been room. References that added little and which were replaced by more recent ones or were summarized by review articles were often culled. Nor was it possible to go through all papers and say why they were not referenced or point out their flaws. Science papers that are flawed or bad sometimes had to be ignored. But several had to be openly dealt with and were.

In a hacked email from Phil Jones, he wrote: *“I can’t see either of these papers being in the next IPCC report. Kevin and I will keep them out somehow – even if we have to redefine what the peer-review literature is !”* AR4 was the first time Jones was on the writing team of an IPCC Assessment. The comment was naïve and sent before he understood the process and before the lead author meetings were held. It was not sanctioned by Kevin Trenberth. Both of the papers referred to were in fact cited and discussed in the IPCC¹. As a veteran of 3 previous IPCC assessments I was well aware that we do not

keep any papers out, and none were kept out. We assessed all papers even though not all could be included. Moreover, the extensive review process, which is a hundred times more rigorous than that for any individual paper, brought to our attention any papers we may have missed.

This was an assessment of the science, not a review of the literature.
That is what we did.

1. MM is often believed to be McIntyre and McKittrick, but in fact it was:

McKittrick, R. and P.J. Michaels, 2004: A test of corrections for extraneous signals in gridded surface temperature data. *Climate Research*, **26**, 159-173.

There is a paragraph about this paper on p244 of AR4, written by David Parker. There is also reference to a paper by

De Laat, A.T.J., and A.N. Maurellis, 2006: Evidence for influence of anthropogenic surface processes on lower tropospheric and surface temperature trends. *Int. J. Climatol.*, **26**, 897-913.

The other paper Jones said he would exclude was included in Ch 6. The paper in Ch 6 was this one:

Soon, W. and Baliunas, S., 2003: Proxy climatic and environmental changes of the past 1000 years. *Clim. Res.* **23**, 89-110.

This is the paper that led to the resignation of several of the editors of the journal.