



To climate change or not?



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No one would dispute that climate change is one of biggest threats that we all face over the forthcoming generations, or would we?

When faced with any scientific or cultural change to our society there comes with it a 'resistance to change'. This fear is only natural and I would argue that the greater potential 'change' to our society, the greater that this resistance will be and the more difficult it will be to overcome and I would include climate change as falling into this category.

I will briefly give an example to support this line of thought, the public's attitude to smoking. Growing up in the mid 1950's it was unusual to see someone who didn't smoke. It was the norm.

Fast forward to today and it is unusual to see anybody smoking. It was feared initially that when the smoking ban was introduced that anarchy would prevail! That people would ignore the ban, licenced premises would go bankrupt and that society in general, would not stand for it. All of these fears proved false.

I believe in climate change. There, that's got that out of the way! So why don't we all believe in climate change? Surely if we all (society) believed in climate change then 'spreading the message' with regards to climate change and adherence to measures preventing climate change would be that much easier, and therefore, more successful.

We can talk about cost of complying with climate change edicts etc, but the real problem in accepting climate change I would argue is the 'resistance to change', a trait that we all have.

I'll now get to the point of my argument. People in time, will forsake this 'resistance to change' and accept the evidence that is presented to them. In this instance 'climate change'. So why are there still climate change deniers?

I have an interest to declare here, as I lived and worked in the Antarctic during the 70's for over two years and you may remember that the British Antarctic Survey was the first research body which identified the hole in the ozone layer in the Antarctic.

Since those early days there has been a growth in the gathering of evidence of climate change from respected scientific sources globally. So why is there doubt in climate change science? I believe that climate change predictions have sometimes proven inaccurate (remember that computer modelling is as only as good as the modeller, GIGO – Garbage in = Garbage out).

The British Antarctic Survey were the first to identify the hole in the ozone layer.



One of the problems is that climate change is a very emotive subject and the arguments both for or against inflame people's views whether they're for or against. There seems to be no middle ground.

Climate change is a very complex matter and people are confused due to the conflicting points of view. This confusion is not helped by emotive or exaggerated claims by either the 'for or against' side. I do not believe that the argument for climate change has been helped by occasionally making claims which, with hindsight have been overstated.

I'm not suggesting for a moment that there is any malicious reason for these overstatements, I believe that they were made in good faith but such claims only serve to give ammunition to climate deniers and sow further confusion amongst the general populace.

To give but one example, a number of years ago, the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) predicted that, within three years the glaciers at Mount Everest would vanish, such was the predicted effect of climate change. This has failed to happen! A few years ago, a Russian research ship sailed to the Antarctic with a view to prove that the Antarctic sea ice was receding at a dramatic rate due to climate change. The research ship had to be rescued by an American icebreaker due to the fact that the sea ice that year was more prevalent than had been for many years. So, what is the public to make of all of these conflicting incidents?

To summarise, my argument is that to gain people's trust, to change attitudes and eradicate climate change denial, we need to carry public opinion with us, and we can only achieve this by presenting good, clear science and avoid scaremongering. I would like to leave you with the following simple thought.

What if these fears and evidence (climate change) are genuine but overstated?

= Loss of Credibility!



Glossary

Key words and phrases often used with climate change:

Climate change - the Earth's climate has been constantly changing since the Earth was formed approximately 4.6 billion years ago. This includes several ice ages and periods of much warmer global temperatures. Until 200 years ago, these changes were all caused by natural changes such as volcanic eruptions and changes in the energy that reaches the Earth from the Sun.

Global warming - the warming of the climate in the past 200 years, which the vast majority of scientists are almost certain has been caused by human activities.

Greenhouse gas - a gas that allows heat from the Earth's sun to pass through, but then traps it. The greenhouse effect of Earth's atmosphere helps to maintain a temperature that allows living things to survive, but there is concern about additional greenhouse gases from human activity causing the Earth's temperature to increase. Greenhouse gases include: water vapour, methane and carbon dioxide.

Find out more

British Antarctic Survey Website

<https://www.bas.ac.uk/>

About the author

Steve Wroe lived and worked in Antarctica for over two years in the 70's, when husky's were still the primary form of transport! Having spent over 20 years as a full-time university lecturer, he currently divides his time between lecturing on Polar Exploration and Science and writing book reviews. He is also a qualified and experienced surveyor.

