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The IPCC was wrong. (Matthew England and the ABC mislead Australians)

By Jo Nova

<http://joannenova.com.au/2012/12/the-ipcc-was-wrong-england-and-the-abc-mislead-australians/#more-25928>

This is a rare unequivocal case of overreach.

Prof Matthew England proves he is either willing to stretch things beyond reason “for the cause”, or he doesn’t know what he is talking about, or both. Sarah Clark at the ABC didn’t do five minutes research on the story to check the facts or ask informed questions. This is not science, and it isn’t journalism either.

The Facts:

1. The IPCC used the word “prediction” in 1990 and predicted a best estimate of **0.3°C** with a range of **0.2°C – 0.5°C per decade**
2. Even with the most generous overestimate of current trends, the temperature trend has fallen *below* their lowest estimate, while CO2 emissions were higher than expected. The 1990 predictions can not be called “true”, “consistent” or to have “occurred” by any definition in any English dictionary.

The IPCC Prediction was Wrong

The quote from the first page of the Executive Summary of the Summary for Policy Makers, FAR 1990:¹

“Based on current model results, we predict:

*Under the IPCC Business-as-Usual (Scenario A) emissions of greenhouse gases, a rate of increase of global mean temperature during the next century of about **0.3C per decade (with an uncertainty range of 0.2°C – 0.5°C)** [IPCC FAR summary]*

The caption on [Fig 8. IPCC FAR Summary](#) makes it clear that the realized temperature is a *prediction* caused by Business-as-usual “emissions”. The predictions are linear from the year 2000.

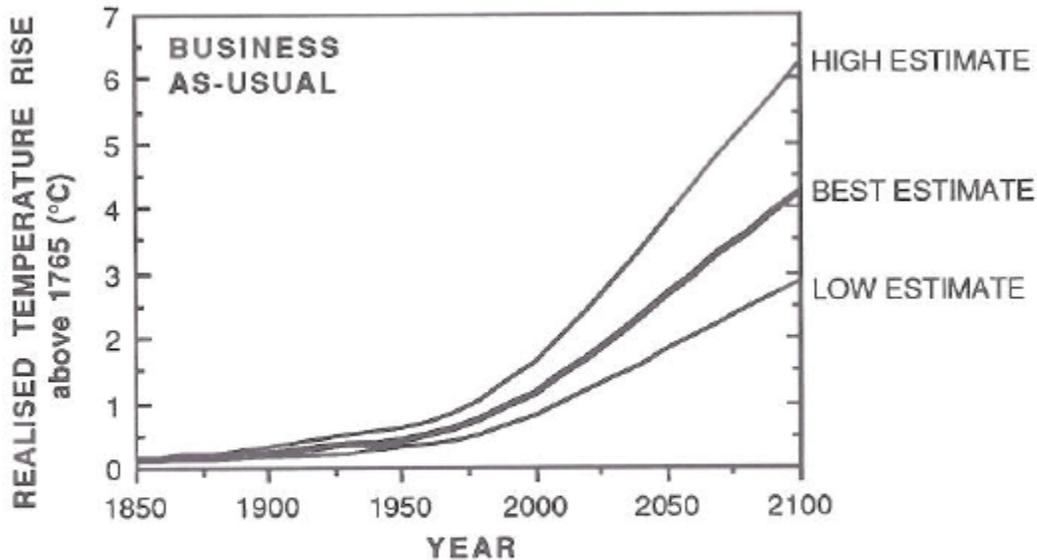


Figure 8: Simulation of the increase in global mean temperature from 1850-1990 due to observed increases in greenhouse gases, and predictions of the rise between 1990 and 2100 resulting from the Business-as-Usual emissions.

The IPCC FAR report 1990.

Furthermore they say that *even if emissions are stabilized at 1990 levels* temperatures **should rise by 0.2°C per decade for the first few decades.**

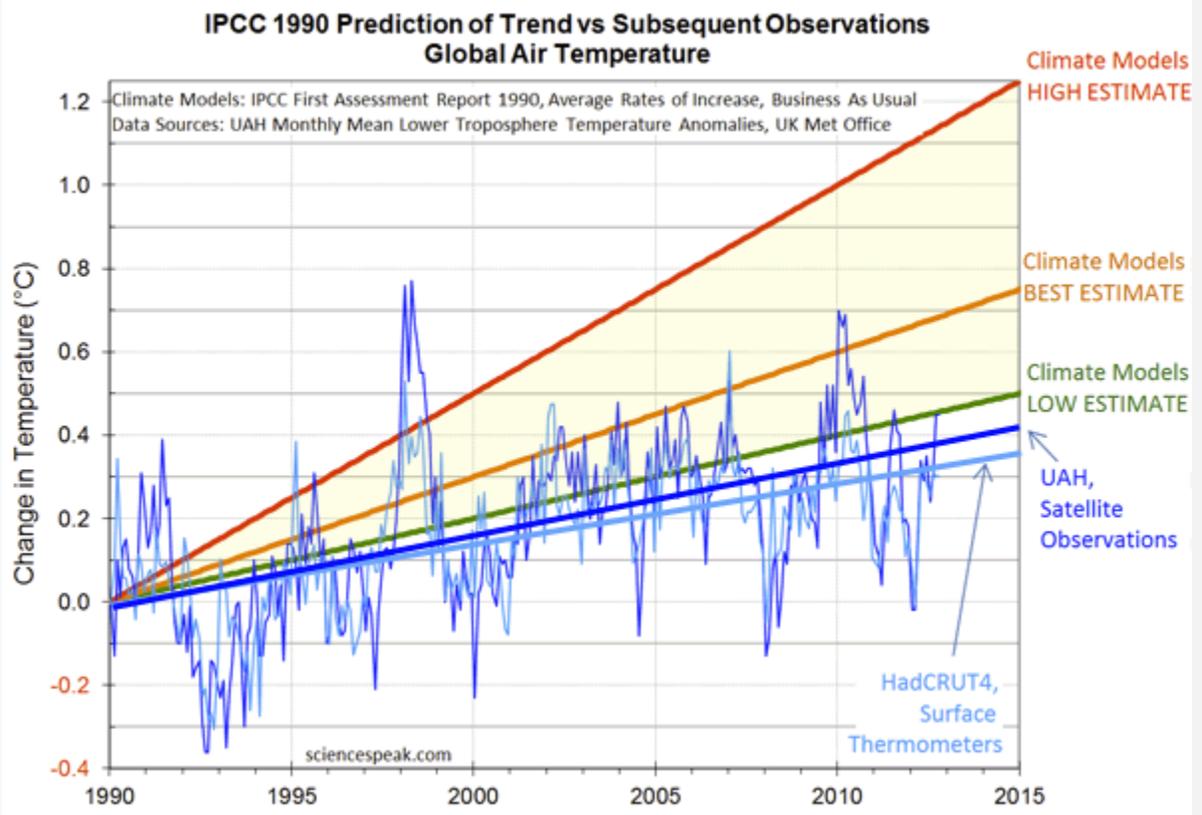
Even if we were able to stabilise emissions of each of the greenhouse gases at present day levels from now on, the temperature is predicted to rise by about 0.2°C per decade for the first few decades.

See the whole scanned IPCC [page in context here](#)

The outcome was 0.14°C – 0.18°C (about half of the best estimate)

Foster and Rahmstorf 2011 looked at five temperature series and calculated trends from **0.14°C to 0.18°C** per decade, lower than the 0.2°C per decade trend which marks the absolute bottom of the IPCC prediction. They are sympathetic to the IPCC aims. These values are as good as it gets for the IPCC. They fail.

[Phil Jones](#), director of the Climatic Research Unit (CRU) at the University of East Anglia (UEA) confirmed in 2010 that the **decadal trends for the last 150 years peak at 0.16°C per decade**. In other words, what happened since 1990 was stock standard normal warming as per the last 150 years yet the IPCC could not even predict a continuation of a straight line. (An eight year old with a ruler would have been cheaper and more accurate.)



Remember, these predictions were based on business as usual (1990) CO₂ emissions. But emissions have been much higher. If the models were right about CO₂ the temperatures should be trending in the upper half, not below the lowest estimate.

Is Prof Matthew England incompetent?

The IPCC made a wide prediction (0.2°C – 0.5°C per decade) and yet they were wrong. Matthew England not only hides this from the people who pay his salary, he describes this scientific failure as: “consistent with its original predictions”, “projections of that report have actually come true”, “warming has progressed at a rate consistent with those projections”, “the projections have occurred”.

England calls us liars for quoting the IPCC documents that he apparently has not read:

“And so anybody out there lying that the IPCC projections are overstatements or that the observations haven’t kept pace with the projections is completely offline with this. The analysis is very clear that the IPCC projections are coming true.”

England called the 1990 IPCC report “very accurate” in April. I raised the error then, and [he replied here](#), he had two excuses, the first was wrong, the second, irrelevant:

1. **He claims the IPCC don’t predict straight line warming** and that it was supposed to be a lower rate now, and a higher rate later. Look at the graph above. Where is the “higher rate”?
2. **He claims I plotted a satellite record rather than the surface temperature**, so it’s oranges and apples comparison. But according to the models the troposphere is supposed to warm more than the surface, and the Hadcrut surface record doesn’t show a large enough trend in any case (see Forster and Rahmstorf).

I then explained exactly what these **IPCC quotes were and why they were wrong**. I also described why the un-SkepticalScience defence of the IPCC uses a trick to hide the IPCC failures. John Cook and dana1981 don't quote the IPCC predictions, they changed the captions on the IPCC graphs, and talk about "radiative forcing" instead of emissions.

Sarah Clarke failed to do any critical research – the ABC acts as PR parrots for pet causes, not as journalists

Sarah Clarke is paid by taxpayers to investigate and inform them. Knowing she was about to interview Matthew England, all she had to do was spend ten minutes on the internet looking for information in order to ask him smart inquiring questions which would have exposed the complete untruth or irrelevance of what he was saying. She could have started with reading the IPCC summary for policy makers from FAR. But she didn't need to even do that ... others have already done the research for her.

Read this IPCC quote and then read what England and Clark make of the 1990 report. This below was the message the scientists wanted the world's decision makers to read and remember (again from the first page of the Executive summary of the summary for policy maker:

"This will result in a likely increase in global mean temperature of about 1° C above the present value by 2025..."

Neither England nor Clarke mention that. Instead Clark helps England to propagate a misdirection:

SARAH CLARKE: So the forecast was of a predicted rise of 0.7 to 1.5 degrees, is that right?

MATT ENGLAND: That's right, and it's by 2030, so we're halfway through this projected period. And the warming to date is consistent with that projection.

We are 22 years into a 35 year prediction of a 1C rise. We should have seen about a 0.6 rise, instead we've seen (at most) a 0.36C rise, and which is not accelerating, but flattening. There are complexities and caveats in the main body of the report, but ultimately, policy makers made decisions involving billions of dollars based on the *summary*.

The questions Sarah Clark would have asked if she was doing her job:

1. Prof England, isn't it true that the IPCC best estimate prediction in 1990 was 0.3C per decade and yet the warming came in at about half that?
2. Isn't it also true that their range of uncertainties was 0.2C – 0.5C, yet despite the wide range, they missed. Peer reviewed estimates of warming came in between 0.14 – 0.18C per decade.
3. To translate this into numbers people find easy to understand, if the IPCC effectively predicted a result of "60" with a range of "40 – 100", how can you say that getting measurements of 28 – 36 is success? In any normal report in science, or economics, or in tests in primary school, this would be called failure. Is 36 consistent with 60?
4. The IPCC described the warming trend of the 20th Century as being "broadly consistent with climate models, but also of the same magnitude as natural climate variability".² They specifically pointed out that the observed increase up to then could be largely due to natural variation. Given that the rate of the warming trend since then is no higher than the rates they were talking about as "natural", doesn't that suggest the current warming could still be largely natural also?
5. Our emissions have been 58%* higher since 1990, yet the rate of the warming trend has not increased. Isn't this "broadly consistent" with CO₂ having only a small effect, or possibly no effect at all?

Vincent Gray has watched the IPCC process for 22 years

He points out the term “predictions” applies only to the year 1990 and disappeared thereafter.

As I have said many times the IPCC ceased making “predictions” altogether after this. The 1990 Report had a Chapter headed “Validation of climate models”. In the first draft of the next (1995) Report they also had such a Chapter. I commented that as no model had ever been validated and no effort to do so is made the term is inappropriate. So, the next draft changed the word “validate” to “evaluate” no less than fifty times, and at the same time changed “predict” to “project” This current paper shows how desperate they are. They cannot claim that current IPCC practise is capable of predicting: any future climate, so they grub around in the past to try and pretend it can be done, when their circumstances and conditions were quite different.

What’s surprising is that people like Matthew England bother to defend these early predictions. His reputation as a UNSW professor surely rests on an assumption that he is honest and well informed. His judgement in defending the indefensible for little gain is bizarre. Skeptics can point to direct quotes showing he is unequivocally wrong, so why not give up on a losing game and just hand-wave and say “models are better now” (which also isn’t right, but at least isn’t quite so easily disproved).

Right now, ABC listeners may think that the 1990 IPCC report was accurate

If it bothers you that your tax money is spent to support journalists who don’t do their research, or who promote inaccurate information that may support their personal world view or voting habits, then you can do something.

If it bothers you that one of our supposedly best universities does not train its staff to use accurate English, to understand that 3 is not 6, and that honest unbiased information is what we expect then, again, it’s time to say something.

We can be cynical that complaints to the ABC, and UNSW will be ignored, but if we do nothing, we let them get away with it. Ladies and Gentlemen, the Media is the problem. If the media were doing a good job, most of our most silly policies, and our most corrupt politicians would not be a national problem. But all too often skeptics think that there is no point in saying anything. That’s what those who live off the public purse want you to think. They pocket the taxpayer cash and have their way with us, because we don’t complain enough.

The links you need:

- The [ABC complaints process](#) (Information about [how to lodge complaints](#) and how the ABC handles them). [[The ABC story this refers too](#)]
 - [Matthew England \(UNSW\)](#)
- UNSW Dean and top Academic staff can be contacted through the [Faculty of Science](#). The Dean of Science is Professor Merlin Crossley. [Alumni](#) can report their dismay at the falling standards of science.
 - Letters to editors: The Australian <letters@theaustralian.com.au>
 - [Contacts for ABC around Australia](#)
 - Head office: Australian Broadcasting Corporation;
ABC Ultimo Centre;
700 Harris Street;
Ultimo NSW 2007;

GPO Box 9994;
Sydney NSW 2001;
Phone (02) 8333 1500;
TTY: 1800 627 854; (Deaf & hearing impaired)
Fax (02) 8333 5344;
Managing Director: Mark Scott
Chief Operating Officer: David Pendleton

Always, always, be polite. If you can't be polite, don't write. All we want is for people paid by the public to serve the public, for our scientists to put science first, use logic and reason and accurate English. Above all, we want journalists to seek the truth. They should do some research to make sure they present accurate unbiased information, and not use public funds to push their personal ideology. Both England and the ABC need to correct the record. The IPCC predictions were not correct. England needs to apologize for suggesting that the people who say the IPCC was overestimating the warming are lying.

We're pretty sure the ABC has "the internet". Why don't they use it?

REFERENCES

Foster and Rahmstorf (2011) Global temperature evolution 1979–2010, *Environ. Res. Lett.* **6** 044022
[[Abstract](#)]

1. Executive Summary, *IPCC summary for Policy Makers*, First Assessment Report, 1990. page xi.
2. Executive Summary, *IPCC summary for Policy Makers*, First Assessment Report, 1990. page xii.

* From Clark herself in the interview

UPDATE: Sceptical Sam gets a gold star for his helpful comment. [December 12, 2012 at 1:13 am](#)