



The Global Warming Policy Foundation

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30 October 2017

BBC Complaints
PO Box 1922
Darlington
DL3 0UR

Dear Sir/Madam,

The recent BBC2 programme entitled 'Russia with Simon Reeve' creates a seriously misleading impression about the impact of climate change on reindeer populations.

During Episode 1 (1 October), Mr Reeve introduces a segment on the reindeer herders of the Kamchatka region of northern Russia by saying that 'in recent years the consequences of our changing climate have been devastating'. He goes on to link the deaths of 'tens of thousands of reindeer' to climate change, saying that 'across Northern Russia, many reindeer populations are in steep decline because of climate change.'

The scientific evidence suggests otherwise. A comprehensive study originating from Saint Petersburg State University: *Changes in reindeer population numbers in Russia: an effect of the political context or of climate?* (Klokov, 2012), found that changes in reindeer numbers were closely linked to the fall of the Soviet Union. The paper concluded that "the effect of the political context is so large as to conceal the impact of other natural factors on reindeer populations such as climate change."

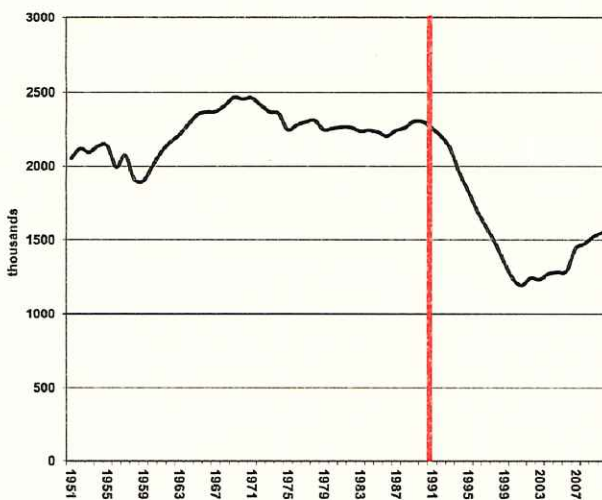
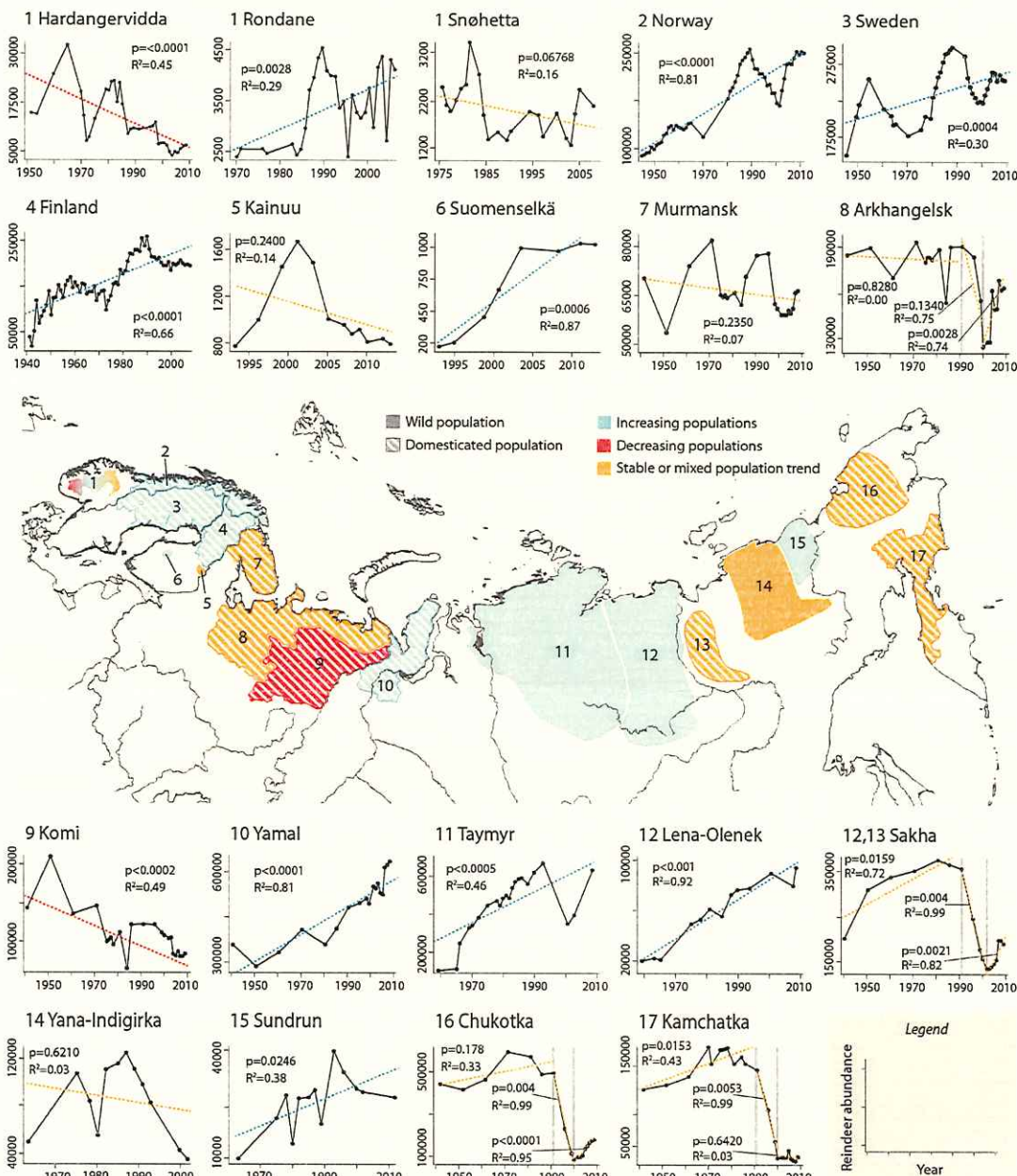


Fig. 1. The population of domesticated reindeer in Russia from 1951 to 2010, in thousands. The vertical line represents the date of the USSR's collapse in 1991. After a decline in the first decade following the end of the Soviet period culminating in a minimum number of 119 700 in 2001, the number of reindeer started to recover.

Link: septentrio.uit.no/index.php/rangifer/article/download/2234/2080

A 2016 study: *Long-Term Trends and Role of Climate in the Population Dynamics of Eurasian Reindeer* (Uboni et al., 2016), confirmed the finding that climate change was not the main driver of changes in reindeer populations in Northern Russia. They conclude that “Proxies of climate variability mostly failed to explain population growth rates and synchrony. For both wild and semi-domesticated populations, local weather, biotic pressures, loss of habitat and human disturbances appear to have been more important drivers of reindeer population dynamics than climate.”

The report gathered time series of annual counts of 19 Eurasian reindeer populations. Only 2 out of the 19 populations were found to have a decreasing trend. The Kamchatka region specifically was found to have a ‘stable or mixed population trend’. The failure to acknowledge this trend, and instead to present an alarmist narrative of climate-change induced population decline, constitutes a serious misrepresentation of the scientific evidence on reindeer populations in northern Russia.

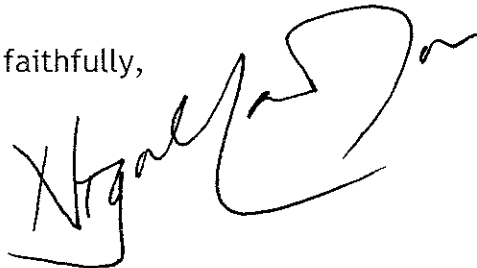


Link: <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0158359>

This was not a programme solely about reindeers. However, the unqualified statement that 'across Northern Russia, many reindeer populations are in steep decline because of climate change', is a distortion of known facts and constitutes a serious factual error. Given that climate change is such a controversial subject, extra care should have been taken to ensure an accurate and therefore balanced explanation of reindeer population changes was given. This would need to recognise the uncertainties involved and the importance of other more significant factors. Unfortunately, this did not happen.

I hope that the BBC will acknowledge this mistake and correct it as soon as possible.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nigel Lawson', written in a cursive style.

Nigel Lawson

Chairman

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