



## The Global Warming Policy Foundation

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**BBC Complaints**  
PO Box 1922  
Darlington  
DL3 0UR

25th April 2019

Dear Sir/Madam,

### Re: 'Climate Change - The Facts'

The programme, *Climate Change - The Facts*, broadcast on BBC One on Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> April, contained some seriously inaccurate and misleading statements. Furthermore, the programme went far beyond its remit to present the facts of climate change, instead presenting a highly politicised manifesto in favour of renewable energy and unjustified alarm. This falls entirely outside of the BBC's Charter to act as a public service broadcaster.

The programme began with the claim that 'Right now we are facing our greatest threat in thousands of years - climate change.' The empirical evidence does not support this claim. Tens of millions of people died in the World Wars for example, whereas the number of global annual deaths from natural disasters has fallen dramatically since the 1920s and 30s, according to data from the University of Oxford (<https://ourworldindata.org/uploads/2018/04/Global-annual-absolute-deaths-from-natural-disasters-01.png>), despite a huge rise in the global population. Indeed, the deadliest form of natural disaster in the past two decades has been earthquakes, rather than weather-related events such as floods and droughts, which were responsible for the majority of casualties in the twentieth century.

This opening claim is then followed by three contiguous statements:

**Richard Lazarus:** What we're doing right now is we're so rapidly changing the climate, for the first time in the world's history people can see the impact of climate change.

**Mark Maslin:** Greater storms, greater floods, greater heatwaves, extreme sea-level rise.

**Michael Mann:** All of this is happening far faster than any of us thought possible.

The logical interpretation of these statements for a reasonable viewer is that storms, floods, heatwaves and sea level rise are all rapidly getting worse. To have an alternative interpretation without being aware of the academic discourse on these topics would require an imaginative leap of some distance.

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However, the best available data contradicts this interpretation, and therefore this segment of the programme must be regarded to have created a misleading impression.

## Storms

In its 5<sup>th</sup> Assessment Report, the IPCC reported that:

“Current datasets indicate no significant observed trends in global tropical cyclone frequency over the past century ... No robust trends in annual numbers of tropical storms, hurricanes and major hurricanes counts have been identified over the past 100 years in the North Atlantic basin.”

In the IPCC’s more recent *Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C*, published in 2018, these findings were reconfirmed. It stated that “Numerous studies towards and beyond AR5 have reported a decreasing trend in the global number of tropical cyclones and/or the globally accumulated cyclonic energy...There is consequently low confidence in the larger number of studies reporting increasing trends in the global number of very intense cyclones.”

These findings also contradict a claim made by Michael Mann later in the programme that: “When there's more moisture in the air, you're gonna get more rainfall, you're gonna get super storms and force flooding events. We are seeing the impacts of climate change now, play out in real time. They're no longer subtle.” This was accompanied by dramatic footage of extreme weather and frightening music.

## Floods

The IPCC’s *Special Report* concluded:

“There is low confidence due to limited evidence, however, that anthropogenic climate change has affected the frequency and the magnitude of floods. ”

Furthermore, data monitoring global run-off into rivers using streamflow indicators, has shown a decreasing global trend in flooding. This data is particularly significant because long-running streamflow records are not affected by reporting biases.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0022169417304171>

Explaining their findings, Professor Seth Westra and Hong Xuan Do, of the University of Adelaide, said:

“To understand whether flood risk is changing - even after accounting for changes in population or asset value - we looked at measurements of the highest water flows at a given location for each year of record... We found that many more locations have experienced a decrease in large streamflow events than have experienced an increase. These decreases are particularly evident in tropical, arid, and humid snowy climate regions, whereas locations with increasing trends were more prevalent in temperate regions.”

## ‘Extreme’ Sea-Level Rise

NASA satellite data shows that since 1993, there has been an annual mean sea level rise of 3.3mm, with no significant acceleration. Tidal gauge data shows a slightly slower rate of sea level rise, but there is still no universally accepted explanation for this divergence. Under RCP 6.0, in which emissions don’t peak until 2080, the sea level

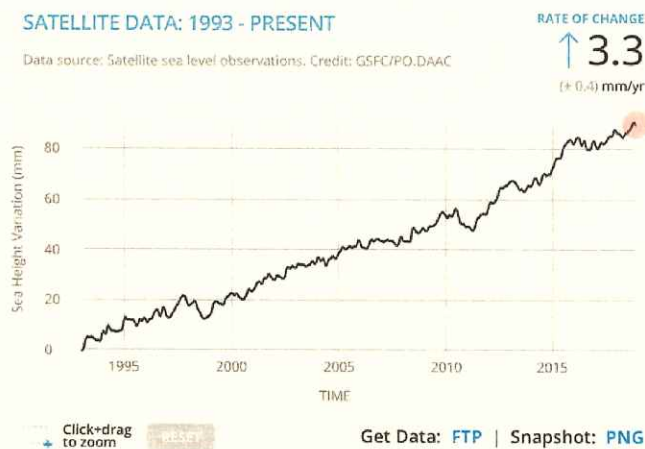
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rise is only 47cm by 2081-2100 not 80cm, which is the specific figure mentioned later in the programme. This figure appears to have been chosen because it was on the more alarming end of predictions. Throughout the entirety of the programme, no sincere attempt was made to convey the nuance of climate science.



Later on in the programme, Sir David Attenborough claimed: “Last year saw record-breaking wildfires take hold across the globe.” In the context of the programme this statement clearly implies that climate change is driving global increases in wildfires.

However, this misleading impression is not supported by the scientific evidence. As documented in a research paper published in *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*, the empirical evidence shows that the global area burned has declined over past decades, and there is increasing evidence to suggest that there is less fire in the global landscape today than centuries ago. These are vitally important facts that should have been mentioned if an accurate description of the impact of climate change on wildfires was to be maintained .

<https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/full/10.1098/rstb.2015.0345>

Extraordinarily, Sir David Attenborough also claimed that ‘In the last three years, repeated heat stress has caused a third of the world’s corals to first bleach and then die.’ I was not able to find any evidence of scientists claiming this was the case, and in the absence of supporting evidence this claim should be withdrawn.

In fact, new observations have confirmed the extraordinary ability of coral reefs to recover from bleaching events. Researchers from the University of California found that despite the widespread bleaching affecting 90% of corals in the Palmyra Atoll in the tropical Pacific, most of the corals recovered, with less than 10 percent dying.

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/04/190411154731.htm>

It would appear that this documentary was never interested in accurately describing the impact of climate change, but instead in promoting a political agenda. This was made explicit when Naomi Oreskes says ‘It’s actually not that complicated. We need to shift our energy system away from fossil fuels that produce greenhouse gases and

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towards renewable energies that don't'. It is categorically not the BBC's role to campaign for particular energy policies. This is all the more unacceptable given that alternative opinions of how to deal with climate change were completely ignored.

A particularly egregious moment of the programme occurred when old footage of Lord Lawson, the Global Warming Policy Foundation's Honorary President, is shown following a segment accusing the fossil fuel industry of 'confus[ing] the science'. The clear implication is that Lord Lawson's perspective derives from fossil fuel interests, a suggestion that is wholly false. Furthermore, the GWPF has always made clear that it does not accept donations from energy companies or anyone with a significant interest in an energy company.

Lord Lawson was not given any opportunity to respond to this insinuation or to the implicit criticism of arguments he had made in the past. This is a clear failure to uphold the 'Right of Reply', which is enshrined in the Ofcom Broadcasting Code.

This complaint has detailed particular occasions where this documentary has been inaccurate or misleading, and which should be corrected as soon as possible. However, there have been so many misleading claims in this programme that it is impossible to include them all here. The documentary should be considered as a whole to be unbalanced and misleading, given its insistence on ignoring the nuances of climate science in favour of presenting a wholly alarmist narrative. I expect the BBC to acknowledge the evident errors documented in this complaint, and to offer remedial measures as soon as possible.

Yours faithfully,

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

Benny Peiser