

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change for beginners

What is it?

A bunch of scientists (not just Western climatologists) from all around the world who spend their time reading cheerful scientific papers about climate change, figuring out which research is the best and then stitching it, *through consensus*, into reports for Decision Makers.

Where did the IPCC come from?

Through the 1980s there were several scientific conferences about climate change. The evidence was relatively fuzzy, but getting less fuzzy year by year. In 1988 the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) set up the IPCC. It produced a report in 1990 that was the basis for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Rio, 1992).

Interestingly, Spencer Weart, Director of the Center for History of Physics at the American Institute of Physics, reckons “*The Reagan administration wanted to forestall pronouncements by self-appointed committees of scientists, fearing they would be “alarmist.” Conservatives promoted the IPCC’s clumsy structure, which consisted of representatives appointed by every government in the world and required to consult all the thousands of experts in repeated rounds of report-drafting in order to reach a consensus. Despite these impediments the IPCC has issued unequivocal statements on the urgent need to act.*”

What does it do?

The role of the IPCC is to assess on a comprehensive, objective, open and transparent basis the scientific, technical and socio-economic information relevant to understanding the scientific basis of risk of human-induced climate change, its potential impacts and options for adaptation and mitigation.

(Mitigation means to stop things getting worse- principally by avoiding an increase in the levels of CO₂ and other gases in the atmosphere. In reality, this just isn't happening, so pretty soon I suspect the focus will switch to 'adaptation...')

Its reports are the main (but not the only) basis for discussion at UN's Framework Convention on Climate Change meetings (the wonderful process that brought us the Kyoto Protocol, and will save the world any day now.)

What doesn't it do?

The IPCC does not carry out research nor does it monitor climate related data or other relevant parameters. It bases its assessment mainly on peer reviewed and published scientific/technical literature.

It does not recommend specific policies, or boss around/criticise individual governments.

What has it done so far?

Assessment Reports. 1990, 1996, 2001 and the fourth one, out this year.

Emissions Scenarios (2000). Incidentally, recent evidence suggests we are heading along the highest and nastiest of these...

Report on Carbon Capture and Storage (“sequestration”)

Safeguarding the Ozone layer and the Global Climate System: Issues Related to Hydrofluorocarbons and Perfluorocarbons (this will be a hilarious drinking game challenge at the next camp)

How does it divide its working?

For each of the three Working Groups there are co-Chairs; one from minority world, and one from majority world. There are 'Technical Support Units' to help each Working Group WG2 is here in the UK.

Working Group 1: The science of climate change

Co-chairs from China and the US (Susan Solomon, instrumental in plugging the ozone hole, for you old hacks whose memories stretch that far back)

The full Working Group I report will be available online from May 2007. It will also be published by Cambridge University Press and is expected to be available in book form by late June 2007.

Working Group 2: Impacts, Adaptations, and Vulnerabilities

Co-chairs from Argentina and UK (chap called Martin Parry)

Report expected in April

Technical Support offered by Hadley Centre of the Met Office

Working Group 3: Mitigation of climate change

Co chairs are from Sierra Leone and the Netherlands

Approval in May, publication in October 2007

Greenhouse Gas Inventory Programme (counting carbs...)

The IPCC National Greenhouse Gas Inventories Programme (IPCC-NGGIP) had been undertaken since 1991 by the IPCC WG I in close collaboration with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the International Energy Agency (IEA).

Who doesn't like it?

The Denialist industry. Each IPCC report makes “ha, they said there'd be a new ice-age” less and less plausible as a response to drowning polar bears, frying frogs etc.

Exxon- they got the previous chair of the IPCC, Bob Watson, sacked by asking the commander in chimp nicely.

For a good look at who habitually launches attacks on the IPCC, and what they might get up to in the coming months, check out a New Scientist article from 4th November 2006...
<http://environment.newscientist.com/article/mg19225765.000-climate-change-special-state-of-denial.html>

Why should I care about any of this?

This is the best science around on the subject. 'nuff said.

When will it next be in the news?

On 2nd February 2007 the Working Group One (that's the science bit) report is released.

I would bet good money (i.e. other people's) that the deniers and the greenwashers will have been getting their retaliation in first, so expect a lot of “it doesn't exist/we're solving it anyway” style messages in the days leading up. No prizes for spotting the coal-industry funded Pat Michaels...

How can I learn more?

Official website is www.ipcc.ch. Fairly light on laughs tho'.

Royal Society will have a two day seminar about Working Group 1's report, 1st-2nd March. Now full, but it will be video-streamed... www.royalsoc.ac.uk/event.asp?id=5464

www.realclimate.org

www.marklynas.org

all italics bits lifted from www.ipcc.ch, except the Spencer Weart bit.
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