

Putting the IPCC in context

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The UNEP (1)

- The roots of the IPCC go back to a United Nations conference on the environment, held in Stockholm in 1972.
- Out of this conference came the United Nations Environment Programme – the UNEP.
- Heading the new organization was Canadian Maurice Strong, who had been instrumental in getting the Stockholm conference up and running.
- Strong is often blamed for what followed but he only stayed in the job about 3 years and for most of that time the UNEP was getting organised in its headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya.
- Reports of UNEP meetings in 1974 indicate dissatisfaction with Strong and it was probably only a matter of time before he was dismissed.
- The new UNEP head was Strong's deputy, Mostafa Tolba, who had run the place during Strong's many absences. He was to remain as UNEP head from late 1975 to 1992, through a period when some of what the UNEP said and did was questionable.

The UNEP (2)



Tolba seems to have been behind the UNEP adopting what's known as "the precautionary principle", which is

"If there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation."

The idea might sound fine but what happens if the science you rely on isn't 100% correct, is later proven incorrect or is even highly disputed? You could be chasing shadows and demanding action that's completely unnecessary.

The UNEP (3)

Tolba developed a reputation as bully. Fiona McConnell, who led the British negotiating team for the Montreal Protocol said of him:

“Dr. Tolba continued to apply his bullying, cajoling, wheedling and threatening tactics. He was unwaveringly courteous to the US because, as he told us all, he did not want to give them an excuse to walk out. But to everyone else he distributed his contempt even-handedly. ... A laugh from Mr. Tolba in response to a proposal he did not favour was inevitably the precursor of an insult...”

- Fiona McConnell: The Biodiversity Convention, Kluwer 1996 (also mentioned in “UNEP The First 40 Years – a narrative” by Stanley Johnson, available from the UNEP)

Acid rain

- In the 1970s the UNEP made a huge fuss about industrial pollutants being carried in the air to other countries, being taken up by rainfall there and this “acid rain” destroying the trees. The UNEP said that the world could lose 10% its trees.
- Dying trees in Sweden were blamed on pollution from Britain.
- The Canadian government blamed the death of trees on pollution from the US.
- There was just one problem – Canadian researchers in the field could find no evidence at all that pollution was to blame. Some trees were suffering from an infestation. Other trees had started to grow quickly in warm weather in early Spring, but then the weather turned cold and killed that early growth.
- Within a few years it was found that the acid-rain scare was a wild exaggeration other than in a few highly polluted areas in Eastern Europe.

Ozone (1)

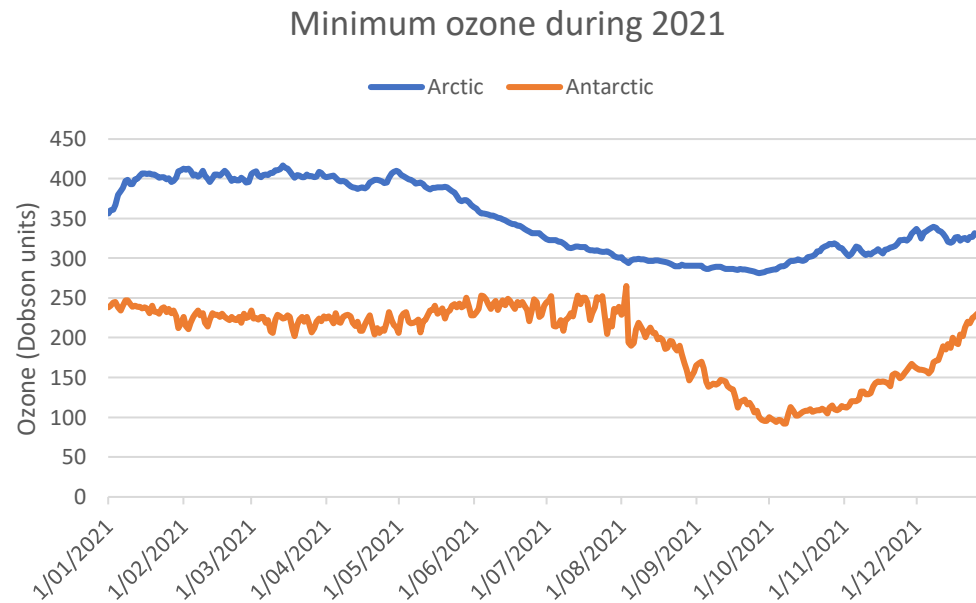
- The UNEP got all excited about ozone on the basis of a single scientific paper by Rowlands and Molina, published in 1974.
- The paper claimed that chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) were destroying the ozone layer, which is the very wide band of the stratosphere where most ozone is found. (CFCs were commonly used in refrigeration.)
- The UNEP pushed hard for a ban on the manufacture and use of CFCs, later adding other chemical compounds. That ban became known as Montreal Protocol.
- Even today most people are convinced that CFCs have caused a hole in the ozone layer.

But ...

- It's not a hole, only a thinning, and it only happens at certain times of the year despite CFCs being present for in the stratosphere for the entire year.

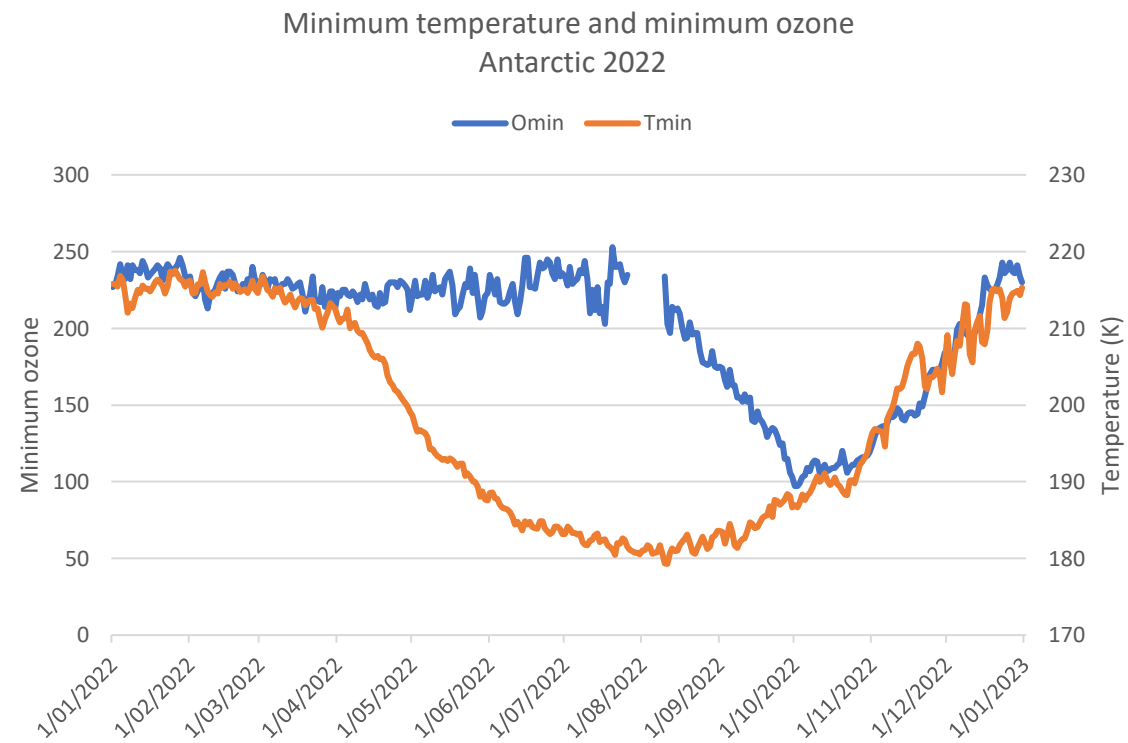
Ozone (2)

- Despite there being more people in the Northern Hemisphere, and logically more use of CFCs, the amount of ozone over the Arctic is greater than the amount over the Antarctic, and while there's some thinning in the Arctic, there's more in the Antarctic.
- The thinning appears in the two locations offset by a few months (not the six months that we might link to seasons of the year).



Ozone (3)

NASA talks about minimum stratospheric temperatures, probably because the UNEP sometimes does, but the relationship between temperature and ozone thinning isn't clear.



Ozone (4)

The UNEP claims that CFCs have damaged the ozone layer but there are good reasons to doubt what the UNEP says:

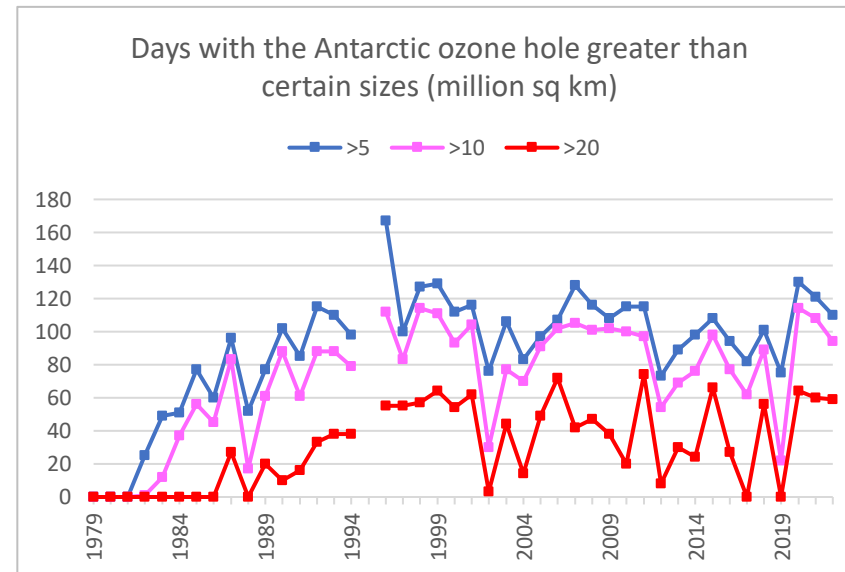
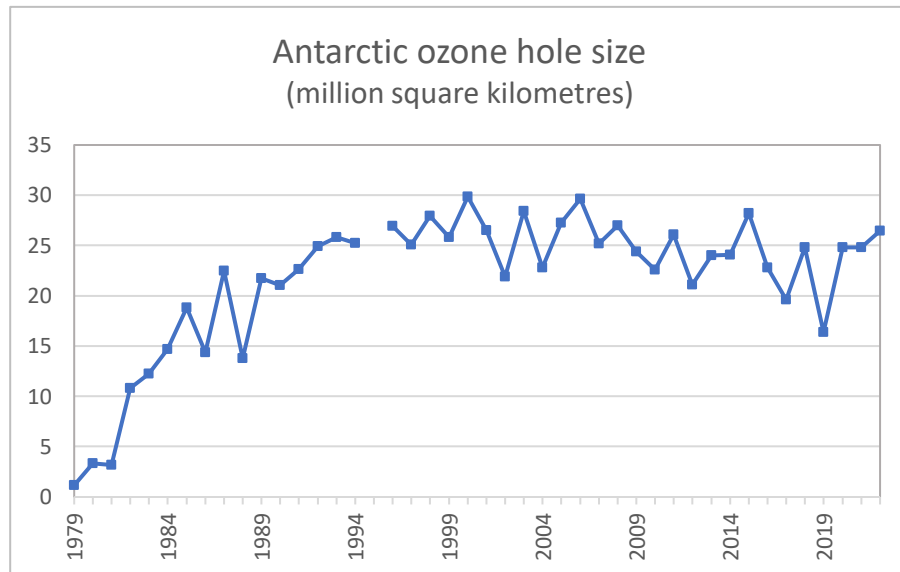
- It doesn't account for the cyclic nature of the holes and differences between the northern and southern hemispheres
- In 2007 scientists discovered a natural source of halogens, which are known ozone depleting agents, in the Antarctic.
- Also in 2007, it was found that a key step of the chemical process by which CFCs are claimed to act is too slow for the whole process to cause ozone destruction
- In 2008, a Canadian researcher found a strong correlation between cosmic rays and ozone depletion. More more recently he's analyzed NASA data and concluded there's lots of thinning in the tropics too.

Ozone (5)

The Montreal Protocol was started in 1987 and entered into force on January 1st, 1989. That's now just over 30 years ago. Last year, 2022, the UNEP head, Inger Andersen, said ...

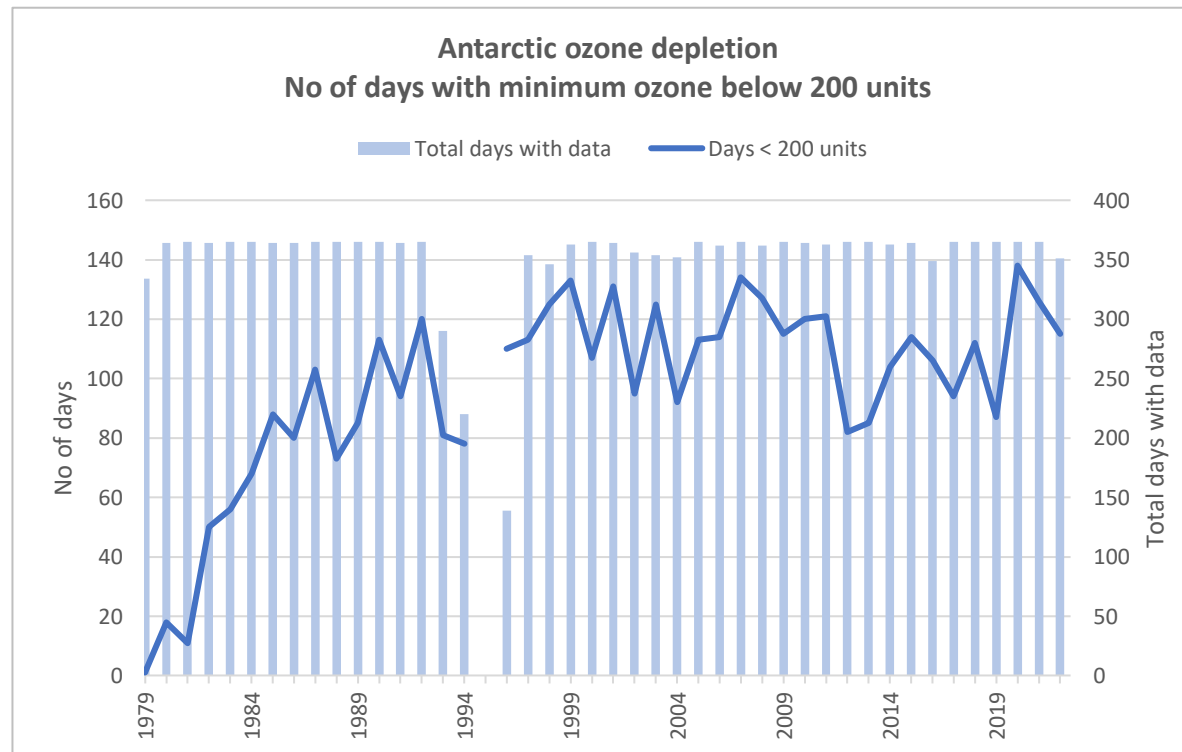
“Perhaps the best example of [UNEP] success is the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. This 1987 global deal fixed the hole in the ozone layer, through which deadly radiation was pouring.”

Fixed?



Ozone (6)

But the size of the hole is probably due to air circulation, so here's another way to look at it – the number of days that the amount of ozone was below a certain level.



DDT (1)

The acid rain scare quietly faded away without great fuss or great cost. The same can't be said about the ozone scare because it's cost the public a fortune for new refrigerants.

There's another UNEP issue that hasn't cost money so much as lives – maybe 20 million or more of them.

This is the DDT scare that grew out of a single book, Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring".

- DDT was used as an agricultural spray for many years in various countries, including the USA.
- In various African countries it was used primarily as an agricultural spray, perhaps funded by the UN or other international agencies. It seems likely that a certain amount was being diverted into spraying around houses to keep mosquitoes at bay and reduce the threat of malaria, but perhaps African countries were paying for that.

DDT (2)

- The UNEP's argument was that DDT persisted in the soil, which was true.
- Sweden banned its use in 1970 and the US followed with a ban in 1972.
- After many years of discussion and negative publicity from the UNEP and WHO, at a conference in 1999 agreement was finally reached to ban DDT as an agricultural spray.
- It wasn't banned regards malaria control, perhaps thanks to about 350 doctors who pointed out just before the conference that its benefits as a defence against malaria outweighed its risks, but the years of negative publicity certainly discouraged its use.
- The big problem was the cost of alternatives. DDT cost between \$1.60 and \$8.50 per household but the alternatives cost \$4.20 to \$24.00 (which is about 3 times higher).
- The negative publicity, perhaps having no DDT for agricultural use, plus the cost of alternatives meant that many African countries no longer had good, cheap defence against malaria.

DDT (3)

- Seven years after the ban on DDT for agricultural use was introduced, the World Health Organization declared DDT safe provided that basic guidelines were followed.
- Some countries didn't wait that long before reintroducing it for malaria control.
- In a 2006 publication, "African Outlook", the UNEP said

Despite the environmental threats it poses, DDT has been the most cost-effective and efficient way of controlling malaria.

When South Africa stopped using DDT in 1996, the number of malaria cases in the KwaZuluNatal province rose from 8,000 to 42,000 by 2000. South Africa tried various alternatives but they proved less effective. Since reintroducing DDT, it has been able to reduce the number of deaths in the province to less than 50 per year.

- The UNEP and WHO's negative publicity about DDT and the ban on it for agricultural use caused an estimated 20 million deaths, this despite both claiming that they care about human health.

Summary so far

Acid rain, ozone issues and DDT are three issues where the UNEP's claims and demands have been very questionable.

In the case of DDT the UNEP failed to weigh up the consequences of its demands and ultimately caused the death of millions of people.

In the cases of acid rain and ozone it looks like the UNEP's reliance on the precautionary principle – acting before all of the science was known – caused it to act on the basis of very questionable claims and to pressure the world into taking false and expensive actions.

The big question is whether the same can be said about the UNEP's position on climate change.

The UNEP and climate change (1)

The UNEP became very interested in climate change in the 1970s. Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s it commissioned various investigations by the International Council of Scientific Unions (or ICSU).

Several of those investigations were headed by Professor Bert Bolin who had claimed for many years that CO₂ emissions were causing warming.

On a 1959 visit to a National Academy of Sciences meeting in Washington, Bolin said the increase in carbon dioxide was believed to have caused the suspected warming trend of two to three degrees Fahrenheit in the previous 50 years.

The UNEP and climate change (2)

In 1980 the UNEP teamed up with the ICSU and the WMO, the World Meteorological Organization, to run a climate change conference of government representatives and scientists. It was inconclusive regards the role of CO₂.

It tried again in 1985, this time inviting scientists in an individual capacity. The report of the meeting wasn't written up for several months after the conference, long after the attendees had returned home. It claimed there was unanimous agreement that CO₂ emissions were the major cause of warming.

Someone who attended that meeting has told me that agreement was in fact far from unanimous. He pointed though that it was simply too difficult to gather opinions and try to correct that report back in pre-internet days.

The UNEP and climate change (3)

After their claims about the 1985 conference the UNEP, ICSU and WMO recommended holding further international conferences on the subject.

One such conference was organized in 1987 not by them but by the Swedish think tank, the Biejer Institute, which had links to Bert Bolin.

The Executive Summary of the report of that 1987 conference says among other things:

It is now generally agreed that if the present trends of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions continue during the next hundred years, a rise of global mean temperature could occur that is larger than any experienced in human history.

There's lots of speculation shown in the Executive Summary. It contains 17 points and the words "could" or "might" appear in 13 of them.

The UNEP and climate change (4)

June 1998 saw two events that really accelerated climate alarmism, the first was without UNEP involvement but it influenced the second which did.

First came James Hansen carefully stage managing a presentation in the US senate on a hot June day in Washington.

His ally, senator Tim Wirth, said later in an interview

‘What we did is that we went in the night before and opened all the windows, I will admit, right, so that the air conditioning wasn’t working inside the room. And so when the hearing occurred, there was not only bliss, which is television cameras and double figures, but it was really hot ... The wonderful Jim Hansen was wiping his brow at the table at the hearing, at the witness table, and giving this remarkable testimony.’

Much of the US was in drought and suffering a heatwave at the time. Hansen told Congress that he was 99% certain that the heatwave was due to CO₂ and that heatwaves would get much worse, starting in just a few years.

The UNEP and climate change (5)

There were two major reasons for the warm conditions in Washington at the time. One is that droughts cause higher temperatures because there's less moisture to evaporate and therefore more of the sun's radiation can heat the ground surface.

The other reason is the El Nino-South Oscillation, the ENSO, which is well known for influencing global average temperatures about six months later. Throughout the 1980s the ENSO was very much in the El Nino direction as NOAA's multi-variate ENSO index shows.

Warm (red) and cold (blue) periods based on a threshold of +/- 0.5

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YEAR	DJ	JF	FM	MA	AM	MJ	JJ	JA	AS	SO	ON	ND
1979	0.5	0.3	-0.1	0.2	0.3	-0.1	-0.1	0.4	0.4	0.2	0.5	0.7
1980	0.4	0.2	0.4	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.2	0.2	0.1	0	-0.1
1981	-0.3	-0.2	0.3	0.4	-0.3	-0.6	-0.5	-0.3	0	-0.1	-0.2	-0.2
1982	-0.4	-0.5	-0.3	-0.3	0	0.8	1.8	2	1.8	1.9	2.3	2.5
1983	2.6	2.7	2.7	2.8	2.9	2	0.8	-0.1	-0.4	-0.4	-0.4	-0.4
1984	-0.5	-0.5	-0.1	0.1	-0.5	-0.7	-0.3	-0.1	-0.1	-0.1	-0.6	-0.3
1985	-0.2	-0.6	-0.6	-0.8	-1.2	-0.6	0	-0.4	-0.4	0	0	-0.3
1986	-0.4	-0.3	-0.4	-0.5	-0.2	0.1	0.6	1.1	1.3	0.6	0.7	1.1
1987	1	1.1	1.5	1.7	1.9	2	1.9	1.5	1.2	1.1	0.9	0.8
1988	0.6	0.3	0.2	0	-0.4	-1.2	-1.8	-1.8	-1.8	-1.5	-1.6	-1.5

The UNEP and climate change (6)

Later in the same month as Hansen's presentation to congress, there was a conference in Toronto, run by the WMO, the UNEP and Environment Canada. It received lots of media attention after Hansen's theatrics.

At this conference William H Mansfield III of the UNEP referred to the success(?) of the Montreal Protocol regards protecting the ozone layer. He went on to say:

The challenge we are addressing this week - climate change - will most certainly have profound impacts on the social fabric of the earth's inhabitants. It must be a top priority for the international community; it is a top priority for UNEP.

Because the problem is man-made and global, no effective solution is possible without broad international cooperation.

Note that he's already decided there was a serious problem and that mankind was to blame rather than natural influences.

The UNEP and climate change (7)

This conference, coupled with Hansen's theatrics, led to the US supporting calls for the establishment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a UN body sponsored by the (UN) WMO and UNEP.

In his 1997 book Shardul Agrawala said:

... while WMO was a natural sponsor for such a process, it did not have sufficient expertise to cover many other relevant aspects of climate change such as policy responses. This argued for UNEP involvement though the US had some reservations about Mostafa Tolba. This is because he had alienated many close allies of the US in Latin America during the ozone negotiations. There was thus a keen interest on the part of the US not to let Tolba run climate change with the same degree of control which he had wielded over ozone.

- "Explaining the Evolution of the IPCC Structure and Process", (Belfer Center for Science & International Affairs, Harvard University)

The IPCC (1)

The first IPCC session (or general meeting) took place in Geneva, Switzerland, in November 1988.

At the meeting Bert Bolin was elected chairman of the IPCC, the person who'd been saying for 30 years that CO2 emissions were causing warming. Of course, his credibility would suffer if CO2 was found to pose negligible or no threat.

According to the report of that meeting, Mostafa Tolba, the UNEP head, “expressed satisfaction at the extent of concern shown by political leaders and policy makers to the threat posed by climate change”.

He apparently went on to say:

... the Panel should, as a first step, identify the agreed facts and projections, separate them from mere speculations and bravely inform the world what ought to be done.

He seems to have already decided there's a serious problem, it's man-made and the world needs to take action. All this despite very weak evidence, in fact the IPCC's role is to find and present that evidence.

The IPCC (2)

He wasn't the only person saying things like this.

Representatives of 18 countries, plus what would later become the European Union, spoke on the subject and the need for the IPCC.

Most expressed a need for proper research and expressed a willingness to work with the IPCC, but a few stand out

- Australia, Norway & Sweden said there was urgency to solve the problem
- Canada and the USA said there were many uncertainties
- Japan and the UK said there was urgency but uncertainty
- India said there was a “projected environmental crisis resulting from climate change”
- Only Israel expressed any doubts - but it was ignored.

The IPCC (3)

At that first meeting various countries wanted more research, but the IPCC does no research other than ask certain climate modelling teams to model various scenarios.

The IPCC's "principles" document tells us

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. [my highlighting]

The IPCC summarises material – data, papers, reports, books etc. – that in some way relate to human-induced (i.e. man-made) climate change.

It doesn't look wider at all potential causes of climate change, no UN agency does that. Maybe if a UN agency investigated solar influences on climate it would tell us that most climate change was due to the changes related to the sun.

The IPCC (4)

But why, at this first IPCC meeting, did countries say that there was a problem and that it needed needed to be addressed with some urgency?

They were alarmed because the UNEP had been pushing the idea very hard on several fronts over the previous few years, and, since Hansen's presentation, the media was reporting widely and uncritically.

UN agencies have access to a huge media machine that produce press releases in multiple languages. Most, if not all, of the media have blind faith in UN agencies and will repeat what its press releases say.

Few journalists ever express doubt because (a) most journalists are ignorant about complex scientific matters and (b) the UN is seen as a kind of demi-god that never makes a mistake.

Members of the public form their opinion on the basis of the information supplied by the media, so given how the media reported this issue, of course public opinion was aligned to the claims of the UN agencies.

The IPCC (5)

Getting involved in UN agencies like the UNEP and IPCC forces certain obligations on governments.

By becoming members of those agencies, governments get the right to vote on decisions made by them.

While it's "one country – one vote" for almost all simple UN decisions, when it comes to written decisions it's more a matter of the text being negotiated between government representatives.

The wording of IPCC's summaries for policy-makers are a case in point. There must be unanimous agreement on the text of those documents. Ultimately the wording is negotiated between the government representatives and compromise is therefore the norm.

There's pressure from other governments and there's coercion, such as that from Mostafa Tolba, to contend with.

Ultimately governments usually take the same position as those decided at UN agencies. (It would be odd to have a government reject something that its representative at the UN agency voted in favour of.)

Summary of UNEP actions

The UNEP suggests that that development of the Montreal Protocol to protect the ozone layer is an appropriate way to deal with the climate change issue . On that issue and on climate change, the UNEP, alone or in concert with the IPCC and other UN agencies, has:

- a) Decided what science dictated the situation before the issue was properly investigated
- b) Used media releases and public figures to force its ideas onto the public
- c) Made claims for which there's little or no evidence
- d) Has inconsistencies in its arguments
- e) Ignored plausible alternative explanations, many involving natural influences
- f) Pressured governments into agreeing with it and into spending large amounts of money on research that supports its claims
- g) Coerced scientists into agreement (if they want to have jobs)
- h) Is unconcerned about the negative impacts its demands have on the public

A better UNEP (1)

The UNEP approach seems to be very much based on Mostafa Tolba's management style. We've already seen comments about this. Paul Berthoud who worked in UN administration roles for 45 years, including as director of the UNEP's Environment Fund, commented on Tolba's management approach saying ...

In this position [of UNEP head], he often felt a personal responsibility to involve himself in detailed aspects of the work of the Secretariat that in good administrative practice are usually entrusted to line staff. ... Tolba had been Minister of Higher Education in Egypt, and I assumed that his management style probably reflected the culture of the Egyptian civil service.

In today's language where I live, Tolba would be regarded as a dictating micro-manager.

A better UNEP (2)

There's a better way for the UNEP to operate than the autocratic style of Tolba that's given rise to the IPCC and other UN agencies

The better way is to adopt a style used now by various other UN bodies - a style of leadership and co-ordination.

This approach is to basically say "We think there might be a problem. We'd like your help to investigate it, and if there really is a problem we'd like your help with devising a way to deal with it."

There are three phases to this that run sequentially. Reviews are held at the end of phases 1 and 2 to decide what happens next and one possibility is that further no action is taken.

A better UNEP (3)

1. Is there really a problem?

- What does monitoring show? (And is the monitoring accurate?)
- What does historical data tell us about this or similar situations?
- Is there a genuine threat (i.e. are there potentially detrimental impacts)?
- Are there benefits to humanity that counterbalance that threat?
- How might the situation, the threats and benefits change in future?

A better UNEP (4)

2. Understanding the cause(s)

- What are all of the plausible possible causes of the problem?
- How does each potential cause operate?
- To what extent might (and does) each potential cause contribute to the problem?
- Can the possible causes be managed or controlled in any way?

A better UNEP (5)

3. Possible countermeasures

- What countermeasures are possible?
- What benefits would they bring? (Quantify the response as much as possible.)
- What are the costs of those countermeasures and how do they compare to the benefits?
- Are those countermeasures available now or do they have to be developed?
- If they have to be developed, what are the obstacles and the estimated time required?
- What are the obstacles regarding implementing those countermeasures and how can they be dealt with?

A better UNEP (6)

This approach is

1. open,
2. based on evidence,
3. exposes the reasoning,
4. makes no initial assumptions, and
5. is progressively reviewed.

Unlike other approaches, it seeks to thoroughly investigate the problem and its potential causes before considering possible solutions.

But can it be retrospectively applied to climate change?

The End

Thank you for your attention