



The New Zealand Centre for Political Debate

Imagining Climate Change

What a wonderfully powerful human trait is the imagination. No other form of animal life can think creatively as we humans...to dream up scenarios of passion...love, joy, hatred, anticipation. But distort our imaginative powers with a bit of fear & guilt instilled by mischievous science...and presto, you have the makings of the catastrophic global warming [oops, I'm sorry], I mean, climate change hysteria.

This hysteria was reinforced on 2 February when the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued its 'Summary to Policymakers' (SPM); but the report on which the Summary is based, IPCC's 4th Assessment 2007, will not be published until May. The problem is that the SPM was produced, not by the scientific writers and reviewers, but by a process of negotiation among unnamed bureaucratic delegates from sponsoring governments. Is it any wonder that this SPM attracted considerable media interest because of its alarmist dogma. The "Man bites dog!" stories always do.

So what is going on? Are we are a course of certain environmental Apocalypse? Of course we're not. Here's why.

Every one of the outcomes predicated on present & continued burning of fossil fuels by mankind are projections generated by computer simulations of future climatic patterns. They are not reality, not certainty, rather a kind of computer imagination. And even with all the mathematical manipulations, the climate models are only as good as the knowledge that is imputed to them. And as much as we would like to think that our knowledge of all atmospheric processes is substantial, the fact is it's grossly lacking in both scope & thoroughness especially when it comes to looking decades into the future. This means that high levels of accuracy & certainty just can't be achieved. Sometimes computer models can't predict our local weather with useful certainty just 48 hours in advance.

Then there's the matter of CO₂...that harmful gas that Al Gore would have us believe is choking us all

to death, that greenhouse gas which Jeanette Fitzsimmons claims "the planet is groaning under the weight of". Again, let's set the record straight. To start with, CO₂ is not a harmful, pollutant gas! It could best be described as an airborne fertilizer that humans exhale. Diesel exhaust, now that's a pollutant.

The Earth's constituent gases consist of 77% Nitrogen, 21% Oxygen with the 2% balance comprised of the so-called 'greenhouse gases'. These trace gases are water vapour (averaging about 1%), followed by carbon dioxide (CO₂) at a whopping 0.038% (usually reported as 380 ppm [parts per million]), methane at 0.00015% and even lesser concentrations of minor gases. So how can a gas that occupies a measly 0.038% of our atmosphere warrant so much attention? That's what needs to be challenged.

The greenhouse effect is a near-miraculous process that carefully regulates the temperature of the planet. By absorbing & re-radiating downward some of the heat energy that would escape to space from the Earth, greenhouse gases effectively keep the average temperature of the planet near 15C rather than at (minus) -18C. So the greenhouse effect is required for life!

Water vapour is, by far & away, the most dominant and naturally-produced of all greenhouse gases, contributing to a massive 95% of the beneficial warming process. Within the remaining 5%, there isn't much clout available for carbon dioxide; it only contributes a meagre 3.5% or so. And when this input is subdivided into naturally produced & anthropogenically sourced, just under 97% comes from Nature, just over 3% from mankind. This means that the human contribution of CO₂ to the Earth's greenhouse warming process is an inconsequential 0.12%. Even if CO₂ doubled in the atmosphere due to man's activity, its impact on greenhouse processes would remain minuscule.

Furthermore, the efficiency of CO₂ as a greenhouse gas does not increase with concentration, as

the Al Gores of the world tell us. Its effectiveness obeys the law of diminishing returns. Only the first 150ppm or so is all that is needed for the planet's greenhouse effect to operate near maximum. Additional carbon dioxide only serves as a spent force.

Because of the dominance of a simple, Earth-unique gas, water vapour, we could say that mankind could not alter our climate if we wanted to! Since carbon dioxide is not the problem, there is no need for any mandatory reduction of planetary CO2 or punitive taxations to prevent its use. Note that this not a proposal to abandon our responsibility of stewardship of the planet's atmosphere.

Scientists have an ethical responsibility to be truthful in their research, to avoid being arrogant, intimidating & intolerant. This is not intended as a criticism of all those involved in climate research, but it is directed in some regard to politicians & policymakers who, in interpreting the 'science', tell us "You have a problem, we can solve it & no other opinion matters". They communicate through a seemingly biased media emphasizing unsubstantiated fright & sensationalism: e.g., a rise in sea-levels that would inundate Pacific island nations. "We must act now!", the global warming zealots scream. Yet I recall my Dad warning about high-pressure salesmen with the 'It must be done now' pitch. Where's David Russell when you need him?

Recall the admonition of Robertson Davies, a 20th century journalist/novelist: "Every man is wise when attacked by a mad dog; fewer when pursued by a mad woman; only the wisest survive when attacked by a mad notion." Imagine that!

Mr. Auer has enjoyed a distinguished career in

meteorology spanning 47 years which has included nearly all facets of meteorology including analysis and forecasting (corporate and governmental), teaching at the tertiary level, airborne research, weather modification, air pollution, legal and forensic consulting, extended range prediction, and media presentations. His interests in seasonal / climate forecasting began in the mid 70's in response to the concerns of agricultural, forestry, and ski industries' business people worried about the impacts of weather on their planning and operations.

Augie first visited New Zealand living in Wellington during a sabbatical leave from university life in 1984-85 and working with the former New Zealand Meteorological Service. Before emigrating with his family to New Zealand in 1990, Mr. Auer retired after 22 years of service as a Professor of Atmospheric Science at the University of Wyoming, U.S.A., with tenure both as an educator and research meteorologist. His research topics are published in more than 75 articles in professional meteorological journals. From 1990 to 1998, Augie served as Chief Meteorologist for the MetService. He was responsible for the improvement and updating of the technical competence of the MetService weather forecasting staff. He often was called upon to serve as liaison between the media and the MetService during major weather events. He is probably best known from his presence on National Radio commenting on weather events, and most certainly as a former member of the TV3 News team presenting the weather each weekday evening as a part of "3 NATIONAL NEWS".

He is known for his simplistic, witty and quick thinking manner in which he talks about the atmosphere (or anything else!) around us.

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Regards

Muriel Newman

(founder & director of NZCPD)

