

Global Warming (AGW): Separating Fact From Fiction & Recognising False Claims

Issue 1: False or Alarmist Health Claims

Graham Williamson

June 2014 (Rev)

Carbon Dioxide Tax: Quackery, or Panacea & Medical Miracle Cure?

Traditionally public health authorities have vigorously condemned those deliberately making false health claims, regarding promoters of all manner of 'magical' therapies as being guilty of quackery. But now the experts advise us that anthropogenic global warming (AGW), being controllable by humans, offers many exciting therapeutic possibilities for the prevention of human disease and deaths. In other words, climate change mitigation strategies such as a carbon dioxide tax, are now seemingly regarded by some as being like life-saving medication, with enormous potential to reduce human health problems and deaths. According to McMichael and colleagues in [Comparative Quantification of Health Risks](#):

"the effect of anthropogenic GHG emissions on climate means that climate change can in principle be considered a risk factor that could potentially be altered by human intervention, with associated effects on the burden of disease."

The significance of using a carbon dioxide tax as a medical therapy is highlighted by numerous alarming claims such as:

- [Global warming that has occurred since the 1970s caused over 140 000 excess deaths annually by the year 2004.](#)
- [The direct damage costs to health \(i.e. excluding costs in health-determining sectors such as agriculture & water & sanitation\), is estimated to be between US\\$ 2-4 billion/year by 2030](#)
- [Climate Change Kills 5 Million People Every Year](#)
- [Climate Change Deaths Could Total 100 Million By 2030](#) If world fails to act

As Geordan Shannon points out in ["why climate change is very bad for your health"](#), *"It is beyond doubt that our emissions contribute to climate change. And climate change is making us sick."* But like many others, Shannon refrains from specifically separating health impacts due to human caused climate change, from those due to severe weather events or natural climate variability.

So is it true that the carbon dioxide tax has now become an exciting new medical therapy? And if so, what is the correct 'dose'? And do all countries/regions require the same dose? And what are the results of an excessive dose? Or, on the other hand, are carbon dioxide tax health claims false and merely another example of quackery?

Let us take a closer look at some of the public health claims being made and the evidence upon which they are based.

300,000 Deaths Each Year?

Given the above figure of 5 million deaths annually, the figure of 300,000 seems very conservative and is a good starting point. Claims made by [Fiona Armstrong](#) of the [Climate and Health Alliance](#), and others, that ["climate change" is responsible for more than 300,000 deaths each year](#) are however, simply not sustainable:

“Climate change is already responsible for the deaths of more than 300,000 people each year. Five million more deaths are expected during the next decade if no effective action is taken to reduce climate risk. Over 80% of the disease burden attributable to climate change falls on children.”

The figure of 300,000 comes from UN reports, with IPCC chairman Rajendra K. Pachauri on the advisory panel, such as [“The Anatomy of a Silent Crisis”](#):

“Based on verified scientific information, established models, and, where needed, on the best available estimates, this report represents the most plausible narrative of the human impact of climate change. It reports in a comprehensive manner the adverse effects people already suffer today due to climate change within a single volume, encompassing the full spectrum of the most important impacts evidenced to date. The findings of the report indicate that every year climate change leaves over 300,000 people dead, 325 million people seriously affected, and economic losses of US\$125 billion. Four billion people are vulnerable, and 500 million people are at extreme risk. These figures represent averages based on projected trends over many years and carry a significant margin of error. The real numbers could be lower or higher.”

In spite of subsequent [sensational media reports warning](#) ‘climate change’ is “already responsible for 300,000 deaths a year”, “is affecting 300m people”, “310m more people will suffer adverse health consequences related to temperature increases”, “20m more people will fall into poverty”, and “75m extra people will be displaced by climate change”, all these reports fail to scientifically distinguish between health impacts due to human caused climate change and those due to natural climate variability or severe weather events.

Experts Refuse to Answer Questions

As a result of my concerns about these claims, I wrote to Fiona Armstrong seeking information as to how deaths and health impacts of human caused climate change were identified (pers. comm. 18/05/2011):

“can you supply scientific evidence of the 300,000 people who died from climate change last year? How many were in Australia? Can you supply names or specific case studies for a selection of these? How many were in China? And which was the worst month? And how were climate change deaths differentiated from deaths due to normal weather variations?”

The only response I received was a referral to other publications such as above, but she was unable to provide any clear evidence confirming a link to “**human caused climate change**”. In other words it seems, the inference that hundreds of thousands of lives would be saved by mitigation measures such as a carbon dioxide tax has no accepted scientific foundation.

In spite of this failure to provide evidence though, [Fiona Armstrong apparently still believes humans can control climate](#):

“Mr Abbott will have to live with the consequences of his actions, as will we, but most significantly, these actions serve to rob our children and future generations of the chance to avoid a wildly unstable climate and irrecoverably degraded ecosystems.”

[Fiona Armstrong and the Climate and Health Alliance apparently even believe](#) the “the polar freeze in the northern Hemisphere” is caused by global warming and is controllable by mitigation measures such a carbon dioxide tax:

“The recent round of extreme weather events, including Super Typhoon Haiyan in The Philippines, the polar freeze in the northern Hemisphere, and intense heatwaves in Australia, should provide a

warning signal about constraining emissions that we ignore at our peril – all this with less than one degree of global warming so far. With much higher levels predicted for coming years and decades, we can anticipate increasing deaths and even greater threats to health and wellbeing as the planet continues to warm – unless we take immediate action to reduce and then eliminate our production of greenhouse gases.”

Some evidence to support these claims would indeed be helpful, but it seems the numerous alarmist claims continue to come BEFORE the evidence exists. Why?

Anthony McMichael & Lesley Hughes Add to the Confusion

More recently, [similar alarming health claims were made by Professors Lesley Hughes and Tony McMichael in their Climate Commission report The Critical Decade; Climate Change and Health:](#)

“The full range of risks to human health from climate change is mostly foreseeable from our existing knowledge about how natural variations in climate and weather, and the level of human-induced climate change already experienced, have affected rates of illness, disease and death. Climate change affects our health in a number of ways, some of which are direct and others that flow on from other changes. Direct risks include:

- » more frequent and intense heat waves resulting in more heart attacks, strokes, accidents, heat exhaustion and death;*
- » more frequent or intense extreme weather events—particularly storms, floods and cyclones—resulting in more injuries, deaths and post-traumatic stress; and*
- » more fires increasing the number of cases of smoke-induced asthma attacks, burns and death.”*

“Health effects of climate change are already being felt in Australia and are likely to grow worse as time goes on (see figure 8). Effects will be wide-ranging and will be felt in many different ways. Everyone is likely to be affected in one way or another.... The most important and urgent strategy to protect our health and way of life is to reduce the emissions that cause climate change. The risks of future climate change to our health are serious, and grow rapidly with each degree of temperature rise. Most scientists agree that the potentially catastrophic impacts of climate change can be avoided if we keep the global temperature rise to no more than 2°C above pre-industrial levels.”

Unlike many researchers, McMichael and Hughes do claim the most important mitigating strategy from a health point of view is *“to reduce the emissions that cause climate change.”* As a result of their claims I asked them for scientific evidence:

- 1. Please supply scientific evidence quantifying the number of people, in various countries, whose health has been adversely impacted by human caused climate change per se.*
- 2. Please supply case histories.*
- 3. To confirm your assertion that human caused climate change is causing or aggravating specific diseases, including heart attacks and asthma, please supply disease specific evidence and case histories of cases confirmed as being caused by human caused climate change.*
- 4. Please supply in full detail, the scientific methodology which has been utilised to distinguish health impacts caused by human caused climate change from those due to normal climatic variation or severe weather events.*
- 5. Since the mitigating climate change strategy adopted by the government is a CO2 tax, are you suggesting that such a tax is capable of preventing asthma, heart attacks etc? Please provide substantiation.*

Professors McMichael & Hughes Also Refuse to Answer Questions

Although I requested this evidence on 10 separate occasions over a 12 month period, I received no response. [As I have summarised](#):

"Their continuing decision to refuse to answer these questions over a 12 month period is alarming and creates a clear perception that the claims referred to are indefensible and therefore, until substantiated, fall into the category of unscientific alarmist propaganda. Indeed, publication of false health claims have always been treated very seriously by the health establishment and have often been relegated to the charlatan's world of quackery and snake oil. In fact, modern medicine is often distinguished from quackery by its evidential basis and the use of what is often referred to as the gold standard of medical evidence, namely the double blind trial. In the case of the alleged health consequences of human caused climate change it seems these standards have been abandoned."

Of course it is well known that natural climate variability, 'climate change' and severe weather events impact upon human health. It is clearly therefore not necessary to waste public resources to determine whether famines, heat waves, and cyclones are harmful. Suggestions that any human suffering resulting from such events are preventable by a carbon dioxide tax however, are most appropriately described as being based upon science fiction, certainly not reality.

Professor Fiona Stanley also Fails to Provide Evidence

Recently, former [Australian of the year Professor Fiona Stanley](#), "warned time is running out for Australia to take action to prevent the public health impacts of global warming." She continued:

"My whole life has been dedicated to getting the best data, the best information to try and prevent problems. So that's the tack that I'm now taking and that we all should take with this big complex problem because if you wait and things are irreversible, it's too scary to contemplate."

But when I repeated my request for evidence, as above, and expressed my concern about various unsubstantiated claims that had been made regarding human caused global warming and health, I received no response from the professor.

Professor Helen Berry also Fails to Respond to Request for Evidence

Recently [Professor Helen Berry warned](#) that "climate change could make humans extinct". [According to Berry and colleagues Tony McMichael and Colin Butler](#), "Human-driven climate change poses a great threat, unprecedented in type and scale, to wellbeing, health and perhaps even to human survival." [Professor Berry warned that](#) "Australia is a 'canary in a cage' when it comes to climate change" and "If climate change goes on unchecked we will see many deaths - we are seeing many deaths already - and you can imagine the human population could possibly go extinct if you take the effects of climate change to their extreme logical conclusion."

So it seems that the threat of extinction is based upon a certain "imagination", but as far as deaths are concerned, not only "will" we see many deaths in the future, but we are "already" seeing such deaths, although colleague Colin Butler seemed less sure of current deaths, and [seemed to see climate change more as a possible future threat](#):

"Fellow contributor Professor Colin Butler, also from the University of Canberra, says climate change could be a major threat in the decades to come."

As a result of my concerns, and in a further attempt obtain evidence, I wrote to Professor Berry (pers. comm. 17/05/2014):

"Dear Professor Berry,

I note your concerns about climate change and health (1, 2), a concern shared by others (3). Some have even claimed 'climate change' is already killing millions of people annually (4), a situation that can allegedly be prevented by mitigation strategies such as a carbon dioxide tax (4). However, in all these instances the profession has been unable to substantiate these claims (4), a fact which continues to discredit the profession (4). In such an important public health matter, why not release the evidence?

In your recent article entitled "[Climate change and health: IPCC reports emerging risks, emerging consensus](#)", you claim:

"The human health chapter in the second ("Impacts") volume of the IPCC's [Fifth Assessment Report](#) concludes that the scientific evidence of many current and future risks to health has strengthened in recent years."

But I note you and your colleagues have failed to mention the following conclusion of the IPCC (see [Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability](#) IPCC Working Group II Contribution to AR5, [Chapter 18](#)):

"Overall, there was a lack of evidence for observed effects of climate change on human health outcomes, and this generally remains the case."

This conclusion of the IPCC is very clear, but yet you have avoided citing this conclusion. Why? Your claims in fact, clearly contradict the IPCC. When the profession is consistently unable to produce evidence, and openly contradicts the IPCC science report, a perception of politicisation is created which is counter to the public health interest.

I urge you to substantiate your claims, and the reason you disagree with the IPCC. If you are unable to do so then in the interest of providing accurate public health information you should advise the public accordingly."

At the date of writing I have received no response from Professor Berry.

From 300,000 to 5 Million Deaths Annually to Merely a Future 'Threat', as 'Climate Change' Becomes Less Dangerous

It seems climate change is no longer a current cause of millions of annual deaths but rather has now become more of a "threat" in the future. According to professors Anthony McMichael, Colin Butler, and Helen Berry, in [Climate Change and Health](#):

"In short, human-driven climate change poses a great threat, unprecedented in type and scale, to well-being, health and perhaps even to human survival.....The human health chapter in the second ("Impacts") volume of the IPCC's [Fifth Assessment Report](#) concludes that the scientific evidence of many current and future risks to health has strengthened in recent years..... During at least the next few decades, the chapter states, climate change will mainly affect human health, disease and death by exacerbating pre-existing health problems.....Currently, the worldwide burden of ill-health clearly attributable to climate change is relatively small compared with other major blights on health such as from poverty, poor sanitation and exposure to tobacco."

But how can the "[Fifth Assessment Report](#) conclude that the scientific evidence of many current and future risks to health has strengthened in recent years" when there is now no mention of the millions of deaths annually? But although McMichael and colleagues cite the IPCC, they fail to

mention the following conclusions of the IPCC, as referred to above (see [Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability](#) IPCC Working Group II Contribution to AR5, [Chapter 18](#)):

“Overall, there was a lack of evidence for observed effects of climate change on human health outcomes, and this generally remains the case.”

Recently, this same concern about the possible future threat posed by climate change, was voiced by the Climate and Health Alliance in November 2013. According to a joint statement signed by Fiona Armstrong and others, ***“Climate change is the greatest health risk of the 21st century”***:

“Climate change is the greatest health risk of the 21st century. There is a clear relationship between human-driven climate change and extreme weather events, including an increase in the frequency and severity of heatwaves, floods, and bushfires.....Climate change has national and global significance as an issue of public health and safety, and has the potential to cause significant loss of life.....The use of fossil fuels such as coal and gas not only drives climate change.....The current and increasingly severe impacts on human health from climate change are not being adequately recognised in public and private sector decisions, or in the national health and medical research agenda.....We urge governments and policymakers to use the expertise of public health professionals and academics as a rigorously researched basis for public policy on health and environment.....This should include research into cognitive psychological barriers to responding to climate change.....We urge the federal and state parliaments to consider the health impacts of climate change and ask all levels of government and parties to work together to develop a national strategy to respond.”

Why do Fiona Armstrong and the Climate and Health Alliance no longer seem to express concern about the hundreds of thousands who are already dying from human caused climate change? Now it seems, they are only concerned about the possible future “threat” or “risk”, but back in 2011, in ***“Health Missing From the Climate Story”***, Fiona Armstrong was concerned about ***“Climate change”*** being ***“already responsible for the deaths of more than 300,000 people each year.”*** Don’t these dying people matter anymore? Why is it that so many ‘experts’ now only seem concerned about a possible vague future threat?

Ending Debate, Silencing Dissent, and Eliminating Opposition

Tyrannical dictators and extremists, throughout history, have sought and maintained power by silencing dissenters and eliminating opponents (5), an approach clearly deemed necessary by insecurity and fears of illegitimacy. Conversely, free and democratic societies are characterised by freedom of speech and open debate (6). [According to Sarah Maddison, Richard Dennis, and Clive Hamilton in “Silencing Dissent”](#):

“It is widely accepted that a well- functioning democracy is not limited to elections every three or four years but involves a continuing process of consultation between government and the citizenry.....Debate is fundamental to the development of good public policy and a well-functioning democracy.”

But alleged human caused climate change, like political tyranny and other forms of extremism, frequently seems to be characterised by this same insecurity driven desire to prevent debate and eliminate opposition. True to form, some even believe those who seek to debate human caused climate change or challenge the so called climate change consensus, are akin to being criminals and should be arrested and thrown in gaol (7, 8). It has even been suggested by Glover that so called deniers should (9)***“have their opinions forcibly tattooed on their bodies”*** or they should be ***“lashed to***

a pole at a certain point in the shallows off Manly”, apparently to test their belief sea level is not rising. Others believe climate change sceptics are simply sick and need treatment (10). As if to underline the true political drivers of climate change alarmism, scientists at the [Planet Under Pressure Conference](#) have even indicated that people’s freedom must be drastically reduced (10):

“The scientists behind the event recently put out a statement calling for humans to be packed into denser cities so that the rest of the planet can be surrendered to mother nature. And fellow attendee Yale University professor Karen Seto told MSNBC: ‘We certainly don’t want them (humans) strolling about the entire countryside. We want them to save land for nature by living closely [together].’”

But as IPCC increasingly support so called ‘sceptics’ regarding lack of evidence of human caused climate change (11, 12, 13, 14), and as concern about alleged health consequences of AGW moves from concern about deaths already occurring to concern about a possible future threat, the [Climate and Health Alliance](#) and the [37 co-signatories of their 2014 Climate and Health statement](#) are concerned about *“research into cognitive psychological barriers to responding to climate change”*. More appropriate however, is a wide ranging enquiry into why so many ‘experts’ are making alarmist claims in the absence of evidence, and insisting their views should be enforced upon others.

If human caused climate change is no longer causing the hundreds of thousands of annual deaths it once allegedly caused surely we should all be celebrating this fantastic achievement! But unfortunately, it seems alarmists don’t like the facts getting in the way of a good scare story.

Although *“AMA Vice President, Professor Geoffrey Dobb, said today that the latest report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) underlines the need for governments to plan to address the impacts of climate change on health”*, surely the AMA should begin by scientifically defining such health impacts of AGW. And they should also take immediate action about quackery and anyone who makes false claims.

The continued preference by many for vague ambiguous language, and the omitting of any evidence of (AGW caused) morbidity and mortality, is astonishing given the previous hysteria about millions of deaths every year. AGW has been consistently associated with wildly exaggerated, hysterical, and politicised claims, a fact which has put back the cause of genuine scientists by decades.

Conclusion

It is reassuring that experts have been unable to substantiate the various claims that the world is experiencing something called human caused global warming and this warming has already caused millions of deaths. This is certainly good news that we should all celebrate. It is disappointing indeed though, that there seems to be such an enormous chasm between reality, as confirmed by the scientific facts, and the alarming health claims made by various authorities. But until convincing scientific evidence is provided which confirms the alleged 300,000 to 5 million annual deaths from AGW, urgent questions must be answered.

- **Why have experts continually refused to describe the methodology utilised to differentiate deaths/diseases caused by AGW from those due to natural climate variability and severe weather events?**
- **Given the seriousness with which quackery, false health claims, and promotion of false community health fears, are traditionally regarded, what actions have been taken to penalise those who have been unable to support their claims?**