

Secretary of State's Appearance on the BBC Question Time Panel, 24 November 2011 - Climate Science Briefing

Issue

One of the other panellists, Daniel Hannan - Conservative MEP, questions the extent to which current global warming is being caused by human activities and, from an economic perspective, thinks efforts to address any future climate change should focus on adaptation, rather than mitigation.

Background information

This briefing provides some background details on Daniel Hannan's views on climate change and the underlying science together with some counter points to those views.

Lines on the latest release of emails and other documents from the University of East Anglia's (UEA) Climate Research Unit (CRU) are given in **Annex A**.

A copy of the Secretary of State's 22 November letter to Baron Turnbull and Lord Lawson, addressing issues about Baron Turnbull's GWPF¹ Paper – *The Really Inconvenient Truth or "It Ain't Necessarily So"*, has been published on the DECC website. Copies of the letter were also given to the Guardian, the Sun and other newspapers.

Mr Daniel Hannan's Views on Climate Change

Daniel Hannan has been Conservative MEP for the South East region since 1999.

Apparent views on climate change that have been expressed on the internet by Mr Hannan are summarised below.

On man-made climate change:

- ***Mr Hannan thinks the world is warming and that it may well be that human activity is playing some part in the process - although probably not to the degree claimed by some climate change professionals.***

Comment:

The physics is incontrovertible and the overwhelming majority of climate science *experts* agree on the fundamentals: that climate change is happening and has recently been caused mainly by increased greenhouse gases from human activities. The Sun's brightness has been constant or decreasing slightly over the past few

¹ Global Warming Policy Foundation

decades and thus can't account for recent global temperature increases, and neither can any other natural factors.

The main uncertainty in climate science is the climate's sensitivity to CO₂ – i.e. the global temperature response to a doubling of CO₂ concentration. This is mainly because of uncertainties concerned with cloud feedbacks. However, nearly all recent scientific analysis and modelling strongly suggests that the climate sensitivity ranges between around 2.0 - 4.5°C.

- ***He considers there is no agreement over how much the world is warming.***

Comment:

Three independent data sets, including the one produced by the Climatic Research Unit, show good agreement and clear evidence of warming of 0.8°C since 1900. A recent independent study from Berkeley University has provisionally found very similar results.

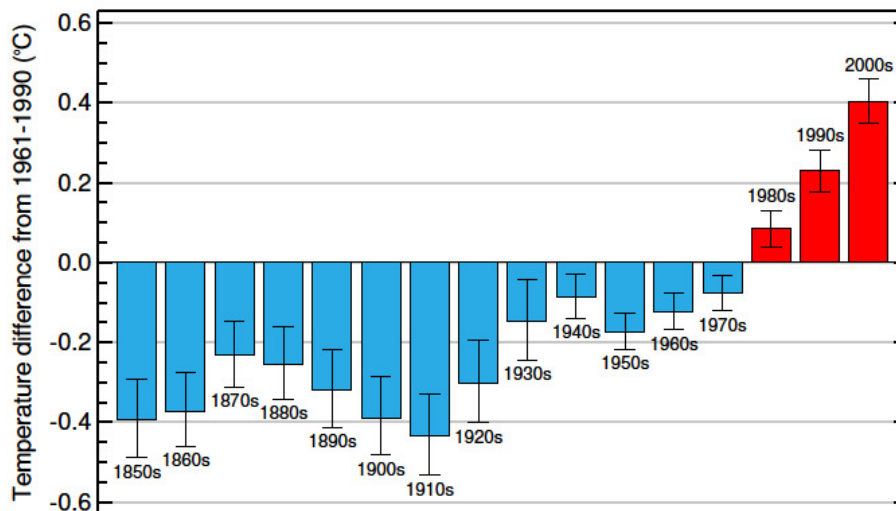
- ***His understanding is that the case for anthropogenic global warming was slightly more convincing a decade ago than it is today, as he thinks global temperatures have recently dropped.***

Comment:

Over short intervals of a few years, natural climate variations can temporarily mask long term warming. 1998 is the joint-warmest year on record but globally, the decade **2000 – 2009 was significantly warmer than any previous decade in the record**, going back to 1850. Individual years (except 2005 and 2010) have not been quite as warm as 1998 and this is quite normal because the human-forced warming trend is taking place on top of natural variations. We will always see such short-term fluctuations but, to confirm long term changes of climate, we need to look at records several decades in length.



Global average temperature 1850-2009
2000s warmest decade



Crown Copyright 2009. Source: Met Office

On how to tackle climate change:

- ***He tends to agree with Nigel Lawson that adaptation would be more effective and cheaper than a programme of greenhouse gas reductions which he considers would only have limited effect on reducing global warming.***

Comment:

Some future climate change is unavoidable – its already in the system because of the delay between emissions and temperature rise (climate system inertia), so it is right that we research and fund adaptation strategies to manage heat-stress, build flood defences and improve water management. However, compelling scientific evidence shows us that the more our emissions grow, the more we risk dangerous climate change, leading to severe impacts for all societies and adaptation will not then be an easy option.

It will not be possible to adapt to *all* the potential impacts of climate change if emissions are unrestrained. Only by cutting greenhouse gas emissions can we hope to keep future climate change impacts to manageable levels.

Some individuals are keen to suggest that climate science is so uncertain that we should delay action on climate change. But we cannot afford to wait. Emissions are rising rapidly and to keep climate change within manageable limits, by keeping global temperature below 2°C (above pre-industrial), requires that global emissions begin to fall within this decade and be reduced by at least 50% by 2050.

Each year we delay action it is becoming increasingly difficult to keep below our two degree target. Emissions need to peak soon and then fall rapidly.

On 'Climategate' (2009):

- ***Mr Hannan's view is that there is no conspiracy and that the authors of the leaked emails genuinely believe that the world is getting warmer as a result of human activity and, as a result, instinctively dismiss evidence that doesn't fit this view. He thinks it probably won't alter things very much.***

Comment:

We agree that there is no evidence of any scientific malpractice at the University of East Anglia. The global land surface temperature dataset produced by the Climatic Research Unit is corroborated by two other, independent US datasets.

Annex A

Further Release of Emails from the University of East Anglia

Issue

A new batch of emails from the University of East Anglia was released on-line, on 22 November. This matter was initially reported by the BBC and is now being reported more widely in the media, although it is unclear at this stage whether it will become a significant issue.

Background

A new batch of emails and other documents from the University of East Anglia's (UEA) Climatic Research Unit has been released. Contents include more than 5,000 emails and other documents, some relating to work with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). A similar release in 2009 triggered the "ClimateGate" affair and accusations of fraud that inquiries later dismissed. The release comes shortly before the annual UN climate summit. It was initially picked up by the BBC and Press Association and UEA held a press conference at the Science Media Centre on 23 November.

Lines to take

- There have already been three separate reviews which found no evidence of scientific malpractice at the University of East Anglia. As with reports of errors in the IPCC 4th Assessment report, nothing whatsoever has been found to undermine the underlying scientific evidence for human-induced climate change.
- We deplore any illegal release of private emails and other data. We need to focus on the important UN climate change talks in Durban next week, this is a poor attempt to distract from that vital work.