

Climate change. This is nothing new.



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Title page: Sunrises, sunsets, blue and overcast sky, hot and cold, will still occur irrespective of climate change. Photographs: M. P. de Villiers.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Pierre de Villiers was born in Durban, South Africa. He was trained to World Meteorological Organization class one meteorologist and multi-discipline weather forecaster in the South African Weather Service where he reached the rank of Director. He served on a weather ship in the South Atlantic. He served on World Meteorological Organization expert teams and was World Meteorological Organization rapporteur for the Africa region. He was also a commercial pilot and flying instructor. More recently he was a weather forecaster in the United Arab Emirates, then in England. Now retired.

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As far back as 2007, in response to an email enquiry from an ex-colleague in the United Arab Emirates, I said that Al Gore (ex-United States of America vice-president) was wrong, namely, the theory that increased CO₂ is driving temperature increase. The consensus is that CO₂ is driving temperature rise. Attention has been drawn to the fact that consensus is not science and science is not about consensus. Galileo said the earth rotated about the sun. The consensus was that the sun rotated about the earth. Consensus wrong. Until more recently, the consensus of medical opinion was that bloodletting solved many ailments. Wrong. The consensus was that Isaac Newton's discovered gravity when an apple fell on his head. Wrong. He discovered slapstick comedy. I jest. It's a myth it did not fall on his head. The lesson is, never underestimate the stupidity of people in large groups. In a hundred years' time, hopefully in much less time, people will wonder how collectively we could have been so stupid.

I do not disagree that the world could be getting warmer. After all we are emerging from a mini-ice age around the 1600-1700s. I do not deny that CO₂ is increasing and that human activity is having some effect. I disagree that CO₂ is driving temperature increase. Temperature increase started long before the CO₂ increase. In the very short term, by which I mean the beginning of the 1900s, temperature decreased between 1940 and 1970 when human activity was supposed to be increasing CO₂ and driving temperatures to rise. Bear in mind, in the very long term, the earth is slowly cooling. Fluctuations between warm and colder phases occur. By the way, measurements such as pressure, wind, humidity, etc., are used to define the climate of a place taken over 30 years. The 30 year mean is adjusted at specified intervals. The most recent adjustment was from 1991 to 2020. The climate of a place, on the Earth, is continually changing.

Going back in prehistory, millions/billions of years, based on geological evidence as well as Antarctic and Greenland ice core analysis, one finds that there have been higher temperatures and CO₂ increases. The glaciers have retreated, the arctic has completely melted, polar bears have survived for around 150 000 years. It has also been much colder for longer with an ice cap covering Europe, most of Asia and 2 thirds of the USA. By the way, coral thrives in warmer water. The best coral is found in the tropics in the Indonesia Archipelago and Philippines area, called the Coral Triangle, which has among the warmest sea water in the world and the world's highest coral species, over 600, 76% of all known species. Yes, coral bleaching does occur, due to changes in water temperature, light, or nutrients. However, it does recover. Two thirds of the Australia Barrier reef has already recovered from the last major bleaching. It is also thought provoking that skeletal and other remains show that the Sahara long ago had a tropical climate. Also digging of the canal through Chester in the 1770s revealed Triassic Chester Pebble Bed Sandstone. It has more recently been established that this sandstone was laid 250 million years ago when this place was where the Sahara Desert is today.

We should be thankful we live in a warming phase. Most human advances have been during warmer phases. It is worth noting that Iceland and Greenland were settled by the Vikings during the medieval warm phase around the late 900s to late 1300s.

Plants thrive in higher CO₂ levels. In geological terms, not too long ago (20 000 years ago) CO₂ levels approached around 182 parts per million (ppm). Plants cannot survive below around

150 ppm. CO₂ levels have been as high as 8000 ppm, 2800 ppm about 160 million years ago. At approximately 400 ppm plants are still not getting optimum CO₂ for growth. Plant growth in Greenhouses has been found to be best at around 1200 ppm. Some sources say 1600 ppm. Increased CO₂ can only be beneficial for everyone. More crops in warmer days. More food for everyone. The real greenhouse effect comes from water vapour in the atmosphere at 90%. Ever noticed that it feels warmer in moist air than dry air. Take for example how cold it gets in a desert at night, but not in the moist tropics. CO₂ contributes only 0.04% to the atmosphere. The so-called tipping point of 400 ppm is nonsense. It has apparently been 418 ppm to 422 ppm for about a year 2023 to 2024. Reference to the 400 ppm tipping point has become rather mute lately.

We are far from understanding the evolution of the earth's atmosphere and the driving processes. For example, the earth's motion in space, which is expanding. It is known that solar activity and cosmic activity even further afield, affects the earth. Indeed, the solar system can have an effect due to the Earth's changing orbit. Latest evidence shows that Mars is also warmer. Did we cause this!? There is much more that goes on in the way of global climate and external effects in the solar system than we are aware. It is only in recent history that there has been increased knowledge of the effect of solar flares and sunspots and its 11 year cycle. There is a lot more that needs to be learnt. I do not believe that we are anywhere near to understanding the evolution of the earth's atmosphere and the driving processes. For example, consider the earth's motion in space. There is a 100 000 year cycle variation. It varies from more to less elliptical. That is, closer to and further from the sun. At present it is slightly closer to the sun in the Southern Hemisphere summer. The earth wobbles on its tilted axis between 22 to 24.5 degrees in a 41 000 year cycle. Its tilted axis changes in a 26 000 year cycle. That is, the North Star will eventually not be aligned with the earth's present north. There is evidence that past glacial events have matched, or been influenced by, these earth cycles. The longer I live and learn, the more I realise how little I know. How little everyone knows. There is still so much to learn.

Emphasis has been placed on climate model predictions. To date their predictions of temperature change, etc., have been highly flawed. Bear in mind that they can only predict according to the algorithms with which they are programmed and the objectivity of the programmers. Do not be fooled into believing that all the persons doing the programming are entirely objective, or honest. Bias can be consciously, or unconsciously incorporated. It is worthwhile remembering chaos theory. That systems behaviour is highly sensitive to slight changes in conditions, so that small alterations can give rise to great consequences and exhibit random unpredictable behaviour. Therefore, no weather application can accurately predict the weather two weeks from now, never mind months, years, decades, etc., ahead. From personal experience they are often not so good even a few days ahead.

Dire predictions have been made of increased catastrophic weather events in the future. At Ironbridge, in the narrow River Severn gorge, there is recurring flooding and damage. A portable barrier has been constructed, which is erected before expected flooding. The Boat Inn has a door marked with previous flood levels. It was interesting to see that while the highest flood marked on the door was 19 feet 6 inches (5.9 metres) on the 1st November 2000, it was only 1 inch (2.5 centimetres) higher than the 10th February 1946 flood. In fact, the next 3 highest floods were in 1947, 1948 and 1941 between 19 and 18 feet (5.8 and 5.5 metres). That is, pre-alleged post-war man-made global warming, now called climate change (because global warming was not playing ball). Between 1929 and 2014 there were 14 floods ranging from 17 and 14 feet (5.2 and 4.3 metres), 7 of them in the 2020s. The 2014 floods were the worst for

duration with flooding on 5 occasions from January 30th to February 16th. The winter of 2013-2014 was an exceptional period for severe storms, heavy rainfall and widespread flooding in the United Kingdom and Ireland, particularly the south of England. So yes, there has lately been increased flooding frequency. However, one speculates how much this increased frequency is rather the result of urban development, deforestation with resulting increased runoff. The Met Office reported the wettest 1st December 2023 to 31st January 2024 since 1876. There was also a report of December to end of February being the wettest since records began in 1766. Notice both events (1876 and 1766) were before so-called human influences. While on the subject of records, the UK Met Office stated July 2022 was the driest since 1935. So, 1935 was drier! Pre-so-called post-war human influence! While not disputing the Earth is potentially going through a warmer phase, I do question the magnitude of humankind's effect. While discussing warmer and drier, it is worth mentioning that September 1592 was the end of a hot summer and London's Thames River became dry with no water in it from London Bridge to Westminster. The level was also low enough in 1114, 1541 and 1716 that one could walk across it in knee deep water. Was this due to human influence? I think not.

The Bronze age Indus Valley Civilisation was at its mature Harappan stage between 2600-1900 BC. Situated in the Indus River Basin, it covered a large area spanning Pakistan, north-western India and north-east Afghanistan. Archaeological excavations at the two major cities of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa revealed highly urbanised communities with tens of thousands of people living in flat-roofed mud or clay fired brick houses. The houses at Harappa were connected to fresh water and sewage systems far more advanced than those seen in most cities for millennia afterward. However, the Indus Valley underwent a climatic shift. Erratic monsoons resulted in the Ghaggar-Hakra River becoming dry, only flowing occasionally with erratic flooding. The floods became too erratic to sustain agricultural activities. The cities could no longer be fed by farmers. Decay set in. By 1700 BC, most of the cities of the Indus Valley were abandoned. This coincided with a 200 year drought that began circa 2200 BC during the Meghalayan age. Sediment studies show this dry period may have lasted longer. It affected human civilizations in the Eastern Mediterranean, Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley and the Yangtze River Valley. Circa 2200-1800 BC coincided with a much warmer than normal to less warm period, although still warmer than today. Sound familiar? Drought and flooding brought about by climate change!

What humans do is a small part in the climate cycle. Global warming has occurred before, as have ice ages and they will happen again. The current warming is still not as warm as in the past when, in medieval times, the Vikings settled in Greenland and the glaciers in the Andes all melted. The human race could not have been "greener" then if they tried with a fraction of the current world population. Yes, we should be better in minimising the human effect, if only for health reasons and not be wasteful. The truth is that global warming, caused by humans, suits politicians, scientists and big business. Politicians (the ruling elite) can use it to impose so called "green" taxes, which do nothing to help the environment, but fill coffers and balance the treasury books. Scientists shout global warming and they are thrown money to investigate and keep themselves in research funding for years to come. A sinecure for life. Big business (the financial elite) likes it because they can use it to sell new products. Emerging industrial countries like China and India are not interested in curbing gas emissions because they need cheap energy, labour and population growth to enable their economies to grow. China has plenty of coal and it uses it in industry. It is not going to stop and the USA will not allow itself to fall behind. Nations' economies are built on positive financial growth, so there is vested interest in perpetuating it. The increased cost of "green" policies badly affect the poor who cannot afford the extra cost with serious social issues, including increased morbidity and death.

Imposing the use of alternative more expensive and less efficient methods also does not help the poor. For example, heat pumps. Poor developing countries who have fossil fuels, such as cheap coal, rely on them to improve their quality of life. Yet aid is denied unless they stop using them. This increases debt. It is a no win situation.

In the same way others have a vested interest in promoting global warming. There is money to be made in ineffectual and costly renewable energy, including grants, subsidies and tax relief paid by the taxpayer. In the same way researchers and scientists have a vested interest. All they have to do is keep saying how bad it is and funding for research is thrown at them. The international bodies (such as the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)) that issue statements about global warming are loaded with global warming supporters (and few if any professional meteorologists/climatologists) anyone who argues against these policies, is quickly barbarised, criticised and denigrated.

My 5 year (plus 3 months bonus) stint on the Royal Meteorological Society (RMetS) Weather editorial board from May 2015 finished in August 2020. It was extended to August until my editor responsibility was reallocated. I confess I had become increasingly disillusioned with the course the journal and the RMetS was taking. In my opinion the society's stance on climate change became increasingly biased against any hint of disagreement. My first brush with it was an article I approved for publication in the October 2016 edition. The article was controversial, but it was considered worthy of publication by the Chief Editor. However, in the same issue an editorial was published distancing the journal and society from the article. No editorial ever appeared distancing the journal and society from pro-climate change articles/papers. In fairness, all editions of the journal should contain a disclaimer regarding the contents of anything published. At meetings the emphasis became more and more toward climate change contributions. The Climate Communication Project (CCP) was also promoted with the suggestion this should feature in quarterly editions of Weather. The CCP is "a collaboration between academics and practitioners working on public engagement with climate change". No bias there! In my mind an euphemism for propaganda.

Fossil fuel and natural gas are still the most economical and efficient method than less reliable and more costly wind and solar renewable energy. In the longer-term nuclear power is the most reliable, although it comes with expensive initial costs and waste disposal. Cleaner nuclear fusion, rather than present fission, shows promise. February 2022, at the Oxfordshire Joint European Torus (JET) laboratory, scientists established a new world record, albeit small, amount of energy was produced in a nuclear fusion experiment. It does not produce a highly radioactive by product. Wind and solar power are unreliable and will never meet world demand.

Dire predictions have been made, in the press and social media, of increased catastrophic weather events in the future. Any alternative discussion is quickly denigrated and criticised. While not disputing the Earth is potentially going through a warmer phase, I do question the magnitude of humankind's effect. The solution is to adapt to the change. We should be thankful we live in a warming phase. It will not last forever. By all means do not waste. Do not litter the earth. Develop cleaner methods, but not at the expense of quality of life, which is happening now and particularly affecting the poor. Do not do it in the fanatical fear instilling, obsessive manner with unrealistic targets being practised at present, aided and abetted by mainstream press and social media, particularly as practised in the United Kingdom.

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