

Communicating Climate Science

Wednesday 7 November 2012

Welcome and introduction.

Dr Emily Shuckburgh, British Antarctic Survey / DECC.

Dr Shuckburgh will introduce the event, highlighting the motivations behind its organisation, and give an overview of the afternoon's talks.

A scientist perspective on communicating climate change.

Prof Tim Palmer, FRS DPhil DSC FRMetS, University of Oxford, ECMWF.

Between 2010 and 2012, Tim Palmer was President of the Royal Meteorological Society. He will give his perspective, as a climate scientist, on the communication of science.

Climate science, the public and the news media.

Dr Rosie Robison, Global Sustainability Institute, Anglia Ruskin University

One of the primary routes by which the public currently acquires climate science information is through the news media. In 2011, we undertook a series of focus groups and complementary opinion polling which aimed to assess public engagement with climate science as it is currently presented in the British media, and also to explore issues of trust in climate scientists. This talk will discuss the work, and the potential improvements to climate science communication suggested by the results. One of our aims was to provide a step on the road towards a more rigorous approach to climate science communication which incorporates testing and evaluation of what works and what does not work in terms of public engagement.

Science communication in the UK: have we moved from top down to discursive models?

Dr Alice Bell, Science and Technology Policy Research, University of Sussex

Science communication in the UK has long been obsessed with a move from top down to discursive models of communication, although despite broad uptake of words like "engagement" and "dialogue" it is questionable how successful this shift has been in practice. We might also ask questions about the applicability of this shift to climate change. As Naomi Oreskes argued in an LA Times op-ed last January, perhaps we need leadership when it comes to climate change, not more public debate. Yet, much of the discussion post-Rio was that leaders had failed us, and so hope lay in work of civil society. Looking at the various initiatives celebrated for their "bottom up" approach, I sensed echoes of Steve Yearley's argument that the green movement enjoys the language of mass participation but only on their own terms (and that similar critique could still be applied to much of the scientific community). The challenge of such grass roots activity, if we choose to take it, is to get beyond the merely rhetorical.

Four degrees and beyond? Emissions trajectories and future challenges.

Dr Alice Bows, Sustainable Consumption Institute, University of Manchester and Tyndall Centre.

The 2°C temperature target dominates debate around climate change mitigation, yet the latest emission trends put the world on a track towards at least 4°C of warming, perhaps as soon as 2060. Whilst those engaged and committed to the climate mitigation agenda or negotiating on the basis of 2°C fear discussion of higher temperatures may deliver less stringent carbon reduction policies, the focus on 2°C risks leaving those adapting to climate change being given misleading information. The question is, does mitigating for 2°C but adapting for 4°C send out confusing and conflicting messages to policy, decision makers and wider society?

Public perceptions of climate change: a social science view.

Dr Adam Corner, Understanding Risk Research group, University of Cardiff and COIN

Adam's talk will focus on providing some 'big picture' context for the findings of the 'Climate Science, the Public and the News Media' report, by discussing some of the most important trends and changes in public opinion over the past five years, and the implications for communicating climate change.

Communicating with the public.

Chris Rose, Campaign Strategy Ltd.

Chris Rose is Director of Campaign Strategy Ltd. He trained as an ecologist and founded and ran several NGOs. He is an author and communications strategist. His clients have included the National Trust, the Home Office, UNICEF, Amnesty International, Shell, BP, Greenpeace, the Cabinet Office, and numerous public bodies and voluntary organisations. His books include What Makes People Tick: The Three Hidden Worlds of Settlers, Prospectors and Pioneers.
