

Global warming: Deluge of denial on its way.

Notebook: Climate Change Denial

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As Climate Change Report Draws Near, Deniers Raise Voices, Bury Heads Deeper

By [Phil Plait](#)

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Here's a simple quiz: How do you know when you're about to read a forehead-slappingly silly article about climate change? Check the venue: Is it the *Daily Mail*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Financial Post*, and/or anything owned by Rupert Murdoch and News Corp?

If yes, then, *yes*. Chances are, what you've read only comes within a glancing blow of reality.

This week, the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#) will release its fifth Assessment Report on the state of the climate. This overarching report gives summaries of the work and conclusions from numerous



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climate science research groups, has over 800 authors, and dozens of expert review editors (though not all are experts; **anyone can sign up**). Leaks have been rampant, and that has given people a chance to put their own spin on the report,

as you'll see in a moment.

But: The bottom line is that the Earth is warming up.

Although land and ocean surface temperatures have been relatively flat for a number of years, that is not the only or even best way to measure the amount of extra heat absorbed by our planet.

Much of the heat has gone deep, dragged down into the ocean depths where it has been building up. A downswing in the Pacific oceans natural temperature cycles has temporarily masked the always-upward trend in surface temperatures. The past three decades have very likely been the warmest 30-year period in the last 800 years, and likely to have been for the 1400.

The cause? Us. We've been dumping carbon dioxide, a known greenhouse gas, into the atmosphere for decades, measurably increasing its amount (and affect). CO₂ is transparent to visible light, but opaque to thermal infrared (or, more simply, heat). Light from the Sun warms the ground, but as we put more CO₂ into the air, that heat has a harder time radiating away into space.

And so the Earth warms.

This is all pretty simple, and very evident. Unless, of course, you limit your reading to the venues listed in the first paragraph of this article. Then you get a very different, and grossly wrong, picture of our situation.

I can start with Matt Ridley's OpEd in the *Wall Street Journal* on Sep. 14, for example. In it, he tries to make the case that a warming Earth won't be so bad. As things heat up, he claims, "the overall effect of climate change will be positive for humankind and the planet."

Oddly, he makes this statement without pointing to a single study backing up his claims. He just states it like it's true. However, we *know* that's not the case. Let me be clear: Like any change, there will be some benefits, but the problem is we don't know exactly what those will be, and *we're gambling with the planet's life support system*. Ridley makes a few off-the-cuff claims—fewer deaths due to extreme cold, extending the range

of farming farther north—but doesn't mention that long heat waves (which will get hotter) are deadly as well, and will last longer as we warm up, and that as farming moves north the folks at the *southern* end of the range will get pushed out. When a used car salesman only tells me the good stuff about his product, my skeptical alarm bells ring pretty loudly. Why should it be any different when it comes to climate?

And [Ridley](#) also doesn't mention the severe consequences we're already seeing. [The effects of a warming planet](#) include [polar ice melting](#), glaciers disappearing, changes in weather patterns on vast scales (including droughts in some places and torrents of rain in others), and huge and rapid pressure on the biosphere—for example, [pine trees dying en masse due to warmer weather extending the life cycle of mountain pine beetles](#), which in turn means more wildfires, and higher temperatures with accompanying lack of rain to keep them raging.

Ridley says a lot of other, um, *oda* things as well in his article. For specifics, try [ClimateScienceWatch](#) and [DeSmogBlog](#). Climate scientist John Abraham [also rebutted Ridley's claims on the *WSJ* itself](#).



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Another newspaper, [The Australian](#) (owned by Murdoch), just ran an error-filled article about climate. Headlined "Doubts over IPCC's global warming rates", it then launches directly into the grossly wrong claim that warming trends reported in the new IPCC report are far lower than in the last report. [I've covered this repeatedly](#); this claim is trying to compare warming trends over two different periods of time, which is a

big no-no. Many climate scientists have responded to the article in *The Australian*, using words like “wrong”, “major errors”, and “confused”.

The article is pretty slanted in its style, too. For example, there’s this gem:

After several leaks and reports on how climate scientists would deal with a slowdown in the rate of average global surface temperatures over the past decade, the IPCC was last week forced to deny it had called for crisis talks.

“Contrary to the articles the IPCC is not holding any crisis meeting,” it said in a statement.

“Forced to deny”? That makes the IPCC sound guilty, doesn’t it? This comes from a ridiculous claim made by David Rose in the UK tabloid *The Mail on Sunday*, saying that because of his attacks on the IPCC, they had to hold a “crisis meeting” to figure out how to deal with all this. This simply isn’t true at all, and apparently Rose made it up out of thin air. Climate scientist Ed Hawkins **even told Rose** that there was no crisis meeting, but *The Mail* has yet to retract this grossly incorrect statement (along with many, many other critical errors Rose made). And now *The Australian* has picked it up and used it to make a strawman argument against the IPCC.

As I pointed out in another article, this is exactly what I was expecting: One person in the deny-o-sphere makes some misleading or dead-wrong statement, and it gets picked up by all the other mouthpieces. They feed on each other like a snake eating its own tail.

And **they won’t stop**, especially now that the IPCC report is nigh. My

advice: Wait to hear what the actual climate scientists who have made a career studying this field have to say—which, in fact, is precisely what’s done in the IPCC Assessment Report. And keep a critical eye on the claims made in the newspapers I listed above. They spread like mold on the underside of a log, and the best disinfectant is to haul them out into the sunshine for all to see.

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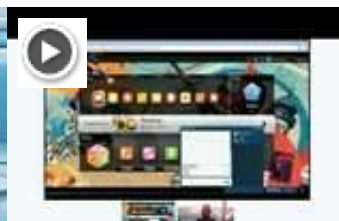
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