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Climate Change

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was established by the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Meteorological Organization in 1988. The purpose of the IPCC is to assess information in the scientific and technical literature related to all significant components of the climate-change issue. To date, the IPCC has produced:

- A comprehensive assessment of climate change which evaluated alterations to the chemical/physical/biological components of the climate system, potential and alternative response measures (IPCC 1990). This report became a standard work of reference, widely used by policy-makers, scientists, and other experts.
- A supplementary review of research on these same issues prepared for the U.N. Conference on Environment and Development (IPCC 1992).

- A special report prepared for the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change covering radiative forcing of climate, greenhouse gas emissions scenarios, and methods for conducting national inventories of emissions of sources and sinks of greenhouse gases and assessments of climate change impacts (IPCC 1994).

Together, these reports have established a common basis of scientific opinion that was used by governments to negotiate the Framework Convention on Climate Change and will be used as a basis for the discussions by the Conference of the Parties.

Organization/Process

The IPCC operates at two overlapping but distinct levels: as a formal intergovernmental body and as a scientific and technical assessment body.

Government representatives meet in formal plenary sessions to approve the topics for assessment and the overall workplans for preparation of the reports. They also review and accept the detailed scientific and technical reports as well as approve on a line-by-line basis the Panel's "Summaries for Policymakers" which highlight the policy implications of the detailed reports. It is through this intergovernmental review and approval mechanism that the work of the IPCC is connected to international and national policy concerns. The detailed reports themselves are prepared through the enthusiasm and cooperation of scientists and

technical experts from around the world. These experts come from many countries and are trained in disciplines from atmospheric chemistry to economics. They include university professors, researchers working in private industry and at national laboratories, and scientific experts affiliated with non-governmental organizations. The teams of experts which draft the individual

Current Work

In 1991, after some reorganization, the IPCC committed itself to producing a Second Assessment Report in 1995, covering the same comprehensive range of topics covered in the 1990 report. This report is being prepared by three working groups. Working Group I, which is co-chaired by the United Kingdom and Brazil, is charged with assessing the state of science with respect to the functioning of the climate system and possible changes to it resulting from human activities. Working Group II, co-chaired by the United States and Zimbabwe, is assessing potential impacts, adaptation, and mitigation measures in a broad range of ecological and socio-economic systems. Working Group III, co-chaired by Canada and South Korea, is focusing on assessments of the economic implications of climate change, including an evaluation of future trends in emissions of greenhouse gases.

sections of the reports are structured to include the broadest range of scientific opinions possible. Because the process of assessment involves reviewing the most up-to-date scientific information, reconciling competing views where possible, and characterizing the disagreements when achieving consensus is not possible, IPCC reports have identified climate change issues which deserve the priority attention of the research community in the future. Hundreds of experts are involved in preparing the different chapters of the reports; literally thousands are involved in providing expert peer review.