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Let's not pollute minds with carbon fears



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Illustration: Eric Lobbecke

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- [1091 Comments](#)

As soon as the words carbon footprint, emissions, pollution, and decarbonisation, climate emergency, extreme weather, unprecedented and extinction are used, I know I am being conned by [ignorant activists](#), populist scaremongering, vote-chasing politicians and rent seekers.

Pollution by plastics, sulphur and nitrogen gases, particulates and chemicals occurs in developing countries. That's real pollution. The major pollution in advanced economies is the polluting of minds about the role of carbon dioxide. There are no carbon emissions. If there were, we could not see because most carbon is black. Such terms are deliberately misleading, as are many claims.

But then again, we should be used to this after the hysteria about the [Great Barrier Reef bleaching](#) that has really been occurring for hundreds of years, fraudulent changing of past weather records, the ignoring of data that shows Pacific islands and the Maldives are growing rather than being inundated, and unsubstantiated claims [polar ice is melting](#). By ignoring history and geology, any claim of unusual weather can be made sensational.

We've had reefs on planet Earth for 3500 million years. They came and went many times. The big killer of reefs was because sea level dropped and water temperature decreased. In the past, reefs thrived when water was warmer and there was an elevated carbon dioxide content

of the atmosphere. Reef material is calcium carbonate, which contains 44 per cent carbon dioxide. Reefs need carbon dioxide; it's their basic food.

We are not living in a period of catastrophic climate change. The past tells us it's business as usual.



A large staghorn coral grows on Moore Reef in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. Picture: Brendan Radke

It has never been shown that human emissions of carbon dioxide drive global warming.

Climate models have been around 30 years. They have all failed. Balloon and satellite measurements show a disconnect from climate model predictions. If they have failed across the past 30 years when we can compare models with measurements, there is little chance that the climate projections across the next 50 years will be more successful. Modellers assume carbon dioxide drives climate change. It does not. The role of the sun and clouds was not considered important by modellers. They are the major drivers for the climate on our planet.

We emit a trace atmospheric gas called carbon dioxide at a time in planetary history of low atmospheric carbon dioxide. The geological history of the planet shows major planetary climate changes have never been driven by a trace gas. Just because we are alive today does not mean we change major planetary systems that operated for billions of years. Earth's climate dances to rhythms every day, every season and on far larger lunar, ocean, solar, orbital, galactic and tectonic cycles. Climate change is normal and continual. When cycles overlap, climate change can be rapid and large. Sporadic events such as supernovas and volcanic eruptions can also change climate.

The main greenhouse gas is water vapour. It is the only gas in air that can evaporate, humidify and condense into clouds that precipitate rain, hail and snow. These processes involve a transfer of energy, and water vapour makes the atmosphere behave like a giant airconditioner. Carbon dioxide is a non-condensable atmospheric gas like nitrogen and oxygen. Water vapour in air varies depending on temperature and location from five times the atmospheric carbon dioxide content in deserts to more than 100 times in the tropics. Water is 12 times more effective than carbon dioxide with respect to all incoming and outgoing radiation.

Earth is unevenly heated. Our spinning oblate globe is influenced by two fluids of different composition and behaviour moving chaotically against each other over the irregular solid surface of the planet. Oceans hold most of the planet's surface heat, not the atmosphere.

Processes that occur during sunlight do not occur at night due to the prime driver of our planet's surface temperature: the sun.



A polar bear walks on sea ice in the Arctic. Picture: iStock

Carbon dioxide is plant food. It is neither a pollutant nor a toxin. Without carbon dioxide, all life on Earth would die. Plants convert carbon dioxide, water and sunlight during photosynthesis into sugars, cellulose, fruit, vegetables and grains, which animal life uses as food. Marine organisms also take up and use carbon dioxide. Plants need almost three times today's carbon dioxide content of the atmosphere to thrive. For decades horticulturalists have pumped carbon dioxide into glasshouses to increase yields. The fossil record shows that a thriving and diversification of plant and animal life occurs every time the atmosphere had a very high carbon dioxide content. In the past, warming has never been a threat to life on Earth. Why should it be now? When there is a low atmospheric carbon dioxide content, especially during very cold times, life struggles.

For the past 500 million years, the atmospheric carbon dioxide content has been decreasing and if we halved today's atmospheric carbon dioxide content, all life would die. This carbon dioxide has been removed into the oceans and is sequestered into coral, shells, limey sediments and muds and on the land into coals, muds, soils and vegetation.

Air contains 0.04 per cent carbon dioxide. We add carbon compounds to our bodies from food and drinks and exhale carbon dioxide. The human breath contains at least 4 per cent carbon dioxide. Our bodies contain carbon compounds. If we were so passionately concerned about our carbon footprint, then the best thing to do is to expire.



Data shows that Pacific islands and the Maldives, above, are growing rather than being inundated. Picture: iStock

In our lifetime, there has been no correlation between carbon dioxide emissions and temperature. On a larger scale, the ice caps show that after a natural orbitally driven warming, atmospheric carbon dioxide content increases 800 years later. Rather than atmospheric carbon dioxide driving temperature, it is the opposite. Geology shows us again there is no correlation between atmospheric carbon dioxide and temperature. Each of the six major past ice ages began when the atmospheric carbon dioxide content was far higher than at present. The thought that a slight increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide will lead to unstoppable global warming is demonstrably wrong.

In the past decade China has increased its carbon dioxide emissions by 53 per cent, 12 times Australia's total carbon dioxide output of 1.3 per cent of the global total. The grasslands, forests, farms and continental shelves of Australia absorb far more carbon dioxide than we emit. The attack on emissions of the gas of life is an irrational attack on industry, our modern way of life, freedoms and prosperity. It has nothing to do with the environment.

Emeritus professor Ian Plimer's latest book is The Climate Change Delusion and the Great Electricity Ripoff (Connor Court).