

## “How I learned to live with Climate Change”, or ‘For intelligent animals we seem to be the dumbest creatures on the planet’ - by Lee Russell

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### **For intelligent animals we must be the dumbest creatures on the planet.**

Over the past c195,000 years *Homo Sapiens*, that's our family of animals, has developed the use of speech, symbolism, writing and advanced technological tools that have enabled us to reach the apex of the tooth & claw battle of Survival of the Fittest. At a species level we are now so able to dominate our physical environment that we are no longer at any real risk of predation and have almost continual access to top quality food, water and shelter. Technology places us apart from the rest of the natural world, so that even people with minimal survival characteristics (in an evolutionary sense) can thrive. Learning how to pass knowledge from one generation to the next has been our species' most profound achievement, and in parallel with the adoption of the scientific method, means we now understand in exquisite detail the cause and effect of very complicated processes in the natural world.

Unfortunately our evolutionary journey also programmed us to do our utmost to ensure **our own** survival and then pass our genetic heritage onto **our next** generation. Those basic animal drives don't care about what happens to anyone or anything else, unless the needs of those 'others' are essential for ensuring our own success. But now our selfish goal-seeking threatens the survival of ourselves, our offspring and a very significant part of the current natural world.

Our collective knowledge and use of the methods of scientific enquiry over the past 120 years (approximately) have revealed how the man-made (industrialised) release of certain gases into the atmosphere is causing the global climate to become significantly warmer. In 1971 climate scientists from 14 nations met in Stockholm to discuss a "**Study of Man's Impact on Climate**" (SMIC) – the Climate Change topic was fully in the open at this point, which is now **47 years ago** from the writing of this essay.

Research continued through the next two decades and the **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change** (IPCC) was established in 1988 (30 years ago). The IPCC's scientists have since analysed, scrutinised and summarised the effect of man-made pollution of the atmosphere with 'greenhouse gases. Their reports have increasingly shown that without a serious and determined effort to move from a fossil-fuel economy, the effects on both the natural world and *Homo Sapiens*' ability to survive alongside it are in jeopardy.

### **Who reads IPCC reports? [ Have you? ]**

- The **scientists** who collectively write them, hoping they will influence politicians/policy-makers to take action, and
- **Those same politicians and policy-makers**, whose own selfish human drives lead them to short-sightedly do only those things that will get them through their next election, and
- **Industrial organisations** who selfishly need to deny the reports in order for Society to allow them to continue functioning, and
- The collective might of '**the media**', which is also driven by self-need, populism and the selfish interests of its shareholders, and
- **A minority of the informed middle-classes** who shake their heads at the things they'd have to give up in order to mitigate Climate Change, and
- **The dumb mass of the remaining population** who, sheep-like, let all those other stakeholders convince them that things are being done (when much too little is actually happening), or that things are too hard to change (when, as a global society, we haven't really tried), or that it is too hard for them to understand (because they can't be bothered to put the effort in to try).

The dumb majority tends to determine the result of most elections and overrides the sense of what sensible people would otherwise do.

- If you were standing on a train line, facing an oncoming locomotive, would you step aside in order to avoid dying? Probably you would.

- If you were standing with a group of people on a train line, facing an oncoming locomotive, would you wait for someone else to step aside before doing something? You might, it would depend.
- If someone in the group said you were safe because a train wouldn't dare to hit you all, would you stay on the tracks? You might - because humans share a group-think ability to behave stupidly, even when our own survival is threatened. Even more so when taking an action would *cost us something to do it*.

Politicians **know** that the global ecosystem is in dire trouble due to Global Warming and Climate Change, and they **know** that it is due to human actions involving industrialisation and the unprecedented release of **billions of tons per year** of certain gases into the atmosphere. Even Donald Trump, the current apparently despotic President of the United States, said on Twitter that "... *it's freezing and snowing in New York – we need global warming*"<sup>1</sup> – he acknowledges the phenomenon, but as a selfish industrialist cannot afford to pay the personal or political costs of mitigating its effects.

**But the train is coming.** In the forward to the IPCC's '*Climate Change 2014 Synthesis Report*', the Secretary General of the World Meteorological Organisation said...

"... human influence on the climate system is clear and growing, with impacts observed across all continents and oceans... **the more human activities disrupt the climate, the greater the risks of severe, pervasive and irreversible impacts for people and ecosystems, and long-lasting changes in all components of the climate system... stabilizing temperature increase to below 2°C relative to pre-industrial levels will require an urgent and fundamental departure from business as usual... the longer we wait to take action, the more it will cost and the greater the technological, economic, social and institutional challenges we will face.**"

**What are some of the risks from unmitigated Climate Change that the World was warned about in the last IPCC report? ....**

**Warning:** Once you read the following points you can no longer claim that you didn't know what was at risk...

1. A large fraction of terrestrial, freshwater and marine species face an increased risk of extinction as climate change interacts with other stressors.
2. More frequent and longer "heat wave" events across most land areas on daily and seasonal timescales. Fewer cold temperature extremes over most land areas on daily and seasonal timescales.
3. More frequent and intense extremes of rainfall, snowfall, etc in some regions, combined with the paradox that more people around the world will experience water scarcity.
4. In urban areas, increased heat stress, storms and extreme precipitation, inland and coastal flooding, land erosion, landslides, air pollution, drought, water scarcity, sea level rise, flooding, storm surges and submergence.
5. In Rural areas, major impacts on water availability, food security, infrastructure and agriculture, including shifts in the production areas of food and non-food crops around the world.
6. Reduced food security, prolonging existing poverty traps and creating new ones, particularly in urban areas and emerging hotspots of hunger.
7. Increased displacement of people, increased risks of violent conflict.

**So now you know.**

**The question is, what are you prepared to give up in order to avoid the worst of these outcomes for future generations, including your own children and grandchildren?**

- **Who still wants to eat that air-freighted strawberry?**
- **or buy that imported Chinese product?**
- **or take a £99 flight to Mallorca?**
- **or have that cruise on the Med?**
- **Who is going to drive less, eat less meat, consume less electricity at home?**

## **A tough one, isn't it?**

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1 - <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/266259787405225984>

There's more from Lee Russell at [www.russellweb.org.uk](http://www.russellweb.org.uk) and  @LeeJ\_Russell

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