

# Academics urge radical new approach to climate change

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By Richard Black Environment correspondent, BBC News



CO2 should not be the prime target of climate policy, the report argues

A major change of approach is needed if society is to restrain climate change, according to a report from a self-styled "eclectic" group of academics.

The UN process has failed, they argue, and a global approach concentrating on CO2 cuts will never work.

They urge instead the use of carbon tax revenue to develop technologies that can supply clean energy to everyone.

Their so-called Hartwell Paper is criticised by others who say the UN process has curbed carbon emissions.

The paper is named after Hartwell House, the Buckinghamshire mansion, hotel and spa where the group of 14 academics from Europe, North America and Japan gathered in February to develop their ideas.

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The paper's focus away from CO2 is misguided, short-sighted and probably wrong

Dr Bill Hare, Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research

Its central message is that climate change can be ameliorated best by pursuing "politically attractive and relentlessly pragmatic" options that also curb emissions.

These options include bringing a reliable electricity supply to the estimated 1.5 billion people in the world without it using efficient, low-carbon technologies.

"The raising up of human dignity is the central driver of the Hartwell Paper, replacing the

preoccupation with human sinfulness that has failed and will continue to fail to deliver progress," said lead author Prof Gwyn Prins.

Prof Prins is director of the Mackinder Programme for the Study of Long Wave Events at the London School of Economics and Political Science, and an adviser to the Global Warming Policy Foundation, the UK charity chaired by Lord Lawson that aims "to help restore balance and trust in the climate debate".

#### Short-term fixes

The paper says that the outcome of December's UN climate summit, plus the "ClimateGate" affair and inaccuracies within the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 2007 report, means "the legitimacy of the institutions of climate policy and science are no longer assured".



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So, successfully tackling climate change initially means re-framing the issue.

In an article for the BBC's Green Room series, another of the authors, Mike Hulme, writes: "Climate change has been represented as a conventional environmental 'problem' that is capable of being 'solved'.

"It is neither of these. Yet this framing has locked the world into the rigid agenda that brought us to the dead end of Kyoto, with no evidence of any discernable acceleration of decarbonisation whatsoever."

The academics advocate concentrating first on short-term fixes for greenhouse gases or other warming agents, such as black carbon - particles emitted from the incomplete burning of fossil fuels, principally in diesel engines and wood stoves.

These particles warm the planet by several mechanisms, including darkening snow so it absorbs more solar energy.

Black carbon may be the second most important man-made warming agent after carbon dioxide.



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As it remains in the atmosphere for a matter of weeks, some researchers have suggested that cleaning up its production could be the quickest way of curbing warming, as well as bringing health benefits to poor countries by reducing air pollution.

"To date, climate policy has focused on carbon dioxide primarily, and even to the exclusion of other human influences on the climate system," the report says.

"We believe this path to have been unwise... early action on a wider range of human influences on climate could be more swiftly productive."

However, they acknowledge that carbon emissions do in the end have to be constrained. To that end, they recommend implementing a hypothecated carbon tax in developed economies to fund development of low-carbon energy technologies.

The damaging effects of climate change in developing countries, meanwhile, would be tackled by having Western countries meet the internationally agreed target of contributing 0.7% of their GDP to overseas aid, rather than through specific and complex new climate adaptation funds.

"Just this one action alone would swamp the miserly amounts of money being offered under the Copenhagen Accord," said Prof Hulme.

#### Lobby group

The outcome of the Copenhagen climate summit - widely seen as a failure among academics and activists - has caused considerable soul-searching about alternative approaches.

But any move away from the negotiated process that puts CO<sub>2</sub> at centre stage is regarded as anathema by many.



Methane production from paddy fields can be quickly and cheaply tackled

"The paper's focus away from CO<sub>2</sub> is misguided, short-sighted and probably wrong," said Bill Hare from the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research in Germany.

"If you take action on black carbon and do not reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions then you may end up with more warming in the long term," he told BBC News.

"And in fact, the Kyoto Protocol is one of the few things that have worked, in that it's given momentum to low-carbon energy development - we wouldn't have had the explosion in wind power without it."

He also questioned the fact that the Hartwell Paper initiative was co-funded by Keidenran Nippon, the Japanese industry lobby group that has regularly opposed the establishment of binding targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, instead promoting voluntary initiatives.

But Prof Hulme denied any link between the group's funding and its conclusions.

"The names of the co-authors suggest to me - and I am one of them so I can certainly speak for myself - individuals who resist all attempts to be cowed into adopting anyone else's viewpoint, whether from a paymaster, priest, president, princess or prophet," he said.