



# State of the climate and the need to act

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# Engagement



- ❖ How to engage with such an overwhelming situation?
- ❖ This may be the first talk of this kind you have attended, or you may have been to many before
- ❖ Importance of engagement on an emotional *as well as* intellectual level
- ❖ Many of the things we will discuss today can provoke strong emotions, **please allow yourself to be open to feeling those emotions but if it does become overwhelming then do also allow yourself to take a break**
- ❖ There is a place between pretending that everything will be fine and despairing that there's nothing we can do – we hope to demonstrate what that looks like for some of us



# The climate and ecological crisis

- ❖ “The world is on fire”- NASA, 2018
  - Last month was the hottest September globally since records began
  - Last July was the hottest month globally since records began
  - Chances of breaching 1.5C warming within the next five years are now more likely than not (66%)
- ❖ In the first six months of 2019, extreme weather events displaced a record seven million people from their homes
  - Climate crisis could displace 1.2 billion people by 2050
- ❖ 200 species of animals are becoming extinct every day
  - It is estimated that roughly 1 billion animals were killed during the Australian 2020 bushfires alone

# Most recent research



BioScience, 2023, 0, 1–10  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/biosci/biad080>  
Advance access publication date: 0 2023  
Special Report

## The 2023 state of the climate report: Entering uncharted territory

William J. Ripple, Christopher Wolf , Jillian W. Gregg, Johan Rockström, Thomas M. Newsome, Beverly E. Law, Luiz Marques, Timothy M. Lenton, Chi Xu, Saleemul Huq, Leon Simons and Sir David Anthony King

RESEARCH ARTICLE | ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES



## Earth beyond six of nine planetary boundaries

KATHERINE RICHARDSON , WILL STEFFEN, WOLFGANG LUCHT, JØRGEN BENDTSEN , SARAH E. CORNELL , JONATHAN F. DONGES , MARKUS DRÜKE ,  
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*“Life on planet Earth is under siege. We are now in an uncharted territory. For several decades, scientists have consistently warned of a future marked by extreme climatic conditions because of escalating global temperatures caused by ongoing human activities that release harmful greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere. Unfortunately, time is up. We are seeing the manifestation of those predictions as an alarming and unprecedented succession of climate records are broken, causing profoundly distressing scenes of suffering to unfold. We are entering an unfamiliar domain regarding our climate crisis, a situation no one has ever witnessed firsthand in the history of humanity”*

**The climate and ecological crisis is happening now – we can’t afford to delay meaningful action any longer. We need a just transition.**

# The health effects


- ❖ Increasing spread of diseases and threat of new disease
  - While discussing COVID-19 pandemic, a former UN Climate Chief stated we should expect more disease outbreaks “if we continue to deny, delude and delay on climate change”
- ❖ Air pollution has effects on all organs, and is already the world's largest environmental cause of disease and premature death
- ❖ Mental health effects are wide ranging and often difficult to quantify
  - Anxiety, depression, PTSD (direct impact of disasters)
  - However also important not to pathologise eco-distress – feeling overwhelmed and despairing are normal reactions to an extremely abnormal situation
- ❖ Children and young people are particularly impacted by pollution and mental health effects



*“We cannot continue on like this as a country, with our heads in the sand. There is no such thing as the ‘right time’ economically to tackle climate change... We must act now and with our children in mind”*

Dr Camilla Kingdon, president of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH), 21<sup>st</sup> October 2023

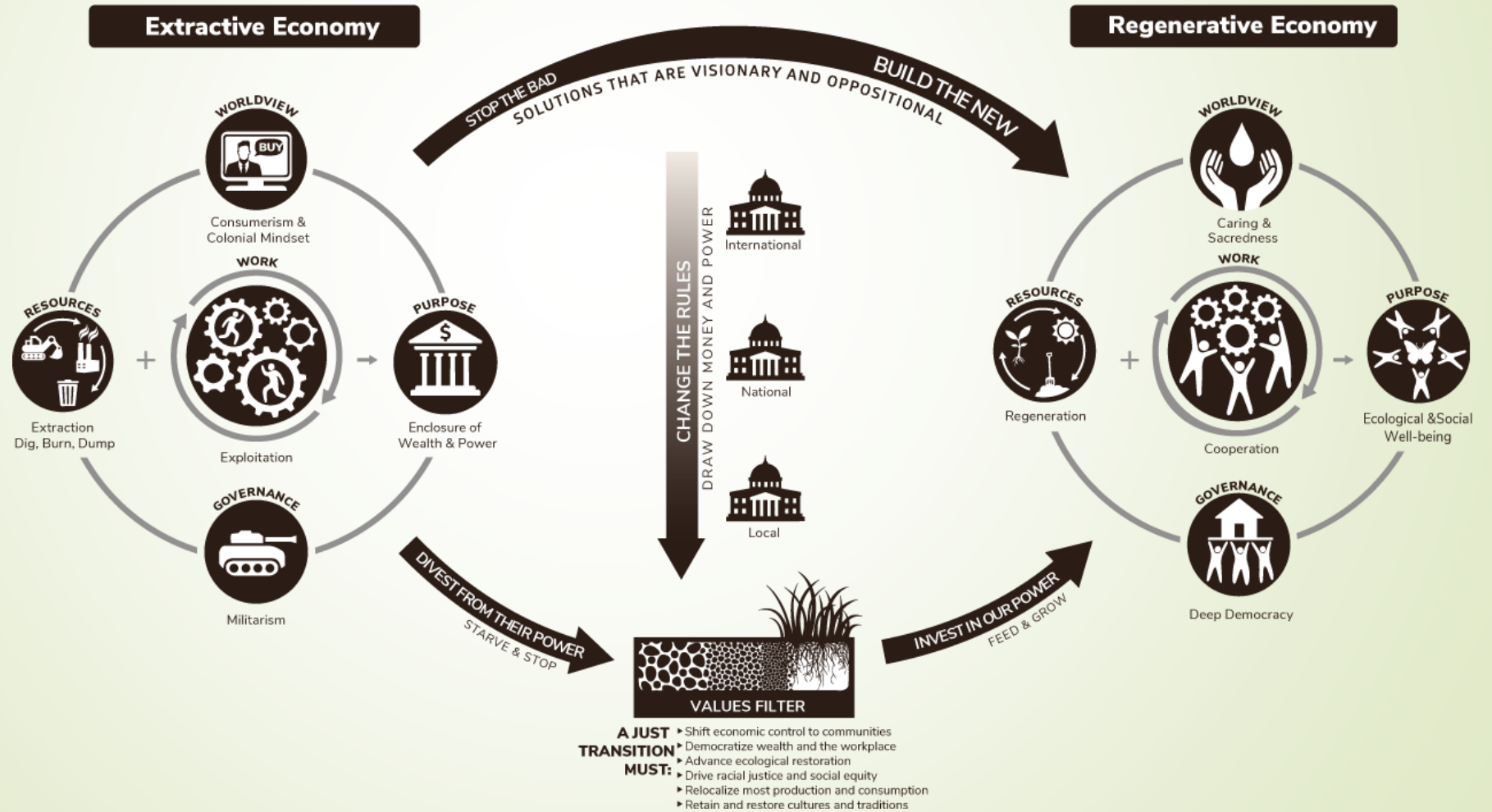




# What does justice mean in a situation like this?

- ❖ Addressing inequality – financially but also in terms of power imbalances
- ❖ The richest 10% of the world's population (everyone in this talk) are responsible for 52% of carbon emissions vs 7% for 3.1 billion people who made up the poorest half of humanity
- ❖ Those who have contributed the least to this crisis are the ones who are bearing the heaviest burden – more than 90% of pollution-related deaths occur in low-income and middle-income countries
- ❖ We as adults in the global north have to take responsibility for our historical and ongoing contributions to the climate and ecological crisis, and act accordingly
- Our lifestyle choices are important
- ❖ But we also have to be clear who holds most of the responsibility and power to act
- Governments, institutions, the ultra wealthy, corporations, investors, banks

# What does a just transition look like?



# The language we use matters

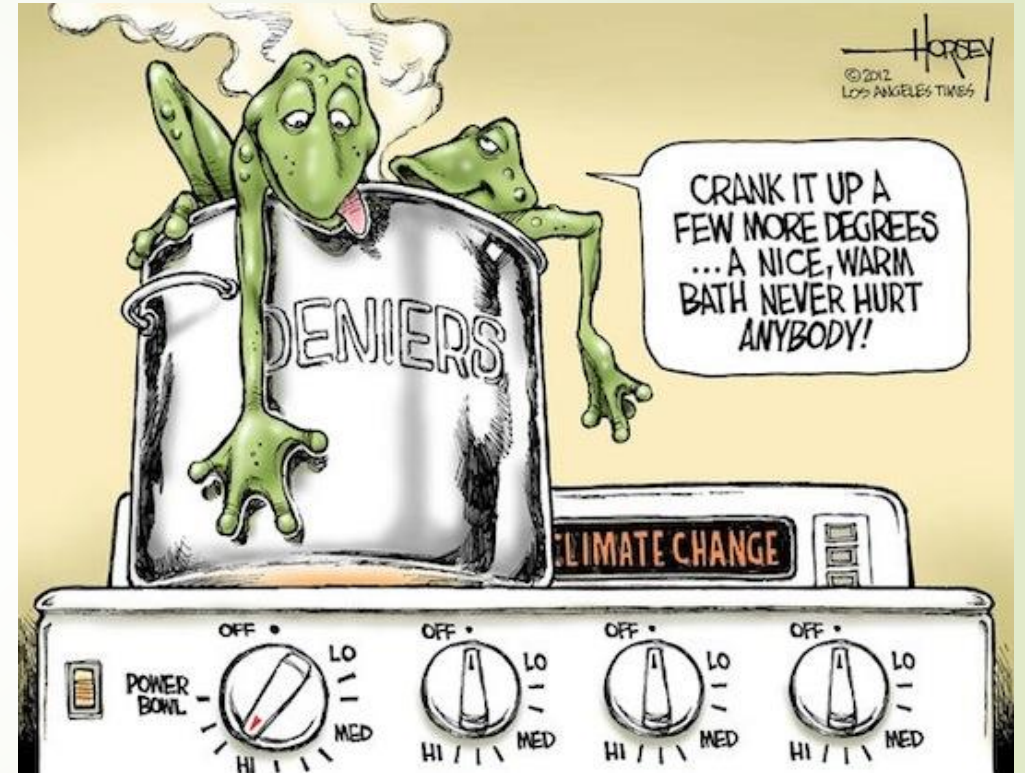
*“Greenhouse effect”*

*“Climate change”*

*“Global warming”*


*“Global heating”*

*“Global temperatures”*



What features do these phrases have in common?





- ❖ “Climate” or “global”

- Makes it seem like it is something amorphous, something “over there” (ie. not where I am)

- ❖ “Effect”, “change”, “warming”, “heating”

- Makes it seem like something we don’t really need to be afraid of

- ❖ Why we need to talk about “*the climate and ecological crisis*”

- “*climate*” is imperfect but the best we have
- “*ecological*” emphasises the importance of biodiversity loss
- “*crisis*” places emphasis on the fact that we need to ACT NOW

- ❖ The language we use needs to convey a sense of seriousness, immediacy and also of action and responsibility



'Gobsmackingly bananas': scientists  
stunned by planet's record September  
heat

VS

**'A death sentence': September was world's  
hottest on record by an 'extraordinary'  
margin**

Which of these do you think conveys a sense of  
seriousness and responsibility?



# The precautionary principle

*"If you got in a plane with a one in 100 chance of crashing you would be appropriately scared. But we are experimenting with the climate in a way that throws up probabilities of very severe consequences of much more than that."*

Sir David King, Former UK Chief Scientist and UK Special Representative for Climate Change

- ❖ Climate modelling makes predictions about *how likely* it is that something terrible will happen in the future if we don't take radical action now
- We cannot say *with certainty* that one event or predicted risk will happen
- ❖ Many climate scientists acknowledge that in the past their models have vastly underestimated potential risks
- ❖ **The precautionary principle reminds us that when it comes to the future of the only planet we have, if there is a plausible risk that we could reach irreversible and uncontrollable tipping points, why would we wait to see if they actually happen?**
- ❖ Eg. Discussions around record temperatures and El Niño phenomenon – yes El Niño makes it more likely that we will have warmer temperatures, should we therefore wait until it's over to see if the wildfires stop?



*Preventive medicine ... is merely another way of saying health by collective action.*

**– Aneurin Bevan**

*In Place of Fear*

