

What Commissioner Wallstrom Doesn't Want You to Hear

BY IAIN MURRAY

Faced with a crumbling façade of unity in the EU over the Kyoto protocol, Margot Wallstrom, EU Commissioner responsible for the environment, spoke to the European Business Summit on 11 March underlining the reasons why she still supports the Kyoto protocol. The speech has made little difference. Since her intervention, even German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder has voiced doubts about whether the EU should stick to its Kyoto targets. Nevertheless, it is important to see just how fragile Commissioner Wallstrom's arguments are. This commentary examines her particular assertions that we know enough to know that we must do something about climate change now. Comments are interspersed between the Commissioner's statements.

WALLSTROM: "...climate change is one of the decisive challenges that our generation has to tackle. Our civilisation can be traced back by about 10,000 years exactly those 10,000 years that were characterised by a pretty stable global climate. Now we are endangering this stability, with unpredictable consequences for the lives of our children and our grand-children."

Comment: UNTRUE. The Earth's temperature has risen considerably since the end of the last ice age 10,000 years ago. From ice core records and other measures we know that during that time there have been periods of warming and cooling just as rapid as the warming we are currently seeing. In recorded history, there seem to have been: a Roman warm period, a "dark ages" cold period, a medieval warm period when Greenland was habitable and vineyards flourished in England, and a "little ice age" that we emerged from only in the 19th century. All of these appear to have been worldwide phenomena.

WALLSTROM: "Already in 1988, the UN brought all the important scientists of the world together under the umbrella of the IPCC (Intergovernmental Pan-

el on Climate Change). They peer-reviewed all the scientific evidence and have reached consensus on three major reports so far. The writing is on the wall."

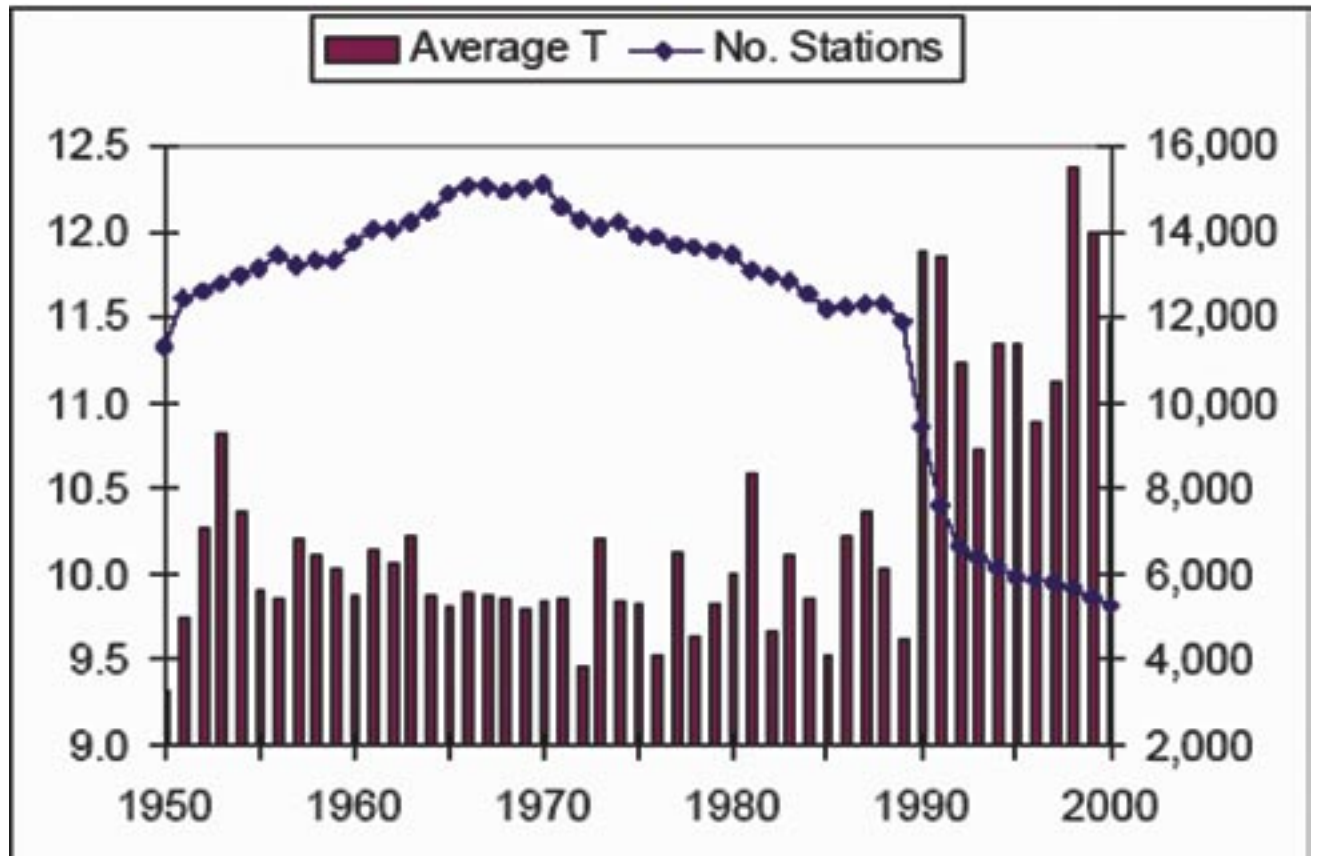
Comment: UNTRUE. The scientists who contributed to the IPCC reports are not "all the important scientists of the world." Dick Lindzen of MIT, an IPCC lead author, pointed out to the US Senate in 2001, "Even within climate science, most of the top researchers (at least in the US) avoid the IPCC because it is extremely time consuming and non-productive."

As a UN activity, it is far more important to have participants from a hundred countries – many of which have almost no active efforts in climate research. For most of these participants, involvement with the IPCC gains them prestige beyond what would normally be available, and these, not surprisingly, are likely to be particularly supportive of the IPCC. Finally, judging from the Citation Index, the leaders of the IPCC process like Sir John Houghton, Dr. Robert Watson, and Prof. Bert Bolin have never been major contributors to basic climate research. They are, however, enthusiasts for the negotiating process without which there would be no IPCC, which is to say that the IPCC represents an interest in its own right."

As for the consensus argument, Lindzen points out, "The vast majority of participants played no role in preparing the summary, and were not asked for agreement," and observes, "Claiming the agreement of thousands of scientists is certainly easier than trying to understand the issue or to respond to scientific questions; it also effectively intimidates most citizens."

WALLSTROM: "We now know that the 20th century was the warmest century in this millennium."

Comment: UNTRUE. We do not know this. Recent investigations into this claim strongly suggest that the data underlying it were not properly examined. When corrected, the data no longer allow that claim to be made. We have known for a long time that in the Middle Ages, the Vikings were able to colonize Greenland and



Source: Essex and McKittrick, "Taken by Storm," 2002

the English were able to raise vines. The data the Commissioner refers to contradict this historical fact.

WALLSTROM: "Even more, all of us that are here at this conference today have experienced the 10 warmest years on record they have all taken place since 1991. In most parts of Europe, the summer of 2003 was the hottest ever. In France alone 15,000 people died due to heat stress, in combination with increased air pollution by ozone and particulates. "Southern Europe was plagued by large-scale forest fires. Agricultural losses across Europe were estimated at over €10 billion. The energy sector, too, proved to be vulnerable. The electricity supply was threatened in many countries of Europe due to a lack of cooling water for fossil fuel and nuclear power plants."

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Comment: DEBATABLE. The fact that the "ten hottest years" happened since 1991 may well be an artifact of the collapse in the number of weather monitoring stations contributing to the global temperature calculations following the fall of communism (see graph).

Moreover, the IPCC itself finds no evidence for "heatwave" alarmism,

saying (p.4), "Since 1950 it is very likely that there has been a reduction in the frequency of extreme low temperatures with a smaller increase in the frequency of extreme high temperatures." It also says, "No systematic changes in the frequency of tornadoes, thunder days, or hail events are evident in the limited areas analysed" (p.5) and, "For some other extreme phenomena, many of which may have important impacts on the environment and society, there is currently insufficient information to assess recent trends, and climate models currently lack the spatial detail required to make confident projections. For example, very small-scale phenomena, such as thunderstorms, tornadoes, hail and lightning, are not simulated in climate models" (p.15).

WALLSTROM: "To put it bluntly: How much more science do we need?"

Comment: This is a scientifically ignorant statement unworthy of reply. No science is ever settled.

WALLSTROM: "Fortunately, people are waking up. A report from the Pentagon warns that the consequences of climate change will reduce the carrying capacity of our earth. As global and local

carrying capacities decline new tensions are likely to arise due to the fight for natural resources such as water. According to the Pentagon, this would have implications for the US national security."

Comment: UNTRUE. The report was not from the Pentagon, but commissioned by a civilian office associated with the Pentagon and rejected as not meeting the Pentagon's needs. The scenario was admitted to be extreme in extent and intensity, so the Commissioner's use of "likely" does not reflect the content of the report. The Pentagon has taken no stance on the implications of global warming for national security.

WALLSTROM: "In a different area, insurance companies keep reminding us of the staggering costs this already involves today. If the current trends of natural disasters continue, total insured economic losses are estimated to be in the range of 30-40 billion US \$ in only 10 years time. This reminds us that climate change is far more than an environmental issue it is a threat to the economy. In considering the costs of slowing down climate change, we should always keep in mind the costs if we do not take action."

Comment: DEBATABLE. See the IPCC's comments above. In addition, the increase in disaster-related insurance claims has more to do with the fact that people are building more in dangerous areas such as hurricane-prone coasts and flood plains. The reinsurance industry may well be using global warming as a convenient excuse for higher premiums and lower payouts.

SUMMARY: The Commissioner should be thanked for revealing how much EU climate change policy is based on half-truths, misinterpretations and distortions.

The truth is that there remains considerable uncertainty over the scientific basis for the EU's policy while there exists much less uncertainty over the economic implications. We know that adopting Kyoto targets will hurt EU economies, just as it will the world economy if America and Russia lose their senses and ratify the protocol. Kyoto is bad for European prospects, competitiveness and jobs. The EU should follow Chancellor Schroeder's advice and think again.

Iain Murray is Senior Fellow International Policy of the Competitive Enterprise Institute. Email: imurray@cei.org