

Submission to B&NES Council in support of the motion on climate emergency and carbon neutrality, 14 March 2019.

The living world is now behaving in ways consistent with excess greenhouse gases, as released by the actions of humanity, trapping solar radiation as heat. Responses include mass die-offs and extinctions, rising sea levels, unstable atmospheric and oceanic currents, lethal multi-year droughts, unusual heatwaves and cold-snaps, unprecedented wildfires and wild storms, and new records for mean global temperature every year. Climate scientists have tested many hypotheses that might exculpate humanity, from coincidence to natural cycles, but all have been rejected because they are inconsistent with the evidence for human agency.

I now live in Bath but I spent 40 years as an ecologist and development professional in tropical countries, where I saw the cutting edge of mass extinction through deforestation, and the impacts of glacial retreat, drought, fire, storm and sea-level rise. I now have no doubt that human carbon emissions have destabilised nature, and that natural systems could well respond by extinguishing most life on Earth. I am particularly worried by the imminent loss of Arctic summer sea ice, which threatens runaway heating from about 2030.

In my work I have often seen effective environmental programmes being built by people who have set aside mere political differences in order to focus on ecological reality and the protection and restoration of the ecosystems that sustain their own communities and businesses. These are exceptions but they prove the value of correctly placing ecology above politics. This principle offers a way for us to respond constructively to a global climate emergency, one that we are not yet doing nearly enough to prevent or mitigate.

It has now been proposed that B&NES Council commits us to zero net carbon emissions by 2030, and I whole-heartedly support this motion as a way to focus minds on the changes that every community will have to make in coming years. Council members will be aware of the rapid increase in public alarm over climate change, which can only accelerate with every climate-related environmental calamity in the UK and worldwide. I hope that the Council will respond by supporting this proposal, thereby showing responsible leadership before public alarm becomes true panic in the face of overwhelming evidence of immediate threat to life and property.

Dr Julian Caldecott
Ecologist and author