



## The Catalyst

*Stirring the pot to cook up change*

**Note to readers:** *This is the most difficult, and important, newsletter I've put out in my five years of compiling the Catalyst. It's not a normal newsletter in the sense that there's really only one piece of news here: the most recent IPCC report.*

*I hope you'll read through what I've noted below on the report, unsettling as it is, because it's critical to understanding our situation now as regards the climate and how we proceed, and because it serves as a springboard for a new direction for the Catalyst. I promise I won't leave you gut-punched but will circle around to living with awareness of the "great unraveling" and still finding meaning and joy and purpose in this most extraordinary of times.*

### The IPCC Report

<http://www.ipcc.ch/report/sr15/>

The Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C, released Oct. 8, 2018, was drafted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the leading world body for assessing the science related to climate change. It was written and edited by 91 scientists from 40 countries who analyzed more than 6000 scientific studies, and was prepared under the leadership of all three IPCC working groups: Working Group I assesses the physical science basis of climate change; Working Group II addresses impacts, adaptation and vulnerability; and Working Group III deals with the mitigation of climate change.

World leaders under the Paris Agreement asked the IPCC to explore the differences between a 1.5°C and a 2°C global warming target, and to identify ways to achieve the lower target. Even at the lower target, the report notes that a 1.5°C (2.7°F) warming leads to coastal and island areas inundated by rising sea levels, mass famine due to crops destroyed by excessive heat and extreme storms, worldwide violence, and masses of refugees.

The IPCC points out that human activities have already caused about 1°C (1.8°F) of warming. The impacts we're seeing from just that temperature rise include melting ice-caps, extreme weather events, severe droughts, worsening wildfires, rising sea levels, disappearing glaciers, acidifying oceans, and an extinction crisis. A big underscore to the IPCC report happened on the heels of its release with an unprecedented Category 4 hurricane hitting the Florida panhandle -- Florida, whose governor has banned the words "climate change" from official reports

<https://www.miamiherald.com/news/state/florida/article-12983720.html>

-- and then Spain getting slammed by a storm "unlike any in living memory".

<https://www.dw.com/en/mallorca-deadly-storm-ravages-spains-popular-tourist-destination/a-45825275>.

If greenhouse-gas emissions continue at the current rate, the report says we'll meet the 1.5°C target as soon as 2040. Limiting warming to that target would require "rapid and far-reaching" transitions in land, energy, industry, buildings, transport, and cities to reduce global emissions 45% from 2010 levels by

2030 (and altogether by 2050). That means, over the next 12 years, we must completely transform our civilization. "It's telling us we need to reverse emissions trends and turn the world economy on a dime," said an Oxford University climate scientist and an author of the report.

## It may even be worse than that...

It's unfortunately necessary to note that this special report is the "watered-down, consensus" version of the climate situation. According to the founder of the Institute for Governance and Sustainable Development, the IPCC report "fails to focus on the weakest link in the climate chain: the self-reinforcing feedbacks which, if allowed to continue, will accelerate warming and risk cascading climate tipping points and runaway warming."

<https://www.commondreams.org/news/2018/10/09/whats-not-latest-terrifying-ipcc-report-much-much-much-more-terrifying-new-research>

In our August 2018 Catalyst, we noted a Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences report in which 16 scientists warned that, due to a series of dramatic positive-feedback loops that might be significantly underestimated by the IPCC, the planet could be headed toward a scenario in which accelerating feedback loops would bring us quickly past 3°C and even 4°C, and possibly to 6°C or even 7°C, the "Hothouse Earth" pathway. How bad would this be? At 4°C warming, according to some estimates, nearly all of Africa and Australia, most of the U.S., South America north of Patagonia, and Asia south of Siberia would be rendered uninhabitable by combinations of desertification and flooding.  
<http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2018/08/theres-worse-climate-news-than-the-mendocino-complex-fire.html>

## Rising Temps, Rising Numbness

Although the Global Warming of 1.5°C report set off shock waves by painting a dire picture of the immediate consequences of climate change and noting that the world economy must be transformed at a speed and scale that has "no documented historic precedent," British analysis website Media Lens noted that the report was on the front of the BBC website for just a few hours before getting buried. In the 10/14 Seattle Times, columnist Leonard Pitts wrote: "News media dutifully reported the story, and pundits dutifully sounded the alarm. But none of it seemed quite to register. Two days later, the story was pretty much over, our attention having already moved on."

<https://www.seattletimes.com/opinion/shrugging-off-climate-catastrophe/>

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So we not only have rising temperatures to deal with, but a rising numbness, as too many of us shut down amidst an onslaught of bad news vying for our attention. As just one bad-news example, at a time when we need the ultimate in global cooperation, neo-fascism is taking us in the opposite direction. If, for instance, extreme-right candidate Jair Bolsonaro becomes Brazil's next president, as seems likely, predictions are that he'll lift all restrictions on logging in the Amazon rainforest, which has long served as one of the planet's prime carbon sinks.

## Ostriches in Chief

Staying on the political track for a moment, the IPCC notes that while it's technically possible to achieve the rapid changes required to avoid 2.7°F of warming, it may be "politically unlikely." Umm, yeah. Here's what our own State Department had to say about the new report: "Acceptance of this report...does not imply endorsement by the United States of the specific findings or underlying contents of the report."

Further, "We reiterate that the United States intends to withdraw from the Paris agreement at the earliest opportunity absent the identification of terms that are better for the American people."

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/07/climate/ipcc-climate-report-2040.html>

To put an even sharper point on this, a recent environmental impact statement by the U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration notes that on its current course, the planet will warm a disastrous 7°F by the end of this century. And since that's the way it is, it's okay to freeze fuel-efficiency standards for cars and light trucks.

Sure, this would increase greenhouse-gas emissions, but would add "just a very small drop to a very big, hot bucket."

As an incredulous scientist noted, "The amazing thing they're saying is human activities are going to lead to this rise of carbon dioxide that is disastrous for the environment and society. And then they're saying they're not going to do anything about it."

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/trump-administration-sees-a-7-degree-rise-in-global-temperatures-by-2100/2018/09/27/b9c6fada-bb45-11e8-bdc0-90f81cc58c5d\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/trump-administration-sees-a-7-degree-rise-in-global-temperatures-by-2100/2018/09/27/b9c6fada-bb45-11e8-bdc0-90f81cc58c5d_story.html)

**"...the world economy must be transformed at a speed and scale that has "no documented historic precedent"**

## Can Technology Save Us?

Does the IPCC put forth solutions that don't depend on heads of state? Sure. It considers actions such as capturing and sequestering CO<sub>2</sub> (CCS), or direct air capture of CO<sub>2</sub> (DAC).

It should be noted here that in May 2017, a letter to the IPCC chair from 108 civil society organizations <https://www.thegef.org/partners/csos> expressed deep concern over the selection of certain authors who are or were senior employees from major oil companies such as ExxonMobil and Saudi Aramco, the second- and third-largest corporate emitters of greenhouse-gas emissions worldwide. The letter pointed out <http://www.etcgroup.org/content/open-letter-ipcc-108-civil-society-organizations> that Exxon holds the most patents and financial interests relating to carbon capture and sequestration of any company worldwide. <https://truthout.org/articles/do-we-really-have-the-time-and-the-tools-to-fix-climate-change/>

Regarding CCS and DAC, energy expert Richard Heinberg points out that even though pilot projects have succeeded in demonstrating that the technology works, "each has been shown to be a pipe dream at scale." He further challenges the report's suggestion that we can continue to grow our industrialized economy while decreasing energy use. "Switching to new and relatively clean energy sources while trying to maintain growth of the overall economy would be a little like redesigning and reconfiguring an airplane while it's in flight. Why not land the airplane, or at least stop trying to gain altitude, while we make the needed upgrades? That's the argument of ecological economists, who point out that the one strategy that would reliably work to reduce emissions would be to shrink overall economic activity and rein in population growth. Still, policymakers are unwilling even to discuss that pathway." <https://psmag.com/environment/2018-ipcc-report-includes-magical-thinking/>

## In Short

So there you have it. The natural world is screaming at us with extreme storms, wildfires, heatwaves, melting icecaps, dying oceans, a sixth mass extinction, and much more. Scientists are screaming at us with the latest IPCC report. See also "Over 15,000 scientists from more than 180 countries warn humanity".

<https://academic.oup.com/bioscience/article/67/12/1026/4605229>

People are numbed, battle-weary, distracted, and in denial, while too many world leaders are bringing us closer to the cliff. "Solutions" with the goal of sustaining an ever-growing world economy, a goal policymakers won't abandon, are pipe dreams. There are solutions we can pursue, although it's too late to prevent a world of loss. But there is still much we can do, and do it we must. As an IPCC scientist says, "The next few years are probably the most important in our history."

## How Now Should We Live?

We're facing the most important moral choice ever to come before humanity: do we radically change the way we live, or do we destroy the planet as we know it? How do we come together as things fall apart? How do we stay awake in a nightmare? What paths of service to the world should we pursue? What defines a life of integrity and courage and compassion now? Where do we find our hope, and joy?

Those are questions I'd like to consider in newsletters to come. Right now, I can think of nothing better than to share this excerpt from "Getting Real About It: Meeting the Psychological and Social Demands of a World in Distress" by Susanne C. Moser, Ph.D [https://climateaccess.org/system/file/Moser\\_Getting%20Real%20About%20It.pdf](https://climateaccess.org/system/file/Moser_Getting%20Real%20About%20It.pdf)

*"The first demand on a leader of the future, according to...Bill McKibben, is to 'do something braver than try to save the world we have known. We must accept the fact that the world we have known is going to change in hideous and damaging ways.'"*

*"The bravest thing is to take this first step: get real. Face the truth, and let it sink in. A friend of mine, a coral researcher, once told the story how when the truth about a future without corals finally sank in, she had to run to the bathroom and vomit, it was so devastating. It took her years to accept it.*

*"We must accept the fact that the world we have known is going to change in hideous and damaging ways."*

— Bill McKibben

*"So, this won't happen quickly and it is not to be rushed, though the temptation to jump into mad action to fight for solutions that may still – against all better knowledge – avert the worst is indeed*

*immense. In fact, taking action may well be the right response for many. But coming to grips with the reality we now are in takes time, and it's critical that we give it a quiet space inside ourselves, and that we ground ourselves in the face of it with any practices of balance we may already have or could adopt.*

*"The landscape you will find yourself in, once you allow this realization to take hold, is a different one. Despair lives there, along with helplessness and anger, fear and disorientation, undoubtedly also unspeakable sadness.*

*"You are likely to come to recognize that this is a new time. The time before was one in which we insisted and relied on hope, on better tomorrows, in the US on the 'American Dream.' Now, we have to accept that 'better tomorrows' may not come. It is akin to accepting one's own mortality, maybe a doctor's prognosis of one's impending death, but on a much grander scale...In Western society, such a suggestion is considered fatalistic and morbid, and anyone who dares to ponder it out loud would be considered bad company.*

*"By contrast, psychologists who study the existential fears of facing our own demise view it as an important capacity of the mature person, and in light of the state of our world, an essential one. As a leader in a time of rapid climate change, you will need to be grounded in this realization.*

*But not just for yourself. Be real about it also with other people. Remember, as more and more impacts unfold, disasters disrupt our lives, and precious landscapes and assets fall apart or are lost, as much larger portions of society awakes to the emerging reality, there is likely to be a lot of confusion, a lot of not-knowing, uncertainty, and probably still a good deal of hanging on to hope-against-hope and denial. To speak clearly and calmly to what is, and what may yet come, cuts down on that confusion, cuts through the strange fog that people are in when they don't understand or deny reality. It's clarifying, grounding to be real with others."*

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## A New Newsletter

In future newsletters, we'll look at trying to understand what brought us to this point, and how not to go numb but instead find our courage and will to navigate whatever may be ahead. We'll talk about all we can still do to help the world, ourselves, and each other. We'll discuss how to build both physical and emotional resilience, two main themes of the Transition movement, more important now than ever. And though it will no longer be the thrust of the newsletter, we still need to know what's happening to the climate that is upending the world we live in. So the newsletter will close with a one-paragraph summary of recent climate developments, with links for those who want more info. (On that score, you may also want to check out the one-page climate "fact sheet" that is now in the "Learn" section of our website. <http://www.TransitionFidalgo.org/learn>

## A Special Invite

I've worked on climate issues for 12 1/2 years now and will consider sharing some of my personal journey through an ever-worsening situation. And there will be words and guidance from people much wiser than me.

If you'd like to share your own reflections or questions, or offer any suggestions for discussion, I'd welcome them. Please send comments to [info@TransitioFidalgo.org](mailto:info@TransitioFidalgo.org) and I'll try to incorporate them into the newsletter so that we can start shaking off the numbness and learn how to talk about the most critical issue of this, or any, time.

*The Catalyst is compiled and written by Evelyn Adams.*

### **Transition Fidalgo & Friends:**

*Growing a resilient community with a reduced reliance on fossil fuels.*

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