

Overview of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

1 The IPCC is the international body for assessing the science related to climate change. Set up in 1988 by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the IPCC provides policymakers with regular assessments of the scientific basis of climate change, its impacts and future risks, and options for adaptation and mitigation.

2 IPCC assessments are policy-relevant but not policy-prescriptive. They present projections of future climate change based on different scenarios, outline the risks that climate change poses, and discuss the implications of response options, but they do not tell policymakers what actions to take.

3 The IPCC provides rigorous and balanced scientific information to decision-makers because of its scientific and intergovernmental nature. Participation in the IPCC is open to all member countries of the WMO and United Nations. It currently has 195 members. The Panel, made up of representatives of the member states, meets in Plenary Sessions to take major decisions. The IPCC Bureau, elected by member governments, provides guidance to the Panel on the scientific and technical aspects of the Panel's work and advises the Panel on related management and strategic issues.

IPCC Assessment Reports

4 The IPCC assessment reports are written by leading scientists who volunteer their time and expertise as Coordinating Lead Authors and Lead Authors of the reports. They enlist hundreds of other experts as Contributing Authors to provide complementary expertise in specific areas. Assessment reports undergo multiple rounds of drafting and review to ensure they are comprehensive and objective, and are produced in an open and transparent way. Thousands of other experts contribute to the reports by acting as reviewers, ensuring the reports reflect the full range of views in the scientific community. Teams of Review Editors provide a thorough monitoring mechanism for making sure that review comments are addressed.

5 The IPCC works by assessing published literature. It does not conduct its own scientific research. The authors provide information on areas where knowledge is well-established and where understanding is evolving, as well as where multiple perspectives exist in the literature.

6 The IPCC's First Assessment Report (FAR) in 1990 played a decisive role in leading to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which was opened for signature at the Rio de Janeiro Summit in 1992. The Second Assessment Report (SAR) of 1995 provided key input for the negotiations of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997. The Third Assessment Report (TAR) of 2001 provided further information relevant to the development of the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol. The 4th Assessment Report (AR4) paid greater attention to the integration of climate change with sustainable development policies and the relationships between mitigation and adaptation, and led to a wider awareness of climate change issues in the general public and among decision-makers. In

2007, after the release of AR4, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the IPCC¹ for its efforts in disseminating knowledge and laying the foundations for action on climate change.

7 The **5th Assessment Report (AR5)**, which will be finalised in 2014, places greater emphasis on assessing the socio-economic aspects of climate change and its implications for sustainable development. It also includes a number of new features such as a new set of climate scenarios, dedicated chapters on sea level change, the carbon cycle and climate phenomena, greater regional detail and information on risk management.

Working Groups under the IPCC

8 The authors that produce the assessment reports are mainly organised into three working groups – **Working Group I: the Physical Science Basis**; Working Group II: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability; and Working Group III: Mitigation of Climate Change.

9 Each of the working groups generates a report and a Summary for Policymakers (SPM). AR5 comprises the three reports of the working groups and a fourth section known as the Synthesis Report.

10 The Working Group I contribution to AR5 includes assessing observations of the climate system, across the atmosphere, the surface, the ocean and the cryosphere (ice), as well as information on past climate.

¹ As co-recipient with Albert Arnold “Al” Gore, Jr, former US Vice-President and environmental activist.