

INTRODUCTION

The Working Group I contribution to the IPCC Fourth Assessment Report describes progress in understanding of the human and natural drivers of climate change¹, observed climate change, climate processes and attribution, and estimates of projected future climate change. It builds upon past IPCC assessments and incorporates new findings from the past six years of research. Scientific progress since the TAR is based upon large amounts of new and more comprehensive data, more sophisticated analyses of data, improvements in understanding of processes and their simulation in models, and more extensive exploration of uncertainty ranges.

The basis for substantive paragraphs in this Summary for Policymakers can be found in the chapter sections specified in curly brackets.

HUMAN AND NATURAL DRIVERS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Changes in the atmospheric abundance of greenhouse gases and aerosols, in solar radiation and in land surface properties alter the energy balance of the climate system. These changes are expressed in terms of radiative forcing², which is used to compare how a range of human and natural factors drive warming or cooling influences on global climate. Since the Third Assessment Report (TAR), new observations and related modelling of greenhouse gases, solar activity, land surface properties and some aspects of aerosols have led to improvements in the quantitative estimates of radiative forcing.

Global atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide have increased markedly as a result of human activities since 1750 and now far exceed pre-industrial values determined from ice cores spanning many thousands of years (see Figure SPM-1). The global increases in carbon dioxide concentration are due primarily to fossil fuel use and land-use change, while those of methane and nitrous oxide are primarily due to agriculture. {2.3, 6.4, 7.3}

- Carbon dioxide is the most important anthropogenic greenhouse gas (see Figure SPM-2). The global atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide has increased from a pre-industrial value of about 280 ppm to 379 ppm³ in 2005. The atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide in 2005 exceeds by far the natural range over the last 650,000 years (180 to 300 ppm) as determined from ice cores. The annual carbon dioxide concentration growth-rate was larger during the last 10 years (1995 – 2005 average: 1.9 ppm per year), than it has been since the beginning of continuous direct atmospheric measurements (1960–2005 average: 1.4 ppm per year) although there is year-to-year variability in growth rates.
- The primary source of the increased atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide since the pre-industrial period results from fossil fuel use, with land use change providing another significant but smaller contribution. Annual fossil carbon dioxide emissions⁴ increased from an average of 6.4 [6.0 to 6.8]⁵ GtC

¹ *Climate change* in IPCC usage refers to any change in climate over time, whether due to natural variability or as a result of human activity. This usage differs from that in the Framework Convention on Climate Change, where climate change refers to a change of climate that is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and that is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods.

² *Radiative forcing* is a measure of the influence that a factor has in altering the balance of incoming and outgoing energy in the Earth-atmosphere system and is an index of the importance of the factor as a potential climate change mechanism. Positive forcing tends to warm the surface while negative forcing tends to cool it. In this report radiative forcing values are for 2005 relative to pre-industrial conditions defined at 1750 and are expressed in watts per square metre (W m⁻²). See Glossary and Section 2.2 for further details.

³ ppm (parts per million) or ppb (parts per billion, 1 billion = 1,000 million) is the ratio of the number of greenhouse gas molecules to the total number of molecules of dry air. For example: 300 ppm means 300 molecules of a greenhouse gas per million molecules of dry air.

⁴ Fossil carbon dioxide emissions include those from the production, distribution and consumption of fossil fuels and as by-product from cement production. An emission of 1 GtC corresponds to 3.67 GtCO₂.

⁵ In general, uncertainty ranges for results given in this Summary for Policymakers are 90% uncertainty intervals unless stated otherwise, i.e., there is an estimated 5% likelihood that the value could be above the range given in square brackets and 5% likelihood that the value could be below that range. Best estimates are given where available. Assessed uncertainty intervals are not always symmetric about the corresponding best estimate. Note that a number of uncertainty ranges in the Working Group I TAR corresponded to 2-sigma (95%), often using expert judgement.