

Ministers, alligators and the voice of reason

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Drawing on my experience of working in government for over 20 years on climate change and other environmental issues, I will look at the challenges of communicating climate change science from the point of view of the science community, government and the media.

I will review the purpose of science communication in a subject where the science matters to people's welfare and is not something of detached interest. This will cover its role in helping to promote behaviour change, through understanding of risk, informing risk management policies, and building a consensus around these based on well attested evidence.

I will look at the role of each of the main players in turn and explore the issues relating to different aspects of communication, namely, scientific substance, organisational processes, presentation of complex facts, the question of authority, the wider context and the diversity of the audience, with respect to their views of climate change and scientists. I will review the interaction between the different players, explore areas of misunderstanding, and discuss the temptation for hype and effects of scepticism and misinformation and how they might be countered. I will also discuss the importance of the IPCC and the role of science in the international climate negotiations.