

# Unhaltable global warming claim withdrawn by Scientific Reports journal

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Science



A press release by Scientific Reports was criticised for giving the public a misleading, "frightening message" about global warming

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A top scientific journal which claimed that global

A top scientific journal which claimed that global warming may already be unstoppable has been forced to issue a clarification after being accused of potentially causing “unnecessary despair”.

*Scientific Reports* sought to publicise a study by Norwegian scientists with a doom-laden press release headlined: “Ending greenhouse gas emissions may not stop global warming.”

After being strongly criticised by leading British scientists, the journal issued a revised press release which admitted that the prediction was based on a particular computer model and said the results should be tested by “alternative models”. The study says that even if man-made [greenhouse gas emissions](#) were to reduce to zero this year, global temperatures would still be about 3C warmer and sea levels 2.5m higher by 2500 compared with 1850.

Richard Betts, professor of climate impacts at the University of Exeter, criticised the press release and questioned the study’s conclusions, saying there was a risk of the public being given a “frightening message” that was misleading. “While the press release suggests that global warming may now be unstoppable for centuries, the model result in this paper is not convincing as support for that message,” he said.

“The paper itself does not actually claim to be a prediction of the real world, it just reports the behaviour of one model – but the press release goes a big step further and presents it as a prediction.

“The model, which is not one used in the main Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change projections, has not been shown to be credible enough to support confident predictions, and is contradicted by more established and extensively evaluated [models] in many of its physical processes.

“This paper clearly may be cited in support of a misleading message that it is now ‘too late’ to avoid catastrophic climate change, which would have the potential to cause unnecessary despair. However, the study is nowhere near strong enough to make such a frightening message credible.”

Andrew Watson, a Royal Society research professor at the University of Exeter, said that he did not agree with the press release describing global warming as potentially catastrophic, “given that it occurs over 500 years”.

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Sir Brian Hoskins, of the Grantham Institute for Climate Change at Imperial College London, said: “This is the sort of investigation with a toy model that should be done and is fun, but should not be given this sort of publicity until

the processes involved have been investigated using more complex models and representations.”

Some scientists said the findings were significant. Phillip Williamson, of the University of East Anglia, said: “This study provides evidence for what we don’t want to hear: that global heating may have already become self-reinforcing, and that we have therefore passed the point of no return for halting long-term climate change.”

Springer Nature, which publishes *Scientific Reports*, said: “After we became aware of concerns raised by some experts, we looked into them and decided that clarification was needed in the press release on the model used.”

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