



INSTITUTIONAL ALARMISM
THE BBC'S DISASTROUS CLIMATE COMPLAINTS

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About the author

Paul Homewood had a career as an accountant in industry. He has been writing on climate and energy issues since 2011.



Introduction

The BBC has often been accused of bias in many areas of its coverage. But one sticks out more than most, and that is the topic of climate change. In 2006, it organised a secret seminar, which has shaped its coverage of global warming ever since. It fought for years, and at a cost of tens of thousands of pounds, to keep the details of the meeting secret. Eventually it emerged, in the scandal now known as 28gate, that the attendees included green activists, such as Greenpeace members, and other strong proponents of climate catastrophism. However, there were no climate sceptics present.

Since then, it has been the norm for BBC reports on climate change and energy policy to exclude or marginalise anybody who does not agree with the consensus view, while giving undue prominence to extreme green activist groups, such as Greenpeace and WWF.

BBC environmental reporters are little more than advocates themselves, and not impartial. Its lead journalist, Roger Harrabin, has recently been accused of being a 'prophet of doom, who belongs in a pulpit'.¹ Indeed, it often appears as if all of its environmental staff has gone rogue, and no longer believes that the corporation's rules concerning impartiality applies to them.

This evidently biased coverage has inevitably led to many complaints, some of which have been upheld. Often they are about factual errors; others concern bias and omission of alternative views.

Many articles and programmes escape without formal complaints, but are equally biased and misleading. This paper outlines a small selection of examples.

This paper has been submitted to the Government's upcoming Mid-Term Review of the BBC.



Justin Rowlatt – BBC Climate Editor

In April 2022, the BBC upheld two complaints against its climate editor, Justin Rowlatt. Both concerned a Panorama edition in November 2021, entitled ‘Wild Weather – Our World Under Threat’, which was written and presented by Rowlatt himself.² The programme was intended to persuade viewers that climate change was making the world’s weather more extreme, as Rowlatt’s opening comments made clear:

The world is getting warmer and our weather is getting ever more unpredictable and dangerous. The death toll is rising around the world, and the forecast is that worse is to come.

His claim that the death toll is rising is actually the opposite of the truth, since deaths from weather disasters have declined significantly in the last fifty years, and continue to do so. A complaint to the BBC was fobbed off with the risible excuse that Panorama was referring to the cumulative death toll, which will obviously rise every year regardless. The complaint was escalated to the BBC’s Executive Complaints Unit (ECU), which found that Rowlatt had been misleading. In their laughable ruling, they noted his claim that the death toll from extreme weather was rising ‘risked giving the impression the rate of deaths from extreme weather-related events was increasing.’ I wonder why!

The programme then went on to graphically describe a handful of bad weather events in 2021, without providing any evidence whatsoever that such events were unprecedented or becoming more common, let alone being the result of global warming. One event was the recent drought in Madagascar, which Rowlatt referred to as ‘the world’s first climate change-induced famine’.

Shortly after the programme was aired, a scientific study suggested that the famine was not linked to climate change at all, and that Madagascar had seen worse droughts in the past. The ECU upheld another complaint against this segment of the programme.

Both complaints highlighted just how shoddy this piece of journalism was; a tiny bit of research would have quickly revealed both claims were fake. Did Rowlatt know his claims were bogus, or could he not be bothered to check?

Moreover, these complaints against him were not the first to be upheld. In 2021, he was censured for falsely claiming that ‘the offshore wind industry was now “virtually subsidy free” in the UK’, in a puff piece for wind farms. At the time, subsidies were running at £3.5 billion per year.³

A history of upheld complaints

This sort of sloppy, one-sided reporting is nothing new at the BBC, however. The rot arguably set in in 2006, when the BBC held a secret seminar, which subsequently shaped its coverage of global warming. The BBC fought for years to keep the names of the attendees secret, but they were eventually revealed to have included a number of extremist eco groups, such as Greenpeace and Stop Climate Chaos.

Indeed, hardly a BBC report on climate change or energy policies goes by which does not include comments from a Greenpeace or WWF spokesman.

Over the years, a number of complaints have been upheld against the BBC's reporting of climate issues. But many others have been simply waved away or ignored, or have simply not generated official complaints, perhaps unsurprisingly given the dogged determination that is required to get a ruling from the ECU.

A selection of some of the upheld complaints are shown opposite.





Some upheld complaints

- October 2020: The National Farmers' Union complained about a BBC documentary, *Meat: A Threat to our Planet*, which made several unsubstantiated claims about meat production in the UK. OFCOM upheld their complaint.⁴
- June 2020: BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme claimed that 2020 saw the hottest May on record in the UK. In fact it was only the 15th warmest.⁵
- February 2019: Roger Harrabin covered an think-tank report, which made the patently absurd claim that 'Since 2005, the number of floods across the world has increased by 15 times, extreme temperature events by 20 times, and wild-fires seven-fold.' The think tank subsequently accepted that their claims were factually untrue, something that Harrabin should have challenged before simply repeating it.⁸
- December 2018: An episode of the BBC Weather World programme, which was little more than a free puff for onshore wind farms, claimed that 'Already about 30% of the UK's power is produced by wind energy'. The actual figure was 15%.⁸
- October 2018: BBC News reported that the African penguin population was rapidly declining because of 'rising tides'. The ECU reluctantly admitted that this was yet another fake claim, and that the real cause of the decline was over-fishing.⁸
- June 2018: John Humphrys interviewed Lord Deben, the chairman of the Climate Change Committee, allowing him to get away with wildly inaccurate claims about wind power unchallenged. In particular, Deben stated that 'even where a community wants to have an onshore wind farm, it can't have it'. In fact there is no such ban, and the Government has actually devolved the decision to approve onshore wind turbines to local councils. As a result, the BBC Executive Complaints Unit found that Deben should have been challenged on this point to ensure listeners were not left with a materially misleading impression.⁸
- May 2018: Environment analyst, Roger Harrabin, wrote that the government had 'banned new onshore wind farms'. There has been no such ban, only the removal of subsidies. The BBC Executive Complaints Unit accepted that the article was materially misleading, and that there had been a serious lapse of editorial standards.⁸
- January 2018: BBC *News at Ten* claimed that 2017 was the 'hottest year on record'. Again, this was manifestly untrue.⁶In 2017, BBC Two broadcast *Russia With Simon Reeve*, which claimed that reindeer populations across Northern Russia were 'in steep decline because of climate change'. In fact, a 2016 study proved that 17 out of 19 sub-populations of Eurasian Reindeer were either increasing in number, or had a stable population.⁷
- December 2017: Chris Fawkes, the BBC meteorologist, categorically stated that 'A warmer world is bringing us a greater number of hurricanes and a greater risk of a hurricane becoming the most powerful category'. Historical data shows no such increase, as the BBC was forced to concede.⁸
- March 2017: *The World at One* made the plainly ridiculous claim that sea levels at Miami were rising at ten times the global rate. The BBC were subsequently forced to admit that sea levels there showed 'little divergence from the global mean'. (The difference was due to sinking of the land, not sea-level rise.)⁸



How the BBC neutralise complaints

All the above complaints were upheld, but the BBC has got the business of deflecting complaints down to a fine art.

The first stage response usually glosses over the complaint, which normally puts an end to the matter there and then, as most people are unprepared to take it further. If this does not work, the BBC employs the 'scientists say' defence – that they are not broadcasting their own views, merely relating what others are saying. Therefore they cannot be held responsible for any errors.

Their most common defence, however, is simply to ignore the complaint, in the hope it will be forgotten.

Maybe the most egregious example was Sir David Attenborough's documentary, *Climate Change – The Facts*, which the BBC broadcast in May 2019. It made several highly questionable assertions, in particular that 'storms, floods, heatwaves and sea level rise are all rapidly getting worse as a result of climate change'. As the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has reported, there is no evidence for such claims. A complaint to this effect was simply wafted away on the basis that some scientists disagreed with the official line.⁹

Other complaints which were either ignored or sidelined in this fashion are listed on the facing page.

Some neutralised complaints

- April 2022: BBC Weather Climate Check reports that the Antarctic is warming at up to three times the global average. Again, this is fake news, as studies show that most of the Antarctic has been getting colder in recent decades.¹⁰
- December 2021: BBC News reported that the 2021 Atlantic hurricane season was the third most active. In reality, since 1851, there have been 50 other years with as many or more than the seven hurricanes recorded in the Atlantic in 2021.¹¹
- September 2021: BBC News claim that 'The number of weather-related disasters to hit the world has increased five-fold over the past 50 years'. But as the organisation which published this data admits, the increases are due to better record keeping, not climate change.¹²
- September 2021: BBC Weather Climate Check claimed that 'Climate scientists believe that global warming is making hurricanes stronger'. (Note the 'scientists say' get out.) The actual data shows this is not true, something which is also confirmed by most reputable hurricane experts. As is so often the case, the BBC makes no attempt at all to offer a range of alternative opinions.¹³
- May 2021: BBC Weather Climate Check claimed that global warming could be making tornadoes worse in the US. Official data shows the opposite: that they are now much less severe than in the 1970s.¹⁴
- May 2021: BBC News reported that the Victoria Falls had dried up, something exacerbated by 'global heating'. (The BBC no longer refer to 'warming'!) In fact, they had not dried up, although trick photography suggested they had. Water levels always drop at that time of year, and the drought that year was not unprecedented, or in any way unusual.¹⁵
- March 2021: BBC News covered the droughts in California in 2014, implying that global warming was a factor. Again, the actual data shows that drought was not unusual, and that much more severe 'megadroughts' have happened regularly in the past.¹⁶
- February 2021: BBC News claimed that the US had had a record number of wildfires and hurricanes in 2020. This was totally untrue, but the BBC refused to issue a correction.¹⁷
- February 2021: BBC News claimed that 'climate disasters' are now more frequent and costing more in the US. Their claims failed to take account of increasing wealth, meaning that insured losses inevitably increase.¹⁸
- December 2019: BBC One broadcast *Seven Worlds: One Planet*, another Attenborough documentary, which falsely and emotively claimed that polar bears are starving because of climate change. In fact, polar bears in the area filmed are thriving.¹⁹
- September 2019: BBC News reported that 'climate change was destroying family life in Vietnam', as a result of the Mekong Delta being submerged by rising seas. In fact, local scientific experts have made it clear that the main problem is land subsidence, as a result of water extraction. Additionally, damming of the Mekong and extraction of sand upstream has created stronger currents, in turn causing erosion of land in the delta. The BBC News report failed to mention these factors.²⁰

Outright propaganda

There are many cases where BBC programmes and reports about climate change are little more than blatant propaganda.

One example was series of articles in 2021 by Roger Harrabin, the corporation's environment analyst, about a proposed coal mine in Cumbria. Between 6 January and 4 February, he wrote five highly prejudiced articles opposing the mine, with extensive quotes from Greenpeace, the Committee on Climate Change, Oxfam, the Campaign to Protect Rural England, Labour, Liberal Democrat and Green Party politicians. There were even comments from the Fijian ambassador.²¹

None of the articles contained any mention of the benefits the mine would bring, whether economic or environmental, and virtually no comments at all from supporters of the mine, local politicians or trade unionists.

The BBC rejected a complaint about bias, on the basis that 'due impartiality' does not mean that every report has to reflect all views and facts.

And in another article last year, Harrabin claimed that 'The wealthiest 5% alone – the so-called 'polluter elite' – contributed 37% of emissions growth between 1990 and 2015'. This statement ignored the fact that all of the global increase in emissions in that period came from Asia, Africa and Latin America, while emissions actually fell in the US and Europe.²²

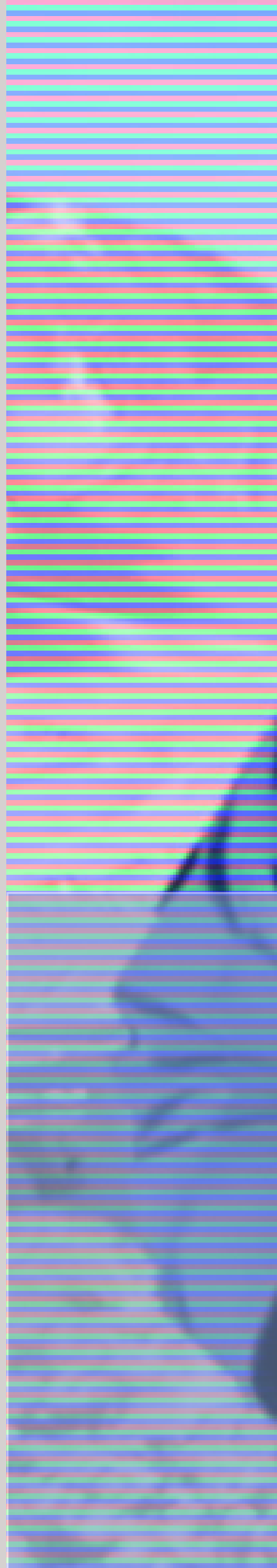
This particular story highlights how the BBC's propaganda often works. It was based on a report from the Cambridge Sustainability Commission on Scaling Behaviour Change, which Harrabin portrays as an official body. In reality it is a self-selected, fringe political campaign group.

Another example came during the run up to the Tokyo Olympics in the summer of 2021. The BBC gave prominent coverage to a silly report that claimed that the impact of global warming would likely lead to 'impaired' performances there. This flew in the face of the fact that many recent Olympics have taken place in much hotter climes, such as Los Angeles, Atlanta and Athens.²³

Another report last year emotionally described how, supposedly, climate change was ruining farming in Bangladesh. It was presented by Qasa Alom, of the BBC's Asian Network, as he returned to his ancestral home. There was, however, no mention of the fact that agricultural output in the country has quadrupled in the last fifty years.²⁴ Similarly, BBC's *Springwatch* did not even attempt to conceal its bias, tweeting two years ago that 'we have to change our ways, to save the planet.'²⁵

None of this should come as any surprise. In January 2020, the BBC officially announced plans for a year-long series of special programming and coverage on climate change. The blitz continues to this day.²⁶

There are doubtless many other examples over the years. And even where complaints are successful, very few actually see them, while the original fake news is seen by millions.





Conclusion

The sheer weight of evidence presented in this paper suggests that bias is now endemic in the BBC's climate reporting.

All of the factual errors noted could easily have been avoided with a bit of basic research. Is this carried out and the results ignored if they don't agree with the BBC's agenda? Or is the corporation's output just made up and printed anyway without checks? Either way, this is journalism at its shoddy worst.

And who is editing this fake reporting? Why are they not insisting on accurate reporting? Where are the highly paid executives, who let all of this continue?

Even where complaints are upheld, very few people are actually aware, or read the corrections logged. By contrast, the fake version is seen by millions, who continue to believe it is the truth. Just as newspapers have to print corrections, the BBC should publish/broadcast all corrections with equal prominence to the original story. In particular, BBC News bulletins should broadcast all corrections at the end of each programme.

The topic of climate change, Net Zero and the total transformation of society which is demanded to achieve it is of crucial importance for the future of the country. The public deserve all of the facts, not just the warped version offered by the BBC.

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For further information about Net Zero Watch and the Global Warming Policy Forum, please visit our website at www.netzerowatch.com.

