

Understanding the IPCC: Global Climate Leadership with Australian Voices

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Climate change affects us all — from shifting weather patterns to rising sea levels and biodiversity loss. But how do we know what's happening, and what can be done? That's where the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) comes in.

What Is the IPCC?

Established in 1988 by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the IPCC is the world's leading authority on climate science. It doesn't conduct original research — instead, it reviews thousands of scientific studies to produce comprehensive reports that help governments, industries, and communities understand climate risks and solutions.

These reports are produced by three Working Groups:

- **WG I:** The physical science of climate change.
- **WG II:** Impacts, adaptation, and vulnerability.
- **WG III:** Mitigation strategies.

Since its first report in 1990, the IPCC has shaped global climate agreements, including the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement. In 2007, it was jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for its efforts to build climate awareness.

A Critical Lens: Where the IPCC Falls Short

Despite its scientific rigor, the IPCC has faced criticism on several fronts:

- **Slow consensus-building:** The IPCC's reports require approval from all member governments, which can dilute urgency and delay publication. For example, the 62nd IPCC session in 2025 ended in gridlock over timelines for the Seventh Assessment Cycle.
- **Underrepresentation of vulnerable voices:** Critics argue that Indigenous knowledge and perspectives from the Global South are often sidelined, despite these communities facing disproportionate climate impacts.
- **Limited enforcement power:** The IPCC provides guidance, not mandates. Its findings are often ignored or underutilized by governments, especially when political or economic interests conflict with climate action.

Success Stories: Global and Australian Impact

Despite these challenges, the IPCC has catalysed meaningful change:

- **Global:** The IPCC's 1.5°C Special Report (2018) galvanized youth movements, corporate pledges, and national targets. It helped shift climate discourse from vague goals to measurable thresholds.
- **Australia:** The Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) spotlighted Australia's vulnerability to extreme heat, bushfires, and biodiversity loss. This contributed to the country's first

National Climate Risk Assessment in 2025, which warned of systemic threats to health, housing, and emergency services.

- **Local adaptation:** IPCC findings have informed regional planning, such as bushfire resilience strategies and water management reforms in Queensland and Victoria.

Australia's Role in the IPCC

Australia continues to contribute through:

- **Scientific leadership:** Researchers like Professor Mark Howden (ANU) serve in senior IPCC roles.
- **Policy engagement:** The federal government supports IPCC participation and integrates findings into climate strategies.
- **Data and modelling:** Australia's unique climate variability enriches global assessments.

The U.S. Position: A Climate Crossroads

As of 2025, the United States under President Donald Trump has taken a more sceptical stance on climate policy. Federal support for international climate agreements has waned, and regulatory rollbacks have weakened domestic climate protections.

This shift has global implications:

- **Reduced momentum:** U.S. disengagement from the Paris Agreement and IPCC processes undermines collective progress.
- **State-level resistance:** Some U.S. states, like California and New York, continue to pursue aggressive climate action, creating a patchwork of policies.
- **Scientific tension:** U.S. agencies remain involved in IPCC research, but political interference has raised concerns about data integrity and transparency.

What You As An Individual Can Do

- Explore IPCC reports at www.ipcc.ch
- Share climate facts with your community.
- Support local adaptation initiatives and policy engagement.
- Stay informed through HOPE's newsletters and advocacy campaigns.

Together, we can turn knowledge into action — and hold institutions accountable.

Sources

1. [Council on Foreign Relations – Global Climate Agreements: Successes and Failures](#)
2. [IPCC Australasia Regional Reports](#)
3. [Australian Geographic – National Climate Risk Assessment](#)
4. [Australian Government – IPCC Contributions](#)
5. [IISD Summary – IPCC 62nd Session](#)