

Inside Climate News

Experts Debunk Viral Post Claiming 1,100 Scientists Say ‘There’s No Climate Emergency’

By Kristoffer Tigue

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To the average consumer of news, the petition’s message might seem reasonable—a healthy dose of skepticism in a debate that affects everyone.

“Computer models are human-made,” the petition begins. “This is precisely the problem of today’s climate discussion to which climate models are central. Climate science has degenerated into a discussion based on beliefs, not on sound self-critical science.”

Dubbed the [World Climate Declaration](#) and allegedly signed by “over 1,100 scientists and professionals,” the petition appears to show a faction of the science community that—concerned the debate surrounding climate change has strayed from empirical evidence and become too political—is courageously breaking from dangerous groupthink to declare that “there is,” in fact, “no climate emergency.”

The declaration, whose top signatory is a Nobel Prize-winning physicist named Ivar Giaever, was shared tens of thousands of times late last week and through the weekend on social media, including by Alex Antic, a senator for Australia’s Liberal Party, who said [in a Thursday post](#) that the declaration “dealt a further blow” to the “green zealots in academia” who claim the science of global warming is mostly a settled matter. His post received more than 8,000 likes and was shared nearly 3,000 times as of this week.

But despite its measured tone and its list of supporters with impressive-sounding titles like professor or doctor, the declaration isn’t what it appears to be, several career climatologists and disinformation experts told Inside Climate News.

Rather, they said, the post seems to be the latest iteration of a broader disinformation campaign that for decades has peddled a series of arguments long discredited by the scientific community at large. Furthermore, the experts told me, the vast majority of the declaration’s signatories have no experience in climate science at all, and the group behind the message—the Climate Intelligence Foundation, or CLINTEL—has well-documented ties to oil money and fossil fuel interest groups.

“Looking at the list of signatories, there are a lot of engineers, medical doctors, and petroleum geologists and almost no actual climate scientists,” said Zeke Hausfather, a longtime research scientist at Berkeley Earth, a non-partisan nonprofit that specializes in analyzing climate data, and the former director of climate and energy programs at the Breakthrough Institute, another independent environmental research firm.

In fact, Ivar Giaever, who has been promoted as a kind of poster child for the declaration in what some believe is meant to give it credibility, won his Nobel with another scientist in 1973 for their discovery of electron tunneling in superconductors, not for anything remotely related to the study of global warming. Other signatories of the petition, [as noted by climate journalist Dave Vetter](#), included at least eight current or former employees of oil giant Shell.

Hausfather, on the other hand, has spent at least a decade of his career analyzing the benefits and limitations of climate models, which use computer simulations of the Earth to predict how rising carbon dioxide levels will affect global temperatures and the environment. In 2019, he led a team of researchers who [published a peer-reviewed study](#) in the science journal *Geophysical Research Letters* that found most of the climate models being used to predict Earth's average surface temperature between 1970 and 2017 have been impressively accurate.

Of the 17 climate models the team studied, [including several developed by NASA](#), 10 predicted outcomes that were consistent with real world observations. In other words, even the most rudimentary models created in the early '70s tracked closely with real-life temperature readings spanning nearly 40 years.

“There are millions of scientists worldwide, so I’m not sure getting 1,000 people to sign a petition is particularly meaningful,” Hausfather said, “particularly when balanced against the massive scientific agreement around climate change, including the national academies of science in pretty much every major country.”

In fact, the term “massive” in this context could be considered an understatement. A 2013 study found that some 97 percent of peer-reviewed research on climate change was in agreement: rapid climate change is happening beyond what would be considered resulting from natural causes, and humans are largely responsible. And in 2021, another study, this one published in the journal *Environmental Research Letters*, analyzed 88,125 peer-reviewed studies on climate change and [found that a jaw-dropping 99.9 percent of them came to the same conclusion](#) as the 2013 study.

It's important to note that the scientific process that governs climate science, and any other academic science, is founded in debate and skepticism, involving a “peer review” process in which experts in a field evaluate the research of their colleagues, attempt to recreate the results of their experiments and seek to poke holes in their methodologies. In that sense, not only have climate models been extensively evaluated over the decades, but “climate science is the most rigorously tested science of all history at this point,” said climate disinformation researcher Michael Khoo.

The World Climate Declaration doesn't just attack climate modeling. It also rehashes several well-known “climate denial” tropes that have long been used in persuasion campaigns that were often traced back to the fossil fuel industry and other players who benefit from unfettered industrial development, said Brendan DeMelle, executive director of Desmog, an investigative climate research organization.

Those tropes include downplaying the role of humans in causing rapid climate change by suggesting natural causes are as much or more of a factor, sowing unfounded doubt in the sciences and implying researchers are pursuing nefarious motives, suggesting that increased CO2 levels in the atmosphere are actually a “good thing” because they help nurture the growth of plants, claiming that global warming doesn't actually impact the frequency and intensity of natural disasters and suggesting that addressing climate change is incompatible with economic stability.

DeMelle, who has been investigating CLINTEL since it was founded in 2019 by retired professor of geophysics Guus Berkhout and journalist Marcel Crok, said the group has circulated identical petitions almost every year. What he's uncovered so far is that CLINTEL, and its co-founder Berkhout, have strong [political, professional and financial connections to the fossil fuel industry and influential right-wing and libertarian think tanks](#), many of which are known for working tirelessly over the years to thwart climate action. Those include organizations like the Heartland Institute and the Cato Institute, both of which are funded by Koch Industry money and promote unobstructed free market ideals, including unfettered fossil fuel development.

What makes last week's campaign different, DeMelle said, is that it appears to be coasting on momentum built in recent years over opposition to government restrictions aimed at curbing the spread of the coronavirus. As governments implemented lockdowns and other science-based strategies to slow infection and death rates, many of the same groups that see climate action as a threat to their bottom line viewed pandemic restrictions in a similar light, he said.

The same groups and public figures that spread narratives of government overreach and accused scientists of being politically motivated during the lockdowns are now "exploiting the pandemic to attack climate science from a new angle," DeMelle told me.

In fact, the Trump administration was highly influential in helping to turn both the pandemic and climate change into top culture war issues in the U.S. Shortly after President Trump took office in 2017, his administration quickly began spreading many of the same "climate denial" tropes that CLINTEL highlights in its declaration, as ICN's political reporter Marianne Lavelle [noted back in 2017](#).

But with President Biden signing the Inflation Reduction Act into law last week, signaling a historic shift in the direction of U.S. energy and environmental policies, DeMelle believes even more disinformation campaigns like CLINTEL's are likely to crop up "out of desperation," which could further exacerbate the nation's already palpable political tensions.

Research published earlier this summer showed that disinformation about climate change [has continued to thrive online](#), even as social media companies promise to crack down on the matter. Many of the posts promoting false or misleading information are framing the issue of climate change through the lens of Western culture wars, the analysis found.

For Michael Mann, whose own modeling work made landmark contributions to climate science, and who has been debunking the claims made in CLINTEL's petition last week [since at least 2012](#), engaging in those arguments now seems to him like a waste of time. And websites like [skepticalscience.com](#) have made it easier than ever to fact check such claims in real time, he said.

"It's irrelevant to the actual conversation that is taking place today about the climate crisis," Mann told me in an email. "Republicans might try to prop up this latest desperate gambit. But the conversation has moved on, and this is really just a distraction and a sideshow."