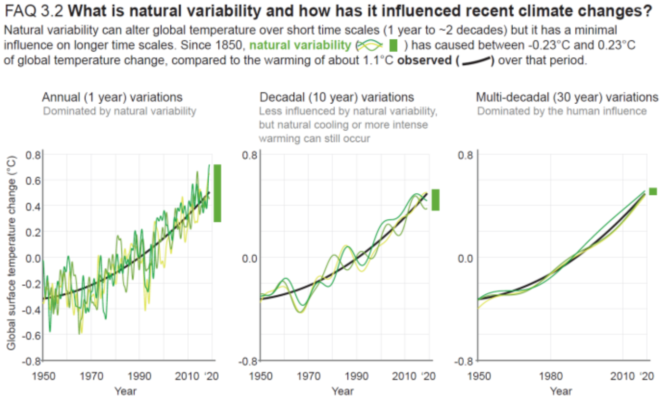
AR6 WGI Report – List of corrigenda to be implemented

The corrigenda listed below will be implemented in the FAQs during copy-editing.

FAQs

Document (Chapter, Annex, Supp. Mat…)	Section	Page :Line (based on the final pdf FGD version)	Detailed info on correction to make
3	FAQ3.2	103:4 & 201:10	Replace “CESM1 large ensemble” with “MPI-ESM grand ensemble”.
3	FAQ3.2	201:2 (Figure 1)	The image should be replaced to  The new figure was uploaded to the Figure Manager.
8	FAQ 8.1	227 :1	Replace “land use changes effect ” by “land use changes affect ”
9	FAQ9.1, Figure 1	131 :9 and 255 :6	Change ‘Table 9.SM.5’ to ‘Table 9.SM.9’.
9	FAQ 9.1	132 : 9	Remove “Table 9.SM.5”
11	FAQ 11.1	117:41	Replace “changes to on be only” with “changes over the globe by only”
11	FAQ 11.1, Figure 1:	343:	Replace “refer” with “refers”
11	FAQ 11.1, Figure 1:	343:	Replace “largest daily rainfall in a year” with “largest daily precipitation in a year”
11	FAQ 11.1, Figure 1:	343:	Replace “CMIP6 ensemble mean” with “CMIP6 ensemble median”

Frequently Asked Questions

FAQ 1.1: Do we understand climate change better now compared to when the IPCC started?

Yes, much better. The first IPCC report, released in 1990, concluded that human-caused climate change would soon become evident, but could not yet confirm that it was already happening. Today, evidence is overwhelming that the climate has indeed changed since the pre-industrial era and that human activities are the principal cause of that change. With much more data and better models, we also understand more about how the atmosphere interacts with the ocean, ice, snow, ecosystems and land surfaces of the Earth. Computer climate simulations have also improved dramatically, incorporating many more natural processes and providing projections at much higher resolutions.

Since the first IPCC report in 1990, large numbers of new instruments have been deployed to collect data in the air, on land, at sea and from outer space. These instruments measure temperature, clouds, winds, ice, snow, ocean currents, sea level, soot and dust in the air, and many other aspects of the climate system. New satellite instruments have also provided a wealth of increasingly fine-grained data. Additional data from older observing systems and even hand-written historical records are still being incorporated into observational datasets, and these datasets are now better integrated and adjusted for historical changes in instruments and measurement techniques. Ice cores, sediments, fossils, and other new evidence from the distant past have taught us much about how Earth's climate has changed throughout its history.

Understanding of climate system processes has also improved. For example, in 1990 very little was known about how the deep ocean responds to climate change. Today, reconstructions of deep ocean temperatures extend as far back as 1871. We now know that the oceans absorb most of the excess energy trapped by greenhouse gases and that even the deep ocean is warming up. As another example, in 1990, relatively little was known about exactly how or when the gigantic ice sheets of Greenland and Antarctica would respond to warming. Today, much more data and better models of ice sheet behaviour reveal unexpectedly high melt rates that will lead to major changes within this century, including substantial sea level rise (see FAQ 9.2).

The major natural factors contributing to climate change on time scales of decades to centuries are volcanic eruptions and variations in the sun's energy output. Today, data show that changes in incoming solar energy since 1900 have contributed only slightly to global warming, and they exhibit a slight downward trend since the 1970s. Data also show that major volcanic eruptions have sometimes cooled the entire planet for relatively short periods of time (typically several years) by erupting aerosols (tiny airborne particles) high into the atmosphere.

The main human causes of climate change are the heat-absorbing greenhouse gases released by fossil fuel combustion, deforestation, and agriculture, which warm the planet, and aerosols such as sulphate from burning coal, which have a short-term cooling effect that partially counteracts human-caused warming. Since 1990, we have more and better observations of these human factors as well as improved historical records, resulting in more precise estimates of human influences on the climate system (see FAQ 3.1).

While most climate models in 1990 focused on the atmosphere, using highly simplified representations of oceans and land surfaces, today's Earth system simulations include detailed models of oceans, ice, snow, vegetation and many other variables. An important test of models is their ability to simulate Earth's climate over the period of instrumental records (since about 1850). Several rounds of such testing have taken place since 1990, and the testing itself has become much more rigorous and extensive. As a group and at large scales, models have predicted the observed changes well in these tests (see FAQ 3.3). Since there is no way to do a controlled laboratory experiment on the actual Earth, climate model simulations can also provide a kind of 'alternate Earth' to test what would have happened without human influences. Such experiments show that the observed warming would not have occurred without human influence. .

Finally, physical theory predicts that human influences on the climate system should produce specific patterns of change, and we see those patterns in both observations and climate simulations. For example, nights are warming faster than days, less heat is escaping to space, and the lower atmosphere (troposphere) is warming but the upper atmosphere (stratosphere) has cooled. These confirmed predictions are all evidence of changes driven primarily by increases in greenhouse gas concentrations rather than natural causes.

[START FAQ 1.1, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 1.1, Figure 1: Sample elements of climate understanding, observations and models as assessed in the IPCC First Assessment Report (1990) and Sixth Assessment Report (2021). Many other advances since 1990, such as key aspects of theoretical understanding, geological records and attribution of change to human influence, are not included in this figure because they are not readily represented in this simple format. Fuller explications of the history of climate knowledge are available in the introductory chapters of the IPCC Fourth and Sixth Assessment Reports.

[END FAQ 1.1, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 1.2: Where is climate change most apparent?

The signs of climate change are unequivocal at the global scale and are increasingly apparent on smaller spatial scales. The high northern latitudes show the largest temperature increase with clear effects on sea ice and glaciers. The warming in the tropical regions is also apparent because the natural year-to-year variations in temperature there are small. Long-term changes in other variables such as rainfall and some weather and climate extremes have also now become apparent in many regions.

It was first noticed that the planet's land areas were warming in the 1930s. Although increasing atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations were suggested as part of the explanation, it was not certain at the time whether the observed warming was part of a long-term trend or a natural fluctuation – global warming had not yet become apparent. But the planet continued to warm, and by the 1980s the changes in temperature had become obvious or, in other words, the signal had *emerged*.

Imagine you had been monitoring temperatures at the same location for the past 150 years. What would you have experienced? When would the warming have become noticeable in your data? The answers to these questions depend on where on the planet you are.

Observations and climate model simulations both demonstrate that the largest long-term warming trends are in the high northern latitudes and the smallest warming trends over land are in tropical regions. However, the year-to-year variations in temperature are smallest in the tropics, meaning that the changes there are also apparent, relative to the range of past experiences (see FAQ 1.2, Figure 1).

Changes in temperature also tend to be more apparent over land areas than over the open ocean and are often most apparent in regions which are more vulnerable to climate change. It is expected that future changes will continue to show the largest signals at high northern latitudes, but with the most apparent warming in the tropics. The tropics also stand to benefit the most from climate change mitigation in this context, as limiting global warming will also limit how far the climate shifts relative to past experience.

Changes in other climate variables have also become apparent at smaller spatial scales. For example, changes in average rainfall are becoming clear in some regions, but not in others, mainly because natural year-to-year variations in precipitation tend to be large relative to the magnitude of the long-term trends. However, extreme rainfall is becoming more intense in many regions, potentially increasing the impacts from inland flooding (see FAQ 8.2). Sea levels are also clearly rising on many coastlines, increasing the impacts of inundation from coastal storm surges, even without any increase in the number of storms reaching land. A decline in the amount of Arctic sea ice is apparent, both in the area covered and in its thickness, with implications for polar ecosystems.

When considering climate-related impacts, it is not necessarily the size of the change which is most important. Instead, it can be the rate of change or it can also be the size of the change relative to the natural variations of the climate to which ecosystems and society are adapted. As the climate is pushed further away from past experiences and enters an unprecedented state, the impacts can become larger, along with the challenge of adapting to them.

How and when a long-term trend becomes distinguishable from shorter-term natural variations depends on the aspect of climate being considered (e.g., temperature, rainfall, sea ice or sea level), the region being considered, the rate of change, and the magnitude and timing of natural variations. When assessing the local impacts from climate change, both the size of the change and the amplitude of natural variations matter.

[START FAQ 1.2, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 1.2, Figure 1: **Observed variations in regional temperatures since 1850** (data from Berkeley Earth). Regions in high latitudes, such as mid-North America (40ºN–64ºN, 140ºW–60ºW, left), have warmed by a larger amount than regions at lower latitudes, such as Tropical South America (10ºS–10ºN, 84ºW–16ºW, right), but the natural variations are also much larger at high latitudes (darker and lighter shading represents 1 and 2 standard deviations, respectively, of natural year-to-year variations). The signal of observed temperature change emerged earlier in Tropical South America than mid-North America even though the changes were of a smaller magnitude. (Note that those regions were chosen because of the longer length of their observational record, see Figure 1.14 for more regions).

[END FAQ 1.2, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 1.3: What can past climate teach us about the future?

In the past, the Earth has experienced prolonged periods of elevated greenhouse gas concentrations that caused global temperatures and sea levels to rise. Studying these past warm periods informs us about the potential long-term consequences of increasing greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

Rising greenhouse gas concentrations are driving profound changes to the Earth system, including global warming, sea level rise, increases in climate and weather extremes, ocean acidification, and ecological shifts (see FAQ 2.2, FAQ 7.1). The vast majority of instrumental observations of climate began during the 20th century, when greenhouse gas emissions from human activities became the dominant driver of changes in Earth's climate (see FAQ 3.1).

As scientists seek to refine our understanding of Earth's climate system and how it may evolve in coming decades to centuries, past climate states provide a wealth of insights. Data about these past states help to establish the relationship between natural climate drivers and the history of changes in global temperature, global sea levels, the carbon cycle, ocean circulation, and regional climate patterns, including climate extremes. Guided by such data, scientists use Earth system models to identify the chain of events underlying the transitions between past climatic states (see FAQ 3.3). This is important because during present-day climate change, just as in past climate changes, some aspects of the Earth system (e.g., surface temperature) respond to changes in greenhouse gases on a time scale of decades to centuries, while others (e.g., sea level and the carbon cycle) respond over centuries to millennia (see FAQ 5.3). In this way, past climate states serve as critical benchmarks for climate model simulations, improving our understanding of the sequences, rates, and magnitude of future climate change over the next decades to millennia.

Analyzing previous warm periods caused by natural factors can help us understand how key aspects of the climate system evolve in response to warming. For example, one previous warm-climate state occurred roughly 125,000 years ago, during the Last Interglacial period, when slight variations in the Earth's orbit triggered a sequence of changes that caused about 1°C–2°C of global warming and about 2–8 m of sea level rise relative to the 1850-1900, even though atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations were similar to 1850-1900 values (FAQ 1.3, Figure 1). Modelling studies highlight that increased summer heating in the higher latitudes of the Northern Hemisphere during this time caused widespread melting of snow and ice, reducing the reflectivity of the planet and increasing the absorption of solar energy by the Earth's surface. This gave rise to global-scale warming, which led in turn to further ice loss and sea level rise. These self-reinforcing positive *feedback cycles* are a pervasive feature of Earth's climate system, with clear implications for future climate change under continued greenhouse gas emissions. In the case of sea level rise, these cycles evolved over several centuries to millennia, reminding us that the rates and magnitude of sea level rise in the 21st century are just a fraction of the sea level rise that will ultimately occur after the Earth system fully adjusts to current levels of global warming.

Roughly 3 million years ago, during the Pliocene Epoch, the Earth witnessed a prolonged period of elevated temperatures (2.5°C–4°C higher than 1850-1900) and higher sea levels (5–25 m higher than 1850-1900), in combination with atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations similar to present-day. The fact that Pliocene atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations were similar to present, while global temperatures and sea levels were significantly higher, reflects the difference between an Earth system that has fully-adjusted to changes in natural drivers (the Pliocene) and one where greenhouse gases concentrations, temperature, and sea level rise are still increasing (present-day). Much about the transition into the Pliocene climate state – in terms of key causes, the role of cycles that hastened or slowed the transition, and the rate of change in climate indicators such as sea level – remain topics of intense study by climate researchers using a combination of paleoclimate observations and Earth system models. Insights from such studies may help to reduce the large uncertainties around estimates of global sea level rise by 2300, which range from 0.3 m to 3 m above 1850-1900 (in a low-emissions scenario) to as much as 16 m higher than 1850-1900 (in a very high-emissions scenario that includes accelerating structural disintegration of the polar ice sheets).

While present-day warming is unusual in the context of the recent geologic past in several different ways (see FAQ 2.1), past warm climate states present a stark reminder that the long-term adjustment to present-day atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations has only just begun. That adjustment will continue over the coming centuries to millennia.

[START FAQ 1.3, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 1.3, Figure 1: Comparison of past, present and future. Schematic of atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations, global temperature, and global sea level during previous warm periods as compared to 1850-1900, present-day (2011-2020), and future (2100) climate change scenarios corresponding to low-emissions scenarios (SSP1-2.6; lighter colour bars) and very high emissions scenarios (SSP5-8.5; darker colour bars).

[END FAQ 1.3, FIGURE 1 HERE]

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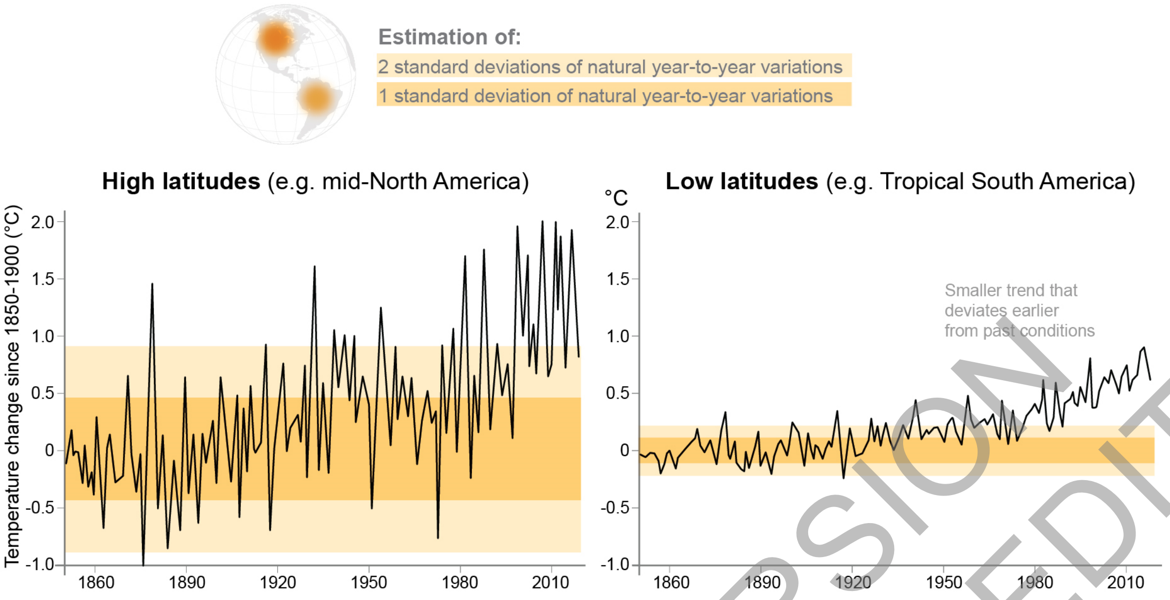
FAQ 1.2: **Where is climate change most apparent?**

Temperature changes are most apparent in regions with smaller natural variations.



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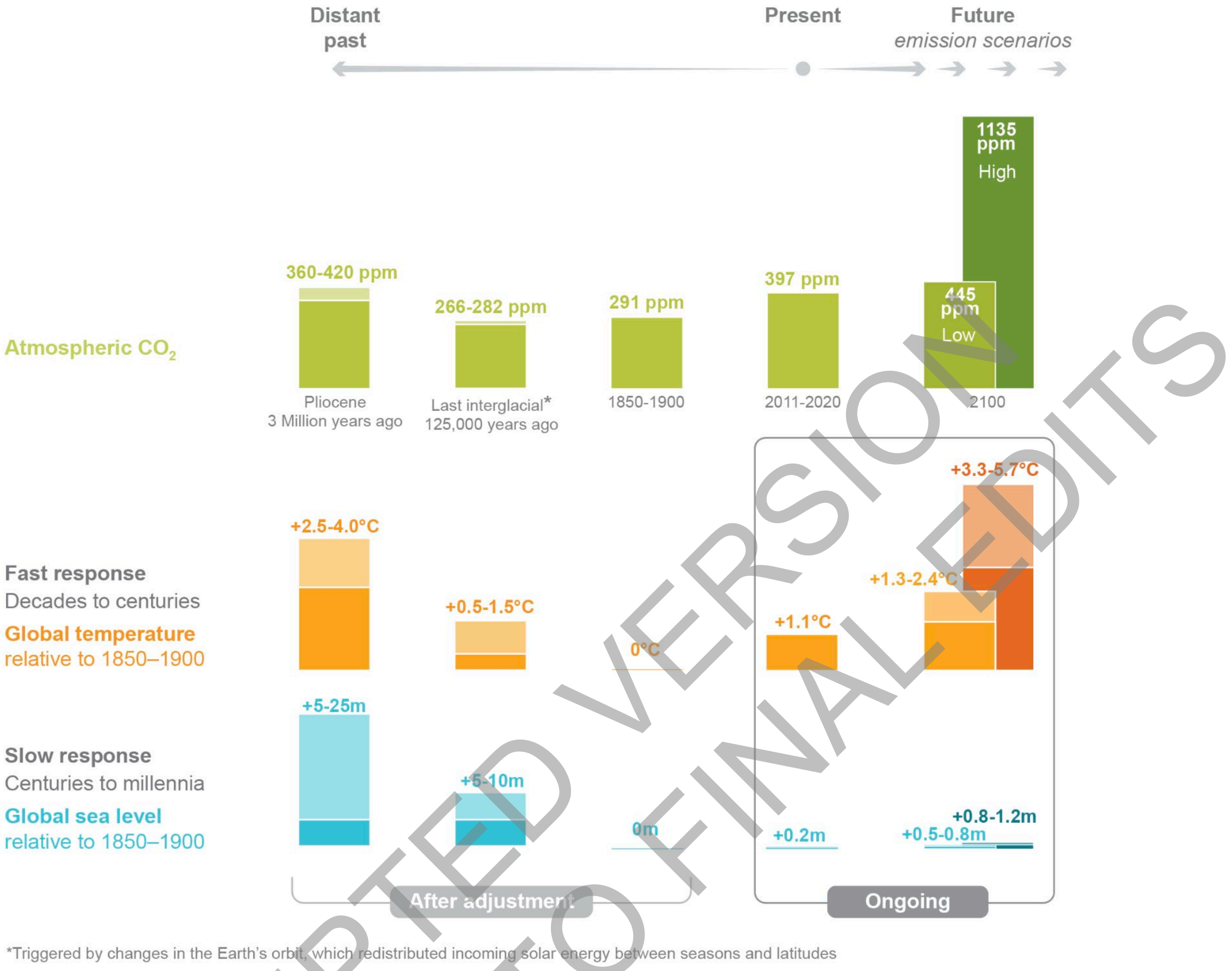
FAQ 1.3: **What can the past tell us about the future?**

Past warm periods inform about the potential consequences of rising greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.



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Frequently asked questions

FAQ 2.1: The Earth's temperature has varied before. How is the current warming any different?

Earth's climate has always changed naturally, but both the global extent and rate of recent warming are unusual. The recent warming has reversed a slow, long-term cooling trend, and research indicates that global surface temperature is higher now than it has been for millennia.

While climate can be characterised by many variables, temperature is a key indicator of the overall climate state, and global surface temperature is fundamental to characterising and understanding global climate change, including Earth's energy budget. A rich variety of geological evidence shows that temperature has changed throughout Earth's history. A variety of natural archives from around the planet, such as ocean and lake sediments, glacier ice and tree rings, shows that there were times in the past when the planet was cooler, and times when it was warmer. While our confidence in quantifying large-scale temperature changes generally decreases the farther back in time we look, scientists can still identify at least four major differences between the recent warming and those of the past.

It's warming almost everywhere. During decades and centuries of the past 2000 years, some regions warmed more than the global average while, at the same time, other regions cooled. For example, between the 10th and 13th centuries, the North Atlantic region warmed more than many other regions. In contrast, the pattern of recent surface warming is globally more uniform than for other decadal to centennial climate fluctuations over at least the past two millennia.

It's warming rapidly. Over the past 2 million years, Earth's climate has fluctuated between relatively warm interglacial periods and cooler glacial periods, when ice sheets grew over vast areas of the northern continents. Intervals of rapid warming coincided with the collapse of major ice sheets, heralding interglacial periods such as the present Holocene Epoch, which began about 12,000 years ago. During the shift from the last glacial period to the current interglacial, the total temperature increase was about 5°C. That change took about 5000 years, with a maximum warming rate of about 1.5°C per thousand years, although the transition was not smooth. In contrast, Earth's surface has warmed approximately 1.1°C since 1850–1900. However, even the best reconstruction of global surface temperature during the last deglacial period is too coarsely resolved for direct comparison with a period as short as the past 150 years. But for the past 2000 years, we have higher-resolution records that show that the rate of global warming during the last 50 years has exceeded the rate of any other 50-year period.

Recent warming reversed a long-term global cooling trend. Following the last major glacial period, global surface temperature peaked by around 6500 years ago, then slowly cooled. The long-term cooling trend was punctuated by warmer decades and centuries. These fluctuations were minor compared with the persistent and prominent warming that began in the mid-19th century when the millennial-scale cooling trend was reversed.

It's been a long time since it's been this warm. Averaged over the globe, surface temperatures of the past decade were probably warmer than when the long cooling trend began around 6500 years ago. If so, we need to look back to at least the previous interglacial period, around 125,000 years ago, to find evidence for multi-centennial global surface temperatures that were warmer than now.

Previous temperature fluctuations were caused by large-scale natural processes, while the current warming is largely due to human causes (see, for example, FAQ 1.3, FAQ 3.1). But understanding how and why temperatures have changed in the past is critical for understanding the current warming and how human and natural influences will interact to determine what happens in the future. Studying past climate changes also makes it clear that, unlike previous climate changes, the effects of recent warming are occurring on top of stresses that make humans and nature vulnerable to changes in ways that they have never before experienced (for example, see FAQ 11.2, FAQ12.3).

[START FAQ 2.1, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 2.1, Figure 1: Evidence for the unusualness of recent warming.

[END FAQ 2.1, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 2.2: What is the evidence for climate change?

The evidence for climate change rests on more than just increasing surface temperatures. A broad range of indicators collectively leads to the inescapable conclusion that we are witnessing rapid changes to many aspects of our global climate. We are seeing changes in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere, and biosphere. Our scientific understanding depicts a coherent picture of a warming world.

We have long observed our changing climate. From the earliest scientists taking meteorological observations in the 16th and 17th centuries to the present, we have seen a revolution in our ability to observe and diagnose our changing climate. Today we can observe diverse aspects of our climate system from space, from aircraft and weather balloons, using a range of ground-based observing technologies, and using instruments that can measure to great depths in the ocean.

Observed changes in key indicators point to warming over land areas. Global surface temperature over land has increased since the late 19th century, and changes are apparent in a variety of societally relevant temperature extremes. Since the mid-1950s the troposphere (i.e., the lowest 6–10 km of the atmosphere) has warmed, and precipitation over land has increased. Near-surface specific humidity (i.e., water vapour) over land has increased since at least the 1970s. Aspects of atmospheric circulation have also evolved since the mid-20th century, including a poleward shift of mid-latitude storm tracks.

Changes in the global ocean point to warming as well. Global average sea surface temperature has increased since the late 19th century. The heat content of the global ocean has increased since the 19th century, with more than 90% of the excess energy accumulated in the climate system being stored in the ocean. This ocean warming has caused ocean waters to expand, which has contributed to the increase in global sea level in the past century. The relative acidity of the ocean has also increased since the early 20th century, caused by the uptake of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, and oxygen loss is evident in the upper ocean since the 1970s.

Significant changes are also evident over the cryosphere – the portion of the Earth where water is seasonally or continuously frozen as snow or ice. There have been decreases in Arctic sea ice area and thickness and changes in Antarctic sea ice extent since the mid-1970s. Spring snow cover in the Northern Hemisphere has decreased since the late-1970s, along with an observed warming and thawing of permafrost (perennially frozen ground). The Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets are shrinking, as are the vast majority of glaciers worldwide, contributing strongly to the observed sea level rise.

Many aspects of the biosphere are also changing. Over the last century, long-term ecological surveys show that many land species have generally moved poleward and to higher elevations. There have been increases in green leaf area and/or mass (i.e., global greenness) since the early 1980s, and the length of the growing season has increased over much of the extratropical Northern Hemisphere since at least the mid-20th century. There is also strong evidence that various phenological metrics (such as the timing of fish migrations) for many marine species have changed in the last half century.

Change is apparent across many components of the climate system. It has been observed using a very broad range of techniques and analysed independently by numerous groups around the world. The changes are consistent in pointing to a climate system that has undergone rapid warming since the industrial revolution.

[START FAQ 2.2, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 2.2, Figure 1: Synthesis of significant changes observed in the climate system over the past several decades. Upwards, downwards and circling arrows indicate increases, decreases and changes, respectively. Independent analyses of many components of the climate system that would be expected to change in a warming world exhibit trends consistent with warming. Note that this list is not comprehensive.

[END FAQ 2.2, FIGURE 1 HERE]

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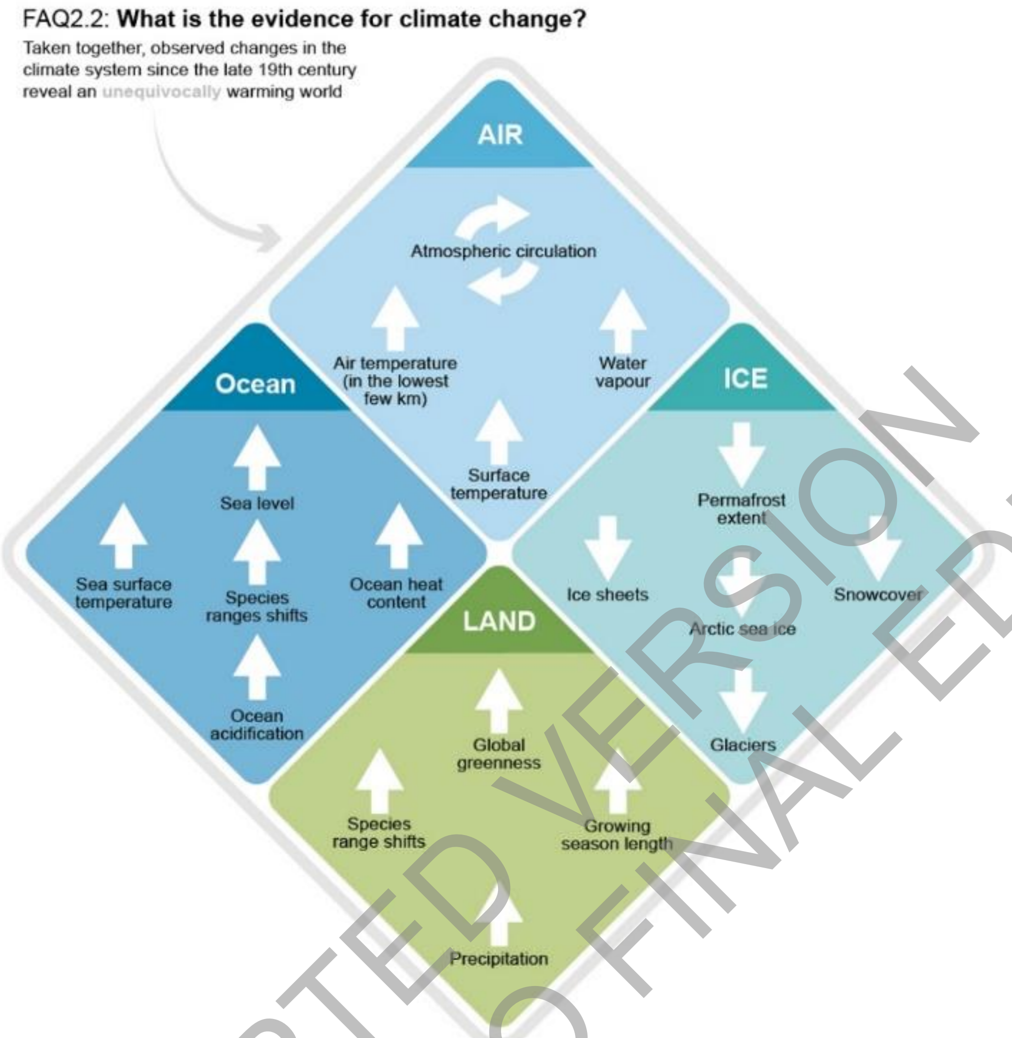

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Frequently Asked Questions

FAQ 3.1: How do we Know Humans are Responsible for Climate Change?

The dominant role of humans in driving recent climate change is clear. This conclusion is based on a synthesis of information from multiple lines of evidence, including direct observations of recent changes in Earth's climate; analyses of tree rings, ice cores, and other long-term records documenting how the climate has changed in the past; and computer simulations based on the fundamental physics that govern the climate system.

Climate is influenced by a range of factors. There are two main natural drivers of variations in climate on timescales of decades to centuries. The first is variations in the sun's activity, which alter the amount of incoming energy from the sun. The second is large volcanic eruptions, which increase the number of small particles (aerosols) in the upper atmosphere that reflect sunlight and cool the surface—an effect that can last for several years (see also FAQ 3.2). The main human drivers of climate change are increases in the atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases and of aerosols from burning fossil fuels, land use and other sources. The greenhouse gases trap infrared radiation near the surface, warming the climate. Aerosols, like those produced naturally by volcanoes, on average cool the climate by increasing the reflection of sunlight. Multiple lines of evidence demonstrate that human drivers are the main cause of recent climate change.

The current rates of increase of the concentration of the major greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide) are unprecedented over at least the last 800,000 years. Several lines of evidence clearly show that these increases are the results of human activities. The basic physics underlying the warming effect of greenhouse gases on the climate has been understood for more than a century, and our current understanding has been used to develop the latest generation climate models (see FAQ 3.3). Like weather forecasting models, climate models represent the state of the atmosphere on a grid and simulate its evolution over time based on physical principles. They include a representation of the ocean, sea ice and the main processes important in driving climate and climate change.

Results consistently show that such climate models can only reproduce the observed warming (black line in FAQ 3.1, Figure 1) when including the effects of human activities (grey band in FAQ 3.1, Figure 1), in particular the increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases. These climate models show a dominant warming effect of greenhouse gas increases (red band, which shows the warming effects of greenhouse gases by themselves), which has been partly offset by the cooling effect of increases in atmospheric aerosols (blue band). By contrast, simulations that include only natural processes, including internal variability related to El Niño and other similar variations, as well as variations in the activity of the sun and emissions from large volcanoes (green band in FAQ 3.1, Figure 1), are not able to reproduce the observed warming. The fact that simulations including only natural processes show much smaller temperature increases indicates that natural processes alone cannot explain the strong rate of warming observed. The observed rates can only be reproduced when human influence is added to the simulations.

Moreover, the dominant effect of human activities is apparent not only in the warming of global surface temperature, but also in the pattern of warming in the lower atmosphere and cooling in the stratosphere, warming of the ocean, melting of sea ice, and many other observed changes. An additional line of evidence for the role of humans in driving climate change comes from comparing the rate of warming observed over recent decades with that which occurred prior to human influence on climate. **Evidence from tree rings and** other paleoclimate records shows that the rate of increase of global surface temperature observed over the past fifty years exceeded that which occurred in any previous 50-year period over the past 2000 years (see FAQ 2.1).

Taken together, this evidence shows that humans are the dominant cause of observed global warming over recent decades.

[START FAQ 3.1, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 3.1, Figure 1: Observed warming (1850-2018) is only reproduced in simulations including human influence. Global surface temperature changes in observations, compared to climate model simulations of the response to all human and natural forcings (grey band), greenhouse gases only (red band), aerosols and other human drivers only (blue band) and natural forcings only (green band). Solid coloured lines show the multi-model mean, and coloured bands show the 5–95% range of individual simulations.

[END FAQ 3.1, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 3.2: What is Natural Variability and How has it Influenced Recent Climate Changes?

Natural variability refers to variations in climate that are caused by processes other than human influence. It includes variability that is internally generated within the climate system and variability that is driven by natural external factors. Natural variability is a major cause of year-to-year changes in global surface climate and can play a prominent role in trends over multiple years or even decades. But the influence of natural variability is typically small when considering trends over periods of multiple decades or longer. When estimated over the entire historical period (1850–2020), the contribution of natural variability to global surface warming of -0.23°C–0.23°C is small compared to the warming of about 1.1°C observed during the same period, which has been almost entirely attributed to the human influence.

Paleoclimatic records (indirect measurements of climate that can extend back many thousands of years) and climate models all show that global surface temperatures have changed significantly over a wide range of time scales in the past. One of these reasons is *natural variability*, which refers to variations in climate that are either *internally* generated within the climate system or *externally* driven by natural changes. Internal natural variability corresponds to a redistribution of energy within the climate system (for example via atmospheric circulation changes similar to those that drive the daily weather) and is most clearly observed as regional, rather than global, fluctuations in surface temperature. External natural variability can result from changes in the Earth's orbit, small variations in energy received from the sun, or from major volcanic eruptions. Although large orbital changes are related to global climate changes of the past, they operate on very long time scales (i.e., thousands of years). As such, they have displayed very little change over the past century and have had very little influence on temperature changes observed over that period. On the other hand, volcanic eruptions can strongly cool the Earth, but this effect is short-lived and their influence on surface temperatures typically fades within a decade of the eruption.

To understand how much of observed recent climate change has been caused by natural variability (a process referred to as attribution), scientists use climate model simulations. When only natural factors are used to force climate models, the resulting simulations show variations in climate on a wide range of time scales in response to volcanic eruptions, variations in solar activity, and internal natural variability. However, the influence of natural climate variability typically decreases as the time period gets longer, such that it only has mild effects on multi-decadal and longer trends (FAQ 3.2, Figure 1).

Consequently, over periods of a couple of decades or less, natural climate variability can dominate the human-induced surface warming trend – leading to periods with stronger or weaker warming, and sometimes even cooling (FAQ 3.2, Figure 1, left and center). Over longer periods, however, the effect of natural variability is relatively small (FAQ 3.2, Figure 1, right). For instance, over the entire historical period (1850–2019), natural variability is estimated to have caused between -0.23°C and +0.23°C of the observed surface warming of about 1.1°C. This means that the bulk of the warming has been almost entirely attributed to human activities, particularly emissions of greenhouse gases (see FAQ 3.1).

Another way to picture natural variability and human influence is to think of a person walking a dog. The path of the walker represents the human-induced warming, while their dog represents natural variability. Looking at global surface temperature changes over short periods is akin to focusing on the dog. The dog sometimes moves ahead of the owner and other times behind. This is similar to natural variability that can weaken or amplify warming on the short term. In both cases it is difficult to predict where the dog will be or how the climate will evolve in the near future. However, if we pull back and focus on the slow steady steps of the owner, the path of the dog is much clearer and more predictable, as it follows the path of its owner. Similarly, human influence on the climate is much clearer over longer time periods.

[START FAQ 3.2, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 3.2, Figure 1: Annual (left), decadal (middle) and multi-decadal (right) variations in average global surface temperature. The thick black line is an estimate of the human contribution to temperature changes, based on climate models, whereas the green lines show the combined effect of natural variations and human-induced warming, different shadings of green represent different simulations, which can be viewed as showing a range of potential pasts. The influence of natural variability is shown by the green bars, and it decreases with longer time scales. The data is sourced from the CESM1 large ensemble.

[END FAQ 3.2, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 3.3: Are Climate Models Improving?

Yes, climate models have improved and continue to do so, becoming better at capturing complex and small-scale processes and at simulating present-day mean climate conditions. This improvement can be measured by comparing climate simulations against historical observations. Both the current and previous generations of models show that increases in greenhouse gases cause global warming. While past warming is well simulated by the new generation models as a group, some individual models simulate past warming that is either below or above what is observed. The information about how well models simulate past warming, as well as other insights from observations and theory, are used to refine this Report's projections of global warming.

Climate models are important tools for understanding past, present and future climate change. They are sophisticated computer programs that are based on fundamental laws of physics of the atmosphere, ocean, ice, and land. Climate models perform their calculations on a three-dimensional grid made of small bricks or *grid cells* of about 100 km across. Processes that occur on scales smaller than the model grid cells (such as the transformation of cloud moisture into rain) are treated in a simplified way. This simplification is done differently in different models. Some models include more processes and complexity than others; some represent processes in finer detail (smaller grid cells) than others. Hence the simulated climate and climate change vary between models.

Climate modelling started in the 1950s and, over the years, models have become increasingly sophisticated as computing power, observations and our understanding of the climate system have advanced. The models used in the IPCC First Assessment Report published in 1990 correctly reproduced many aspects of climate (FAQ 1.1). The actual evolution of the climate since then has confirmed these early projections, when accounting for the differences between the simulated scenarios and actual emissions. Models continue to improve and get better and better at simulating the large variety of important processes that affect climate. For example, many models now simulate complex interactions between different aspects of the Earth system, such as the uptake of carbon by vegetation on land and by the ocean, and the interaction between clouds and air pollutants. While some models are becoming more comprehensive, others are striving to represent processes at higher resolution, for example to better represent the vortices and swirls in currents responsible for much of the transport of heat in the ocean.

Scientists evaluate the performance of climate models by comparing historical model simulations to observations. This evaluation includes comparison of large-scale averages as well as more detailed regional and seasonal variations. There are two important aspects to consider: (1) how models perform individually and (2) how they perform as a group. The average of many models often compares better against observations than any individual model, since errors in representing detailed processes tend to cancel each other out in multi-model averages.

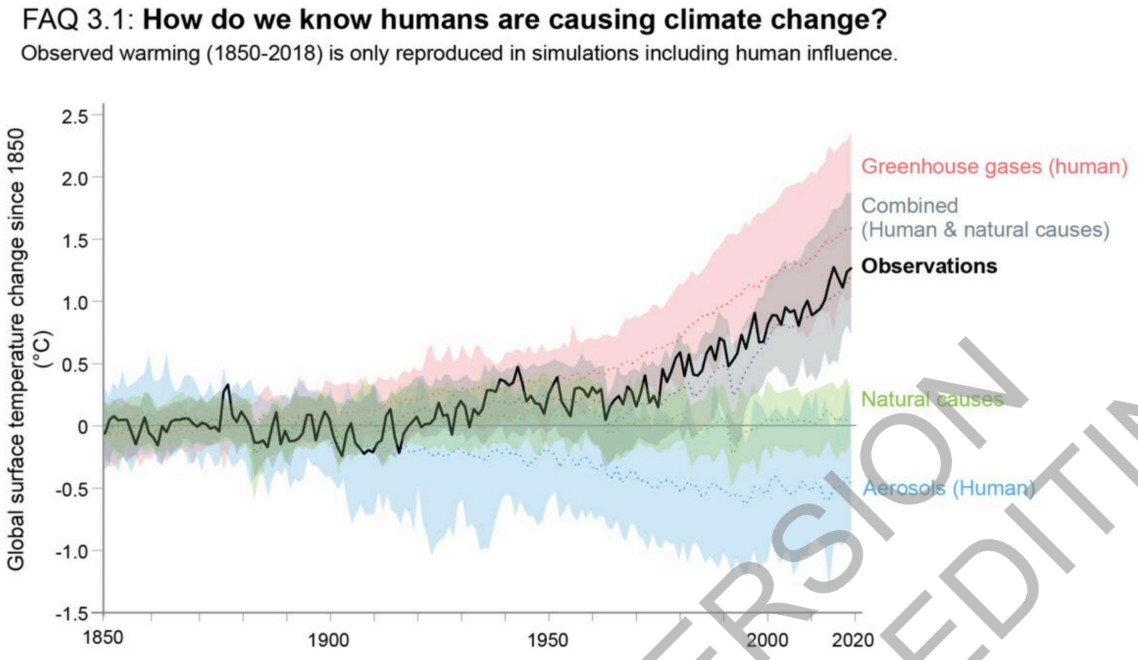
As an example, FAQ 3.3 Figure 1 compares simulations from the three most recent generations of models (available around 2005, 2010 and present) with observations of three climate variables. It shows the correlation between simulated and observed patterns, where a value of 1 represents perfect agreement. Many individual models of the new generation perform significantly better, as indicated by values closer to 1. As a group, each generation out-performs the previous generation: the multi-model average (shown by the longer lines) is progressively closer to 1. The vertical extent of the colored bars indicates the range of model performance across each group. The top of the bar moves up with each generation, indicating improved performance of the best performing models from one generation to the next. In the case of precipitation, the performance of the worst performing models is similar in the two most recent model generations, increasing the spread across models.

Developments in the latest generation of climate models, including new and better representation of physical, chemical and biological processes, as well as higher resolution, have improved the simulation of many aspects of the Earth system. These simulations, along with the evaluation of the ability of the models to simulate past warming as well as the updated assessment of the temperature response to a doubling of CO_2 in the atmosphere, are used to estimate the range of future global warming (FAQ 7.3).

[START FAQ 3.3, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 3.3, Figure 1: Pattern correlations between models and observations of three different variables: surface air temperature, precipitation and sea level pressure. Results are shown for the three most recent generations of models, from the Coupled Model Intercomparison Project (CMIP): CMIP3 (orange), CMIP5 (blue) and CMIP6 (purple). Individual model results are shown as short lines, along with the corresponding ensemble average (long line). For the correlations the yearly averages of the models are compared with the reference observations for the period 1980-1999, with 1 representing perfect similarity between the models and observations. CMIP3 simulations performed in 2004-2008 were assessed in the IPCC Fourth Assessment, CMIP5 simulations performed in 2011-2013 were assessed in the IPCC Fifth Assessment, and CMIP6 simulations performed in 2018-2021 are assessed in this report.

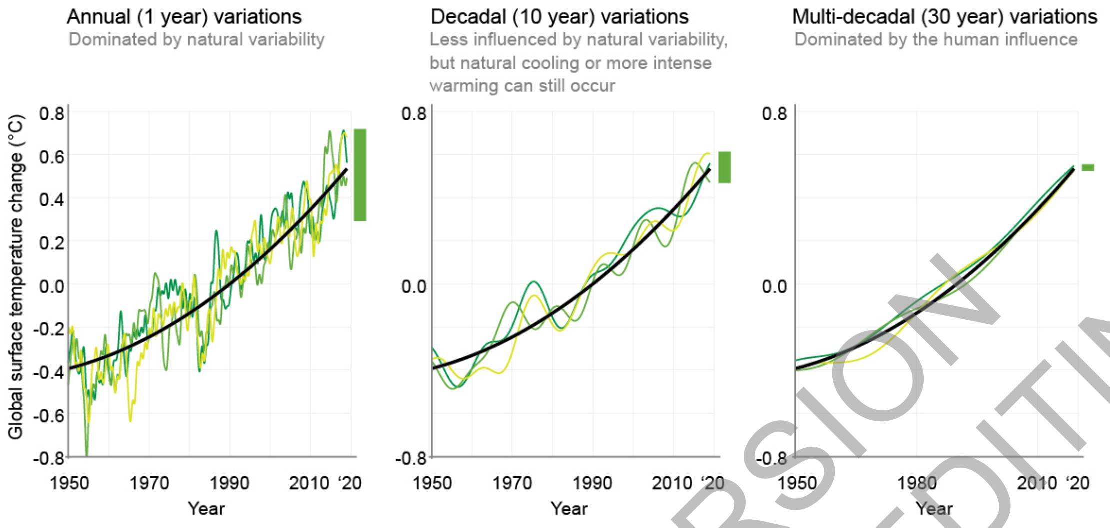
[END FAQ 3.3, FIGURE 1 HERE]



FAQ 3.1, Figure 1: Observed warming (1850-2018) is only reproduced in simulations including human influence. Global surface temperature changes in observations, compared to climate model simulations of the response to all human and natural forcings (grey band), greenhouse gases only (red band), aerosols and other human drivers only (blue band) and natural forcings only (green band). Solid coloured lines show the multi-model mean, and coloured bands show the 5–95% range of individual simulations.

FAQ 3.2 **What is natural variability and how has it influenced recent climate changes?**

Natural variability can alter global temperature over short time scales (1 year to ~2 decades) but it has a minimal influence on longer time scales. Since 1850, **natural variability** (🟩) has caused between -0.23°C and 0.23°C of global temperature change, compared to the warming of about 1.1°C **observed (** **)** over that period.



Annual (1 year) variations
Dominated by natural variability

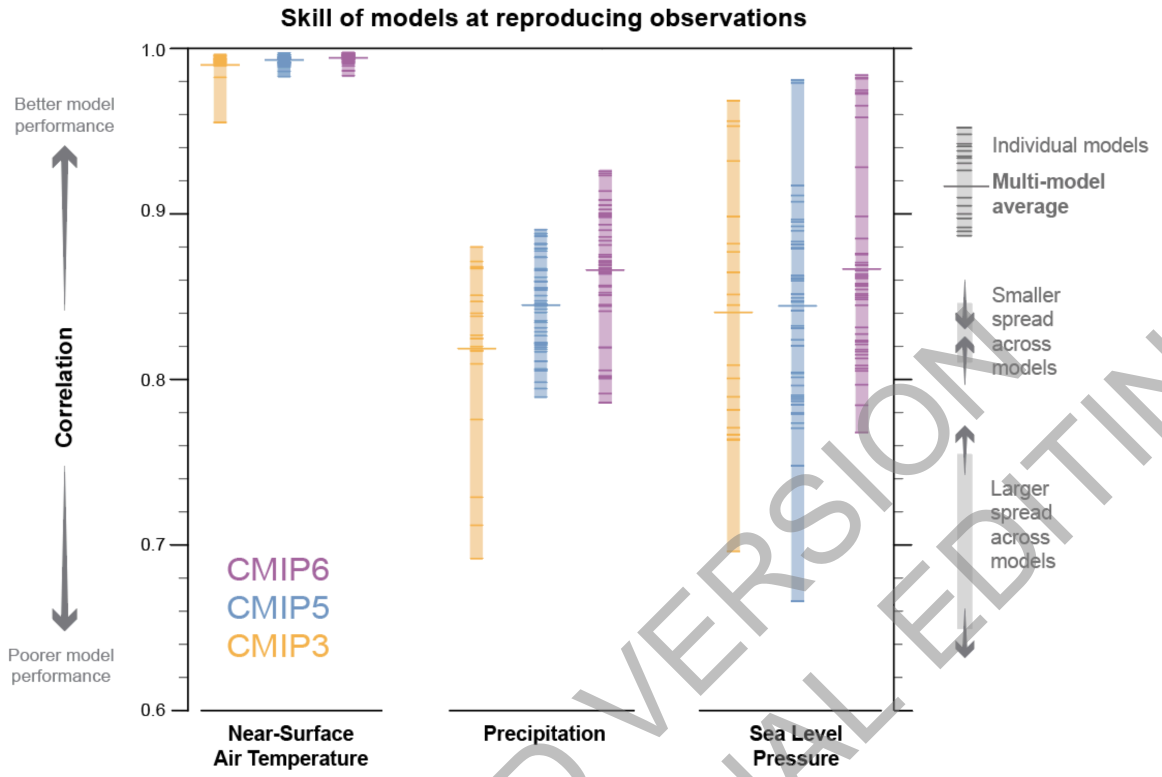
Decadal (10 year) variations
Less influenced by natural variability, but natural cooling or more intense warming can still occur

Multi-decadal (30 year) variations
Dominated by the human influence

FAQ 3.2, Figure 1: Annual (left), decadal (middle) and multi-decadal (right) variations in average global surface temperature. The thick black line is an estimate of the human contribution to temperature changes, based on climate models, whereas the green lines show the combined effect of natural variations and human-induced warming, different shadings of green represent different simulations, which can be viewed as showing a range of potential pasts. The influence of natural variability is shown by the green bars, and it decreases with longer time scales. The data is sourced from the CESM1 large ensemble.

FAQ 3.3: **Are Climate Models Improving?**

Yes, climate models have improved with increasing computer power and better understanding of climate processes.



FAQ 3.3, Figure 1: Pattern correlations between models and observations of three different variables: surface air temperature, precipitation and sea level pressure. Results are shown for the three most recent generations of models, from the Coupled Model Intercomparison Project (CMIP): CMIP3 (orange), CMIP5 (blue) and CMIP6 (purple). Individual model results are shown as short lines, along with the corresponding ensemble average (long line). For the correlations the yearly averages of the models are compared with the reference observations for the period 1980-1999, with 1 representing perfect similarity between the models and observations. CMIP3 simulations performed in 2004-2008 were assessed in the IPCC Fourth Assessment, CMIP5 simulations performed in 2011-2013 were assessed in the IPCC Fifth Assessment, and CMIP6 simulations performed in 2018-2021 are assessed in this report.

Frequently Asked Questions

FAQ 4.1: How Will the Climate Change over the Next Twenty Years?

The parts of the climate system that have shown clear increasing or decreasing trends in recent decades will continue these trends for at least the next twenty years. Examples include changes in global surface temperature, Arctic sea ice cover, and global average sea level. However, over a period as short as twenty years, these trends are substantially influenced by natural climate variability, which can either amplify or attenuate the trend expected from the further increase in greenhouse gas concentrations.

Twenty years are a long time by human standards but a short time from a climate point of view. Emissions of greenhouse gases will continue over the next twenty years, as assumed in all the scenarios considered in this report, albeit with varying rates. These emissions will further increase concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere (see FAQ 4.2), leading to continued trends in global surface warming and other parts of the climate system, including Arctic sea ice and global average sea level (see FAQ 9.2). FAQ 4.1, Figure 1 shows that both global surface temperature rise and the shrinking of sea ice in the Arctic will continue, with little difference between high- and low-emission scenarios over the next 20 years (that is, between the red and blue lines).

However, these expected trends will be overlain by natural climate variability (see FAQ 3.2). First, a major volcanic eruption might occur, such as the 1991 eruption of Mt. Pinatubo on the Philippines; such an eruption might cause a global surface cooling of a few tenths of a degree Celsius lasting several years. Second, both atmosphere and ocean show variations that occur spontaneously, without any external influence. These variations range from localized weather systems to continent- and ocean-wide patterns and oscillations that change over months, years, or decades. Over a period of twenty years, natural climate variability strongly influences many climate quantities, when compared to the response to the increase in greenhouse gas concentrations from human activities. The effect of natural variability is illustrated by the very different trajectories that individual black, red or blue lines can take in FAQ 4.1, Figure 1. Whether natural variability would amplify or attenuate the human influence cannot generally be predicted out to twenty years into the future. Natural climate variability over the next twenty years thus constitutes an uncertainty that at best can be quantified accurately but that cannot be reduced.

Locally, the effect of natural variability would be much larger still. Simulations (not shown here) indicate that, locally, a cooling trend over the next twenty year cannot be ruled out, even under the high-emission scenario – at a small number of locations on Earth, but these might lie anywhere. Globally, though, temperatures would rise under all scenarios.

In summary, while the direction of future change is clear for the two important climate quantities shown here – the global surface temperature and the Arctic sea-ice area in September – the magnitude of the change is much less clear because of natural variability.

[START FAQ 4.1, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 4.1, Figure 1: Simulations over the period 1995–2040, encompassing the recent past and the next twenty years, of two important indicators of global climate change, (top) global surface temperature, and (bottom), the area of Arctic sea ice in September. Both quantities are shown as deviations from the average over the period 1995–2014. The black curves are for the historical period ending in 2014; the blue curves represent a low-emission scenario (SSP1-2.6) and the red curves one high-emission scenario (SSP3-7.0).

[END FAQ 4.1, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 4.2: How Quickly Would We See the Effects of Reducing Carbon Dioxide Emissions?

The effects of substantial reductions in carbon dioxide emissions would not be apparent immediately, and the time required to detect the effects would depend on the scale and pace of emissions reductions. Under the lower-emission scenarios considered in this report, the increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations would slow visibly after about five to ten years, while the slowing down of global surface warming would be detectable after about twenty to thirty years. The effects on regional precipitation trends would only become apparent after several decades.

Reducing emissions of carbon dioxide (CO_2) – the most important greenhouse gas emitted by human activities – would slow down the rate of increase in atmospheric CO_2 concentration. However, concentrations would only begin to decrease when net emissions approach zero, that is, when most or all of the CO_2 emitted into the atmosphere each year is removed by natural and human processes (see FAQ 5.1, FAQ 5.3). This delay between a peak in emissions and a decrease in concentration is a manifestation of the very long lifetime of CO_2 in the atmosphere; part of the CO_2 emitted by humans remains in the atmosphere for centuries to millennia.

Reducing the rate of increase in CO_2 concentration would slow down global surface warming within a decade. But this reduction in the rate of warming would initially be masked by natural climate variability and might not be detected for a few decades (see FAQ 1.2, FAQ 3.2, FAQ 4.1). Detecting whether surface warming has indeed slowed down would thus be difficult in the years right after emissions reductions begin.

The time needed to detect the effect of emissions reductions is illustrated by comparing low- and high-emission scenarios (FAQ 4.2, Figure 1). In the low-emission scenario (SSP1-2.6), CO_2 emissions level off after 2015 and begin to fall in 2020, while they keep increasing throughout the 21st century in the high-emission scenario (SSP3-7.0). The uncertainty arising from natural internal variability in the climate system is represented by simulating each scenario ten times with the same climate model but starting from slightly different initial states back in 1850 (thin lines). For each scenario, the differences between individual simulations are caused entirely by simulated natural internal variability. The average of all simulations represents the climate response expected for a given scenario. The climate history that would actually unfold under each scenario would consist of this expected response combined with the contribution from natural internal variability and the contribution from potential future volcanic eruptions (the latter effect is not represented here).

FAQ 4.2, Figure 1 shows that the atmospheric CO_2 concentrations differ noticeably between the two scenarios about five to ten years after the emissions have begun to diverge in year 2015. In contrast, the difference in global surface temperatures between the two scenarios does not become apparent until later – about two to three decades after the emissions histories have begun to diverge in this example. This time would be longer if emissions were reduced more slowly than in the low-emission scenario illustrated here and shorter in the case of stronger reductions. Detection would take longer for regional quantities and for precipitation changes, which vary more strongly from natural causes. For instance, even in the low-emission scenario, the effect of reduced CO_2 emissions would not become visible in regional precipitation until late in the 21st century.

In summary, it is only after a few decades of reducing CO_2 emissions that we would clearly see global temperatures starting to stabilise. By contrast, short-term reductions in CO_2 emissions, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic, do not have detectable effects on either CO_2 concentration or global temperature. Only sustained emission reductions over decades would have a widespread effect across the climate system.

[START FAQ 4.2, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 4.2, Figure 1: Observing the benefits of emission reductions. (top) Carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions, (middle) CO_2 concentration in the atmosphere and (bottom) effect on global surface temperature for two scenarios: a low-emission scenario (SSP1-2.6, blue) and a high-emission scenario (SSP3-7.0). In the low-emission scenario, CO_2 emissions begin to decrease in 2020 whereas they keep increasing throughout the 21st century in the high-emission scenario. The thick lines are the average of the ten individual simulations (thin line) for each scenario. Differences between individual simulations reflect natural variability.

[END FAQ 4.2, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 4.3: At a given level of global warming, what are the spatial patterns of climate change?

As the planet warms, climate change does not unfold uniformly across the globe, but some patterns of regional change show clear, direct and consistent relationships to increases in global surface temperature. The Arctic warms more than other regions, land areas warm more than the ocean surface, and the Northern Hemisphere more than the Southern Hemisphere. Precipitation increases over high latitudes, tropics and large parts of the monsoon regions, but decreases over the subtropics. For cases like these, we can infer the direction and magnitude of some regional changes – particularly temperature and precipitation changes – for any given level of global warming.

The intensity of climate change will depend on the level of global warming. It is possible to identify certain patterns of regional climate change that occur consistently, but increase in amplitude, across increasing levels of global warming. Such robust spatial patterns of climate change are largely independent of the specific scenario (and pathway in time) that results in a given level of global warming. That is, as long as different scenarios result in the same global warming level, irrespective of the time when this level is attained in each scenario, we can infer the patterns of regional change that would result from this warming. When patterns of changes are robust, regional consequences can be assessed for all levels of global warming, for all future time periods, and for all scenarios. Temperature and precipitation show such robust patterns of changes that are particularly striking.

The high latitudes of the Northern Hemisphere are projected to warm the most, by two to four times the level of global warming – a phenomenon referred to as Arctic amplification (FAQ 4.3 Figure 1, left). Several processes contribute to this high rate of warming, including increases in the absorption of solar radiation due to the loss of reflective sea ice and snow in a warmer world. In the Southern Hemisphere, Antarctica is projected to warm faster than the mid-latitude Southern Ocean, but the Southern Hemisphere high latitudes are projected to warm at a reduced amplitude compared to the level of global warming (FAQ 4.3 Figure 1, left). An important reason for the relatively slower warming of the Southern Hemisphere high latitudes is the upwelling of Antarctic deep waters that drives a large surface heat uptake in the Southern Ocean.

The warming is generally stronger over land than over the ocean, and in the Northern Hemisphere compared to the Southern Hemisphere, and with less warming over the central subpolar North Atlantic and the southernmost Pacific. The differences are the result of several factors, including differences in how land and ocean areas absorb and retain heat, the fact that there is more land area in the Northern Hemisphere than in the Southern Hemisphere, and the influence of ocean circulation. In the Southern Hemisphere, robust patterns of relatively high warming are projected for subtropical South America, southern Africa, and Australia. The relatively strong warming in subtropical southern Africa arises from strong interactions between soil moisture and temperature and from increased solar radiation as a consequence of enhanced subsidence.

Precipitation changes are also proportional to the level of global warming (FAQ 4.3 Figure 1, right), although uncertainties are larger than for the temperature change. In the high latitudes of both the Southern and Northern Hemispheres, increases in precipitation are expected as the planet continues to warm, with larger changes expected at higher levels of global warming (FAQ 4.3 Figure 1, right). The same holds true for the projected precipitation increases over the tropics and large parts of the monsoon regions. General drying is expected over the subtropical regions, particularly over the Mediterranean, southern Africa and parts of Australia, South America, and southwest North America, as well as over the subtropical Atlantic and parts of the subtropical Indian and Pacific Oceans. Increases in precipitation over the tropics and decreases over the subtropics amplify with higher levels of global warming.

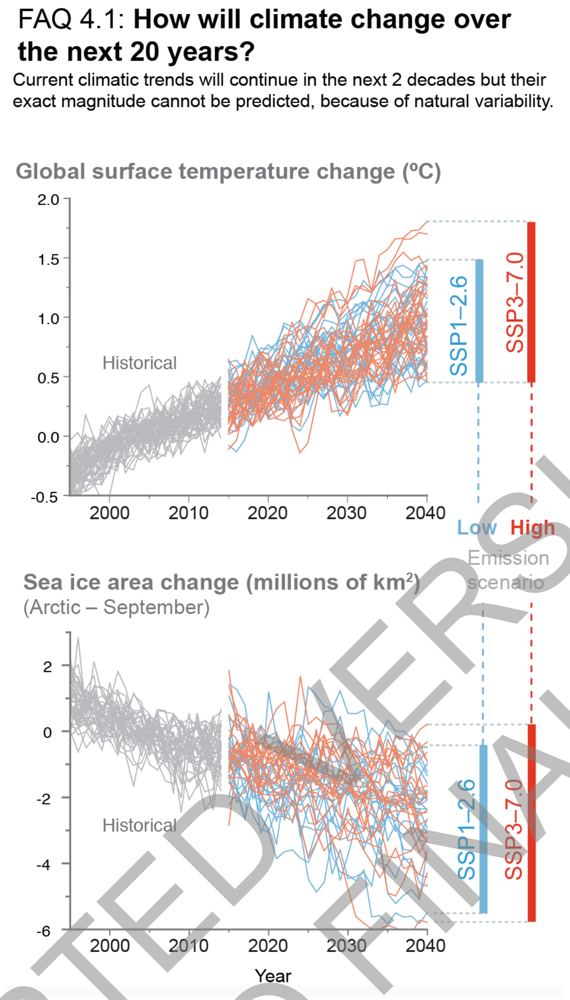
Some regions that are already dry and warm, such as southern Africa and the Mediterranean, are expected to become progressively drier and drastically warmer at higher levels of global warming.

In summary, climate change will not affect all the parts of the globe evenly. Rather, distinct regional patterns of temperature and precipitation change can be identified, and these changes are projected to amplify as the level of global warming increases.

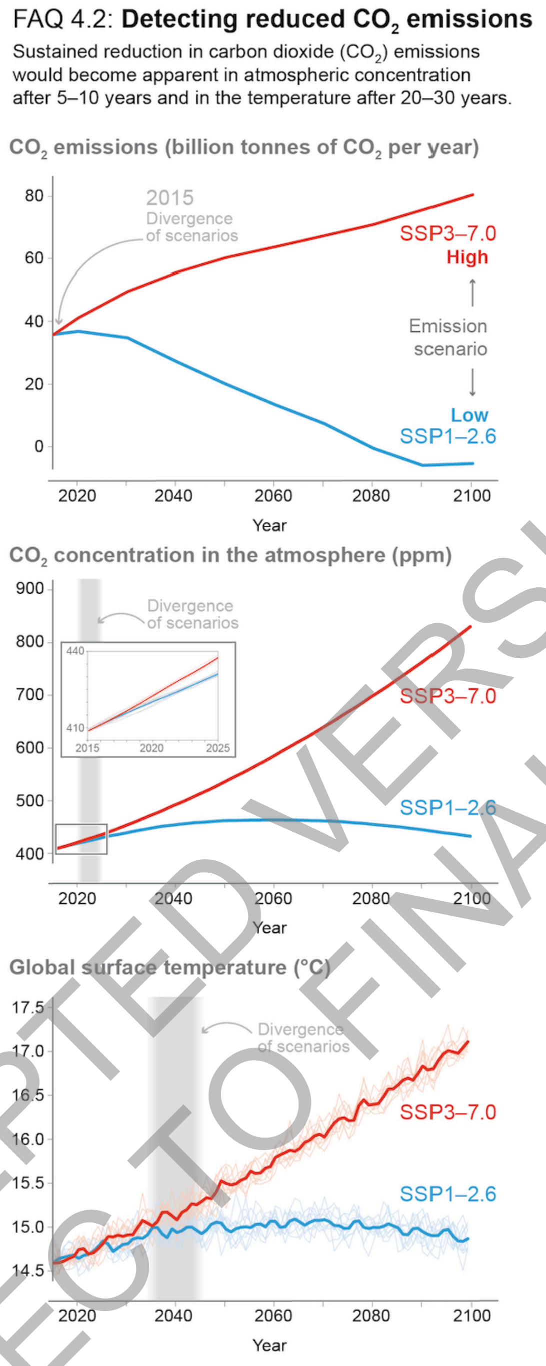
[START FAQ 4.3, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 4.3, Figure 1: Regional changes in temperature (left) and precipitation (right) are proportional to the level of global warming, irrespective of the scenario through which the level of global warming is reached. Surface warming and precipitation change are shown relative to the 1850–1900 climate, and for time periods over which the globally averaged surface warming is 1.5°C (top) and 3°C (bottom), respectively. Changes presented here are based on thirty-one CMIP6 models using the high-emission scenario SSP3-7.0.

[END FAQ 4.3, FIGURE 1 HERE]



FAQ 4.1, Figure 1: Simulations over the period 1995–2040, encompassing the recent past and the next twenty years, of two important indicators of global climate change. (top) global surface temperature, and (bottom), the area of Arctic sea ice in September. Both quantities are shown as deviations from the average over the period 1995–2014. The black curves are for the historical period ending in 2014; the blue curves represent a low-emission scenario (SSP1-2.6) and the red curves one high-emission scenario (SSP3-7.0).



FAQ 4.2: **Detecting reduced CO_2 emissions**

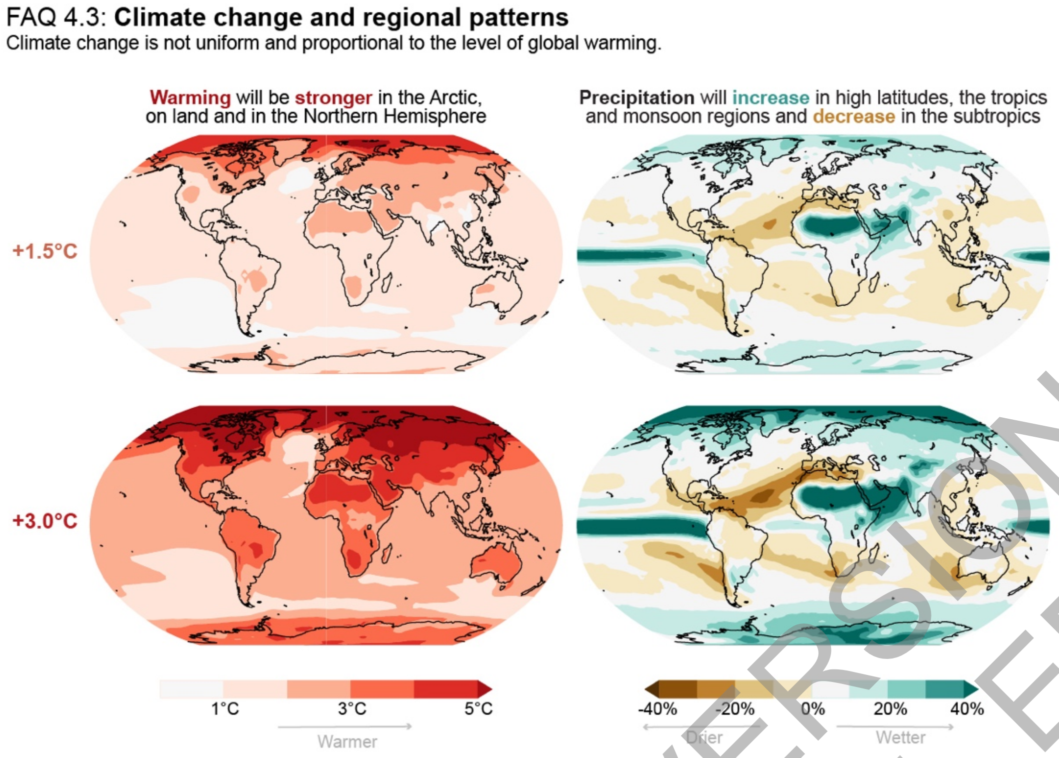
Sustained reduction in carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions would become apparent in atmospheric concentration after 5–10 years and in the temperature after 20–30 years.

CO_2 emissions (billion tonnes of CO_2 per year)

CO_2 concentration in the atmosphere (ppm)

Global surface temperature (°C)

FAQ 4.2, Figure 1: Observing the benefits of emission reductions. (top) Carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions, (middle) CO_2 concentration in the atmosphere and (bottom) effect on global surface temperature for two scenarios: a low-emission scenario (SSP1-2.6, blue) and a high-emission scenario (SSP3-7.0). In the low-emission scenario, CO_2 emissions begin to decrease in 2020 whereas they keep increasing throughout the 21st century in the high-emission scenario. The thick lines are the average of the ten individual simulations (thin line) for each scenario. Differences between individual simulations reflect natural variability.



FAQ 4.3, Figure 1: Regional changes in temperature (left) and precipitation (right) are proportional to the level of global warming, irrespective of the scenario through which the level of global warming is reached. Surface warming and precipitation change are shown relative to the 1850–1900 climate, and for time periods over which the globally averaged surface warming is 1.5°C (top) and 3°C (bottom), respectively. Changes presented here are based on thirty-one CMIP6 models using the high-emission scenario SSP3-7.0.

Frequently Asked Questions

FAQ 5.1: Is the natural removal of carbon from the atmosphere weakening?

For decades, about half of the carbon dioxide (CO_2) that human activities have emitted to the atmosphere has been taken up by natural carbon sinks in vegetation, soils and oceans. These natural sinks of CO_2 have thus roughly halved the rate at which atmospheric CO_2 concentrations have increased, and therefore slowed down global warming. However, observations show that the processes underlying this uptake are beginning to respond to increasing CO_2 in the atmosphere and climate change in a way that will weaken nature's capacity to take up CO_2 in the future. Understanding of the magnitude of this change is essential for projecting how the climate system will respond to future emissions and emission reduction-efforts.

Direct observations of CO_2 concentrations in the atmosphere, which began in 1958, show that the atmosphere has only retained roughly half of the CO_2 emitted by human activities due to the combustion of fossil fuels and land-use change such as deforestation (FAQ 5.1, Figure 1). Natural carbon cycle processes on land and in the oceans have taken up the remainder of these emissions. These land and ocean removals or 'sinks' have grown largely in proportion to the increase in CO_2 emissions, taking up 31% (land) and 23% (ocean) of the emissions in 2010–2019, respectively (FAQ 5.1, Figure 1). Therefore, the average proportion of yearly CO_2 emissions staying in the atmosphere has remained roughly stable at 44 % over the last six decades despite continuously increasing CO_2 emissions from human activities.

On land, it is mainly the vegetation that captures CO_2 from the atmosphere through *plant photosynthesis,* which ultimately accumulates both in vegetation and soils. As more CO_2 accumulates in the atmosphere, plant carbon capture increases through the so-called *CO_2 fertilisation effect* in regions where plant growth is not limited by, for instance, nutrient availability. Climate change affects the processes responsible for the uptake and release of CO_2 on land in multiple ways. Land CO_2 uptake is generally increased by longer growing seasons due to global warming in cold regions and by nitrogen deposition in nitrogen-limited regions. Respiration by plants and soil organisms, natural disturbances such as fires, and human activities such as deforestation all release CO_2 back into the atmosphere. The combined effect of climate change on these processes is to weaken the future land sink. In particular, extreme temperatures and droughts as well as permafrost thaw (see FAQ 5.2) tend to reduce the land sink regionally.

In the ocean, several factors control how much CO_2 is captured: the difference in CO_2 partial pressure between the atmosphere and the surface ocean; wind speeds at the ocean surface; the chemical composition of seawater (that is, its *buffering capacity*), which affects how much CO_2 can be taken up; and the use of CO_2 in photosynthesis by seawater microalgae. The CO_2-enriched surface ocean water is transported to the deep ocean in specific zones around the globe (such as the Northern Atlantic and the Southern Ocean), effectively storing the CO_2 away from the atmosphere for many decades to centuries. The combined effect of warmer surface ocean temperatures on these processes is to weaken the future ocean CO_2 sink.

The ocean carbon sink is better quantified than the land sink thanks to direct ocean and atmospheric carbon observations. The land carbon sink is more challenging to monitor globally, because it varies widely even regionally. There is currently no direct evidence that the natural sinks are slowing down, because observable changes in the fraction of human emissions stored on land or in oceans are small compared to year-to-year and decadal variations of these sinks. Nevertheless, it is becoming more obvious that atmospheric and climate changes are affecting the processes controlling the land and ocean sinks.

Since both the land and ocean sinks respond to the rise in atmospheric CO_2 and to human-induced global warming, the absolute amount of CO_2 taken up by land and ocean will be affected by future CO_2 emissions. This also implies that if countries manage to strongly reduce global CO_2 emissions, or even remove CO_2 from the atmosphere, these sinks will take up less CO_2 because of the reduced human perturbation of the carbon cycle. Under future high-warming scenarios, it is expected that the global ocean and land sinks will stop growing in the second half of the century as climate change increasingly affects them. Thus, both the total amount of CO_2 emitted to the atmosphere and the responses of the natural CO_2 sinks will determine what efforts are required to limit global warming to a certain level (see FAQ 5.4), underscoring how important it is to understand the evolution of these natural CO_2 sinks.

[START FAQ 5.1, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 5.1, Figure 1: Atmospheric CO2 and natural carbon sinks. (Top) Global emissions of CO2 from human activities and the growth rate of CO2 in the atmosphere, (middle) the net land and ocean CO2 removal ("natural sinks"), as well as (bottom) the fraction of CO2 emitted by human activities remaining in atmosphere from 1960 to 2019. Lines are the five years running mean, error-bars denote the uncertainty of the mean estimate. See Table 5.SM.6 for more information on the data underlying this figure.

[END FAQ 5.1, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 5.2: Can thawing permafrost substantially increase global warming?

In the Arctic, large amounts of organic carbon are stored in permafrost – ground that remains frozen throughout the year. If significant areas of permafrost thaw as the climate warms, some of that carbon may be released into the atmosphere in the form of carbon dioxide or methane, resulting in additional warming. Projections from models of permafrost ecosystems suggest that future permafrost thaw will lead to some additional warming – enough to be important, but not enough to lead to a 'runaway warming' situation, where permafrost thaw leads to a dramatic, self-reinforcing acceleration of global warming.

The Arctic is the biggest climate-sensitive carbon pool on Earth, storing twice as much carbon in its frozen soils, or *permafrost*, than is currently stored in the atmosphere. As the Arctic region warms faster than anywhere else on earth, there are concerns that this warming could release greenhouse gases to the atmosphere and therefore significantly amplify climate change.

The carbon in the permafrost has built up over thousands of years, as dead plants have been buried and accumulated within layers of frozen soil, where the cold prevents the organic material from decomposing. As the Arctic warms and soils thaw, the organic matter in these soils begins to decompose rapidly and return to the atmosphere as either carbon dioxide or methane, which are both important greenhouse gases. Permafrost can also thaw abruptly in a given place, due to melting ice in the ground reshaping Arctic landscapes, lakes growing and draining, and fires burning away insulating surface soil layers. Thawing of permafrost carbon has already been observed in the Arctic, and climate models project that much of the shallow permafrost (<3 m depth) throughout the Arctic would thaw under moderate to high amounts of global warming (2°C–4°C).

While permafrost processes are complex, they are beginning to be included in models that represent the interactions between the climate and the carbon cycle. The projections from these permafrost carbon models show a wide range in the estimated strength of a carbon–climate vicious circle, from both carbon dioxide and methane, equivalent to 14–175 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide released per 1°C of global warming. By comparison, in 2019, human activities have released about 40 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. This has two implications. First, the extra warming caused by permafrost thawing is strong enough that it must be considered when estimating the total amount of remaining emissions permitted to stabilise the climate at a given level of global warming (i.e., the remaining carbon budget, see FAQ 5.4). Second, the models do not identify any one amount of warming at which permafrost thaw becomes a 'tipping point' or threshold in the climate system that would lead to a runaway global warming. However, models do project that emissions would continuously increase with warming, and that this trend could last for hundreds of years.

Permafrost can also be found in other cold places (e.g., mountain ranges), but those places contain much less carbon than in the Arctic. For instance, the Tibetan plateau contains about 3% as much carbon as is stored in the Arctic. There is also concern about carbon frozen in shallow ocean sediments. These deposits are known as *methane hydrates* or *clathrates*, which are methane molecules locked within a cage of ice molecules. They formed as frozen soils that were flooded when sea levels rose after the last ice age. If these hydrates thaw, they may release methane that can bubble up to the surface. The total amount of carbon in permafrost-associated methane hydrates is much less than the carbon in permafrost soils. Global warming takes millennia to penetrate into the sediments beneath the ocean, which is why these hydrates are still responding to the last deglaciation. As a result, only a small fraction of the existing hydrates could be destabilised during the coming century. Even when methane is released from hydrates, most of it is expected to be consumed and oxidised into carbon dioxide in the ocean before reaching the atmosphere. The most complete modelling of these processes to date suggests a release to the atmosphere at a rate of less than 2% of current human-induced methane emissions.

Overall, thawing permafrost in the Arctic appears to be an important additional source of heat-trapping gases to the atmosphere, more so than undersea hydrates. Climate and carbon cycle models are beginning to consider permafrost processes. While these models disagree on the exact amount of the heat-trapping gases that will be released into the atmosphere, they agree (i) that the amount of such gases released from permafrost will increase with the amount of global warming, and (ii) that the warming effect of thawing permafrost is significant enough to be considered in estimates of the remaining carbon budgets for limiting future warming.

[START FAQ 5.2, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 5.2, Figure 1: The Arctic permafrost is a big pool of carbon that is sensitive to climate change. (left) Quantity of carbon stored in the permafrost, to 3 m depth (NCSCDv2 dataset) and (right) area of permafrost vulnerable to abrupt thaw (Circumpolar Thermokarst Landscapes dataset).

[END FAQ 5.2, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 5.3: Could climate change be reversed by removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere?

Deliberate removal of carbon dioxide (CO_2) from the atmosphere could reverse *(i.e. change the direction of) some aspects of climate change. However, this will only happen if it results in a net reduction in the total amount of CO_2 in the atmosphere, that is, if deliberate removals are larger than emissions. Some climate change trends, such as the increase in global surface temperature, would start to reverse within a few years. Other aspects of climate change would take decades (e.g., permafrost thawing) or centuries (e.g., acidification of the deep ocean) to reverse, and some, such as sea level rise, would take centuries to millennia to change direction.*

The term *negative carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions* refers to the removal of CO_2 from the atmosphere by deliberate human activities, in addition to the removals that occur naturally, and is often used as synonymous with *carbon dioxide removal*. Negative CO_2 emissions can compensate for the release of CO_2 into the atmosphere by human activities. They could be achieved by strengthening natural CO_2 sequestration processes on land (e.g., by planting trees or through agricultural practices that increase the carbon content of soils) and/or in the ocean (e.g., by restoration of coastal ecosystems) or by removing CO_2 directly from the atmosphere. If CO_2 removals are greater than human-caused CO_2 emissions globally, emissions are said to be *net negative*. It should be noted that CO_2 removal technologies are not yet ready or unable to achieve the scale of removal that would be required to compensate for current levels of emissions, and most have undesired side effects.

In the absence of deliberate CO_2 removal, the CO_2 concentration in the atmosphere (a measure of the amount of CO_2 in the atmosphere) results from a balance between human-caused CO_2 release and the removal of CO_2 by natural processes on land and in the ocean (natural 'carbon sinks') (see FAQ 5.1). If CO_2 release exceeds removal by carbon sinks, the CO_2 concentration in the atmosphere would increase; if CO_2 release equals removal, the atmospheric CO_2 concentration would stabilise; and if CO_2 removal exceeds release, the CO_2 concentration would decline. This applies in the same way to *net* CO_2 emissions that is, the sum of human-caused releases and deliberate removals.

If the CO_2 concentration in the atmosphere starts to go down, the Earth's climate would respond to this change (FAQ 5.3, Figure 1). Some parts of the climate system take time to react to a change in CO_2 concentration, so a decline in atmospheric CO_2 as a result of net negative emissions would not lead to immediate reversal of all climate change trends. Recent studies have shown that global surface temperature starts to decline within a few years following a decline in atmospheric CO_2, although the decline would not be detectable for decades due to natural climate variability (see FAQ 4.2). Other consequences of human-induced climate change such as reduction in permafrost area would take decades, and yet others such as warming, acidification and oxygen loss of the deep ocean would take centuries to reverse following a decline in the atmospheric CO_2 concentration. Sea level would continue to rise for many centuries to millennia, even if large deliberate CO_2 removals were successfully implemented.

A class of future scenarios that is receiving increasing attention, particularly in the context of ambitious climate goals such as the global warming limits of 1.5°C or 2°C included in the Paris Agreement, are so-called 'overshoot' scenarios. In these scenarios, a slow rate of reductions in emissions in the near term is compensated by net negative CO_2 emissions in the later part of this century, which results in a temporary breach or 'overshoot' of a given warming level. Due to the delayed reaction of several climate system components, it follows that the temporary overshoot would result in additional climate changes compared to a scenario that reaches the goal without overshoot. These changes would take decades to many centuries to reverse, with the reversal taking longer for scenarios with larger overshoot.

Removing more CO_2 from the atmosphere than is emitted into it would indeed begin to reverse some aspects of climate change, but some changes would still continue in their current direction for decades to millennia. Approaches capable of large-scale removal of CO_2 are still in the state of research and development or unproven at the scales of deployment necessary to achieve a net reduction in atmospheric CO_2 levels. CO_2 removal approaches, particularly those deployed on land, can have undesired side-effects on water, food production and biodiversity.

[START FAQ 5.3, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 5.3, Figure 1: Changes in aspects of climate change in response to a peak and decline in the atmospheric CO_2 concentration (top panel). The vertical grey dashed line indicates the time of peak CO_2 concentration in all panels. It is shown that the reversal of global surface warming lags the decrease in the atmospheric CO_2 concentration by a few years, the reversal of permafrost area decline lags the decrease in atmospheric CO_2 by decades, and ocean thermal expansion continues for several centuries. Note that the quantitative information in the figure (i.e., numbers on vertical axes) is not to be emphasized as it results from simulations with just one model and will be different for other models. The qualitative behaviour, however, can be expected to be largely model independent.

[END FAQ 5.3, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 5.4: What are carbon budgets?

There are several types of carbon budgets. Most often, the term refers to the total net amount of carbon dioxide (CO_2) that can still be emitted by human activities while limiting global warming to a specified level (e.g., 1.5ºC or 2ºC above pre-industrial levels). This is referred to as the 'remaining carbon budget'. Several choices and value judgments have to be made before it can be unambiguously estimated. When the remaining carbon budget is combined with all past CO_2 emissions to date, a 'total carbon budget' compatible with a specific global warming limit can also be defined. A third type of carbon budget is the 'historical carbon budget', which is a scientific way to describe all past and present sources and sinks of CO_2.

The term *remaining carbon budget* is used to describe the total net amount of CO_2 that human activities can still release into the atmosphere while keeping global warming to a specified level, like 1.5°C or 2°C relative to pre-industrial temperatures. Emissions of CO_2 from human activities are the main cause of global warming. A remaining carbon budget can be defined because of the specific way CO_2 behaves in the Earth system. That is, global warming is roughly linearly proportional to the total net amount of CO_2 emissions that are released into the atmosphere by human activities – also referred to as cumulative anthropogenic CO_2 emissions. Other greenhouse gases behave differently and have to be accounted for separately.

The concept of a remaining carbon budget implies that to stabilize global warming at any particular level, global emissions of CO_2 need to be reduced to net zero levels at some point. Net zero CO_2 emissions describes a situation in which all the anthropogenic emissions of CO_2 are counterbalanced by deliberate anthropogenic removals so that on average no CO_2 is added or removed from the atmosphere by human activities. Atmospheric CO_2 concentrations in such a situation would gradually decline to a long-term stable level as excess CO_2 in the atmosphere is taken up ocean and land sinks (see FAQ 5.1). The concept of a remaining carbon budget also means that if CO_2 emissions reductions are delayed, deeper and faster reductions are needed later to stay within the same budget. If the remaining carbon budget is exceeded, this will result in either higher global warming or a need to actively remove CO_2 from the atmosphere to reduce global temperatures back down to the desired level (see FAQ 5.3).

Estimating the size of remaining carbon budgets depends on a set of choices. These choices include (1) the global warming level that is chosen as a limit (for example, 1.5°C or 2°C relative to pre-industrial levels), (2) the probability with which we want to ensure that warming is held below that limit (for example, a one-in-two, two-in-three, or higher chance), and (3) how successful we are in limiting emissions of other greenhouse gases that affect the climate, such as methane or nitrous oxide. These choices can be informed by science but ultimately represent subjective choices. Once they have been made, we can combine knowledge about how much our planet has warmed already, about the amount of warming per cumulative tonne of CO_2, and about the amount of warming that is still expected once global net CO_2 emissions are brought down to zero to estimate the remaining carbon budget for a given temperature goal. For example, to limit global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels with either a one-in-two (50%) or two-in-three (67%) chance, the remaining carbon budgets amount to 500 and 400 billion tonnes of CO_2, respectively, from 1 January 2020 onward (FAQ 5.4, Figure 1). Currently, human activities are emitting around 40 billion tonnes of CO_2 into the atmosphere in a single year.

The remaining carbon budget depends on how much the world has already warmed to date. This past warming is caused by historical emissions, which are estimated by looking at the *historical carbon budget* – a scientific way to describe all past and present sources and sinks of CO_2. It describes how the CO_2 emissions from human activities have redistributed across the various CO_2 reservoirs of the Earth system. These reservoirs are the ocean, the land vegetation, and the atmosphere (into which CO_2 was emitted). The share of CO_2 that is not taken up by the ocean or the land, and that thus increases the concentration of CO_2 in the atmosphere, causes global warming. The historical carbon budget tells us that of the about 2560 billion tonnes of CO_2 that were released into the atmosphere by human activities between the years 1750 and 2019, about a quarter were absorbed by the ocean (causing ocean acidification) and about a third by the land vegetation. About 45% of these emissions remain in the atmosphere (see FAQ 5.1). Adding these historical CO_2 emissions to estimates of remaining carbon budgets allows one to estimate the *total carbon budget* consistent with a specific global warming level.

In summary, determining a remaining carbon budget – that is, how much CO_2 can be released into the atmosphere while stabilizing global temperature below a chosen level – is well understood but relies on a set of choices. What is clear, however, is that for limiting warming below 1.5°C or 2°C the remaining carbon budget from 2020 onwards is much smaller than the total CO_2 emissions released to date.

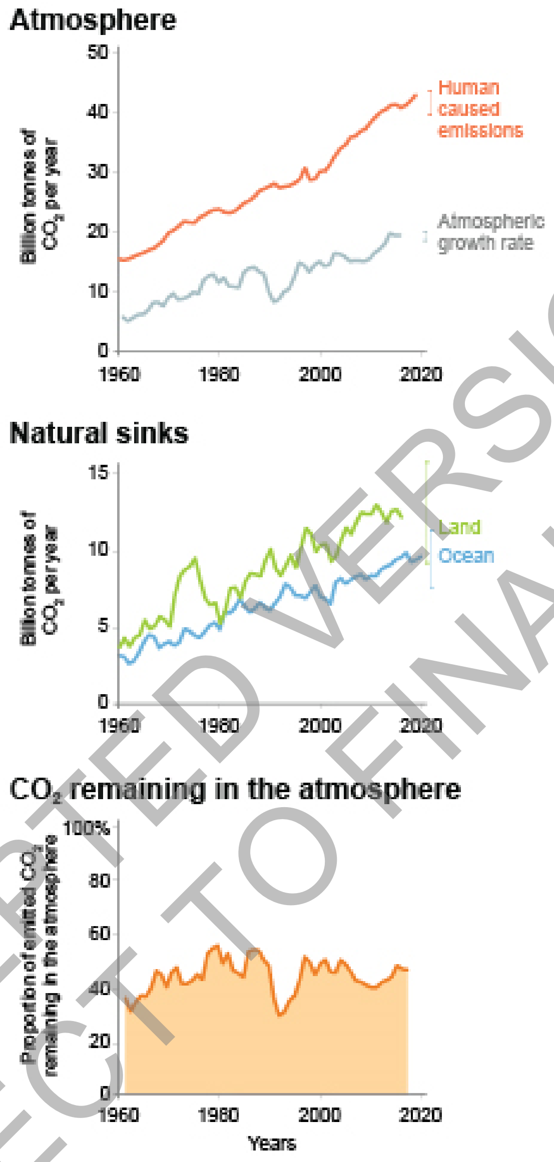
[START FAQ 5.4, FIGURE 1]

FAQ 5.4, Figure 1: Various types of carbon budgets. Historical cumulative CO_2 emissions determine to a large degree how much the world has warmed to date, while the remaining carbon budget indicates how much CO_2 could still be emitted while keeping warming below specific temperature thresholds. Several factors limit the precision with which the remaining carbon budget can be estimated, and estimates therefore need to specify the probability with which they aim at limiting warming to the intended target level (e.g., limiting warming to 1.5°C with a 67% probability).

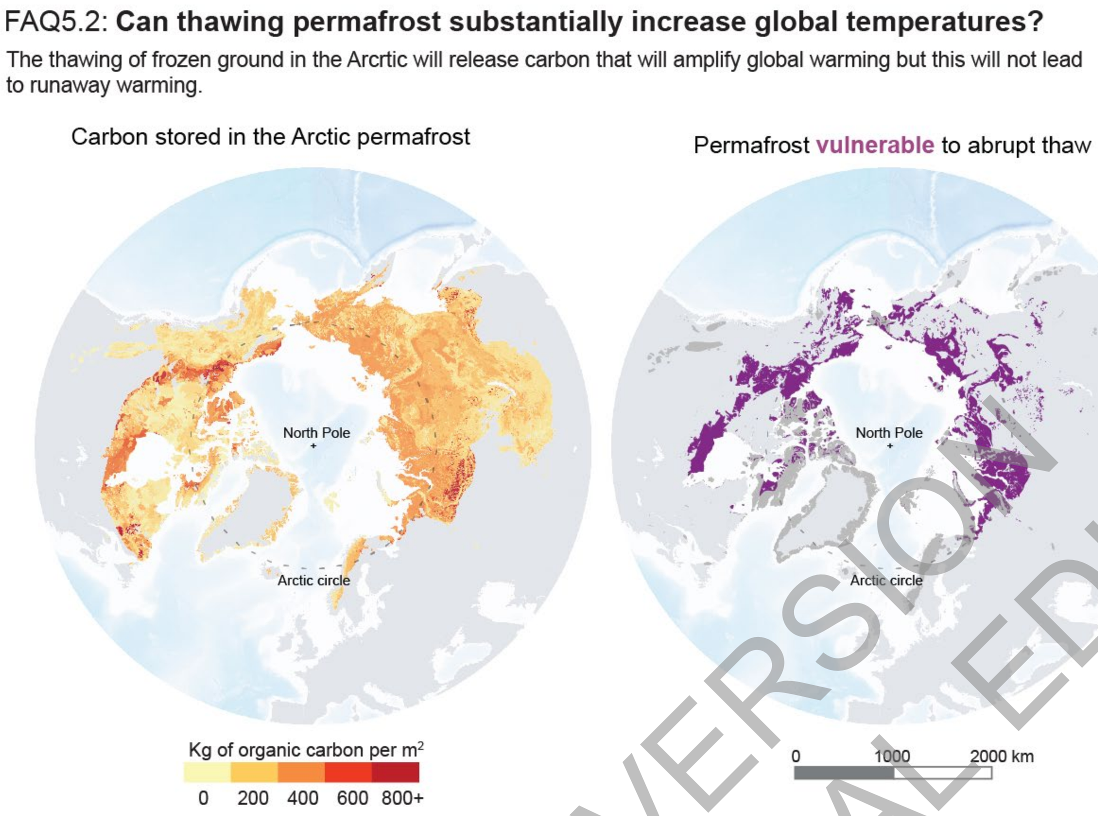
[END FAQ 5.4, FIGURE 1]

FAQ 5.1: Is natural removal of carbon from the atmosphere weakening?

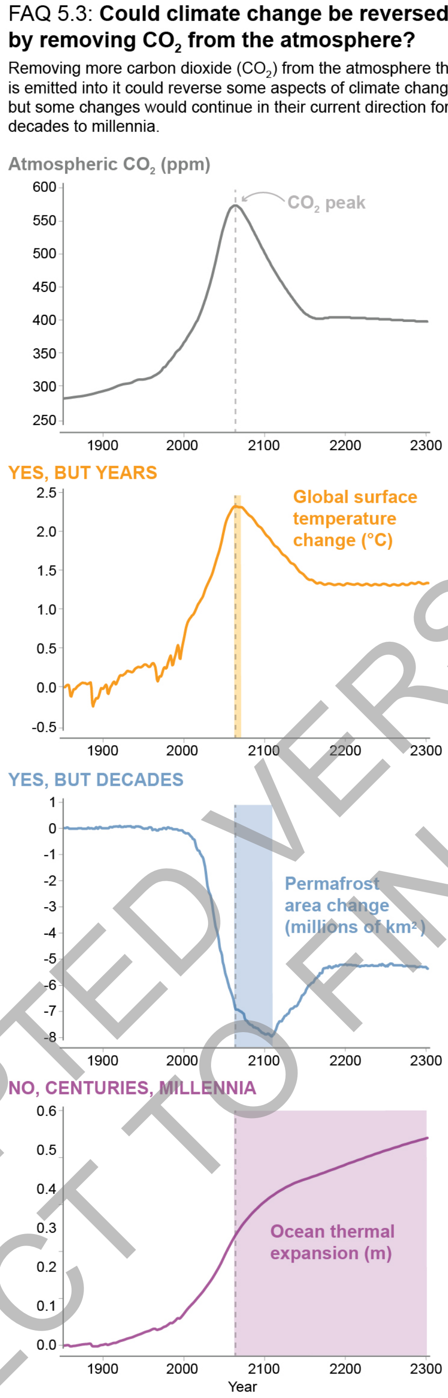
No, natural carbon sinks have taken up a near constant fraction of our carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions over the last six decades. However, this fraction is expected to decline in the future if CO_2 emissions continue to increase.



FAQ 5.1, Figure 1: Atmospheric CO2 and natural carbon sinks. (Top) Global emissions of CO2 from human activities and the growth rate of CO2 in the atmosphere, (middle) the net land and ocean CO2 removal ("natural sinks"), as well as (bottom) the fraction of CO2 emitted by human activities remaining in atmosphere from 1960 to 2019. Lines are the five years running mean, error-bars denote the uncertainty of the mean estimate. See Table 5.SM.6 for more information on the data underlying this figure.



FAQ 5.2, Figure 1: The Arctic permafrost is a big pool of carbon that is sensitive to climate change. (left) Quantity of carbon stored in the permafrost, to 3 m depth (NCSCDv2 dataset) and (right) area of permafrost vulnerable to abrupt thaw (Circumpolar Thermokarst Landscapes dataset).



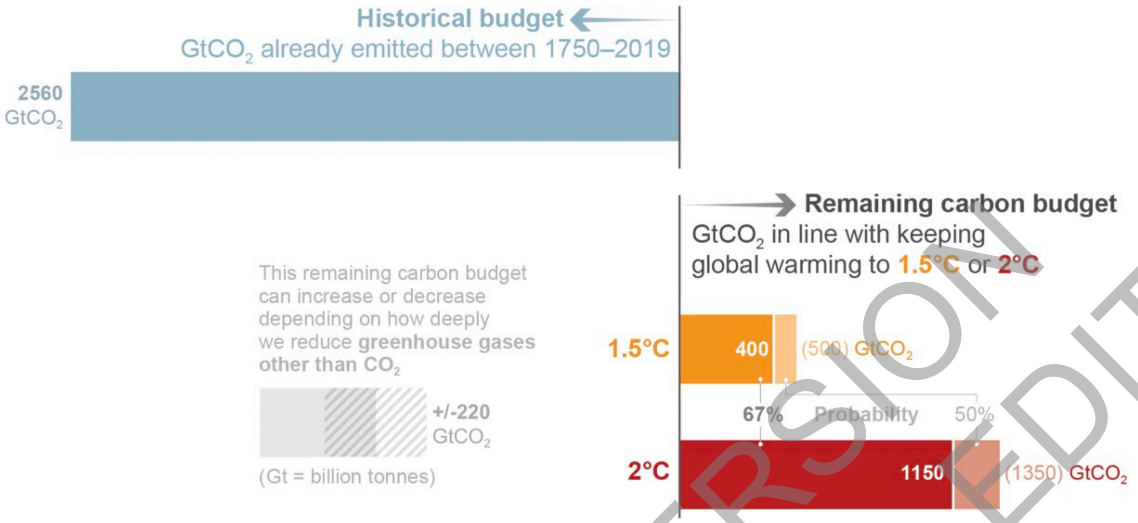
FAQ 5.3: **Could climate change be reversed by removing CO_2 from the atmosphere?**

Removing more carbon dioxide (CO_2) from the atmosphere than is emitted into it could reverse some aspects of climate change, but some changes would continue in their current direction for decades to millennia.

FAQ 5.3, Figure 1: Changes in aspects of climate change in response to a peak and decline in the atmospheric CO_2 concentration (top panel). The vertical grey dashed line indicates the time of peak CO_2 concentration in all panels. It is shown that the reversal of global surface warming lags the decrease in the atmospheric CO_2 concentration by a few years, the reversal of permafrost area decline lags the decrease in atmospheric CO_2 by decades, and ocean thermal expansion continues for several centuries. Note that the quantitative information in the figure (i.e., numbers on vertical axes) is not to be emphasized as it results from simulations with just one model and will be different for other models. The qualitative behaviour, however, can be expected to be largely model independent.

FAQ 5.4: **What are Carbon Budgets?**

The term carbon budget is used in several ways. Most often the term refers to the total net amount of carbon dioxide (CO_2) that can still be emitted by human activities while limiting global warming to a specified level.



FAQ 5.4, Figure 1: Various types of carbon budgets. Historical cumulative CO_2 emissions determine to a large degree how much the world has warmed to date, while the remaining carbon budget indicates how much CO_2 could still be emitted while keeping warming below specific temperature thresholds. Several factors limit the precision with which the remaining carbon budget can be estimated, and estimates therefore need to specify the probability with which they aim at limiting warming to the intended target level (e.g., limiting warming to 1.5°C with a 67% probability).

Frequently Asked Questions

FAQ 6.1: What are short-lived climate forcers and how do they affect the climate?

Short-lived climate forcers (SLCFs) are compounds such as methane and sulphate aerosols that warm or cool the Earth's climate over shorter time scales – from days to years – than greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide, whose climatic effect lasts for decades, centuries or more. Because SLCFs do not remain in the atmosphere for very long, their effects on the climate are different from one region to another and can change rapidly in response to changes in SLCF emissions. As some SLCFs also negatively affect air quality, measures to improve air quality have resulted in sharp reductions in emissions and concentrations of those SLCFs in many regions over the few last decades.

The SLCFs include gases as well as tiny particles called *aerosols*, and they can have a warming or cooling effect on the climate (FAQ 6.1, Figure 1). Warming SLCFs are either greenhouse gases (e.g., ozone or methane) or particles like black carbon (also known as soot), which warm the climate by absorbing energy and are sometimes referred to as *short-lived climate pollutants*. Cooling SLCFs, on the other hand, are mostly made of aerosol particles (e.g., sulphates, nitrates and organic aerosols) that cool down the climate by reflecting away more incoming sunlight.

Some SLCFs do not directly affect the climate but produce climate-active compounds and are referred to as precursors. SLCFs are emitted both naturally and as a result of human activities, such as agriculture or extraction of fossil fuels. Many of the human sources, particularly those based on combustion, produce SLCFs at the same time as carbon dioxide and other long-lived greenhouse gases. Emissions have increased since the start of industrialization, and humans are now the dominant source for several SLCFs and SLCF precursors, such as sulphur dioxide (which produces sulphates) and nitrogen oxides (which produce nitrates and ozone), despite strong reductions over the last few decades in some regions from efforts to improve air quality.

The climatic effect of a chemical compound in the atmosphere depends on two things: (1) how effective it is at cooling or warming the climate (its *radiative efficiency*) and (2) how long it remains in the atmosphere (its *lifetime*). Because they have high radiative efficiencies, SLCFs can have a strong effect on the climate even though they have relatively short lifetimes of up to about two decades after emission. Today, there is a balance between warming and cooling from SLCFs, but this can change in the future.

The short lifetime of SLCFs constrains their effects in both space and time. First, of all the SLCFs, methane and the short-lived halocarbons persist the longest in the atmosphere: up to two decades (FAQ 6.1, Figure 1). This is long enough to mix in the atmosphere and to spread globally. Most other SLCFs only remain in the atmosphere for a few days to weeks, which is generally too short for mixing in the atmosphere, sometimes even regionally. As a result, the SLCFs are unevenly distributed and their effects on the climate are more regional than those of longer-lived gases. Second, rapid (but sustained) changes in emissions of SLCFs can result in rapid climatic effects.

In addition to the direct warming and cooling effects, SLCFs have many other consequences for the climate system and for air quality (see FAQ 6.2). For instance, deposition of black carbon on snow darkens its surface, which subsequently absorbs more solar energy, leading to more melting and more warming. Aerosols also modify the properties of clouds, which has indirect cooling effects on the climate and causes changes in local rainfall (see FAQ 7.2). Climate models indicate that SLCFs have altered atmospheric circulation on local and even hemispheric scales (e.g., monsoons) as well as regional precipitation. For instance, recent observations show that regional weather is influenced by strong regional contrasts in the evolution of aerosol concentrations, particularly over South and East Asia.

Although policies to limit climate change and discussions of the so-called *remaining carbon budgets* primarily focus on carbon dioxide (see FAQ 5.4), SLCFs can significantly affect temperature changes. It is therefore important to understand how SLCFs work and to quantify their effects. Because reducing some of the SLCF emissions, such as methane, can simultaneously reduce warming effects and adverse effects on air quality as well as help attaining Sustainable Development Goals, mitigation of SLCFs is often viewed as a favourable 'win-win' policy option.

[START FAQ 6.1, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 6.1, Figure 1: Main short-lived climate forcers, their sources, how long they exist in the atmosphere, and their relative contribution to global surface temperature changes between 1750 and 2019 (area of the globe). By definition, this contribution depends on the lifetime, the warming/cooling potential (radiative efficiency), and the emissions of each compound in the atmosphere. Blue indicates cooling and orange warming. Note that, between 1750 and 2019, the cooling contribution from aerosols (blue diamonds and globe) was approximately half the warming contribution from carbon dioxide.

[END FAQ 6.1, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 6.2: What are the links between limiting climate change and improving air quality?

Climate change and air quality are intimately linked. Many of the human activities that produce long-lived greenhouse gases also emit air pollutants, and many of these air pollutants are also 'short-lived climate forcers' that affect the climate. Therefore, many options for improving air quality may also serve to limit climate change and vice versa. However, some options for improving air quality cause additional climate warming, and some actions that address climate change can worsen air quality.

Climate change and air pollution are both critical environmental issues that are already affecting humanity. In 2016, the World Health Organization attributed 4.2 million deaths worldwide every year to ambient (outdoor) air pollution. Meanwhile, climate change impacts water resources, food production, human health, extreme events, coastal erosion, wildfires, and many other phenomena.

Most human activities, including energy production, agriculture, transportation, industrial processes, waste management and residential heating and cooling, result in emissions of gaseous and particulate pollutants that modify the composition of the atmosphere, leading to degradation of air quality as well as to climate change. These air pollutants are also *short-lived climate forcers* – substances that affect the climate but remain in the atmosphere for shorter periods (days to decades) than long-lived greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide (see FAQ 6.1). While this means that the issues of air pollution and climate change are intimately connected, air pollutants and greenhouse gases are often defined, investigated and regulated independently of one another in both the scientific and policy arenas.

Many sources simultaneously emit carbon dioxide and air pollutants. When we drive our fossil fuel vehicles or light a fire in the fireplace, it is not just carbon dioxide or air pollutants that are emitted, but always both. It is therefore not possible to separate emissions into two clearly distinct groups. As a result, policies aiming at addressing climate change may have benefits or side-effects for air quality, and vice versa.

For example, some short-term 'win-win' policies that simultaneously improve air quality and limit climate change include the implementation of energy efficiency measures, methane capture and recovery from solid waste management and oil and gas industry, zero-emission vehicles, efficient and clean stoves for heating and cooking, filtering of soot (particulate matter) for diesel vehicles, cleaner brick kiln technology, practices that reduce burning of agricultural waste, and the eradication of burning of kerosene for lighting.

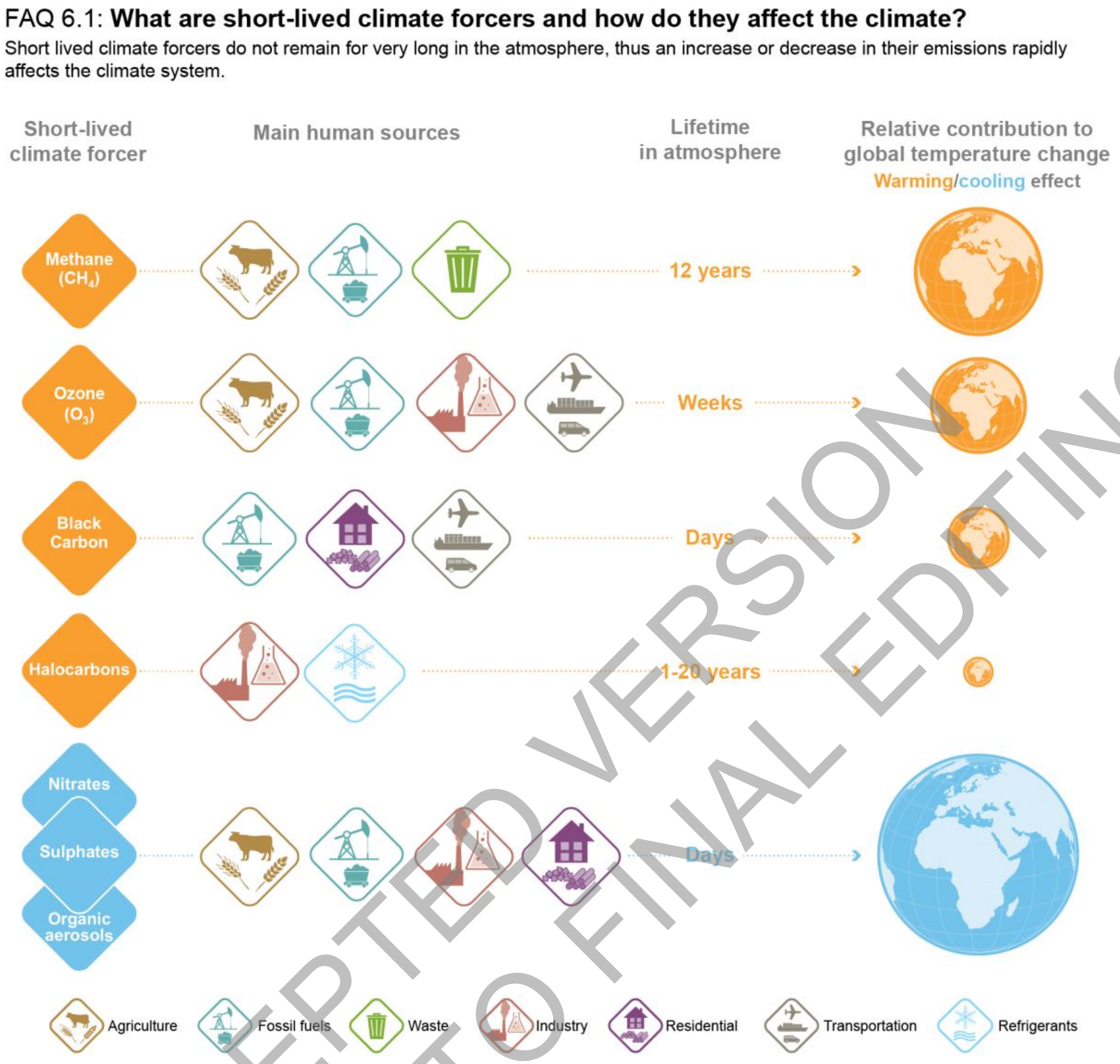
There are, however, also 'win-lose' actions. For example, wood burning is defined as carbon neutral because a tree accumulates the same amount of carbon dioxide throughout its lifetime as is released when wood from that tree is burned. However, burning wood can also result in significant emissions of air pollutants, including carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds, and particulate matter, that locally or regionally affect the climate, human health and ecosystems (FAQ 6.2, Figure 1). Alternatively, decreasing the amount of sulphate aerosols produced by power and industrial plants and from maritime transport improves air quality but results in a warming influence on the climate, because those sulphate aerosols contribute to cooling the atmosphere by blocking incoming sunlight.

Air quality and climate change represent two sides of the same coin, and addressing both issues together could lead to significant synergies and economic benefits while avoiding policy actions that mitigate one of the two issues but worsen the other.

[START FAQ 6.2, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 6.2, Figure 1: Links between actions aiming to limit climate change and actions to improve air quality. Greenhouse gases and aerosols (orange and blue) can affect directly climate. Air pollutants (bottom) can affect the human health, ecosystems and climate. All these compounds have common sources and sometimes interact with each other in the atmosphere which makes impossible to consider them separately (dotted grey arrows).

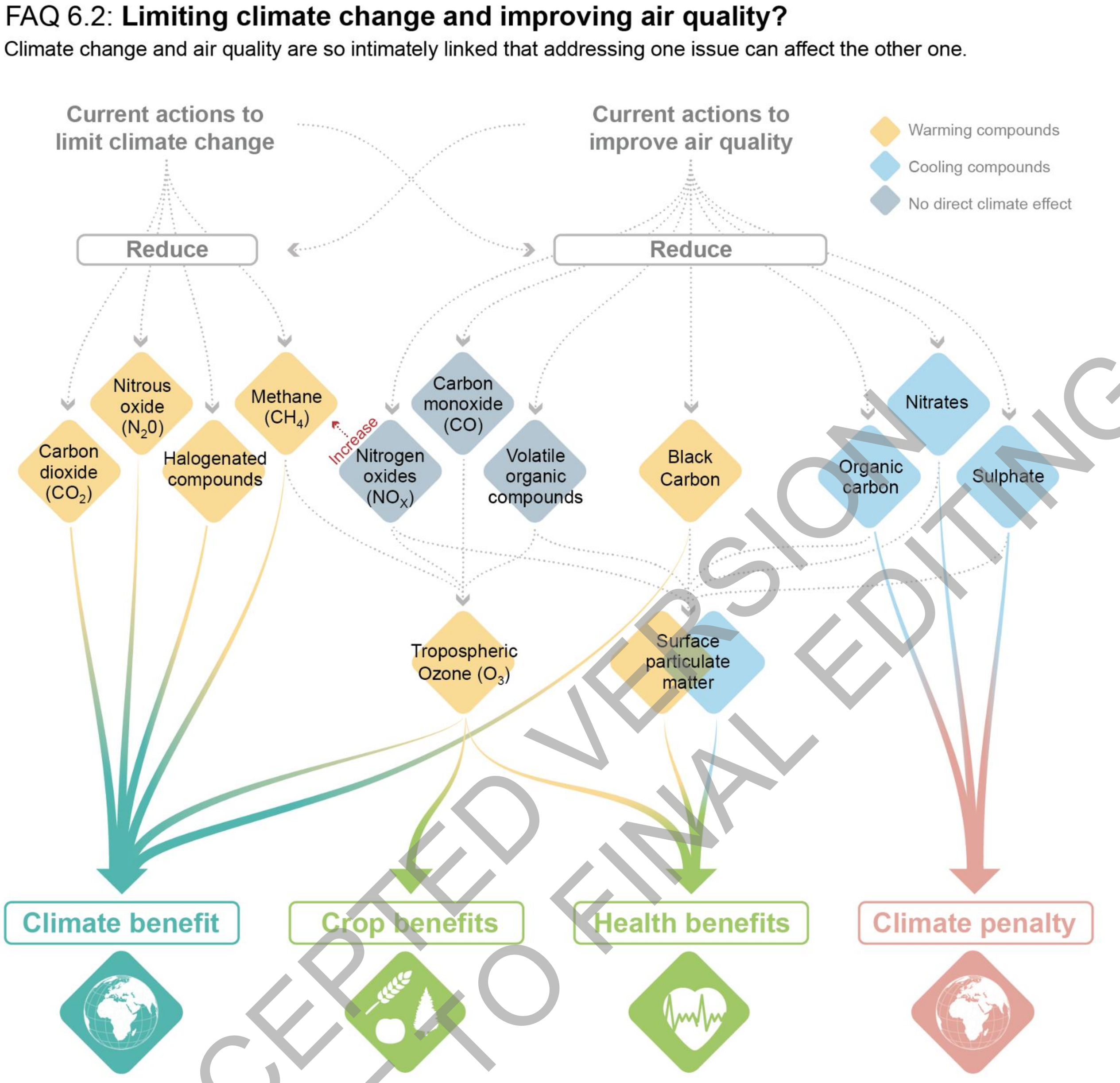
[END FAQ 6.2, FIGURE 1 HERE]



FAQ 6.1: **What are short-lived climate forcers and how do they affect the climate?**

Short lived climate forcers do not remain for very long in the atmosphere, thus an increase or decrease in their emissions rapidly affects the climate system.

FAQ 6.1, Figure 1: Main short-lived climate forcers, their sources, how long they exist in the atmosphere, and their relative contribution to global surface temperature changes between 1750 and 2019 (area of the globe). By definition, this contribution depends on the lifetime, the warming/cooling potential (radiative efficiency), and the emissions of each compound in the atmosphere. Blue indicates cooling and orange warming. Note that, between 1750 and 2019, the cooling contribution from aerosols (blue diamonds and globe) was approximately half the warming contribution from carbon dioxide.



FAQ6.2, Figure 1: Links between actions aiming to limit climate change and actions to improve air quality. Greenhouse gases and aerosols (orange and blue) can affect directly climate. Air pollutants (bottom) can affect the human health, ecosystems and climate. All these compounds have common sources and sometimes interact with each other in the atmosphere which makes impossible to consider them separately (dotted grey arrows).

Frequently Asked Questions

[START FAQ7.1 HERE]

FAQ 7.1: What is the Earth's energy budget, and what does it tell us about climate change?

The Earth's energy budget describes the flow of energy within the climate system. Since at least 1970 there has been a persistent imbalance in the energy flows that has led to excess energy being absorbed by the climate system. By measuring and understanding these energy flows and the role that human activities play in changing them, we are better able to understand the causes of climate change and project future climate change more accurately.

Our planet receives vast amounts of energy every day in the form of sunlight. Around a third of the sunlight is reflected back to space by clouds, by tiny particles called *aerosols*, and by bright surfaces such as snow and ice. The rest is absorbed by the ocean, land, ice, and atmosphere. The planet then emits energy back out to space in the form of thermal radiation. In a world that was not warming or cooling, these energy flows would balance. Human activity has caused an imbalance in these energy flows.

We measure the influence of various human and natural factors on the energy flows at the top of our atmosphere in terms of *radiative forcings*, where a positive radiative forcing has a warming effect and a negative radiative forcing has a cooling effect. In response to these forcings, the Earth system will either warm or cool, so as to restore balance through changes in the amount of outgoing thermal radiation (the warmer the Earth, the more radiations it emits). Changes in Earth's temperature in turn lead to additional changes in the climate system (known as *climate feedbacks*) that either amplify or dampen the original effect. For example, Arctic sea-ice has been melting as the Earth warms, reducing the amount of reflected sunlight and adding to the initial warming (an amplifying feedback). The most uncertain of those climate feedbacks are clouds, as they respond to warming in complex ways that affect both the emission of thermal radiation and the reflection of sunlight. However, we are now more confident that cloud changes, taken together, will amplify climate warming (see FAQ 7.2).

Human activities have unbalanced these energy flows in two main ways. First, increases in greenhouse gas levels have led to more of the emitted thermal radiation being absorbed by the atmosphere, instead of being released to space. Second, increases in pollutants have increased the amount of aerosols such as sulphates in the atmosphere (see FAQ 6.1). This has led to more incoming sunlight being reflected away, by the aerosols themselves and through the formation of more cloud drops, which increases the reflectivity of clouds (see FAQ 7.2).

Altogether, the global energy flow imbalance since the 1970s has been just over half a watt per square metre of the Earth's surface. This sounds small, but because the imbalance is persistent and because Earth's surface is large, this adds up to about 25 times the total amount of primary energy consumed by human society, compared over 1971 to 2018. Compared to the IPCC Fifth Assessment Report, we are now better able to quantify and track these energy flows from multiple lines of evidence, including satellite data, direct measurements of ocean temperatures, and a wide variety of other Earth system observations (see FAQ 1.1). We also have a better understanding of the processes contributing to this imbalance, including the complex interactions between aerosols, clouds and radiation.

Research has shown that the excess energy since the 1970s has mainly gone into warming the ocean (91%), followed by the warming of land (5%) and the melting ice sheets and glaciers (3%). The atmosphere has warmed substantially since 1970, but because it is comprised of thin gases it has absorbed only 1% of the excess energy (FAQ 7.1, Figure 1). As the ocean has absorbed the vast majority of the excess energy, especially within their top two kilometres, the deep ocean is expected to continue to warm and expand for centuries to millennia, leading to long-term sea level rise – even if atmospheric greenhouse gas levels were to decline (see FAQ 5.3). This is in addition to the sea level rise expected from melting ice sheets and glaciers.

Understanding the Earth's energy budget also helps to narrow uncertainty in future projections of climate. By testing climate models against what we know about the Earth's energy budget, we can make more confident projections of surface temperature changes we might expect this century and beyond.

[START FAQ7.1, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ7.1, Figure 1: The Earth's energy budget compares the flows of incoming and outgoing of energy that are relevant for the climate system. Since the at least the 1970s, less energy is flowing out than is flowing in, which leads to excess energy being absorbed by the ocean, land, ice and atmosphere, with the ocean absorbing 91%.

[END FIGURE FAQ7.1, FIGURE 1 HERE]

[END FAQ 7.1 HERE]

[START FAQ 7.2 HERE]

FAQ 7.2: Clouds – What is the role in a warming climate?

One of the biggest challenges in climate science has been to predict how clouds will change in a warming world and whether those changes will amplify or partially offset the warming caused by increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases and other human activities. Scientists have made significant progress over the past decade and are now more confident that changes in clouds will amplify, rather than offset, global warming in the future.

Clouds cover roughly two thirds of the Earth's surface. They consist of small droplets and/or ice crystals, which form when water vapour condenses or deposits around tiny particles called *aerosols* (such as salt, dust, or smoke). Clouds play a critical role in the Earth's *energy budget* at the top of atmosphere and therefore influence Earth's surface temperature (see FAQ 7.1) . The interactions between clouds and the climate are complex and varied. Clouds at low altitudes tend to reflect incoming solar energy back to space, preventing this energy from reaching and warming the Earth and causing a cooling effect. On the other hand, higher clouds tend to trap (i.e., absorb and then emit at a lower temperature) some of the energy leaving the Earth, leading to a warming effect. On average, clouds reflect back more incoming energy than the amount of outgoing energy they trap, resulting in an overall net cooling effect on the present climate. Human activities since the pre-industrial era have altered this climate effect of clouds in two different ways: by changing the abundance of the aerosol particles in the atmosphere and by warming the Earth's surface, primarily as a result of increases in greenhouse gas emissions.

The concentration of aerosols in the atmosphere has markedly increased since the pre-industrial era, and this has had two important effects on clouds. First, clouds now reflect more incoming energy because cloud droplets have become more numerous and smaller. Second, smaller droplets may delay rain formation, thereby making the clouds last longer, although this effect remains uncertain. Hence, aerosols released by human activities have had a cooling effect, counteracting a considerable portion of the warming caused by increases in greenhouse gases over the last century (see FAQ 3.1). Nevertheless, this cooling effect is expected to diminish in the future, as air pollution policies progress worldwide, reducing the amount of aerosols released into the atmosphere.

Since the pre-industrial period, the Earth's surface and atmosphere have warmed, altering the properties of clouds, such as their altitude, amount, and composition (water or ice), thereby affecting the Earth's energy budget and, in turn, changing temperature. This cascading effect of clouds, known as the *cloud feedback,* could either amplify or offset some of the future warming and has long been the biggest source of uncertainty in climate projections. The problem stems from the fact that clouds can change in many ways and that their processes occur on much smaller scales than what global climate models can explicitly represent. As a result, global climate models have disagreed on how clouds, particularly over the subtropical ocean, will change in the future and whether the change will amplify or suppress the global warming.

Since the last IPCC Report in 2013, understanding of cloud processes has advanced with better observations, new analysis approaches and explicit high-resolution numerical simulation of clouds. Also, current global climate models simulate cloud behaviour better than previous models, due both to advances in computational capabilities and process understanding. Altogether, this has helped to build a more complete picture of how clouds will change as the climate warms (FAQ 7.2, Figure 1). For example, the amount of low clouds will reduce over the subtropical ocean, leading to less reflection of incoming solar energy, and the altitude of high clouds will rise, making them more prone to trapping outgoing energy; both processes have a warming effect. In contrast, clouds in high latitudes will be increasingly made of water droplets rather than ice crystals. This shift from fewer, larger ice crystals to smaller but more numerous water droplets will result in more of the incoming solar energy being reflected back to space and produce a cooling effect. Better understanding of how clouds respond to warming has led to more confidence than before that future changes in clouds will, overall, cause additional warming (i.e., by weakening the current cooling effect of clouds). This is called a *positive net cloud feedback.*

In summary, clouds will amplify rather than suppress the warming of the climate system in the future, as more greenhouse gases and fewer aerosols are released to the atmosphere by human activities.

[START FAQ7.2, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ7.2, Figure 1: Interactions between clouds and the climate today and in a warmer future. Global warming is expected to alter the altitude (left) and the amount (centre) of clouds, which will amplify warming. On the other hand, cloud composition will change (right), offsetting some of the warming. Overall clouds are expected to amplify future warming.

[END FAQ7.2, FIGURE 1 HERE]

[END FAQ 7.2 HERE]

FAQ 7.3: What is equilibrium climate sensitivity and how does it relate to future warming?

For a given future scenario, climate models project a range of changes in global surface temperature. This range is closely related to equilibrium climate sensitivity, or ECS, which measures how climate models respond to a doubling of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Models with high climate sensitivity project stronger future warming. Some climate models of the new generation are more sensitive than the range assessed in the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report. This leads to end-of-century global warming in some simulations of up to 2°C–3°C above the current IPCC best estimate. Although these higher warming levels are not expected to occur, high-ECS models are useful for exploring high impact, low-likelihood futures.

The *equilibrium climate sensitivity* (ECS) is defined as the long-term global warming caused by a doubling of carbon dioxide above its pre-industrial concentration. For a given emission scenario, much of the uncertainty in projections of future warming can be explained by the uncertainty in ECS (FAQ 7.3, Figure 1). The significance of equilibrium climate sensitivity has long been recognised, and the first estimate was presented by Swedish scientist Svante Arrhenius in 1896.

This Sixth Assessment Report concludes that there is a 90% or more chance (*very likely*) that the ECS is between 2°C and 5°C. This represents a significant reduction in uncertainty compared to the Fifth Assessment Report, which gave a 66% chance (*likely*) of ECS being between 1.5°C and 4.5°C. This reduction in uncertainty has been possible not through a single breakthrough or discovery but instead by combining evidence from many different sources and by better understanding their strengths and weaknesses.

There are four main lines of evidence for ECS. First, the self-reinforcing processes, called *feedback loops,* that amplify or dampen the warming in response to increasing carbon dioxide are now better understood. For example, warming in the Arctic melts sea ice, resulting in more open ocean area, which is darker and therefore absorbs more sunlight, further intensifying the initial warming. It remains challenging to represent realistically all the processes involved in these feedback loops, particularly those related to clouds (see FAQ 7.2). Such identified model errors are now taken into account, and other known, but generally weak, feedback loops that are usually not included in models are now included in the assessment of ECS.

Second, historical warming since early industrialisation provides strong evidence that climate sensitivity is not small. Since 1850, the concentration of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases have increased, and as a result the Earth has warmed by about 1.1ºC. However, relying on this industrial-era warming to estimate ECS is challenging, partly because some of the warming from greenhouse gases was offset by cooling from aerosol particles and partly because the ocean are still responding to past increases in carbon dioxide.

Third, evidence from ancient climates that had reached equilibrium with greenhouse gas concentrations, such as the coldest period of the last ice age around 20,000 years ago, or warmer periods further back in time, provide useful data on the ECS of the climate system (see FAQ 1.3). Fourth, statistical approaches linking model ECS values with observed changes, such as global warming since the 1970s, provide complementary evidence.

All four lines of evidence rely, to some extent, on climate models, and interpreting the evidence often benefits from model diversity and spread in modelled climate sensitivity. Furthermore, high-sensitivity models can provide important insights into futures that have a low likelihood of occurring but that could result in large impacts. But, unlike in previous assessments, climate models are not considered a line of evidence in their own right in the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report.

The ECS of the latest climate models is, on average, higher than that of the previous generation of models and also higher than this report's best estimate of 3.0°C. Furthermore, the ECS values in some of the new models are both above and below the 2°C to 5°C *very likely* range, and although such models cannot be ruled out as implausible solely based on their ECS, some of them do display climate change that is inconsistent with the observed when tested with ancient climates. A slight mismatch with models is only natural because the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report is based on observations and an improved understanding of the climate system.

[START FAQ 7.3, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ7.3, Figure 1: Equilibrium climate sensitivity and future warming. (left) Equilibrium climate sensitivities for the current generation (sixth climate model intercomparison project, CMIP6) climate models, and the previous (CMIP5) generation. The assessed range in this report (AR6) is also shown. (right) Climate projections of CMIP5, CMIP6, and AR6 for the very high-emission scenarios RCP8.5, and SSP5-8.5, respectively. The thick horizontal lines represent the multi-model average and the thin horizontal lines the results of individual models. The boxes represent the model ranges for CMIP5 and CMIP6 and the range assessed in AR6.

[END FAQ 7.3, FIGURE 1 HERE]

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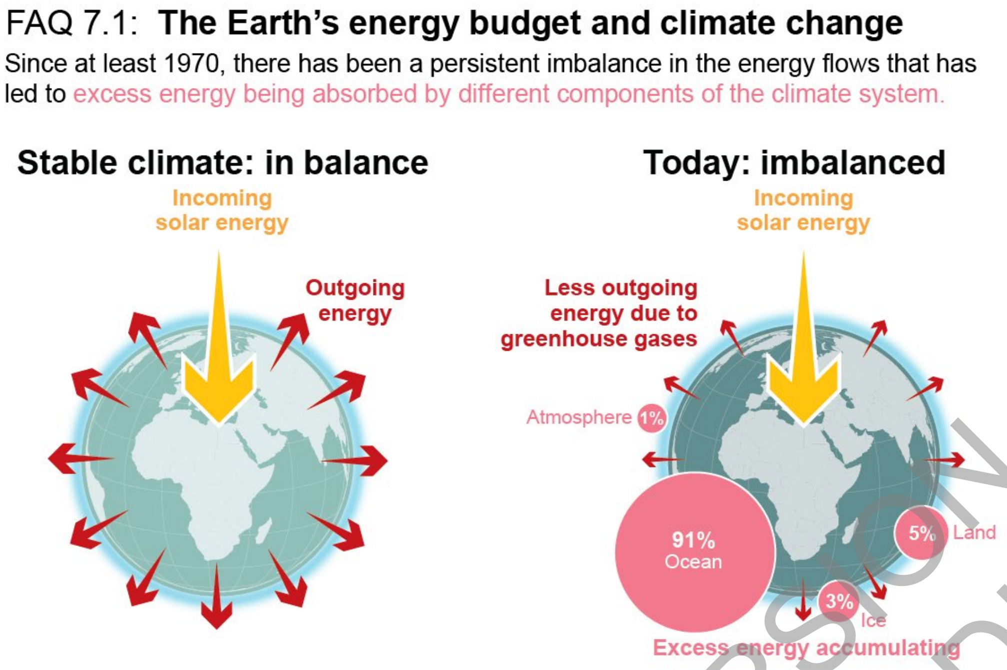
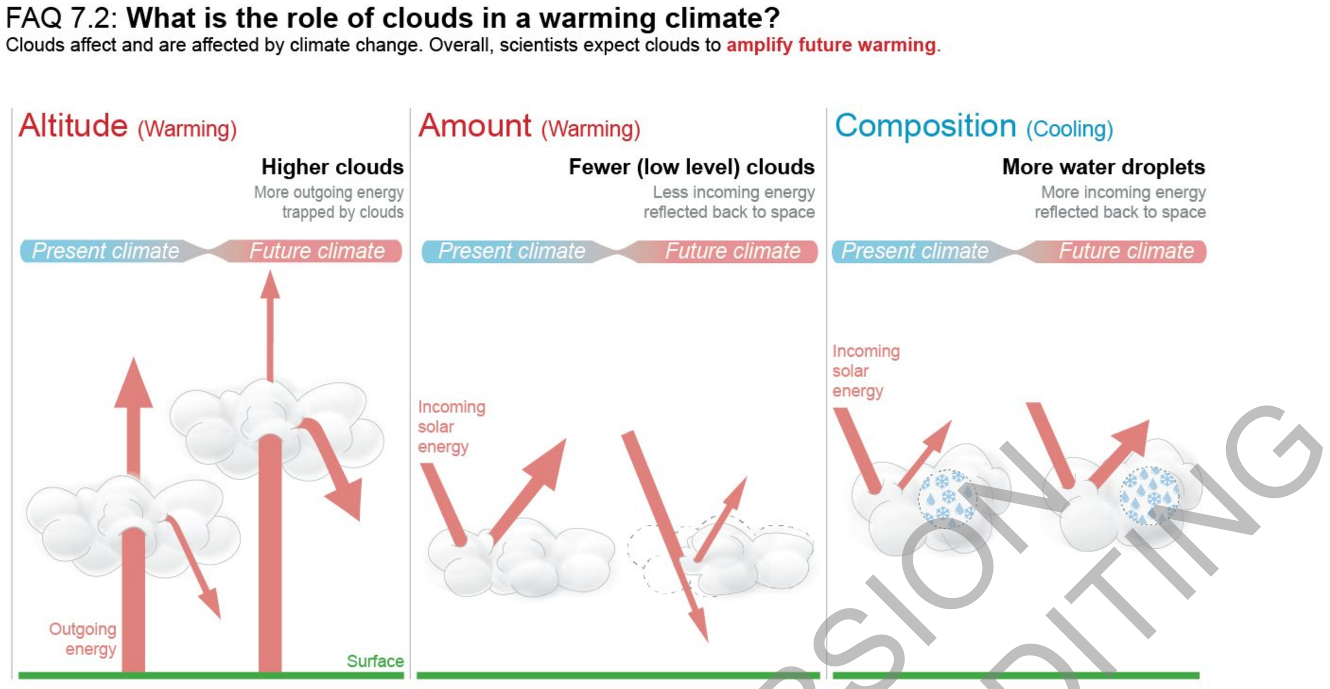
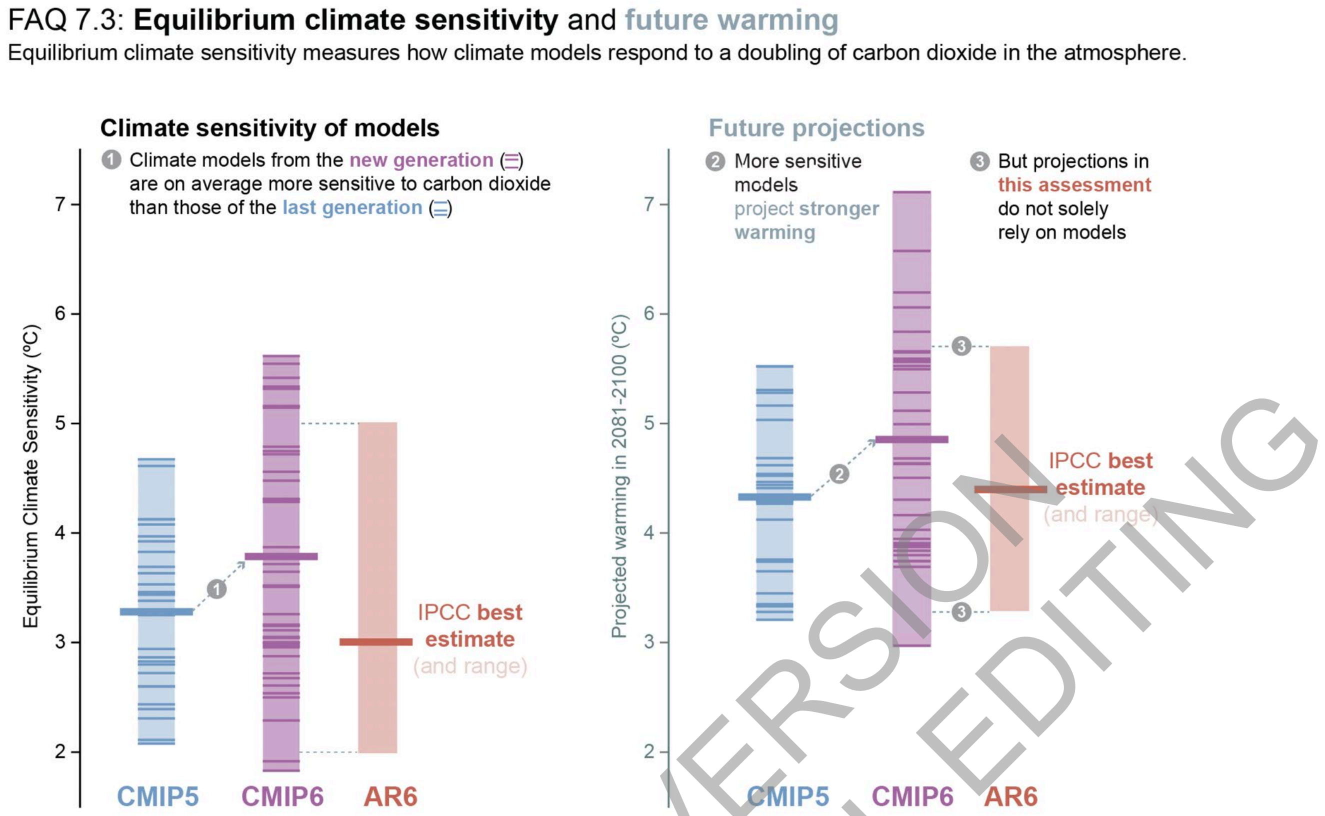


FAQ 7.1, Figure 1: **The Earth's energy budget compares the flows of incoming and outgoing of energy that are relevant for the climate system.** Since the at least the 1970s, less energy is flowing out than is flowing in, which leads to excess energy being absorbed by the ocean, land, ice and atmosphere, with the ocean absorbing 91%.



FAQ 7.2, Figure 1: **Interactions between clouds and the climate today and in a warmer future**. Global warming is expected to alter the altitude (left) and the amount (centre) of clouds, which will amplify warming. On the other hand, cloud composition will change (right), offsetting some of the warming. Overall clouds are expected to amplify future warming.



FAQ7.3, Figure 1: Equilibrium climate sensitivity and future warming. (left) Equilibrium climate sensitivities for the current generation (sixth climate model intercomparison project, CMIP6) climate models, and the previous (CMIP5) generation. The assessed range in this report (AR6) is also shown. (right) Climate projections of CMIP5, CMIP6, and AR6 for the very high-emission scenarios RCP8.5, and SSP5-8.5, respectively. The thick horizontal lines represent the multi-model average and the thin horizontal lines the results of individual models. The boxes represent the model ranges for CMIP5 and CMIP6 and the range assessed in AR6.

Frequently Asked Questions

FAQ 8.1: How does land use change alter the water cycle?

The ways in which humans use and change land cover, for example, by converting fields to urban areas or clearing forests, can affect every aspect of the water cycle. Land-use changes can alter precipitation patterns and how water is absorbed into the ground, flows into streams and rivers, or floods the land surface, as well as how moisture evaporates back into the air. Changes in any of these aspects of the interconnected water cycle can affect the entire cycle and the availability of freshwater resources.

Land use describes the combination of activities and ground cover defining each area of the Earth's continental surface. Altering land use can modify the exchange of water between the atmosphere, soil and sub-surface (FAQ 8.1, Figure 1).

For instance, changes in land cover can affect the ability of soils to soak up surface water (infiltration). When soil loses its capacity to soak up water, precipitation that would normally infiltrate and contribute to groundwater reserves will instead overflow, increasing surface water (runoff) and the likelihood of flooding. For example, changing from vegetation to urban cover can cause water to flow rapidly over buildings, roads and driveways and into drains rather than soaking into the ground. Deforestation over wide areas can also directly reduce soil moisture, evaporation and rainfall locally but can also cause regional temperature changes that affect rainfall patterns.

Extracting water from the ground and river systems for agriculture, industry and drinking water depletes ground water and can increase surface evaporation because water that was previously in the ground is now in direct contact with the atmosphere, being available for evaporation

Changing land use can also alter how wet the soil is, influencing how quickly the ground heats up and cools down and the local water cycle. Drier soils evaporate less water into the air but heat up more in the day. This can lead to warmer, more buoyant plumes of air that can promote cloud development and precipitation if there is enough moisture in the air.

Changes in land use can also modify the amount of tiny aerosol particles in the air. For instance, industrial and domestic activities can contribute to aerosol emissions, as do natural environments such as forests or salt lakes. Aerosols cool down global temperature by blocking out sunlight but can also affect the formation of clouds and therefore the occurrence of precipitation (see FAQ 7.2).

Vegetation plays an important role in soaking up soil moisture and evaporating water into the air (*transpiration*) through tiny holes (*stomata*) that allow the plants to take in carbon dioxide. Some plants are better at retaining water than others, so changes in vegetation can affect how much water infiltrates into the ground, flows into streams and rivers, or is evaporated.

More globally, land-use change is currently responsible for about 15% of the emissions of carbon dioxide from human activities, leading to global warming, which in turn affects precipitation, evaporation, and plant transpiration. In addition, higher atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide due to human activities can make plants more efficient at retaining water because the stomata do not need to open so widely. Improved land and water management (e.g., reforestation, sustainable irrigation) can also contribute to reducing climate change and adapting to some of its adverse consequences.

In summary, there is abundant evidence that changes in land use and land cover alter the water cycle globally, regionally and locally, by changing precipitation, evaporation, flooding, ground water, and the availability of fresh water for a variety of uses. Since all the components of the water cycle are connected (and linked to the carbon cycle), changes in land use trickle down to many other components of the water cycle and climate system.

[START FAQ 8.1, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 8.1, Figure 1: Land-use changes and their consequences on the water cycle. As all the components or the water cycle are tightly connected, changes in one aspect of the cycle affects almost all the cycle.

[END FAQ 8.1, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 8.2: Will floods become more severe or more frequent as a result of climate change?

A warmer climate increases the amount and intensity of rainfall during wet events, and this is expected to amplify the severity of flooding. However, the link between rainfall and flooding is complex, so while the most severe flooding events are expected to worsen, floods could become rarer in some regions.

Floods are a natural and important part of the water cycle but they can also threaten lives and safety, disrupt human activities, and damage infrastructure. Most inland floods occur when rivers overtop their banks (*fluvial* flooding) or when intense rainfall causes water to build up and overflow locally (*pluvial* flooding). Flooding is also caused by coastal inundation by the sea, rapid seasonal melting of snow, and the accumulation of debris, such as vegetation or ice, that stops water from draining away.

Climate change is already altering the location, frequency and severity of flooding. Close to the coasts, rising sea levels increasingly cause more frequent and severe coastal flooding, and the severity of these floods is exacerbated when combined with heavy rainfall. The heavy and sustained rainfall events responsible for most inland flooding are becoming more intense in many areas as the climate warms because air near Earth's surface can carry around 7% more water in its gas phase (vapour) for each 1°C of warming. This extra moisture is drawn into weather systems, fueling heavier rainfall (FAQ 8.2, Figure 1).

A warming climate also affects wind patterns, how storms form and evolve, and the pathway those storms usually travel. Warming also increases condensation rates, which in turn releases extra heat that can energize storm systems and further intensify rainfall. On the other hand, this energy release can also inhibit the uplift required for cloud development, while increases in particle pollution can delay rainfall but invigorate storms. These changes mean that the character of precipitation events (how often, how long-lasting and how heavy they are) will continue to change as the climate warms.

In addition to climate change, the location, frequency and timing of the heaviest rainfall events and worst flooding depend on natural fluctuations in wind patterns that make some regions unusually wet or dry for months, years, or even decades. These natural variations make it difficult to determine whether heavy rainfall events are changing locally as a result of global warming. However, when natural weather patterns bring heavy and prolonged rainfall in a warmer climate, the intensity is increased by the larger amount of moiture in the air.

An increased intensity and frequency of record-breaking daily rainfall has been detected for much of the land surface where good observational records exist, and this can only be explained by human-caused increases in atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations. Heavy rainfall is also projected to become more intense in the future for most places. So, where unusually wet weather events or seasons occur, the rainfall amounts are expected to be greater in the future, contributing to more severe flooding.

However, heavier rainfall does not always lead to greater flooding. This is because flooding also depends upon the type of river basin, the surface landscape, the extent and duration of the rainfall, and how wet the ground is before the rainfall event (FAQ 8.2, Figure 1) Some regions will experience a drying in the soil as the climate warms, particularly in sub-tropical climates, which could make floods from a rainfall event less probable because the ground can potentially soak up more of the rain. On the other hand, less frequent but more intense downpours can lead to dry, hard ground that is less able to soak up heavy rainfall when it does occur, resulting in more runoff into lakes, rivers and hollows. Earlier spring snowmelt combined with more precipitation falling as rain rather than snow can trigger flood events in cold regions. Reduced winter snow cover can, in contrast, decrease the chance of flooding arising from the combination of rainfall and rapid snowmelt. Rapid melting of glaciers and snow in a warming climate is already increasing river flow in some regions, but as the volumes of ice diminish, flows will peak and then decline in the future. Flooding is also affected by changes in the management of the land and river systems. For example, clearing forests for agriculture or building cities can make rain water flow more rapidly into rivers or low lying areas. On the other hand, increased extraction of water from rivers can reduce water levels and the likelihood of flooding.

A mix of both increases and decreases in flooding have been observed in some regions and these changes have been attributed to multiple causes, including changes in snowmelt, soil moisture and rainfall. Although we know that a warming climate will intensify rainfall events, local and regional trends are expected to vary in both direction and magnitude as global warming results in multiple, and sometimes counteracting, influences. However, even accounting for the many factors that generate flooding, when weather patterns cause flood events in a warmer future, these floods will be more severe.

[START FAQ 8.2, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 8.2, Figure 1: Schematic illustrating factors important in determining changes in heavy precipitation and flooding.

[END FAQ 8.2, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 8.3: What causes droughts, and will climate change make them worse?

Droughts usually begin as a deficit of precipitation, but then propagate to other parts of the water cycle (soils, rivers, snow/ice and water reservoirs). They are also influenced by factors like temperature, vegetation and human land and water management. In a warmer world, evaporation increases, which can make even wet regions more susceptible to drought.

A drought is broadly defined as drier than normal conditions; that is, a moisture deficit relative to the average water availability at a given location and season. Since they are locally defined, a drought in a wet place will not have the same amount of water deficit as a drought in a dry region. Droughts are divided into different categories based on where in the water cycle the moisture deficit occurs: meteorological drought (precipitation), hydrological drought (runoff, streamflow, and reservoir storage), and agricultural or ecological drought (plant stress from a combination of evaporation and low soil moisture). Special categories of drought also exist. For example, a snow drought occurs when winter snowpack levels are below average, which can cause abnormally low streamflow in subsequent seasons. And while many drought events develop slowly over months or years, some events, called flash droughts, can intensify over the course of days or weeks. One such event occurred in 2012 in the midwestern region of North America and had a severe impact on agricultural production, with losses exceeding $30 billion US dollars. Droughts typically only become a concern when they adversely affect people (reducing water available for municipal, industrial, agricultural, or navigational needs) and/or ecosystems (adverse effects on natural flora and fauna). When a drought lasts for a very long time (more than two decades) it is sometimes called a megadrought.

Most droughts begin when precipitation is below normal for an extended period of time (meteorological drought). This typically occurs when high pressure in the atmosphere sets up over a region, reducing cloud formation and precipitation over that area and deflecting away storms. The lack of rainfall then propagates across the water cycle to create agricultural drought in soils and hydrological drought in waterways. Other processes act to amplify or alleviate droughts. For example, if temperatures are abnormally high, evaporation increases, drying out soils and streams and stressing plants beyond what would have occurred from the lack of precipitation alone. Vegetation can play a critical role because it modulates many important hydrologic processes (soil water, evapotranspiration, runoff). Human activities can also determine how severe a drought is. For example, irrigating croplands can reduce the socioeconomic impact of a drought; at the same time, depletion of groundwater in aquifers can make a drought worse.

The effect of climate change on drought varies across regions. In the subtropical regions like the Mediterranean, southern Africa, southwestern Australia and southwestern South America, as well as tropical central America, western Africa and the Amazon basin, precipitation is expected to decline as the world warms, increasing the possibility that drought will occur throughout the year (FAQ 8.3, Figure 1). Warming will decrease snowpack, amplifying drought in regions where snowmelt is an important water resource (such as in southwestern South America). Higher temperatures lead to increased evaporation, resulting in soil drying, increased plant stress, and impacts on agriculture, even in regions where large changes in precipitation are not expected (such as central and northern Europe). If emissions of greenhouse gases are not curtailed, about a third of global land areas are projected to suffer from at least moderate drought by 2100. On the other hand, some areas and seasons (such as high-latitude regions in North America and Asia, and the South Asian monsoon region) may experience increases in precipitation as a result of climate change, which will decrease the likelihood of droughts. FAQ 8.3, Figure 1 highlights the regions where climate change is expected to increase the severity of droughts.

[START FAQ 8.3, FIGURE HERE]

FAQ 8.3, Figure 1: Drought is expected to get worse in the regions highlighted in brown as a consequence of climate change. This pattern is similar regardless of the emissions scenario; however, the magnitude of change increases under higher emissions.

[END OF FAQ 8.3, FIGURE]

Acknowledgements

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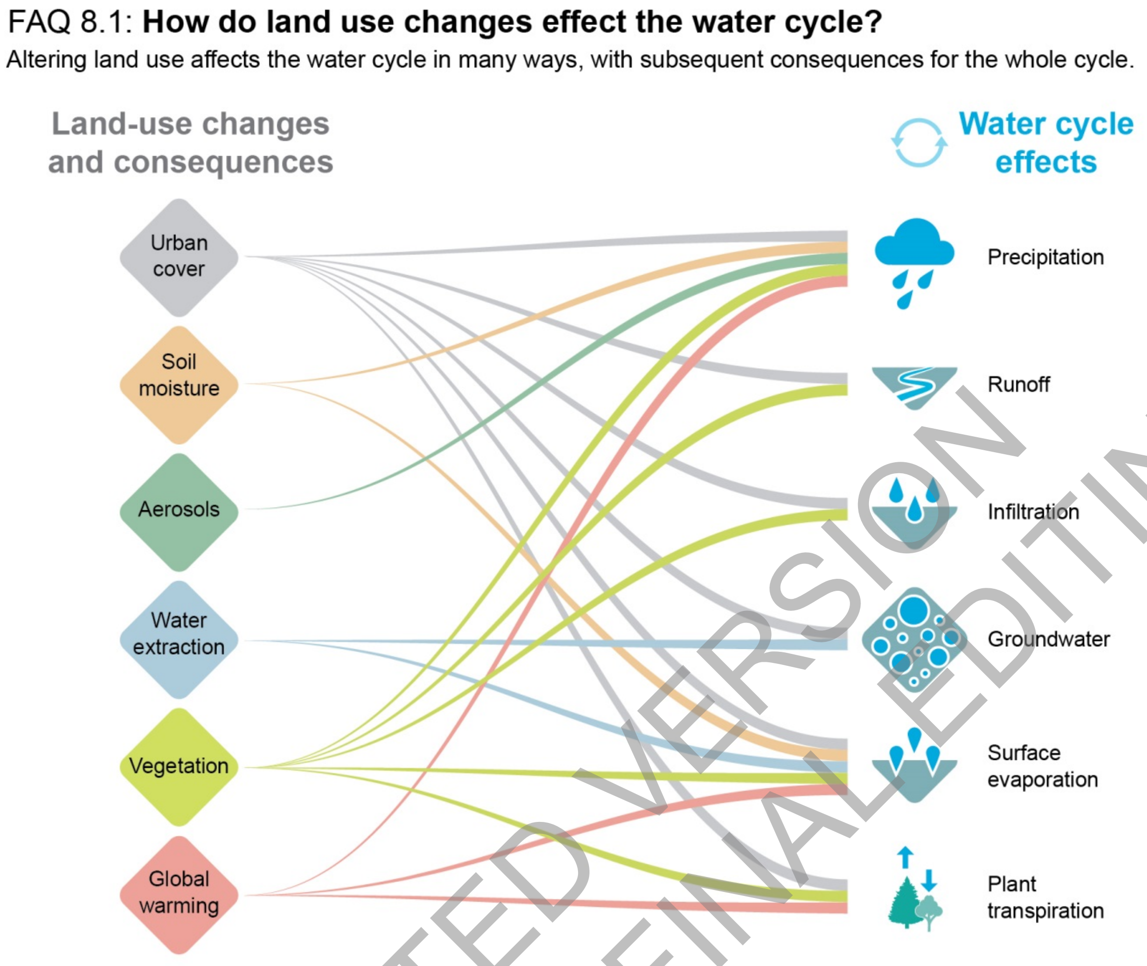
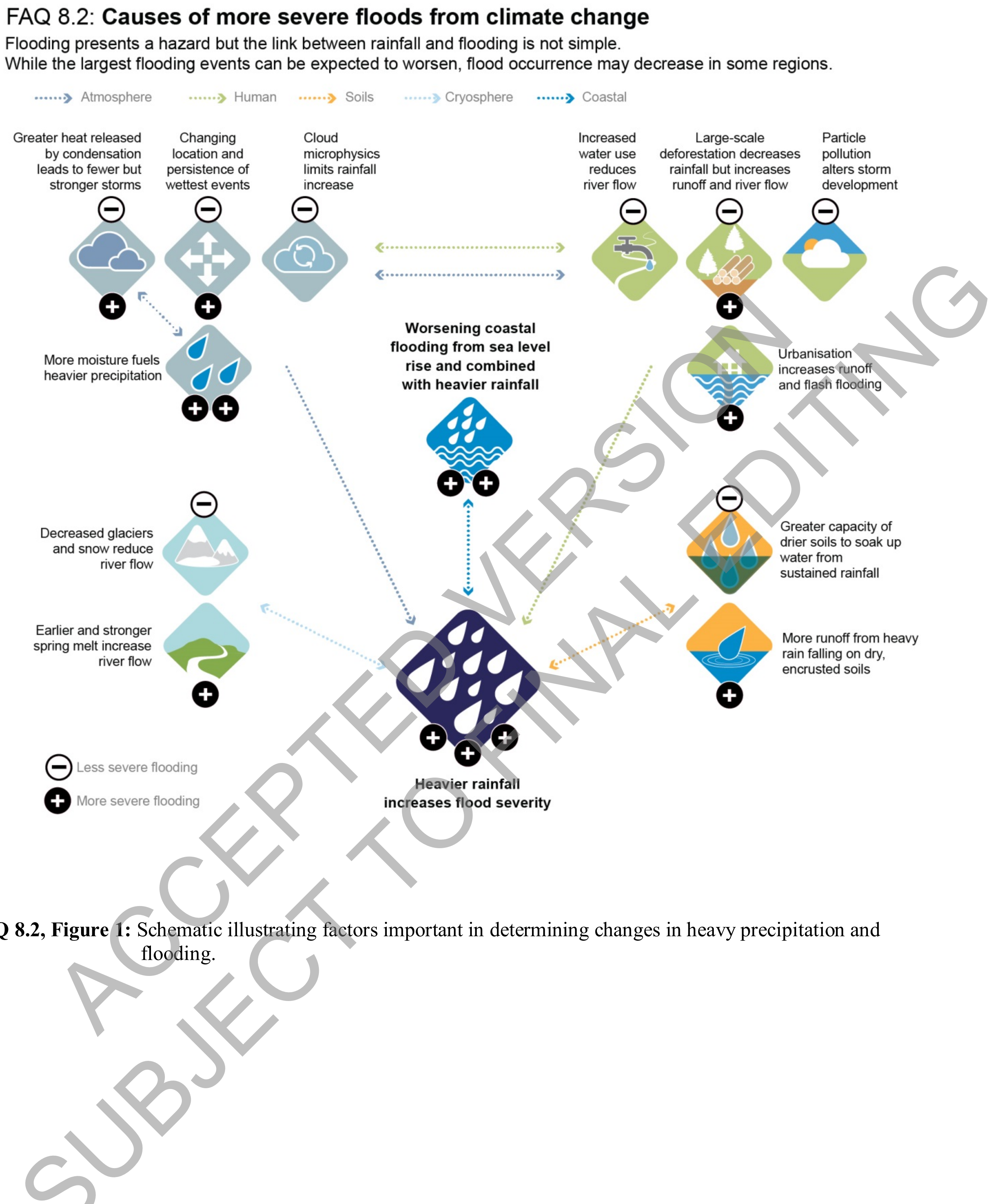
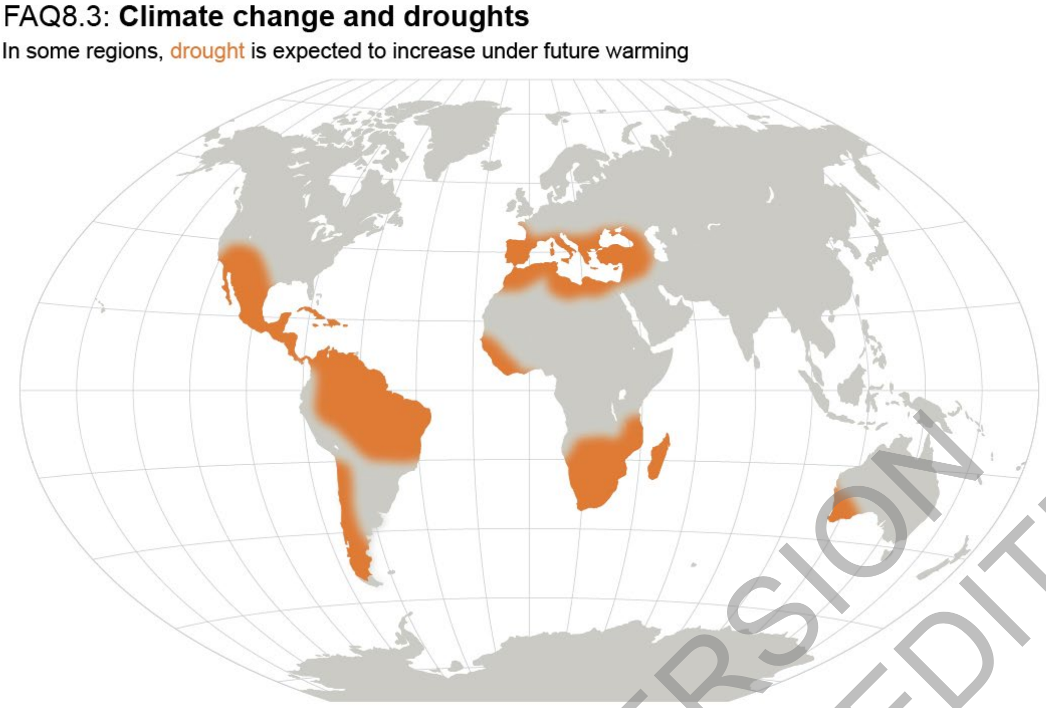


FAQ8.1, Figure 1: Land-use changes and their consequences on the water cycle. As all the components or the water cycle are tightly connected, changes in one aspect of the cycle affects almost all the cycle.



FAQ 8.2, Figure 1: Schematic illustrating factors important in determining changes in heavy precipitation and flooding.



FAQ 8.3, Figure 1: Schematic map highlighting in brown the regions where droughts are expected to become worse as a result of climate change. This pattern is similar regardless of the emissions scenario; however, the magnitude of change increases under higher emissions.

Frequently Asked Questions

FAQ 9.1: Can continued melting of the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets be reversed? How long would it take for them to grow back?

Evidence from the distant past shows that some parts of the Earth system might take hundreds to thousands of years to fully adjust to changes in climate. This means that some of the consequences of human-induced climate change will continue for a very long time, even if atmospheric heat-trapping gas levels and global temperatures are stabilized or reduced in the future. This is especially true for the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets, which grow much more slowly than they retreat. If the current melting of these ice sheets continues for long enough it becomes effectively irreversible on human timescales, as does the sea level rise caused by that melting.

Humans are changing the climate and there are mechanisms that amplify the warming in the polar regions (Arctic and Antarctic). The Arctic is already warming faster than anywhere else (see FAQ 4.3). This is significant because these colder high latitudes are home to our two remaining ice sheets: in Antarctica and Greenland. Ice sheets are huge reservoirs of frozen freshwater, built up by tens of thousands of years of snowfall. If they were to completely melt, the water released would raise global sea level by about 65 m. Understanding how these ice sheets are affected by warming of nearby ocean and atmosphere is therefore critically important. The Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets are already slowly responding to recent changes in climate, but it takes a long time for these huge masses of ice to adjust to changes in global temperature. That means that the full effects of a warming climate may take hundreds or thousands of years to play out. An important question is whether these changes can eventually be reversed, once levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere are stabilized or reduced by humans and natural processes. Records from the past can help us answer this question.

For at least the last 800,000 years, the Earth has followed cycles of gradual cooling followed by rapid warming caused by natural processes. During cooling phases, more and more ocean water is gradually deposited as snowfall, causing ice sheets to grow and sea level to slowly decrease. During warming phases, the ice sheets melt more quickly, resulting in more rapid rises in sea level (FAQ 9.1, Figure 1). Ice sheets build up very slowly because growth relies on the steady accumulation of falling snow that eventually compacts into ice. As the climate cools, areas that can accumulate snow expand, reflecting back more sunlight that otherwise would keep the Earth warmer. This means that once started, glacial climates develop rapidly. However, as the climate cools, the amount of moisture that the air can hold tends to decrease. As a result, even though glaciations begin quite quickly, it takes tens of thousands of years for ice sheets to grow to a point where they are in balance with the colder climate.

Ice sheets retreat more quickly than they grow because of processes that, once triggered, drive self-reinforcing ice loss. For ice sheets that are mostly resting on bedrock *above* sea level – like the Greenland ice sheet – the main self-reinforcing loop that affects them is the ‘elevation–mass balance feedback’ (FAQ 9.1, Figure 1, right). In this situation, the altitude of the ice sheet surface decreases as it melts, exposing the sheet to warmer air. The lowered surface then melts even more, lowering it faster still, until eventually the whole ice sheet disappears. In places where the ice sheet rests instead on bedrock that is *below* sea level and which also deepens inland, including many parts of the Antarctic ice sheet, an important process called ‘marine ice-sheet instability’ is thought to drive rapid retreat (FAQ 9.1, Figure 1, left). This happens when the part of the ice sheet that is surrounded by sea water melts. That leads to additional thinning, which in turn accelerates the motion of the glaciers that feed into these areas. As the ice sheet flows more quickly into the ocean, more melting takes place, leading to more thinning and even faster flow that brings ever-more glacier ice into the ocean, ultimately driving rapid deglaciation of whole ice-sheet drainage basins.

These (and other) self-reinforcing processes explain why relatively small increases in temperature in the past led to very substantial sea level rise over centuries to millennia, compared to the many tens of thousands of years it takes to grow the ice sheets that lowered the sea level in the first place. These insights from the past imply that if human-induced changes to the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets continue for the rest of this century, it will take thousands of years to reverse that melting, even if global air temperatures decrease within this or the next century. In this sense, these changes are therefore irreversible, since the ice sheets would take much longer to regrow than the decades or centuries for which modern society is able to plan.

[START FAQ9.1, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 9.1, Figure 1: Ice sheets growth and decay. (Top) Changes in ice-sheet volume modulate sea level variations. The grey line depicts data from a range of physical environmental sea-level recorders such as coral reefs (see Table 9.SM.5) while the blue line is a smoothed version of it. (Bottom, left) Example of destabilisation mechanism in Antarctica. (Bottom, right) Example of destabilisation mechanism in Greenland.

[END FAQ9.1, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 9.2: How much will sea level rise in the next few decades?

As of 2018, global average sea level was about 15–25 cm higher than in 1900 and 7–15 cm higher than in 1971. Sea level will continue to rise by an additional 10–25 cm by 2050. The major reasons for this ongoing rise in sea level are the thermal expansion of seawater as its temperature increases and the melting of glaciers and ice sheets. Local sea level changes can be larger or smaller than the global average, with the smallest changes in formerly glaciated areas and the largest changes in low-lying river delta regions.

Across the globe, sea level is rising, and the rate of increase has accelerated. Sea level increased by about 4 mm per year from 2006 to 2018, which was more than double the average rate over the 20th century. Rise during the early 1900s was due to natural factors, such as glaciers catching up to warming that occurred in the Northern Hemisphere during the 1800s. However, since at least 1970, human activities have been the dominant cause of global average sea level rise, and they will continue to be for centuries into the future.

Sea level rises either through warming of ocean waters or the addition of water from melting ice and bodies of water on land. Expansion due to warming caused about 50% of the rise observed from 1971 to 2018. Melting glaciers contributed about 22% over the same period. Melting of the two large ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctica has contributed about 13% and 7%, respectively, during 1971-2018, but melting has accelerated in the recent decades, increasing their contribution to 22% and 14% since 2016. Another source is changes in land water storage: reservoirs and aquifers on land have reduced, which contributed about a 8% increase in sea level.

By 2050, sea level is expected to rise an additional 10–25 cm whether or not greenhouse gas emissions are reduced (FAQ 9.2, Figure 1). Beyond 2050, the amount by which sea level will rise is more uncertain. The accumulated total emissions of greenhouse gases over the upcoming decades will play a big role beyond 2050, especially in determining where sea level rise and ice sheet changes eventually level off.

Even if net zero emissions are reached, sea level rise will continue because the deep ocean will continue to warm and ice sheets will take time to catch up to the warming caused by past and present emissions: ocean and ice sheets are slow to respond to environmental changes (see FAQ 5.3). Some projections under low emissions show sea level rise continuing as net zero is approached at a rate comparable to today (3–8 mm per year by 2100 versus 3–4 mm per year in 2015), while others show substantial acceleration to more than five times the present rate by 2100, especially if emissions continue to be high and processes that accelerate retreat of the Antarctic Ice Sheet occur widely (FAQ 9.1).

Sea level rise will increase the frequency and severity of extreme sea level events at coasts (see FAQ 8.2),, such as storm surges, wave inundation and tidal floods: risk can be increased by even small changes in global average sea level. Scientists project that in some regions, extreme sea level events that were recently expected once in 100 years will occur annually at 20-25% of locations by 2050 regardless of emissions, but by 2100 emissions choice will matter: annually at 60% of locations for low emissions, and at 80% of locations under strong emissions.

In many places, local sea level change will be larger or smaller than the global average. From year to year and place to place, changes in ocean circulation and wind can lead to local sea level change. In regions where large ice sheets, such as the Fennoscandian in Eurasia and the Laurentide and Cordilleran in North America, covered the land during the last ice age, the land is still slowly rising up now that the extra weight of the ice sheets is gone. This local recovery is compensating for global sea level rise in these regions and can even lead to local decrease in sea level. In regions just beyond where the former ice sheets reached and the Earth bulged upwards, the land is now falling, and as a result local sea level rise is faster than the global rate. In many regions within low-lying delta regions (such as New Orleans and the Ganges–Brahmaputra delta), the land is rapidly subsiding (sinking) because of human activities such as building dams or groundwater and fossil fuel extraction. Further, when an ice sheet melts it has less gravitational pull on the ocean water nearby. This reduction in gravitational attraction causes sea level to fall close to the (now less-massive) ice sheet while causing sea level to rise farther away. Melt from a polar ice sheet therefore raises sea level most in the opposite hemisphere or in low latitudes – amounting to tens of centimetres difference in rise between regions by 2100.

[START FAQ9.2, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 9.2, Figure 1: Observed and projected global mean sea level rise and the contributions from its major constituents.

[END FAQ9.2, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 9.3: Will the Gulf Stream shut down?

The Gulf Stream is part of two circulation patterns in the North Atlantic: the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC) and the subtropical gyre. Based on models and theory, scientific studies indicate that, while the AMOC is expected to slow in a warming climate, the Gulf Stream will not change much and would not shut down totally, even if the AMOC did. Most climate models project that the AMOC slows in the later 21st century under most emissions scenarios, with some models showing it slowing even sooner. The Gulf Stream affects the weather and sea level, so if it slows, North America will see higher sea levels and Europe's weather and rate of relative warming will be affected.

The Gulf Stream is the biggest current in the North Atlantic Ocean. It transports about 30 billion kilograms of water per second northward past points on the east coast of North America. It is a warm current, with temperatures 5°C to 15°C warmer than surrounding waters, so it carries warmer water (thermal energy) from its southern origins and releases warmth to the atmosphere and surrounding water.

The Gulf Stream is part of two major circulation patterns, the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC) and the North Atlantic Subtropical Gyre (FAQ 9.3, Figure 1). The rotation of the Earth causes the big currents in both circulations to stay on the western side of their basin, which in the Atlantic means the circulations combine to form the Gulf Stream. Other large currents contribute to gyres, such as the Kuroshio in the North Pacific and the East Australian Current in the South Pacific, but the Gulf Stream is special in its dual role. There is no comparable deep overturning circulation in the North Pacific to the AMOC, so the Kuroshio plays only one role as part of a gyre.

The gyres circulate surface waters and result primarily from winds driving the circulation. These winds are not expected to change much and so neither will the gyres, which means the gyre portion of the Gulf Stream and the Kuroshio will continue to transport thermal energy poleward from the equator much as they do now. The gyre contribution to the Gulf Stream is 2 to 10 times larger than the AMOC contribution.

The Gulf Stream's role in the AMOC is supplying surface source water that cools, becomes denser and sinks to form cold, deep waters that travel back equatorward, spilling over features on the ocean floor and mixing with other deep Atlantic waters to form a southward current at a depth of about 1500 metres beneath the Gulf Stream. This overturning flow is the AMOC, with the Gulf Stream in the upper kilometre flowing northward and the colder deep water flowing southward.

The AMOC is expected to slow over the coming centuries. One reason why is freshening of the ocean waters: by meltwater from Greenland, changing Arctic sea ice, and increased precipitation over warmer northern seas. An array of moorings across the Atlantic has been monitoring the AMOC since 2004, with recently expanded capabilities. The monitoring of the AMOC has not been long enough for a trend to emerge from variability and detect long-term changes that may be underway (see FAQ 1.2). Other indirect signs may indicate slowing overturning – for example, slower warming where the Gulf Stream's surface waters sink. Climate models show that this 'cold spot' of slower-than-average warming occurs as the AMOC weakens, and they project that this will continue. Paleoclimate evidence indicates AMOC changed significantly in the past, especially during transitions from colder climates to warmer ones, but indicate it has been stable for 8000 years.

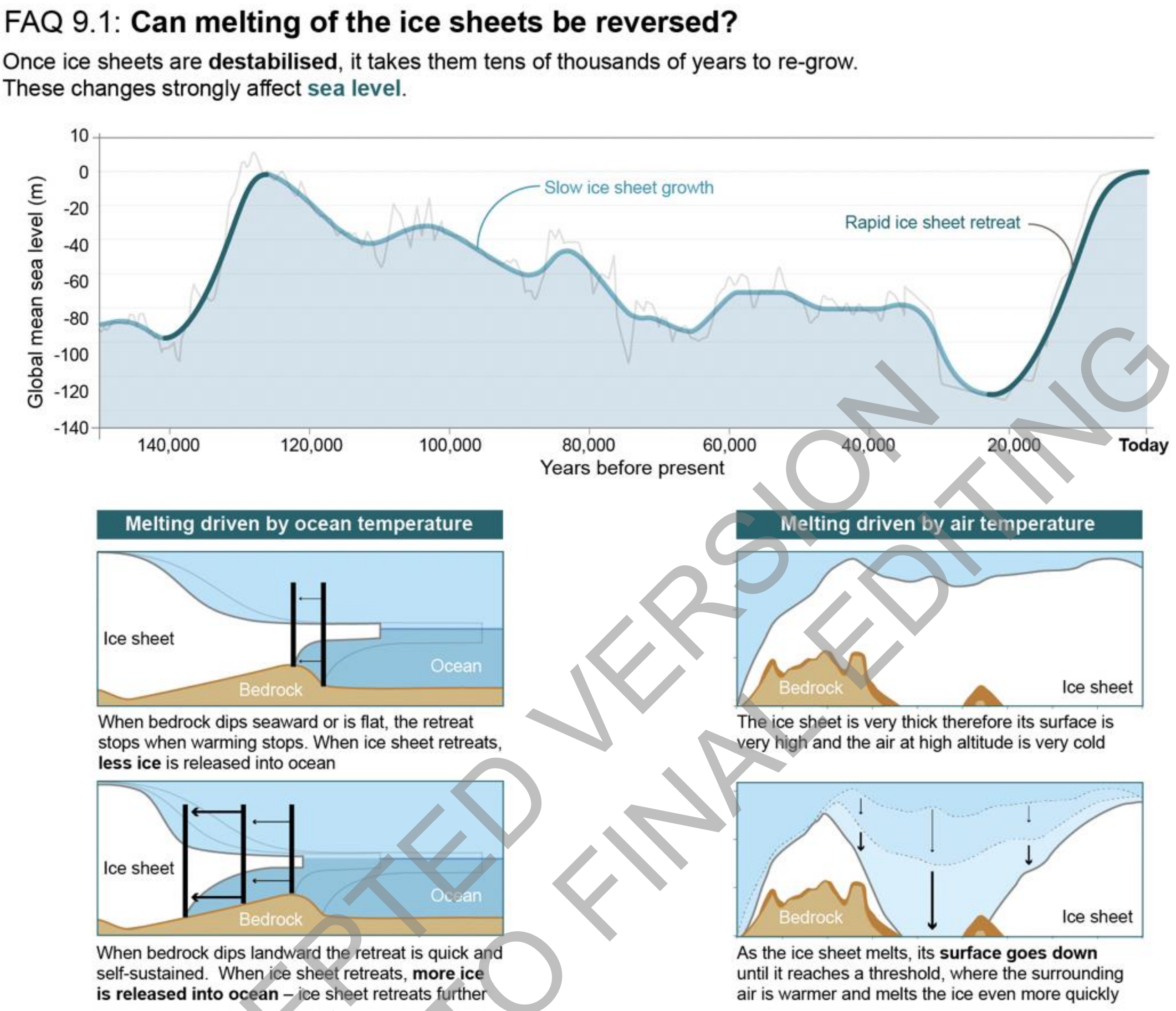
What happens if the AMOC slows in a warming world? The atmosphere adjusts somewhat, compensating partly for the decreases in heat carried by AMOC by carrying more heat. But the 'cold spot' makes parts of Europe warm more slowly. Models indicate that weather patterns in Greenland and around the Atlantic will be affected, with reduced precipitation in the mid-latitudes, changing strong precipitation patterns in the tropics and Europe, and stronger storms in the North Atlantic storm track. The slowing of this current combined with the rotation of the Earth means that sea level along North America rises as the AMOC contribution to the Gulf Stream slows.

The North Atlantic is not the only site of sensitive meridional overturning. Around Antarctica, the world's densest seawater is formed by freezing into sea ice, leaving behind salty, cold water that sinks to the bottom and spreads northward. Recent studies show that melting of the Antarctic Ice Sheet and changing winds over the Southern Ocean can affect this southern meridional overturning, affecting regional weather.

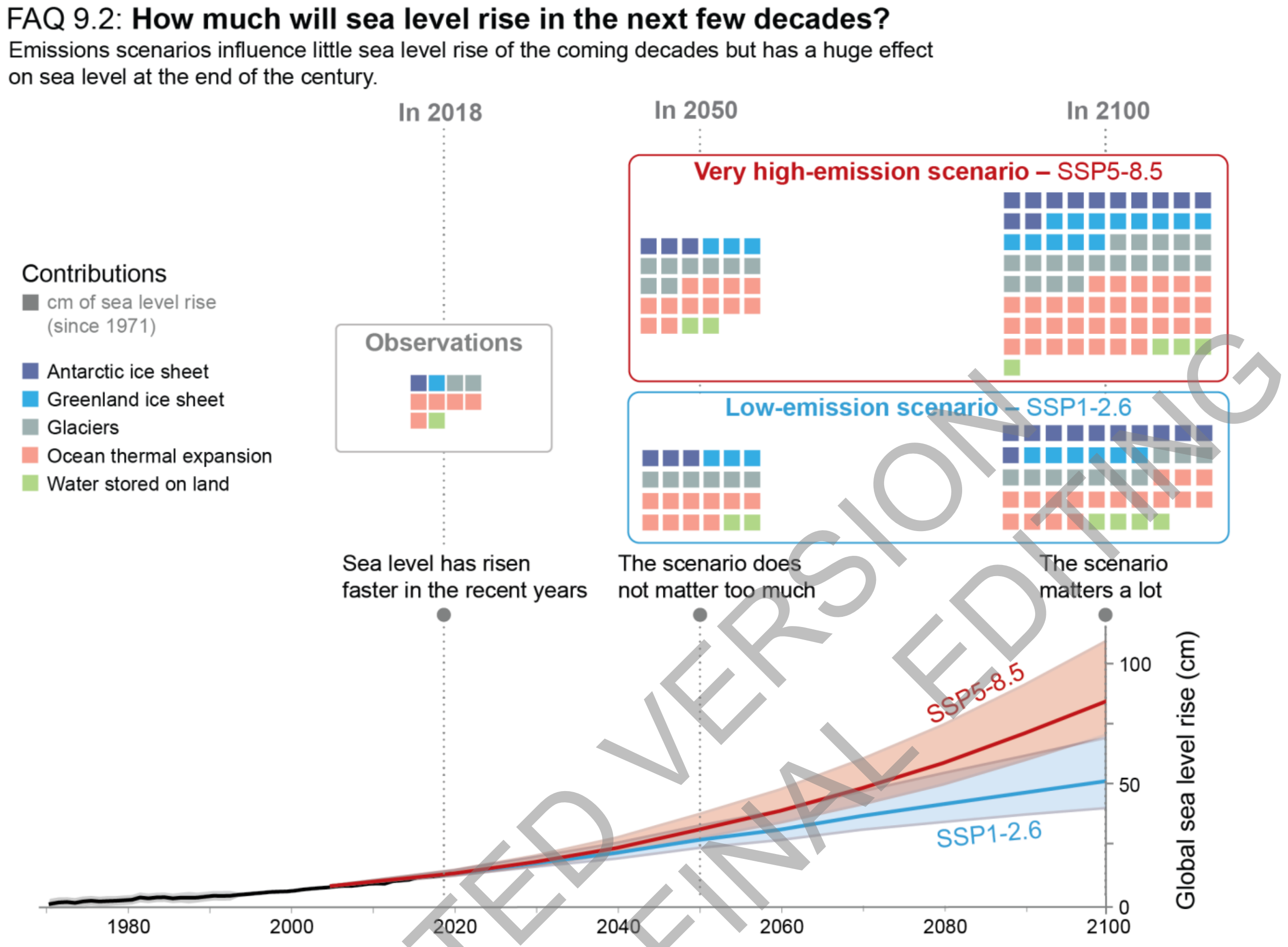
[START FAQ9.3, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 9.3, Figure 1: **Horizontal (gyre) and vertical (Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation - AMOC) circulations in the Atlantic today (left) and in a warmer world (right).** The Gulf Stream is a warm current composed of both circulations.

[END FAQ9.3, FIGURE 1 HERE]



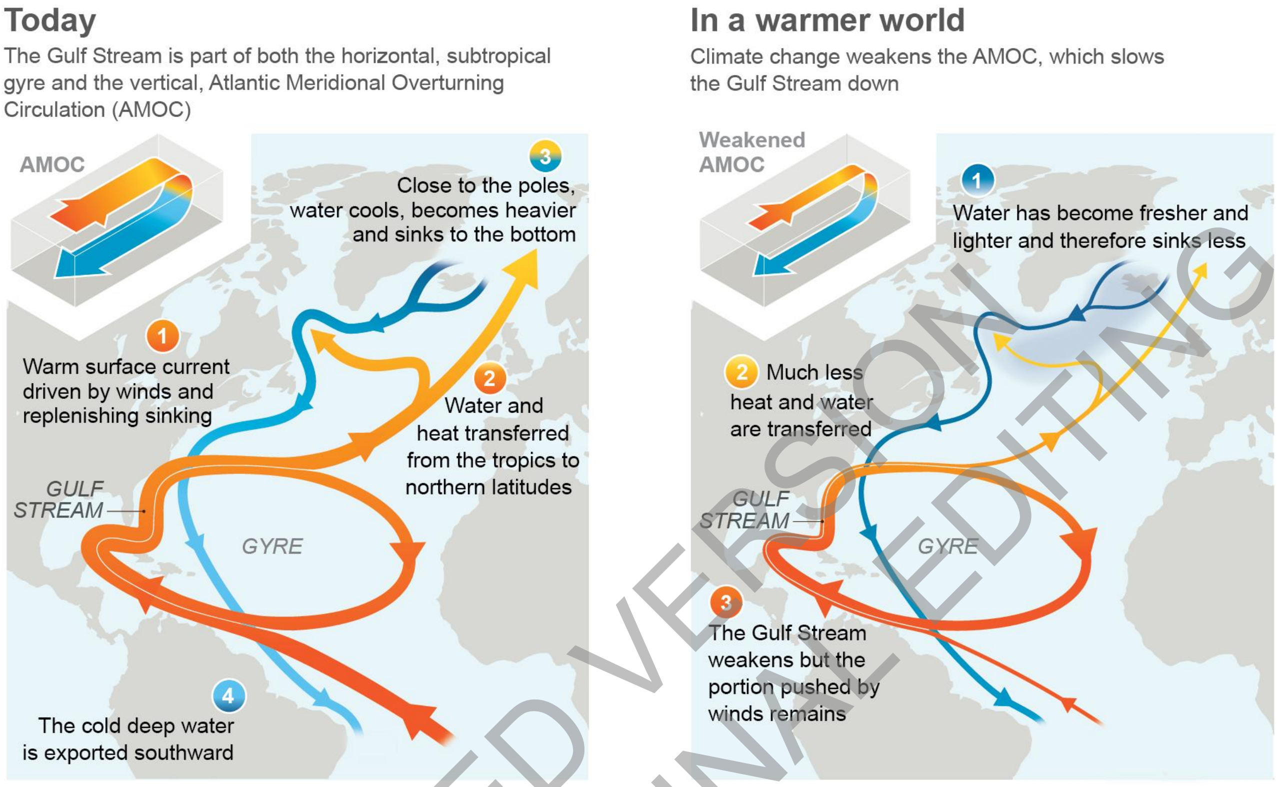
FAQ 9.1, Figure 1: Ice sheets growth and decay (Top) Changes in ice-sheet volume modulate sea level variations. The grey line depicts data from a range of physical environmental sea-level recorders such as coral reefs (see Table 9.SM.5) while the blue line is a smoothed version of it. (Bottom, left) Example of destabilisation mechanism in Antarctica. (Bottom, right) Example of destabilisation mechanism in Greenland.



FAQ 9.2, Figure 1: Observed and projected global mean sea level rise and the contributions from its major constituents.

FAQ 9.3: **Will the Gulf Stream shut down?**

The Gulf Stream, a warm current, is expected to weaken but not cease. This slowdown will affect regional weather and sea level.



FAQ 9.3, Figure 1: **Horizontal (gyre) and vertical (Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation - AMOC) circulations in the Atlantic today (left) and in a warmer world (right).** The Gulf Stream is a warm current composed of both circulations.

Frequently Asked Questions

[START FAQ10.1 HERE]

FAQ 10.1: How can we provide useful climate information for regional stakeholders?

The world is physically and culturally diverse, and the challenges posed by climate change vary by region and location. Because climate change affects so many aspects of people's daily work and living, climate change information can help with decision-making, but only when the information is relevant for the people involved in making those decisions. Users of climate information may be highly diverse, ranging from professionals in areas such as human health, agriculture or water management to a broader community that experiences the impacts of changing climate. Providing information that supports response actions thus requires engaging all relevant stakeholders, their knowledge and their experiences, formulating appropriate information, and developing a mutual understanding of the usefulness and limitations of the information.

The development, delivery, and use of climate change information requires engaging all parties involved: those producing the climate data and related knowledge, those communicating it, and those who combine that information with their knowledge of the community, region or activity that climate change may impact. To be successful, these parties need to work together to explore the climate data and thus co-develop the climate information needed to make decisions or solve problems, distilling output from the various sources of climate knowledge into relevant climate information. Effective partnerships recognize and respond to the diversity of all parties involved (including their values, beliefs and interests), especially when they involve culturally diverse communities their indigenous and local knowledge of weather, climate and their society. This is particularly true for climate change – a global issue posing challenges that vary by region. By recognizing this diversity, climate information can be relevant and credible, most notably when conveying the complexity of risks for human systems and ecosystems and for building resilience.

Constructing useful climate information requires considering all available sources in order to capture the fullest possible representation of projected changes and distil the information in a way that meets the needs of the stakeholders and communities impacted by the changes. For example, climate scientists can provide information on future changes by using simulations of global and/or regional climate and inferring changes in the weather behaviour influencing a region. An effective distillation process (FAQ 10.1, Figure 1) engages with the intended recipients of the information, especially stakeholders whose work involves non-climatic factors, such as human health, agriculture or water resources. The distillation evaluates the accuracy of all information sources (observations, simulations, expert judgement), weighs the credibility of possible conflicting information, and arrives at climate information that includes estimating the confidence a user should have in it. Producers of climate data should further recognize that the geographic regions and time periods governing stakeholders' interest (for example, the growing season of an agricultural zone) may not align well with the time and space resolution of available climate data; thus additional model development or data processing may be required to extract useful climate information.

One way to distil complex information for stakeholder applications is to connect this information to experiences stakeholders have already had through storylines as plausible unfoldings of weather and climate events related to stakeholders' experiences. Dialogue between stakeholders and climate scientists can determine the most relevant experiences to evaluate for possible future behaviour. The development of storylines uses the experience and expertise of stakeholders, such as water-resource managers and health professionals, who seek to develop appropriate response measures. Storylines are thus a pathway through the distillation process that can make climate information more accessible and physically comprehensible. For example, a storyline may take a common experience like an extended drought, with depleted water availability and damaged crops, and show how droughts may change in the future, perhaps with even greater precipitation deficits or longer duration. With appropriate choices, storylines can engage nuances of the climate information in a meaningful way by building on common experiences, thus enhancing the information's usefulness.

Forging partnerships among all involved with producing, exploring and distilling climate data into climate information is at the centre of creating stakeholder-relevant information. These partnerships can occur through direct interaction between climate scientists and stakeholders as well as through organizations that have emerged to facilitate this process, such as climate services, national and regional climate forums, and consulting firms providing specialized climate information. These so-called 'boundary organizations' can serve the varied needs of all who would fold climate information into their decision processes. All of these partnerships are vital for arriving at climate information that responds to physical and cultural diversity and to challenges posed by climate change that can vary region-by-region around the world.

[START FAQ 10.1, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 10.1, Figure 1: Climate information for decision makers is more useful if the physical and cultural diversity across the world is considered. The figure illustrates schematically the broad range of knowledge that must be blended with the diversity of users to distil information that will have relevance and credibility. This blending or distillation should engage the values and knowledge of both the stakeholders and the scientists. The bottom row contains examples of stakeholders' interests and is not all-inclusive. As part of the distillation, the outcomes can advance the U.N.'s Sustainable Development Goals, covered in part by these examples.

[END FAQ 10.1, FIGURE 1 HERE]

[END FAQ10.1 HERE]

[START FAQ10.2 HERE]

FAQ 10.2: Why are cities hotspots of global warming?

Urban areas experience air temperatures that can be several degrees Celsius warmer than surrounding areas, especially during the night. This 'urban heat island' effect results from several factors, including reduced ventilation and heat trapping due to the close proximity of tall buildings, heat generated directly from human activities, the heat-absorbing properties of concrete and other urban building materials, and the limited amount of vegetation. Continuing urbanization and increasingly severe heatwaves under climate change will further amplify this effect in the future.

Today, cities are home to 55% of the world's population. This number is increasing, and every year cities welcome 67 million new residents, 90% of whom are moving to cities in developing countries. By 2030, almost 60% of the world's population is expected to live in urban areas. Cities and their inhabitants are highly vulnerable to weather and climate extremes, particularly heatwaves, because urban areas already are local hotspots. Cities are generally warmer – up to several degrees Celsius at night – than their surroundings. This warming effect, called the urban heat island, occurs because cities both receive and retain more heat than the surrounding countryside areas and because natural cooling processes are weakened in cities compared to rural areas.

Three main factors contribute to amplify the warming of urban areas (orange bars in FAQ 10.2, Figure 1). The strongest contribution comes from urban geometry, which depends on the number of buildings, their size and their proximity. Tall buildings close to each other absorb and store heat and also reduce natural ventilation. Human activities, which are very concentrated in cities, also directly warm the atmosphere locally, due to heat released from domestic and industrial heating or cooling systems, running engines, and other sources. Finally, urban warming also results directly from the heat-retaining properties of the materials that make up cities, including concrete buildings, asphalt roadways, and dark rooftops. These materials are very good at absorbing and retaining heat, and then re-emitting that heat at night.

The urban heat island effect is further amplified in cities that lack vegetation and water bodies, both of which can strongly contribute to local cooling (green bars in FAQ 10.2, Figure 1). This means that when enough vegetation and water are included in the urban fabric, they can counterbalance the urban heat island effect, to the point of even cancelling out the urban heat island effect in some neighbourhoods.

The urban heat island phenomenon is well known and understood. For instance, temperature measurements from thermometers located in cities are corrected for this effect when global warming trends are calculated. Nevertheless, observations, including long-term measurements of the urban heat island effect are currently too limited to allow a full understanding of how the urban heat island varies across the world and across different types of cities and climatic zones, or how this effect will evolve in the future.

As a result, it is hard to assess how climate change will affect the urban heat island effect, and various studies disagree. Two things are, however, very clear. First, future urbanization will expand the urban heat island areas, thereby amplifying future warming in many places all over the world. In some places, the nighttime warming from the urban heat island effect could even be on the same order of magnitude as the warming expected from human-induced climate change. Second, more intense, longer and more frequent heatwaves caused by climate change will more strongly impact cities and their inhabitants, because the extra warming from the urban heat island effect will exacerbate the impacts of climate change.

In summary, cities are currently local hotspots because their structure, material and activities trap and release heat and reduce natural cooling processes. In the future, climate change will, on average, have a limited effect on the magnitude of the urban heat island itself, but ongoing urbanization together with more frequent, longer and warmer heatwaves will make cities more exposed to global warming.

[START FAQ 10.2, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 10.2, Figure 1: Efficiency of the various factors at warming up or cooling down neighbourhoods of urban areas. Overall, cities tend to be warmer than their surroundings. This is called the 'urban heat island' effect. The hatched areas on the bars show how the strength of the warming or cooling effects of each factor varies depending on the local climate. For example, vegetation has a stronger cooling effect in temperate and warm climates. Further details on data sources are available in the chapter data table (Table 10.SM.11)

[START FAQ 10.2, FIGURE 1 HERE]

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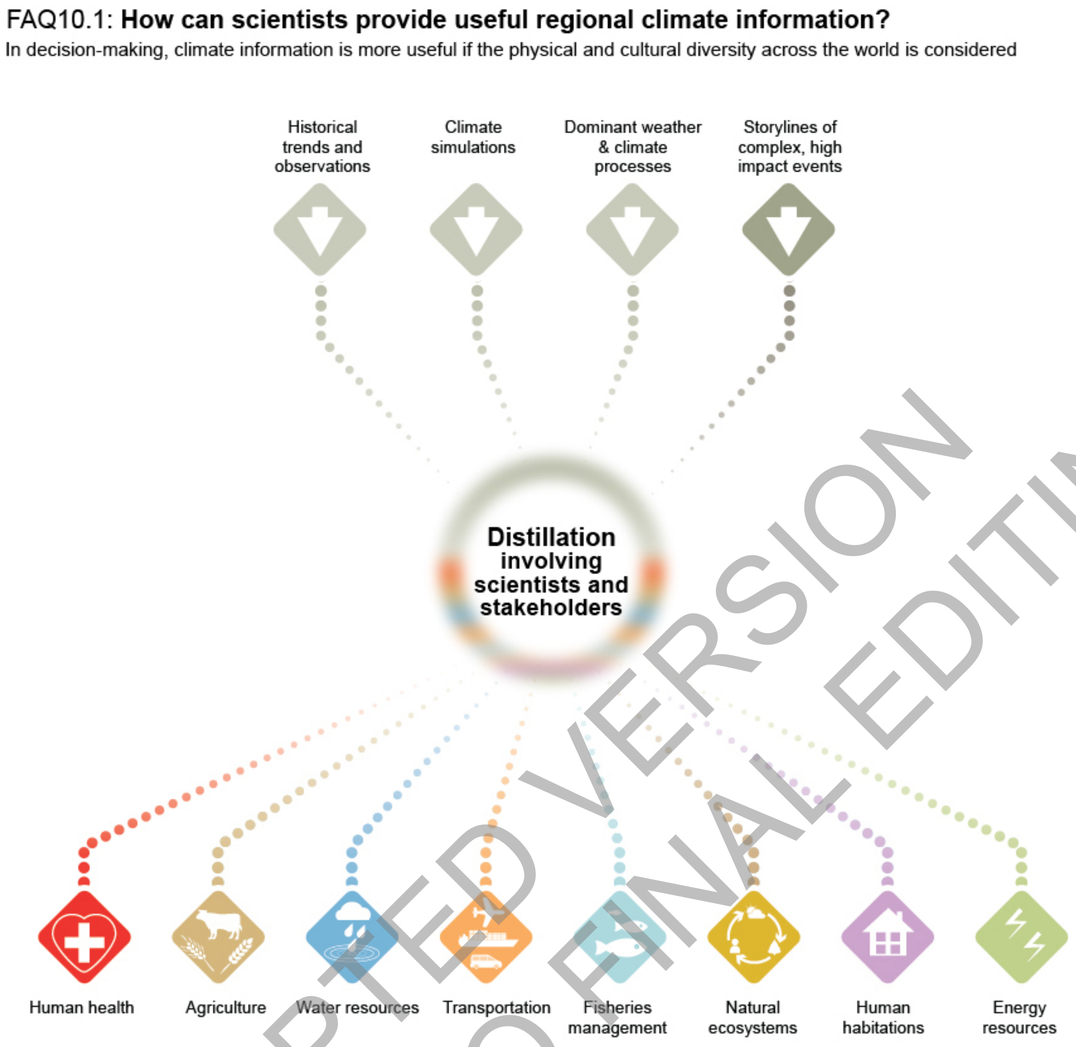
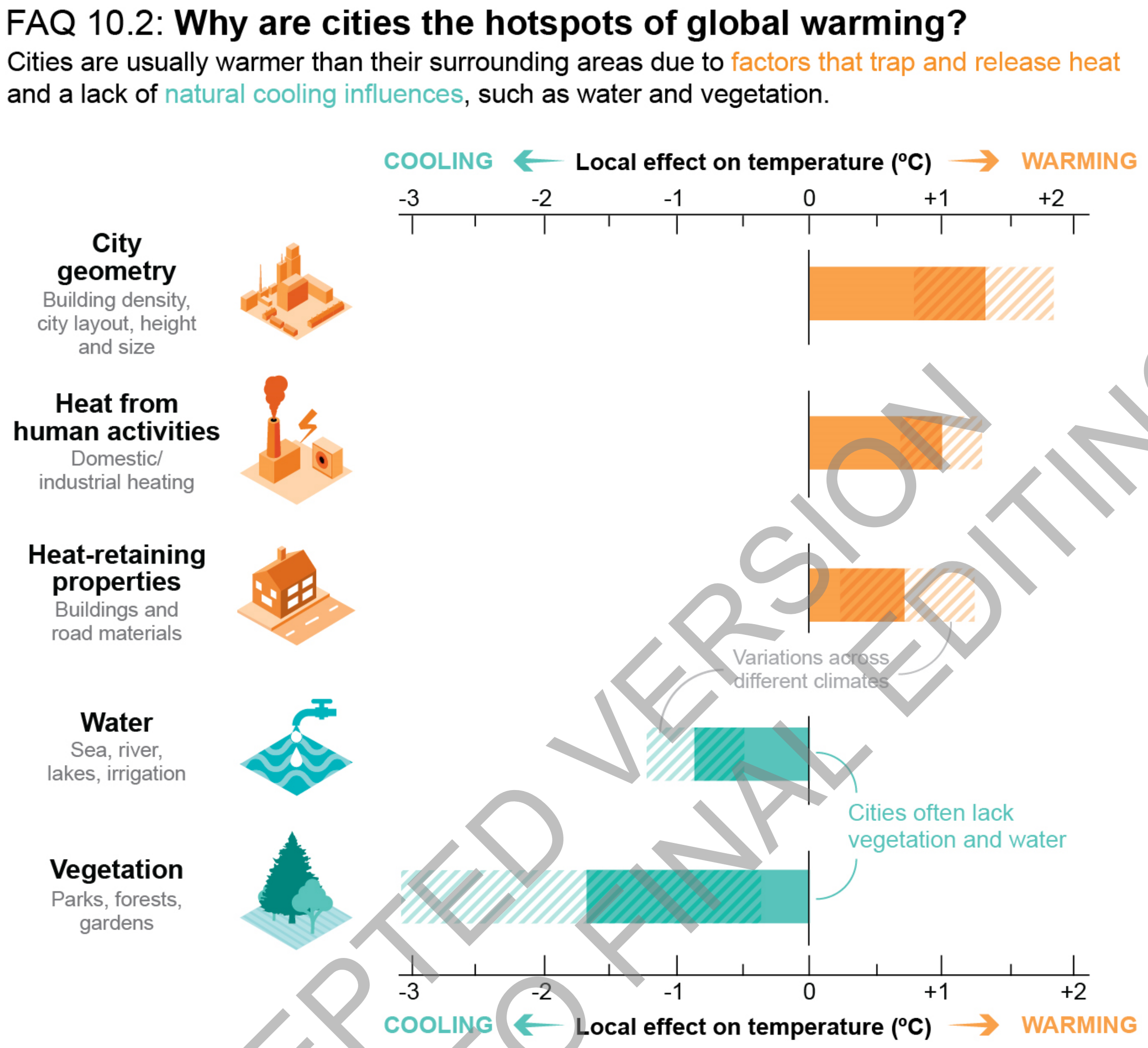


FAQ 10.1, Figure 1: **Climate information for decision makers is more useful if the physical and cultural diversity across the world is considered.** The figure illustrates schematically the broad range of knowledge that must be blended with the diversity of users to distil information that will have relevance and credibility. This blending or distillation should engage the values and knowledge of both the stakeholders and the scientists. The bottom row contains examples of stakeholders' interests and is not all-inclusive. As part of the distillation, the outcomes can advance the U.N.'s Sustainable Development Goals, covered in part by these examples.



FAQ 10.1, Figure 2: Efficiency of the various factors at warming up or cooling down neighbourhoods of urban areas. Overall, cities tend to be warmer than their surroundings. This is called the 'urban heat island' effect. The hatched areas on the bars show how the strength of the warming or cooling effects of each factor varies depending on the local climate. For example, vegetation has a stronger cooling effect in temperate and warm climates. Further details on data sources are available in the chapter data table (Table 10.SM.11).

Frequently Asked Questions

FAQ 11.1: How do changes in climate extremes compare with changes in climate averages?

Human-caused climate change alters the frequency and intensity of climate variables (e.g., surface temperature) and phenomena (e.g., tropical cyclones) in a variety of ways. We now know that the ways in which average and extreme conditions have changed (and will continue to change) depend on the variable and the phenomenon being considered. Changes in local surface temperature extremes follow closely the corresponding changes in local average surface temperatures. On the contrary, changes in precipitation extremes (heavy precipitation) generally do not follow those in average precipitation and can even move in the opposite direction (e.g., with average precipitation decreasing but extreme precipitation increasing).

Climate change will manifest very differently depending on which region, which season and which variable we are interested in. For example, over some parts of the Arctic, temperatures will warm at rates about 3-4 times higher during winter compared to summer months. And in summer, most of northern Europe will experience larger temperatures increases than most places in Southeast South America and Australasia, with differences that can be larger than 1°C depending on the level of global warming. In general, differences across regions and seasons arise because the underlying physical processes differ drastically across regions and seasons.

Climate change will also manifest differently for different weather regimes and can lead to contrasting changes in average and extreme conditions. Observations of the recent past and climate model projections show that, in most places, changes in daily temperatures are dominated by a general warming in which both the climatological average and extreme values are shifted towards higher temperatures, making warm extremes more frequent and cold extremes less frequent. The top panels in FAQ 11.1, Figure 1 show projected changes in surface temperature for long-term average conditions (left) and for extreme hot days (right) during the warm season (summer in mid- to high-latitudes). Projected increases in long-term average temperature differ substantially in different places, varying from less than 3°C in some places in central South Asia and southern South America to over 7°C in some places in North America, north Africa and the Middle East. Changes in extreme hot days follow changes in average conditions quite closely, although in some places the warming rates for extremes can be intensified (e.g., southern Europe and the Amazon basin) or weakened (e.g., northern Asia and Greenland) compared to average values.

Recent observations and global and regional climate model projections point to changes in precipitation extremes (including both rainfall and snowfall extremes) differing drastically from those in average precipitation. The bottom panels in FAQ 11.1, Figure 1 show projected changes in the long-term average precipitation (left) and in heavy precipitation (right). Averaged precipitation changes show striking regional differences, with substantial drying in places such as southern Europe and northern South America and wetting in places such as Middle East and southern South America. Changes in extreme heavy precipitation are much more uniform, with systematic increases over nearly all land regions. The physical reasons behind the different response of averaged and extreme precipitation are now well understood. The intensification of extreme precipitation is driven by the increase in atmospheric water vapour (about 7% per 1°C of warming near the surface), although this is modulated by various dynamical changes. In contrast, changes in average precipitation are driven not only by moisture increases but also by slower processes that constrain future changes to on be only about 2–3% per 1°C of warming near the surface.

In summary, the specific relationship between changes in average and extreme conditions strongly depends on the variable or phenomenon being considered. At the local scale, average and extreme surface temperature changes are strongly related, while average and extreme precipitation changes are often weakly related. For both variables, the changes in average and extreme conditions vary strongly across different places due to the effect of local and regional processes.

[START FAQ 11.1, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 11.1, Figure 1: Global maps of future changes in surface temperature (top panels) and precipitation (bottom panels) for long-term average (left) and extreme conditions (right). All changes were estimated using the CMIP6 ensemble mean for a scenario with a global warming of 4°C relative to 1850-

1900 temperatures. Average surface temperatures refer to the warmest three-month season (summer in mid- to high-latitudes) and extreme temperature refer to the hottest day in a year. Precipitation changes, which can include both rainfall and snowfall changes, are normalized by 1850-1900 values and shown in percentage; extreme precipitation refers to the largest daily rainfall in a year.

[END FAQ 11.1, FIGURE 1 HERE]

[END FAQ 11.1 HERE]

[START FAQ 11.2 HERE]

FAQ 11.2: Will unprecedented extremes occur as a result of human-induced climate change?

Climate change has already increased the magnitude and frequency of extreme hot events and decreased the magnitude and frequency of extreme cold events, and, in some regions, intensified extreme precipitation events. As the climate moves away from its past and current states, we will experience extreme events that are unprecedented, either in magnitude, frequency, timing or location. The frequency of these unprecedented extreme events will increase with increasing global warming. Additionally, the combined occurrence of multiple unprecedented extremes may result in large and unprecedented impacts.

Human-induced climate change has already affected many aspects of the climate system. In addition to the increase in global surface temperature, many types of weather and climate extremes have changed. In most regions, the frequency and intensity of hot extremes have increased and those of cold extremes have decreased. The frequency and intensity of heavy precipitation events have increased at a global scale and over a majority of land regions. Although extreme events such as land and marine heatwaves, heavy precipitation, drought, tropical cyclones, and associated wildfires and coastal flooding have occurred in the past and will continue to occur in the future, they often come with different magnitudes or frequencies in a warmer world. For example, future heatwaves will last longer and have higher temperatures, and future extreme precipitation events will be more intense in several regions. Certain extremes, such as extreme cold, will be less intense and less frequent with increasing warming.

Unprecedented extremes – that is, events not experienced in the past – will occur in the future in five different ways (FAQ 11.2, Figure 1). First, events that are considered to be extreme in the current climate will occur in the future with unprecedented magnitudes. Second, future extreme events will also occur with unprecedented frequency. Third, certain types of extremes may occur in regions that have not previously encountered those types of events. For example, as the sea level rises, coastal flooding may occur in new locations, and wildfires are already occurring in areas, such as parts of the Arctic, where the probability of such events was previously low. Fourth, extreme events may also be unprecedented in their timing. For example, extremely hot temperatures may occur either earlier or later in the year than they have in the past.

Finally, compound events, where multiple extreme events of either different or similar types occur simultaneously and/or in succession, may be more probable or severe in the future. These compound events can often impact ecosystems and societies more strongly than when such events occur in isolation. For example, a drought along with extreme heat will increase the risk of wildfires and agriculture damages or losses. As individual extreme events become more severe as a result of climate change, the combined occurrence of these events will create unprecedented compound events. This could exacerbate the intensity and associated impacts of these extreme events.

Unprecedented extremes have already occurred in recent years, relative to the 20th century climate. Some recent extreme hot events would have had very little chance of occurring without human influence on the climate (see FAQ 11.3). In the future, unprecedented extremes will occur as the climate continues to warm. Those extremes will happen with larger magnitudes and at higher frequencies than previously experienced. Extreme events may also appear in new locations, at new times of the year, or as unprecedented compound events. Moreover, unprecedented events will become more frequent with higher levels of warming, for example at 3°C of global warming compared to 2°C of global warming.

[START FAQ 11.2, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 11.2, Figure 1: New types of unprecedented extremes that will occur as a result of climate change.

[END FAQ 11.2, FIGURE 1 HERE]

[END FAQ 11.2 HERE]

[START FAQ 11.3 HERE]

FAQ 11.3: Did climate change cause that recent extreme event in my country?

While it is difficult to identify the exact causes of a particular extreme event, the relatively new science of event attribution is able to quantify the role of climate change in altering the probability and magnitude of some types of weather and climate extremes. There is strong evidence that characteristics of many individual extreme events have already changed because of human-driven changes to the climate system. Some types of highly impactful extreme weather events have occurred more often and have become more severe due to these human influences. As the climate continues to warm, the observed changes in the probability and/or magnitude of some extreme weather events will continue as the human influences on these events increase.

It is common to question whether human-caused climate change caused a major weather- and climate-related disaster. When extreme weather and climate events do occur, both exposure and vulnerability play an important role in determining the magnitude and impacts of the resulting disaster. As such, it is difficult to attribute a specific disaster directly to climate change. However, the relatively new science of event attribution enables scientists to attribute aspects of specific extreme weather and climate events to certain causes. Scientists cannot answer directly whether a particular event was caused by climate change, as extremes do occur naturally and any specific weather and climate event is the result of a complex mix of human and natural factors. Instead, scientists quantify the relative importance of human and natural influences on the magnitude and/or probability of specific extreme weather events. Such information is important for disaster risk reduction planning, because improved knowledge about changes in the probability and magnitude of relevant extreme events enables better quantification of disaster risks.

On a case-by-case basis, scientists can now quantify the contribution of human influences to the magnitude and probability of many extreme events. This is done by estimating and comparing the probability or magnitude of the same type of event between the current climate – including the increases in greenhouse gas concentrations and other human influences – and an alternate world where the atmospheric greenhouse gases remained at pre-industrial levels. FAQ 11.3 Figure 1 illustrates this approach using differences in temperature and probability between the two scenarios as an example. Both the pre-industrial (blue) and current (red) climates experience hot extremes, but with different probabilities and magnitudes. Hot extremes of a given temperature have a higher probability of occurrence in the warmer current climate than in the cooler pre-industrial climate. Additionally, an extreme hot event of a particular probability will be warmer in the current climate than in the pre-industrial climate. Climate model simulations are often used to estimate the occurrence of a specific event in both climates. The change in the magnitude and/or probability of the extreme event in the current climate compared to the pre-industrial climate is attributed to the difference between the two scenarios, which is the human influence.

Attributable increases in probability and magnitude have been identified consistently for many hot extremes. Attributable increases have also been found for some extreme precipitation events, including hurricane rainfall events, but these results can vary among events. In some cases, large natural variations in the climate system prevent attributing changes in the probability or magnitude of a specific extreme to human influence. Additionally, attribution of certain classes of extreme weather (e.g., tornadoes) is beyond current modelling and theoretical capabilities. As the climate continues to warm, larger changes in probability and magnitude are expected, and as a result it will be possible to attribute future temperature and precipitation extremes in many locations to human influences. Attributable changes may emerge for other types of extremes as the warming signal increases.

In conclusion, human-caused global warming has resulted in changes in a wide variety of recent extreme weather events. Strong increases in probability and magnitude, attributable to human influence, have been found for many heat waves and hot extremes around the world.

[START FAQ11.3 FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 11.3, Figure 1: Changes in climate result in changes in the magnitude and probability of extremes. Example of how temperature extremes differ between a climate with pre-industrial greenhouse gases (shown in blue) and the current climate (shown in orange) for a representative region. The horizontal axis shows the range of extreme temperatures, while the vertical axis shows the annual chance of each temperature event's occurrence. Moving towards the right indicates increasingly hotter extremes that are more rare (less probable). For hot extremes, an extreme event of a particular temperature in the pre-industrial climate would be more probable (vertical arrow) in the current climate. An event of a certain probability in the pre-industrial climate would be warmer (horizontal arrow) in the current climate. While the climate under greenhouse gases at the pre-industrial level experiences a range of hot extremes, such events are hotter and more frequent in the current climate.

[END FAQ11.3 FIGURE 1 HERE]

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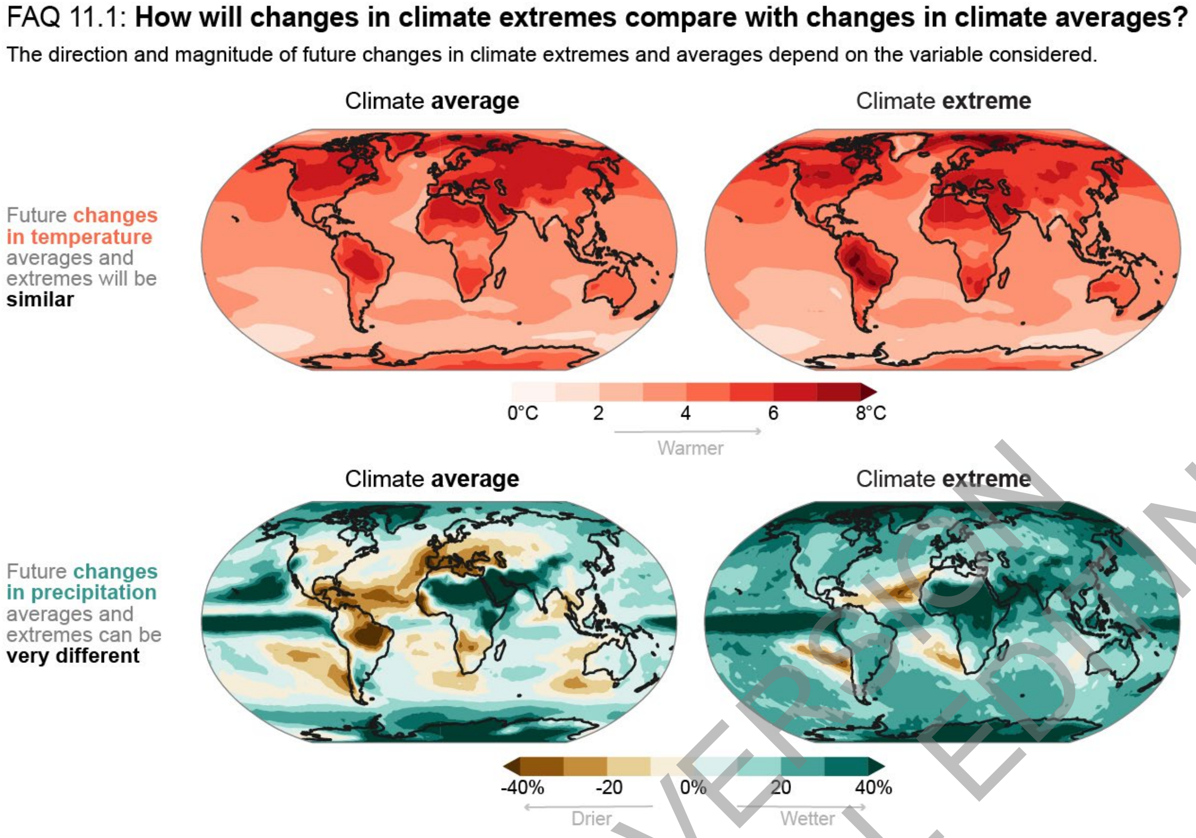
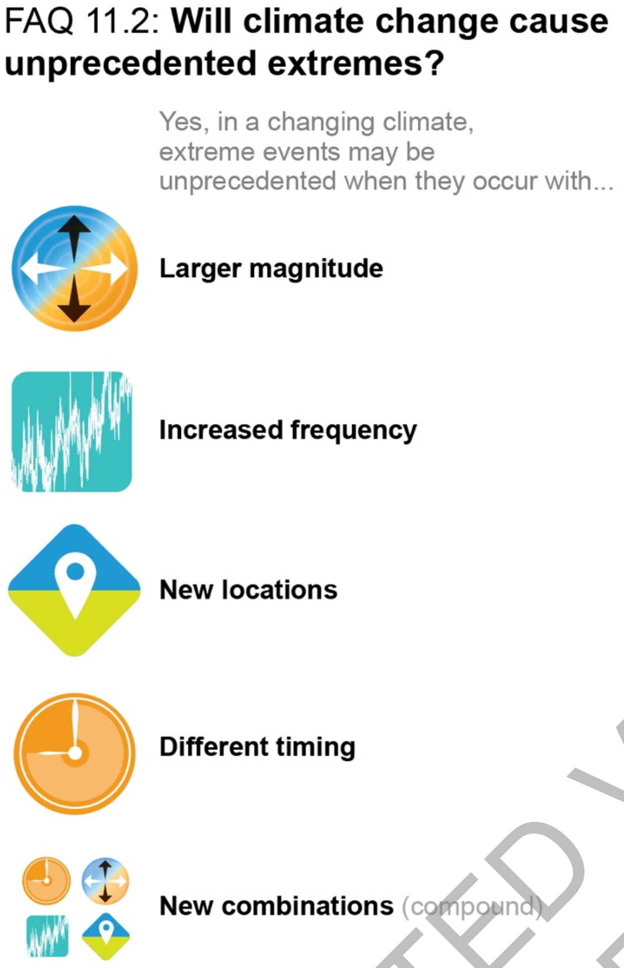
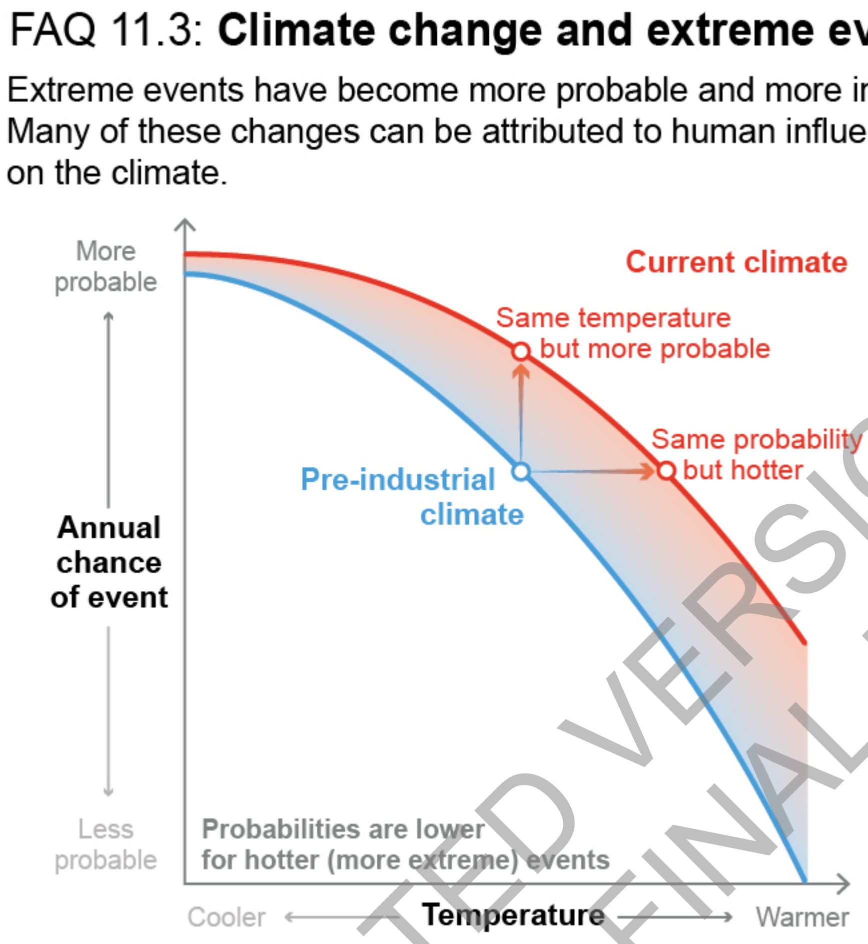


FAQ 11.1, Figure 1: Global maps of future changes in surface temperature (top panels) and precipitation (bottom panels) for long-term average (left) and extreme conditions (right). All changes were estimated using the CMIP6 ensemble mean for a scenario with a global warming of 4°C relative to 1850-1900 temperatures. Average surface temperatures refer to the warmest three-month season (summer in mid- to high-latitudes) and extreme temperature refer to the hottest day in a year. Precipitation changes, which can include both rainfall and snowfall changes, are normalized by 1850-1900 values and shown in percentage; extreme precipitation refers to the largest daily rainfall in a year.



FAQ 11.2, Figure 1: New types of unprecedented extremes that will occur as a result of climate change.



FAQ 11.3, Figure 1: Changes in climate result in changes in the magnitude and probability of extremes. Example of how temperature extremes differ between a climate with pre-industrial greenhouse gases (shown in blue) and the current climate (shown in orange) for a representative region. The horizontal axis shows the range of extreme temperatures, while the vertical axis shows the annual chance of each temperature event's occurrence. Moving towards the right indicates increasingly hotter extremes that are more rare (less probable). For hot extremes, an extreme event of a particular temperature in the pre-industrial climate would be more probable (vertical arrow) in the current climate. An event of a certain probability in the pre-industrial climate would be warmer (horizontal arrow) in the current climate. While the climate under greenhouse gases at the pre-industrial level experiences a range of hot extremes, such events are hotter and more frequent in the current climate.

Frequently Asked Questions

FAQ 12.1: What is a climatic impact-driver (CID)?

A climatic impact-driver is a physical climate condition that directly affects society or ecosystems. Climatic impact-drivers may represent a long-term average condition (such as the average winter temperatures that affect indoor heating requirements), a common event (such as a frost that kills off warm-season plants), or an extreme event (such as a coastal flood that destroys homes). A single climatic impact-driver may lead to detrimental effects for one part of society while benefiting another, while others are not affected at all. A climatic impact-driver (or its change caused by climate change) is therefore not universally hazardous or beneficial, but we refer to it as a 'hazard' when experts determine it is detrimental to a specific system.

Climate change can alter many aspects of the climate system, but efforts to identify impacts and risks usually focus on a smaller set of changes known to affect, or potentially affect, things that society cares about. These *climatic impact-drivers* (CIDs) are formally defined in this Report as 'physical climate system conditions (e.g., means, events, extremes) that affect an element of society or ecosystems. Depending on system tolerance, CIDs and their changes can be detrimental, beneficial, neutral, or a mixture of each across interacting system elements and regions'. Because people, infrastructure and ecosystems interact directly with their immediate environment, climate experts assess CIDs locally and regionally. CIDs may relate to temperature, the water cycle, wind and storms, snow and ice, oceanic and coastal processes or the chemistry and energy balance of the climate system. Future impacts and risk may also be directly affected by factors unrelated to the climate (such as socio-economic development, population growth, or a viral outbreak) that may also alter the vulnerability or exposure of systems.

CIDs capture important characteristics of the average climate and both common and extreme events that shape society and nature (see FAQ 12.2). Some CIDs focus on aspects of the average climate (such as the seasonal progression of temperature and precipitation, average winds and the chemistry of the ocean) that determine, for example, species distribution, farming systems, the location of tourist resorts, the availability of water resources and the expected heating and cooling needs for buildings in an average year. CIDs also include common episodic events that are particularly important to systems, such as thaw events that can trigger springtime plant development, cold spells that are important for fruit crop chill requirements, or frost events that eliminate summer vegetation as winter sets in. Finally, CIDs include many extreme events connected to impacts such as hailstorms that damage vehicles, coastal floods that destroy shoreline property, tornadoes that damage infrastructure, droughts that increase competition for water resources, and heatwaves that can strain the health of outdoor laborers.

Many aspects of our daily lives, businesses and natural systems depend on weather and climate, and there is great interest in anticipating the impacts of climate change on the things we care about. To meet these needs, scientists engage with companies and authorities to provide climate services – meaningful and possibly actionable climate information designed to assist decision-making. Climate science and services can focus on CIDs that substantially disrupt systems to support broader risk management approaches. A single CID change can have dramatically different implications for different sectors or even elements of the same sector, so engagement between climate scientists and stakeholders is important to contextualize the climate changes that will come. Climate services responding to planning and optimization of an activity can focus on more gradual changes in climate operating conditions.

FAQ 12.1, Figure 1 tracks example outcomes of seasonal snow cover changes that connect climate science to the need for mitigation, adaptation and regional risk management. The length of the season with snow on the ground is just one of many regional climate conditions that may change in the future, and it becomes a CID because there are many elements of society and ecosystems that rely on an expected seasonality of snow cover. Climate scientists and climate service providers examining human-driven climate change may identify different regions where the length of the season with snow cover could increase, decrease, or stay relatively unaffected. In each region, change in seasonal snow cover in turn may affect different systems in beneficial or detrimental ways (in the latter case, changing seasonal snow cover would be a 'hazard'), although systems such as coastal aquaculture remain relatively unaffected. The changing profile of benefits and hazards connected to these changes in the seasonal snow cover CID in turn affects the profile of impacts, risks and benefits that stakeholder in the region manage in response to climate change.

[START FAQ12.1, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 12.1, Figure 1: A single climatic impact-driver can affect ecosystems and society in different ways. A variety of impacts from the same climatic impact-driver change, illustrated with the example of regional seasonal snow cover.

[END FAQ12.1, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 12.2: What are climatic thresholds and why are they important?

Climatic thresholds tell us about the tolerance of society and ecosystems so that we can better scrutinize the types of climate changes that are expected to impact things we care about. Many systems have natural or structural thresholds. If conditions exceed those thresholds, the result can be sudden changes or even collapses in health, productivity, utility or behavior. Adaptation and risk management efforts can change these thresholds, altering the profile of climate conditions that would be problematic and increasing overall system resilience.

Decision makers have long observed that certain weather and climate conditions can be problematic, or hazardous, for things they care about (i.e., things with socio-economic, cultural or intrinsic value). Many elements of society and ecosystems operate in a suitable climate zone selected naturally or by stakeholders considering the expected climate conditions. However, as climate change moves conditions beyond expected ranges, they may cross a climatic 'threshold' – a level beyond which there are either gradual changes in system behaviour or abrupt, non-linear and potentially irreversible impacts.

Climatic thresholds can be associated with either natural or structural tolerance levels. Natural thresholds, for instance, include heat and humidity conditions above which humans cannot regulate their internal temperatures through sweat, drought durations that heighten competition between species, and winter temperatures that are lethal for pests or disease-carrying vector species. Structural thresholds include engineered limits of drainage systems, extreme wind speeds that limit wind turbine operation, the height of coastal protection infrastructure, and the locations of irrigation infrastructure or tropical cyclone sheltering facilities.

Thresholds may be defined according to raw values (such as maximum temperature exceeding 35°C) or percentiles (such as the local 99th percentile daily rainfall total). They also often have strong seasonal dependence (see FAQ 12.3). For example, the amount of snowfall that a deciduous tree can withstand depends on whether the snowfall occurs before or after the tree sheds its leaves. Most systems respond to changes in complex ways, and those responses are not determined solely or precisely by specific thresholds of a single climate variable. Nonetheless, thresholds can be useful indicators of system behaviours, and an understanding of these thresholds can help inform risk management decisions.

FAQ 12.2 Figure 1 illustrates how threshold conditions can help us understand climate conditions that are suitable for normal system operation and the thresholds beyond which impacts occur. Crops tend to grow most optimally within a suitable range of daily temperatures that is influenced by the varieties being cultivated and the way the farm is managed. As daily temperatures rise above a 'critical' temperature threshold, plants begin to experience heat stress that reduces growth and may lower resulting yields. If temperatures reach a higher 'limiting' temperature threshold, crops may suffer leaf loss, pollen sterility, or tissue damage that can lead to crop failure. Farmers typically select a cropping system with some consideration to the probability of extreme temperature events that may occur within a typical season, and so identifying hot temperature thresholds helps farmers select their seed and field management strategies as part of their overall risk management. Climate experts may therefore aim to assist farm planning by providing information about the climate change-induced shifts to the expected frequency of daily heat extremes that exceed crop tolerance thresholds.

Adaptation and other changes in societies and environment can shift climatic thresholds by modifying vulnerability and exposure. For example, adaptation efforts may include breeding new crops with higher heat tolerance levels so that corresponding dangerous thresholds occur less frequently. Likewise, increasing the height of a flood embankment protecting a given community can increase the level of river flow that may be tolerated without flooding, reducing the frequency of damaging floods. Stakeholders therefore benefit from climate services that are based on a co-development process, with scientists identifying system-relevant thresholds and developing tailored climatic impact-driver indices that represent these thresholds (FAQ 12.1). These thresholds help focus the provision of action-relevant climate information for adaptation and risk management.

[START FAQ12.2, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ12.2, Figure 1: Crop response to maximum temperature thresholds. Crop growth rate responds to daily maximum temperature increases, leading to reduced growth and crop failure as temperatures exceed critical and limiting temperature thresholds, respectively. Note that changes in other environmental factors (such as carbon dioxide and water) may increase the tolerance of plants to increasing temperatures.

[END FAQ12.2, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 12.3: How will climate change affect the regional characteristics of a climate hazard?

Human-driven climate change can alter the regional characteristics of climate hazard by changing the magnitude or intensity of a climate hazard, the frequency with which it occurs, the duration that hazardous conditions persist, the timing when a hazard occurs, or the spatial extent threatened by a hazard. By examining each of these aspects of a hazard's profile change, climate services may provide climate risk information that allows decision makers to better tailor adaptation, mitigation and risk management strategies.

A *climate hazard* is a climate condition with the potential to harm natural systems or society. Examples include heatwaves, droughts, heavy snowfall events and sea level rise. Climate scientists look for patterns in climatic impact-drivers to detect the signature of changing hazards that may influence stakeholder planning (FAQ 12.1). Climate service providers work with stakeholders and impacts experts to identify key system responses and tolerance thresholds (FAQ 12.2) and then examine historical observations and future climate projections to identify associated changes to the characteristics of a regional hazard's profile. Climate change can alter at least five different characteristics of the hazard profile of a region (FAQ 12.3, Figure 1):

Magnitude or intensity is the raw value of a climate hazard, such as an increase in the maximum yearly temperature or in the depth of flooding that results from a coastal storm with a 1% change of occurring each year.

Frequency is the number of times that a climate hazard reaches or surpasses a threshold over a given period. For example, increases to the number of heavy snowfall events, tornadoes, or floods experienced in a year or in a decade.

Duration is the length of time over which hazardous conditions persist beyond a threshold, such as an increase in the number of consecutive days where maximum air temperature exceeds 35°C, the number of consecutive months of drought conditions, or the number of days that a tropical cyclone affects a location.

Timing captures the occurrence of a hazardous event in relation to the course of a day, season, year, or other period in which sectoral elements are evolving or co-dependent (such as the time of year when migrating animals expect to find a seasonal food supply). Examples include a shift toward an earlier day of the year when the last spring frost occurs or a delay in the typical arrival date for the first seasonal rains, the length of the winter period when the ground is typically covered by snow, or a reduction in the typical time needed for soil moisture to move from normal to drought conditions.

Spatial extent is the region in which a hazardous condition is expected, such as the area currently threatened by tropical cyclones, geographical areas where the coldest day of the year restricts a particular pest or pathogen, terrain where permafrost is present, the area that would flood following a common storm, zones where climate conditions are conducive to outdoor labour, or the size of a marine heatwave.

Hazard profile changes are often intertwined or stem from related physical changes to the climate system. For example, changes in the frequency and magnitude of extreme events are often directly related to each other as a result of atmospheric dynamics and chemical processes. In many cases, one aspect of hazard change is more apparent than others, which may provide a first emergent signal indicating a larger set of changes to come (FAQ1.2).

Information about how a hazard has changed or will change helps stakeholders prioritize more robust adaptation, mitigation and risk management strategies. For example, allocation of limited disaster relief resources may be designed to recognize that tropical cyclones are projected to become more intense even as the frequency of those storms may not change. Planning may also factor in the fact that even heatwaves that are not record-breaking in their intensity can still be problematic for vulnerable populations when they persist over a long period. Likewise, firefighters recognize new logistical challenges in the lengthening of the fire weather season and an expansion of fire conditions into parts of the world where fires were not previously a great concern. Strong engagement between climate scientists and stakeholders therefore helps climate services tailor and communicate clear information about the types of changing climate hazards to be addressed in resilience efforts.

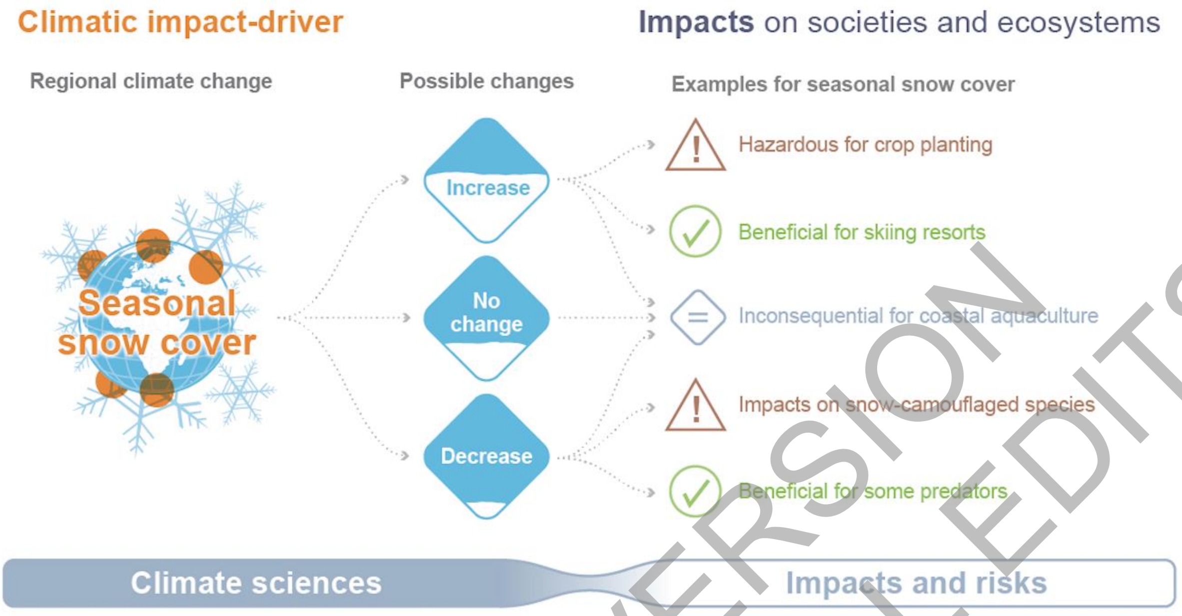
[START FAQ12.3, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 12.3, Figure 1: Types of changes to a region's hazard profile. The first five panels illustrate how climate changes can alter a hazard's intensity (or magnitude), frequency, duration, and timing (by seasonality and speed of onset) in relation to a hazard threshold (horizontal grey line). The difference between the historical climate (blue) and future climate (red) shows the changing aspects of climate change that stakeholders will have to manage. The bottom-right panel shows how a given climate hazard (such as a once-in-100-year river flood) may reach new geographical areas under a future climate change.

[END FAQ12.3, FIGURE 1 HERE]

FAQ 12.1: **What is a climatic impact-driver (CID)?**

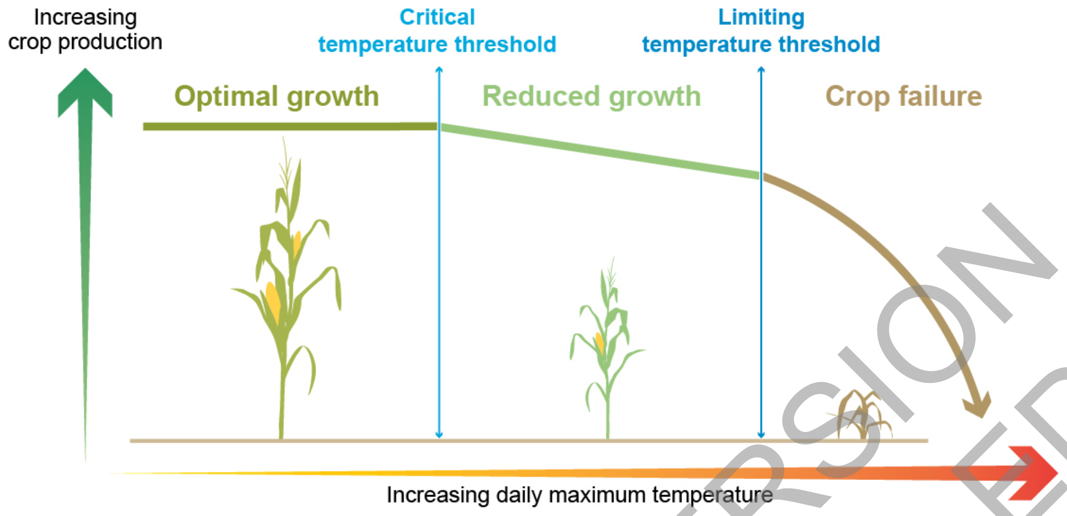
A **climatic impact-driver (CID)** is a climate condition that directly affects elements of society or ecosystems. Climatic impact-drivers and their changes can lead to positive, negative, or inconsequential outcomes (or a mixture).



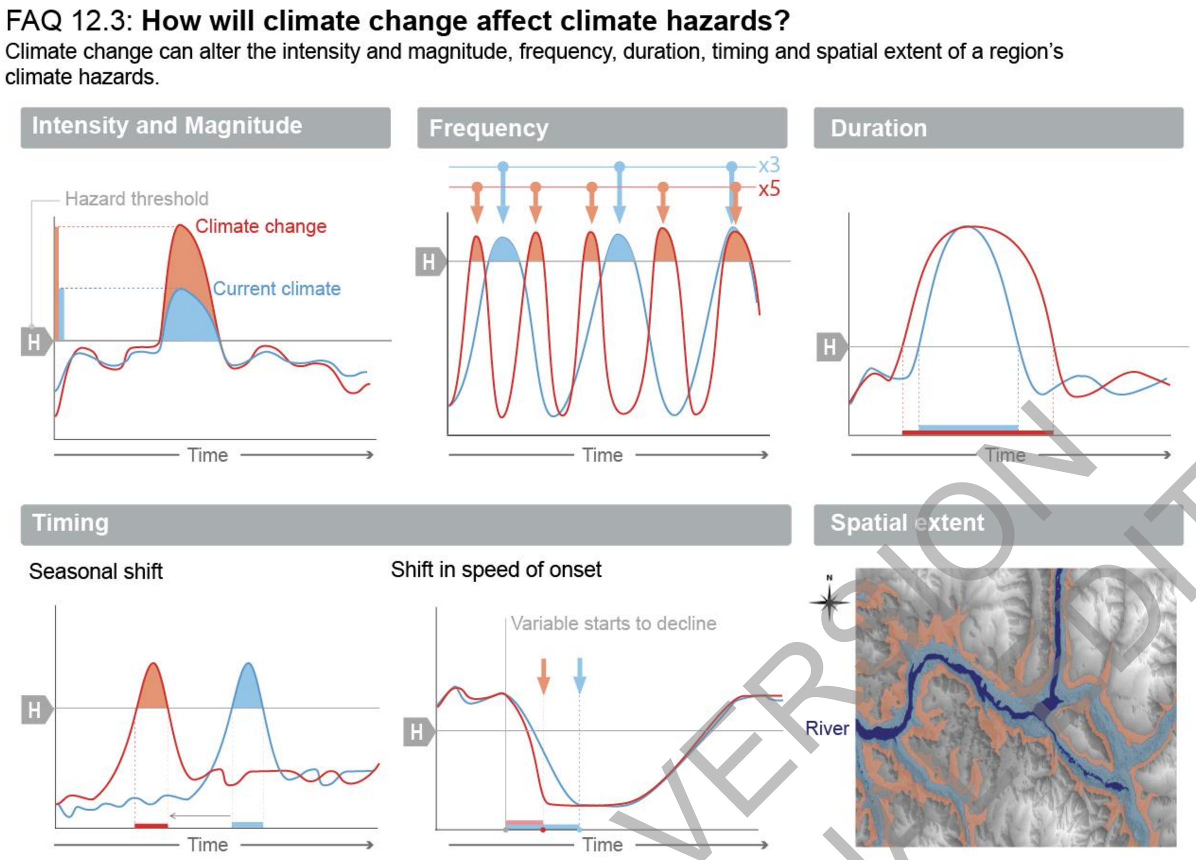
FAQ 12.1, Figure 1: A single climatic impact-driver can affect ecosystems and society in different ways. A variety of impacts from the same climatic impact-driver change, illustrated with the example of regional seasonal snow cover.

FAQ 12.2: **What are climatic thresholds and why are they important?**

Many systems have thresholds that can lead to sudden changes, if climate conditions exceed them. Adaptation and risk management efforts can increase overall system resilience by identifying and changing tolerance thresholds.



FAQ12.2, Figure 1: Crop response to maximum temperature thresholds. Crop growth rate responds to daily maximum temperature increases, leading to reduced growth and crop failure as temperatures exceed critical and limiting temperature thresholds, respectively. Note that changes in other environmental factors (such as carbon dioxide and water) may increase the tolerance of plants to increasing temperatures.



FAQ 12.3, Figure 1: Types of changes to a region's hazard profile. The first five panels illustrate how climate changes can alter a hazard's intensity (or magnitude), frequency, duration, and timing (by seasonality and speed of onset) in relation to a hazard threshold (horizontal grey line). The difference between the historical climate (blue) and future climate (red) shows the changing aspects of climate change that stakeholders will have to manage. The bottom-right panel shows how a given climate hazard (such as a once-in-100-year river flood) may reach new geographical areas under a future climate change.