

Published on Jewcy.com (<http://www.jewcy.com>)

What Polar Bears Can Teach Us About the Environment (Hint: It's Not What You Think)

By [Bjørn Lomborg](#)

Created 04/22/2008 - 15:41

The threat of man-made climate change looms larger than any other problem facing the planet, so it's no wonder that the discussion about global warming has turned into a kind of choreographed screaming that drowns out the facts.

Science unequivocally tells us that climate change is real and caused by man, but predictions of destruction on an epic scale don't stack up.

Consider the plight of the polar bear – a pin-up 'victim' of global warming. Some campaigners claim polar bears are dying because of warmer temperatures, but the facts don't support the hysteria.

Since the 1960s, polar bear numbers have actually grown five-fold. Polar bears will eventually be affected by climate change, but many creatures and plants in the Arctic will do better as temperatures rise. That doesn't make up for waning populations of polar bears, but we need to hear both sides of the story.

Scare stories are based on faulty assumptions about just one declining bear population. For the sake of argument, let's accept those faulty assumptions at face value. That means we are losing 15 bears a year to climate change. This means that – at most – 15 bears could be saved this year if we could stop global warming right now. Of course, we can't. The Kyoto Protocol will cost \$180 billion dollars, yet will not affect temperatures by very much: it would probably save .06 of one bear each year.

There are smarter alternatives. Hunters shoot between 300 and 500 polar bears each year. We can revoke hunting rights and clamp down on poachers. Surely it makes more sense to save 300-500 polar bears at virtually no cost than it does to spend hundreds of billions of dollars saving just one.

Of course, we don't just care about polar bears, but also about the human toll of climate change. It seems logical to expect more heat waves and therefore more deaths. But though this fact gets much less billing, rising temperatures will also reduce the number of cold spells. And the cold is a much bigger killer than the heat. According to the first complete peer-reviewed survey of climate change's health effects, global warming will actually save lives. It's estimated that by 2050, global warming will cause almost 400,000 more heat-related deaths each year. But at the same time, 1.8 million fewer people will die from cold.

The Kyoto Protocol, at great expense, is not a sensible way to stop people from dying in future heat waves. At a much lower cost, urban designers and politicians could lower temperatures more effectively by planting trees, adding water features, and reducing the amount of asphalt in at-risk cities. Estimates show that this could reduce the peak temperatures in cities by more than 20 degrees Fahrenheit.

Global warming will claim lives in another way: by increasing the number of people at risk of catching malaria by about 3 percent over this century. According to scientific models, implementing the Kyoto Protocol for the rest of this century would reduce the malaria risk by just 0.2 percent.

On the other hand, we could spend \$3 billion annually -- 2 percent of the protocol's cost -- on mosquito nets and medication and cut malaria incidence almost in half within a decade. For every dollar we spend saving one person through policies like the Kyoto Protocol, we could save 36,000 through direct intervention.

The world shouldn't ignore climate change. Rather than throwing trillions of dollars at a treaty that will achieve little, I advocate a dramatic increase in spending on research into low-carbon energy. If every nation took part, this would be much more efficient than Kyoto, yet cost almost ten times less.

We should remember when we respond to the threat of climate change that other huge challenges face the planet:

- 4 million people will die from malnutrition this year
- 3 million from HIV/AIDS
- 2.5 million from indoor and outdoor air pollution
- 2 million from lack of micronutrients (iron, zinc and vitamin A)
- And almost 2 million from lack of clean drinking water.

Climate change policies are not the most effective way of dealing with these issues.

My latest project, Copenhagen Consensus 2008, will look at the world's biggest challenges and ask some of the world's top minds to identify the best solutions to them. Four Nobel laureates and four other top economists will weigh up how much good could be achieved by different approaches to world problems, and will identify the most effective ways to make a difference.

There's more information at [Copenhagen Consensus](#).

Cutting carbon emissions through Kyoto has become the instantaneous answer to any problem, but we could achieve more through simpler policies.

For one thing, we should stop shooting polar bears.

Bjørn Lomborg is the organizer of the Copenhagen Consensus 2008, adjunct professor at the Copenhagen Business School, and author of [Cool It](#) and [The Skeptical Environmentalist](#).

Source URL (retrieved on 10/17/2008 - 11:02): http://www.jewcy.com/post/what_polar_bears_can_teach_us_about_environment_hint_its_not_what_you_think

Links:

[1] http://www.jewcy.com/user/2448/bjorn_lomborg

[2] <http://www.copenhagenconsensus.com/Default.aspx?ID=788>

[3] http://www.amazon.com/Cool-Skeptical-Environmentalists-Global-Warming/dp/0307266923/ref=pd_bbs_2?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1208891274&sr=8-2

[4] http://www.amazon.com/Skeptical-Environmentalist-Measuring-State-World/dp/0521010683/ref=pd_bbs_sr_3?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1208891274&sr=8-3



Okay, First Things First: stop shooting at us.