

FINANCIAL TIMES

November 25, 2011 12:00 am

Comment: Global warming needs a more innovative solution

By Bjørn Lomborg

For a considerable time, it has been claimed that we must fix climate change immediately or all will be lost. As long ago as 1989, the director of the United Nations environment programme stated: "We shall win – or lose – the climate struggle in the first years of the 1990s. The issue is as urgent as that." In his 2006 film, *An Inconvenient Truth*, Al Gore, the former US vice-president, stated: "We have just 10 years to avert a major catastrophe."

The UK's Prince Charles claimed in 2008 that we had just "18 months to stop climate change disaster", while at the disastrous Copenhagen climate conference in 2009, Gordon Brown, then UK prime minister, declared: "We have fewer than 50 days" to save the planet from catastrophe.

Since those deadlines have come and gone, the financial crisis has shunted global warming off the agenda of the media and politicians.

That is a shame. Climate change is real, man-made and important. By the end of the century, economic models show that the negative impact globally will run to 1-5 per cent of gross domestic product (depending on how much we can adapt), with the negative cumulative impact across the century in the order of 0.5 per cent of GDP.

However, we need to be careful not to do more harm with our "solution". Global warming is a century-long problem. Most of the impact will have significant, negative effects only in 50-100 years, despite much of the media coverage suggesting dire consequences today. As Richard Tol, a climate economist, has shown, global warming now is beneficial for the world. Only in 2075 will it become a problem.

When people point out that we will have a world with more heat-related deaths, they are right. But there will be considerably fewer cold-related deaths. The only peer-reviewed article attempting to count all of both increased-heat deaths and decreased-cold deaths showed 400,000 more heat deaths, but 1.8m fewer cold deaths by mid-century. Overall, global warming impacts will end up negative. But this does not mean that we should ignore the reality that it will include both negative and positive consequences.

Likewise, we are often told that global warming makes everything more extreme.

would have a much higher likelihood than our current approach of creating the framework for the kind of game-changing breakthroughs needed to fuel a carbon-free future. If we could find alternatives such as solar panels that are cheaper than fossil fuels over the next two to four decades, everyone would switch and global warming would be fixed. Not only would such a solution be less expensive than trying to cut carbon emissions, it would reduce global warming more quickly. And, unlike carbon cuts, this is a solution that developing countries could embrace.

Global warming needs a sustainable, long-term solution. We have tried a shortcut around this cycle with scare tactics and suggestions of imminent deadlines, but we have little but expensive and ineffective policies to show for it. We need to do better.

The writer is author of 'The Sceptical Environmentalist' and 'Cool It', organiser of the Copenhagen Consensus Center and adjunct professor at Copenhagen Business School

Printed from: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/7f004a72-1576-11e1-b9b8-00144feabdc0.html>

Print a single copy of this article for personal use. Contact us if you wish to print more to distribute to others.

© THE FINANCIAL TIMES LTD 2011 FT and 'Financial Times' are trademarks of The Financial Times Ltd.