

Dave Rado

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Reflections on the IPCC author selection process and the Summary for Policy Maker approval process

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Each of the three IPCC Working Groups (WG) has two co-chairs and six vice-chairs, who collectively make up a WG Bureau. The Bureau is responsible for vetting the author nominations submitted by the ~140 national governments that participate in the IPCC. For the Third Assessment (TAR) full curricula vitae for more than a thousand nominations for WG II authors were reviewed by the Bureau. The initial task was to identify a pair of authors who would take responsibility for coordinating the each of the nineteen chapters. Based upon their publication records, giving weight to nominees who had published relevant papers, especially since the last assessment, in leading journals. In response to an occasional criticism of the IPCC author list, it should be noted that a substantial proportion of the people with doctorates in science who are highly visible critics of the IPCC reports, especially in the public media (newspaper opinion pieces, television and radio shows, etc.), voice opinions that have no foundation in scientific journal publications. Thus it is not surprising that even if nominated by their governments many of the so-called contrarians would not asked by a WG Bureau to assume responsibility for authoring the WG report.

The full complement of Lead Authors (LAs) for TAR WG II numbered 180. LAs meet as chapter teams, and in two sessions with the full complement of LAs as chapters were nearing second drafts, and as they were nearing final drafts. This was important for cross-linkages among chapters, especially for the system/sector and the regional chapters. In the course of the chapter preparation other scientists are asked to contribute by correspondence when additional specialized expertise was needed. These individuals were not vetted by the Bureau, and they need not have been nominated by their government. On the recommendation of a Coordinating LA, a person would be acknowledged as a Contributing Author. WGII TAR had about 240 Contributing Authors.

The WG II TAR review process enlisted another 33 scientists as Independent Review Editors. These were individuals who were knowledgeable of the chapter topic, but without any author duties in this assessment. Their function was similar that of an editor of a scientific journal regarding oversight of author responses to reviews of the chapter drafts. Authors were held accountable by an editor who signed off on a chapter only after the authors

had satisfactorily responded to all of the scientific and government reviews. Overall WG II TAR received reviews from 440 individuals or groups of individuals.

The twenty page Summary for Policy (SPM) makers for each WG was drafted last, as it needs to accurately and compactly reflect the overall message of the full report. About 70 LA who had been active in the preparation of the main report were asked to draft the SPM. Over the course of a year the SPM is revised in response to one expert scientific community review and two reviews by government experts. A core group of about 10 authors from Europe, Africa, Asia, Latin and North America whose collective expertise represented the breadth of the report were engaged in regular conference calls to incorporate input from the larger author group and the comments received from reviewers.

A four day plenary of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change finalizes the WG report. Over one-hundred nations send delegations (varying from one to a dozen or more individuals per nation from national governmental departments and ministries of science, environment, and foreign affairs).

The purpose of the plenary is to review and approve (a specifically defined authority of the assembled Panel) the text of the Summary for Policy Makers, line by line. This a consensus process. All delegations are free to ask questions and propose alternate wording. During this process a pair of LA most familiar with the science of this section of the SPM were on the dais with WG Co-Chairs. These authors are asked to comment if any proposed change would be inconsistent with the science, and if so, the proposed change was not made. If the proposed change was consistent with the science and seemed to add clarity to the message, it would be made. Often delegates from multiple nations would engage in the pros and cons of a proposed change in wording. No votes are taken in this process. Rather, each sentence is gavelled as Approved when no nation continues to express concern about the message it conveys. At this point it is agreed that the text is both correct and clearly understood.

It is important to keep in mind that although the discussions that take place during the four-day plenary are in English, all proceedings are simultaneously translated into the other five UN languages. It was interesting to note that some of the misunderstandings that were corrected during this process had to do important differences in the meaning of common words. The word "few" for example, has very different connotations across the six UN languages.

During plenary proceedings the portion of text under discussion was displayed on a large screen using a track-change edit system. At several points in the four-day meeting printed copies indicating all approved changes were distributed.

Two examples of typical products of editing that occurred during

the plenary are attached. In my impression they reflect improvements over the original text.

I can say with complete confidence that during the TAR WG II plenary no change was made to the SPM text that in any way compromised representation of the scientific assessment that was at the core of the WG II report. In many regards the final SPM product was superior to the draft that was brought to the plenary.

DRAFT TEXT



“These are the general features of climate change that will act on natural and human systems and set the context for the Working Group II assessment.”

FINAL APPROVED TEXT

“These general features of climate change act on natural and human systems and they set the context for the Working Group II assessment. The available literature has not yet investigated climate change impacts, adaptation, and vulnerability associated with the upper end of the projected range of warming.”

DRAFT TEXT



“The warming which will vary by region, will be accompanied by changes in precipitation that include regional increases and decreases that are scenario dependent, changes in the variability of climate, and changes in the frequency and intensity of extreme climate phenomena.”

FINAL APPROVED TEXT

“These projections indicate that the warming would vary by region, and be accompanied by increases and decreases in precipitation. In addition, there would be changes in the variability of climate, and changes in the frequency and intensity of some extreme climate phenomena.”