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Copenhagen report: 'climate change running ahead'

'Climate change is happening faster than predicted' was the message from the congress of 2500 scientists from 70 countries who met in Copenhagen in March to review 1400 climate studies carried out since the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Fourth Assessment Report in 2007.



Credit: ANU/ScienceWise

The recently published report from the congress¹ concludes that many climate change impacts are occurring near the upper boundary of earlier projections, and that the world faces serious risks if the temperature of the planet rises by only 2 degrees above the pre-industrial level.

'The latest science suggests the 2°C "guardrail" is an upper limit to the temperature rise that humanity might be able to cope with, and as observed and "committed" temperature rises together are already about 1.3 degrees, we are running out of time to get emissions tracking downwards,' says the ANU's Professor Will Steffen, a co-author of the report.

'The economic analyses presented at the congress highlighted the escalating costs of any further delays in initiating significant emission reductions – the cost of both dealing with impacts and implementing mitigation actions will rise sharply the longer we wait to act.'

Australia's latest National Greenhouse Accounts – part of Australia's reporting obligations under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – show that Australia's carbon pollution is increasing, particularly in the energy sector. Emissions from the energy sector increased by 43.5 per cent from 1990 to 2008.

Another recent report² from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) found that renewables made up just over one per cent of Australia's total energy production in 2006–07.

1 Copenhagen congress synthesis report – 'Climate change: global risks, challenges and decisions'. <http://climatecongress.ku.dk/pdf/synthesisreport>

2 ABS (2009) 'Energy account, Australia, 2006–07'. Australian Bureau of Statistics, cat. no. 4604.0

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