
Stern report was changed after being published

Information was quietly removed from an influential government report on the cost of climate change after its initial publication because supporting scientific evidence could not be found.

By Richard Gray, Science Correspondent
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The Stern Review on the economics of climate change, which was commissioned by the Treasury, was greeted with headlines worldwide when it was published in October 2006

It contained dire predictions about the impact of climate change in different parts of the world.



Claims that eucalyptus and savannah habitats in Australia would also become more common were also deleted from the report

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But it can be revealed that when the report was printed by Cambridge University Press in January 2007, some of these predictions had been watered down because the scientific evidence on which they were based could not be verified.

Among the claims that were removed in the later version of the report, which is now also available in its altered form online, were claims that North West Australia has been hit by stronger tropical typhoons in the past 30 years.

Another claim that southern regions in Australia have lost rainfall due to rising ocean temperatures and air currents pushing rain further south was also removed.

Claims that eucalyptus and savannah habitats in Australia would also become more common were also deleted.

The claims were highlighted in several Australian newspapers when the report was initially published, but the changes were never publicly announced.

A figure on the cost of US Hurricanes was also changed after a typographical error was spotted in the original report. The original stated in a table the cost of hurricanes in the US would rise from 0.6% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to 1.3%.

The later report corrected the error so the increase was from 0.06% to 0.13%. A statement about the correction appeared in a postscript of the report and on the Treasury website.

The Stern Review has been instrumental in helping the UK government draw up its climate change policies while it has also been cited by leading organisations such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in its assessment reports on climate change.

Details of the changes, which have not been publicly detailed before, have emerged as the IPCC is under fire for errors on the melting of Himalayan glaciers that appeared in their most recent assessment report because of a failure to check the sources of the information.

A spokesman for Lord Stern, who headed the review and is now chair of the Grantham Institute for Climate Change and the Environment at the London School of Economics, said that the changes to the statements about Australia were made following a quality control check before the report was printed by Cambridge University Press.

He said: "Statements were identified in the section on Australia for which the relevant scientific references could not be located.

They were therefore, as a precaution, omitted from the version published by Cambridge University Press and they were deleted from the electronic version on the HM Treasury website.

"These changes to the text had no implications for any other parts of the report.

"It is perhaps not surprising that in a report of more than 700 pages a few typographic errors and minor but necessary clarifications to the text were identified in November and December 2006 after its launch.

"However, none of these corrections and changes affected the analysis or conclusions in the Stern Review, which is rightly regarded as an important contribution on the economics of climate change."

Professor Roger Pielke, from the centre of Science and Technology Policy Research at the University of Colorado who has been a long term critic of the Stern Review, described the changes to the report as "remarkable".

He said: "In any academic publication changes to published text to correct errors or to clarify require the subsequent publication of a formal erratum or corrigendum.

"This is to ensure the integrity of the literature and a paper trail, otherwise confusion would result if past work could be quietly rewritten.

"Such a practice is very much a whitewash of the historical record.

"One would assume – and expect – that studies designed to inform government (and international) policy would be held to at least these same standards if not higher standards."

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