Climate Tipping Points, Irreversibility and their Consequences for Society, Environment and Economies

Switzerland’s Proposal for an IPCC Special Report

25 May 2022 | 10:00 - 11:30 CEST | IEH II & Online

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SPEAKERS

**Thomas STOCKER**
Professor of Climate and Environmental Physics, Physics Institute, University of Bern & President of the Oeschger Centre for Climate Change Research

**Sebastian KÖNIG**
Chief Scientist, International Affairs Division, Swiss Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN) & IPCC Focal Point, Switzerland

**Maria NEIRA**
Director, Department of Environment, Climate Change and Health, World Health Organization

**Alexandra BILAK**
Director, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

**Sabine PABST**
Environmental and Climate Destruction & Asia Coordinator, FIAN International

**Eric USHER**
Head, United Nations Environment Programme’s Finance Initiative

**Jürg LUTERBACHER**
Director, Science and Innovation Department & Chief Scientist, World Meteorological Organization

**Dina IONESCO**
Manager at United Nations Climate Secretariat (UNFCCC) | Moderator
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- Sebastian KÖNIG, Chief Scientist in the International Affairs Division, Swiss Federal Office for the Environment, IPCC Focal Point for Switzerland
- Dina IONESCO, Manager at United Nations Climate Secretariat | Moderator

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- Financial impacts, including insurance premiums above affordability threshold | Eric USHER, Head, United Nations Environment Programme's Finance Initiative
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Chief Scientist, International Affairs Division, Swiss Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN) & Focal Point for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Switzerland

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Call for an IPCC Special Report on «Tipping Points»
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Proposal of Switzerland for an

IPCC Special Report

Climate Tipping Points and their Implications for Habitability and Resources

Thomas Stocker

Physics Institute
Oeschger Centre for Climate Change Research
University of Bern, Switzerland
IPCC 2021: Unprecedented forcing — unprecedented response
Last Ice Age: Abundant occurrence of climate tipping
Observations of Atlantic MOC: Tipping point approaching?

Trend or no trend?
Observations of Atlantic MOC: Tipping point approaching?

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Observations of Atlantic MOC: Tipping point approaching?

Caesar et al., 2018

Latif et al., 2022
Ice sheet mass balance observations: Tipping points approaching?

- **Greenland (GRACE)**: 400 Gt/yr
- **Antarctica (various)**: 130 Gt/yr
Tipping points in Antarctica: Pine Island Glacier is a candidate

Rosier et al., 2021

Joughin et al., 2021
Tipping points in ENSO characteristics: Reduced amplitude
Tipping Points: Controversial in the public

Nature

Overshooting tipping point thresholds in a climate

Paul D. L. Brierley, Joseph J. Clarke, Peter M. Cox & Chris Huntingford

Nature, 512, 517–520 (2001) | Cite this article

Abstract

Palaeorecords suggest that the climate system has tipping points, where a forcing can cause substantial and irreversible alteration to Earth system components. A catastrophic greenhouse gas concentration increase of fossil fuel burning, human activity could also trigger tipping, and the impacts would be difficult to adapt to. Previous studies report slow warming thresholds, but industrial conditions for key tipping elements such as ice-sheet melt. If so, contemporary rates of warming imply that exceeding these thresholds is likely, which is widely assumed to mean that we are now committed to suffering the implications of catastrophic changes in Earth's climate.

The Guardian

Climate emergency / World 'may have crossed tipping points'

Warning of "existential threat to civilisation" as impacts lead to cascade of unstoppable events

The 7 climate tipping points that could change the world forever

Alexandra Herr, Shannon Oaks, & Meddie Stone - Science

Disastrous Climate Tipping Points Could Be Reversed - If We Act Fast, Scientists Warn

AFP - 23 MARCH 2021

Global warming thresholds that could tip massive ice sheets into irreversible melting or see the Amazon rainforest shrink into savannah have "grave periods", giving humanity more time to draw down planet-warming carbon emissions, researchers have calculated.

More than a dozen tipping points triggered mainly by rising temperatures could unleash catastrophic changes in Earth's climate system.
Tipping Points: Global Research Programs start to focus
• Surprises in the climate system
• Unexpected events, abrupt climate change
• Atlantic meridional overturning
• Polar ice sheets

• Tipping points
• Irreversible changes in all climate system components
• Impacts

Tipping Points: Slowly emerging in the IPCC Assessments
14 Reasons of Concern

- Amazon Forest Dieback
- Boreal Forest Dieback
- Ice Sheets
- Glaciers
- Global Ocean Temperature
- Sea Level Rise
- Ocean Circulation (AMOC)
- Permafrost Carbon
- Arctic Sea Ice
- Snow Cover of the NH
- Global Monsoon
- ENSO
- Methane Clathrates
Global and regional risks for increasing levels of global warming

(a) Global surface temperature change increase relative to the period 1850–1900

Projections for different scenarios:
- SSP1-1.9
- SSP1-2.6 (shade representing very likely range)
- SSP2-4.5
- SSP3-7.0 (shade representing very likely range)
- SSP5-8.5

(b) Reasons for Concern (RFC)
Impact and risk assessments assuming low to no adaptation

Risk/impact:
- Very high
- High
- Moderate
- Undetectable

Transition range
Confidence level assigned to transition range:
- Low
- Very high

Historical average temperature increase in 2011–2020 was 1.09°C (dashed line) range 0.95–1.20°C

2°C
IPCC 2022 Working Group II: Global risks and impacts

Global and regional risks for increasing levels of global warming

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Cross-Chapter Box 12.1

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Tipping Points: Comprehensive assessment is missing

IPCC Special Report on "Climate Tipping Points and Consequences for Habitability and Resources"

Draft Table of Contents

Front matter (2 pages)
Summary for Policy Makers (~10 pages)
Technical Summary (consisting of chapter executive summaries with figures) (~30 pages)
Chapter 1: Framing and Context (~10 pages)
Chapter 2: Tipping points in natural systems (~25 pages)
Chapter 3: Tipping points in human systems (~25 pages)
Chapter 4: The impact of tipping on resources and regional habitability (~30 pages)
Chapter 5: Tipping points and planetary boundaries (e.g. biosphere integrity; ocean acidification) (~30 pages)
Chapter 6: Prevention and Adaptation: Synergies, trade-offs and Integrated Response Options (~30 pages)
Chapter 7: Risk management and decision making in relation to tipping points (~30 pages)
Boxes, Case Studies and FAQs (~up to 30 pages)
Total: maximum 250 pages
Conclusions

❖ Tipping elements are Reasons of Concern. Their global and regional impacts pose **key risks for humans and ecosystems**.

❖ A comprehensive scientific assessment of tipping points and their regional impacts is missing. **Tipping points are not yet part of IPCC scenarios**.

❖ This calls for a cross-Working Group **IPCC Special Report** on *Climate Tipping points and Consequences for Habitability and Resources* in the IPCC's 7th cycle.

❖ **Special attention to the assessment of IPCC WGII and WGIII contributions**
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