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Research Published by an International Team of Scientists Found that the Paris Temperature Target of 1.5°C is Unjust

AMSTERDAM, Netherlands — New research published yesterday in *The Lancet Planetary Health*, decisively concludes that aiming for and maintaining the Paris Agreement’s 1.5°C temperature target is patently unjust. This extensive research, conducted by a team of 65 scientists across 20 countries and hosted by the Earth Commission*, presents evidence that this level of heating fails to protect human well-being now and in the future.

The research defines “just” Earth System Boundaries (ESBs) as those that “safeguard people from significant harm now and in the future” and describes “significant harm” as “existential or irreversibly negative effects on people, communities, or countries, such as substantial loss of life, deterioration of health, chronic disease, injury, malnutrition, displacement, loss of livelihood or income, loss of access to nature’s contributions to people, or loss of land.” It then goes on to reinforce studies dating back to 1990 by setting the “just” boundary at 1.0°C or less of temperature rise—which corresponds with 350 parts per million (ppm) or less of atmospheric CO₂—reinforcing that these long-standing boundaries remain the best scientific-based benchmarks for a safe and just climate system today.

The research team’s conclusions also echo earlier findings indicating that the “likelihood of passing multiple climate tipping points would become ... high with 1.5°C warming” and, moreover, that at “the 2024 level of mean warming (around 1.2°C), some tipping point temperature thresholds could be breached” triggering “many negative impacts over long-time scales”.

Furthermore, it recognizes the power and importance of the law stating, “The legal system offers many opportunities—preventive and restorative—for transformations and can overcome barriers ... and incorporate much stronger recognition of human rights.”

“Since the adoption of the Paris Agreement in 2015, legal actions have diverged into two distinct paths: one advocating for courts to mandate adherence to the science-based 350 ppm planetary boundary, and the other accepting the 1.5°C political target as ‘good enough’,” said Kelly Matheson, Deputy Director of Global Climate Litigation with Our Children’s Trust. “This new research decisively confirms that the 1.5°C target endangers rather than protects humanity, particularly children. This clear scientific conclusion is the proverbial nail-in-the-coffin for the 1.5°C target leaving no room for doubt—courts must now recognize the necessity of a more rigorous, science-based, climate target to ensure global justice.”

Background

In 2008 and 2009, well before the Paris Agreement was finalized in 2015, prominent climate scientists issued stark warnings about the threats climate change posed to vital systems upon which humanity depends. They called for a reduction of atmospheric CO₂ from 385 ppm to 350 ppm by 2100—corresponding to approximately 1.0°C or less of temperature rise—a threshold recognized by the original Working Group II of the World Meteorological Organization, International Council for Science, and United Nations Environment Programme as early as 1990 when they defined the long-term environmental goals for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and remains the scientific consensus today. Despite the warnings, governments have continued to promote fossil fuel-based energy systems, leading to CO₂ levels surpassing 420 ppm, a level currently causing the majority of today’s (i.e., last 10-year average) 1.2°C temperature rise.

*The Earth Commission is hosted by Future Earth, which is governed by the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

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Our Children’s Trust was founded in 2010 on the idea that courts are vital to democracy and empowered to protect our children and the planet. Without a stable climate system, every natural resource we rely upon to exercise our basic human rights—life, liberty, home, happiness—is under threat. Our work will be achieved when there is universal recognition

of children's climate rights by courts around the world and children's fundamental rights to life on this planet are protected. www.ourchildrenstrust.org