



WN *Balance*

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Facing the facts of this century. Climate disruption
**Speaking, acting from
our hearts and souls**



Hetty Einzig

Transition Expertise. <http://transitionexpertise.com/>

Email: einzig@hettyeinzig.org

[Access July 2012 Rolling Stone Bill McKibben on climate disruption here](#)

[Access December 2009 Tony McMichael, Colin Butler on climate here](#)

[Access October 2013 New Statesman Naomi Klein on climate disruption here](#)

[Access March 2014 IPCC report on food systems impacts here](#)

[Access March 2014 IPCC report on world health impacts here](#)

[Access April 2014 Editorial on climate and food systems here](#)

[Access May 2014 Editorial on climate and food systems here](#)

[Access June 2014 Colin Butler on climate Planet Titanic here](#)

[Access October 2014 Naomi Klein et al on UN climate summit here](#)

[Access December 2014 Feedback Colin Butler on climate change here](#)

[Access December 2014 The Bullet on Bolivian climate summit here](#)

[Access January-February Update Climate and food wars here](#)

[Access January-February Update Colin Butler on climate direct action here](#)

[Access 2014 This is how scientists feel \(about climate disruption\) website here](#)

Box 1

Climate disruption and *World Nutrition*



The threat of climate disruption causes riots. This is not just a threat. Climate is disrupted now. Like other overuses and abuses of natural resources, erratic and violent climate is causing crop failure, food insecurity, famine, destruction of rural livelihoods – and violence

Editor's statement

We at *World Nutrition* came late to climate disruption. In May and October last year we featured climate on our cover. See also the links above. Some readers wondered what is the connection with public health nutrition. This is easy to answer. Both the president of the World Bank and the chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change have continyed to state as from early last year that the most devastating effects of climate change will be and already are on food systems and world health.

Climate disruption is a cause of food insecurity, which in turn is a cause of insurrections, most conspicuously in North Africa. It is now commonly predicted that food insecurity, also caused by staple foods now being a commodity on currency speculators' 'markets', will cause uprisings to become food wars, as has happened throughout history. No food means no nutrition.

Knowledge, decision – action

Climate disruption, and other determinants of population nutrition and health, will remain a central concern of *WN*. In this commentary here we go further. Our author Hetty Einzig, the *WN* editorial team member convening our *Balance* series, is a distinguished guide to acting well and succeeding in business, sport and life. Her work includes confronting senior executives with the meaning of their work. Here, climate disruption is the example. In public health, and many other areas of work, there comes a point when knowledge so clearly and urgently points to action, that professionals decide that they must stand up, speak out, and act as citizens. With climate disruption this time has come again and again.

But as Hetty Einzig points out, there is more. In declaring unswerving commitment to the need to confront and control climate disruption, the Australian scientists below are engaging themselves fully, in their minds, and also from their hearts and souls. They are expressing what it really and truly means to be a scientist working in the public interest. So to circle back to nutrition science. *World Nutrition* is occasionally queried for being apparently 'activist'. Yes, we are. Discussion and debate are essential, but crises require action. Climate disruption is one example. There are others.

Confronting realities

This *WN* commentary comes with our logo or brand for *Balance*, the department or theme of *WN* I convene, with support from the editorial team. My interest in nutrition is deep and broad, because nourishment is central to life. My formal training is in transpersonal psychology. For 30 years I have engaged in development of leadership globally. I read the testimonies of the scientists published here, and others gathered by [Australian National University student Joe Duggan](#), and look at the stunning portraits by Nick Bowers, with sympathy and respect. Joe Duggan says

The thing that hits me the most, are that these people are the ones that understand the facts, that understand the data and can pass judgment on climate change, and they're scared. They are literally scared for the world they are leaving behind for their children. They express optimism as well, that they can reach their goals.

I also read the testimonies, originally all handwritten, with a sense of relief and joy. Like many of the executives I work with, scientists typically are trained to work with data. This is a great strength and a great weakness. Its strength is that reliably extracted and examined information and evidence can be judged scrupulously and objectively, and this is certainly vital.

Its weakness is in what it misses. Seeking proof is one thing. Seeking truth, a very much bigger mission, is something else. When faced with facts or feelings that discomfort us we so often cope through denial – we do not see what we cannot see. Much of what lies ahead cannot be known for sure – the future is always a dark country, and it should be. To venture forth we need to prepare by considering what is right action and what is wrong.

What is most important cannot be proved

Data are of limited use in determining this. Our must include ethical issues, principles, and other matters that require knowledge and also wisdom. In steering any course of action we need to agree where we intend to go and for what purpose. All exploration demands courage to venture into the unknown. 'What?' is never enough. In all aspects of life we must address 'when?' and 'how?' and above all 'why?' Science today is hesitant faced with these larger questions. So is business. So, alas, are many of the people citizens elect to serve the public interest, and the unelected officials who may have greater power. In my work with leaders we face the 'why?' and the 'what for?' increasingly, and more so as personal, professional and public issues interlock and shift exponentially. Everyone seeks certainty, a stable comfort zone. But of its nature life is uncertain and unstable.

One answer is to dance – to acquire greater flow and flex of the mind, greater rage of the heart. Climate disruption, the topic of Joe Duggan's investigation, is a thought we must let in – the time is now. One fount of wisdom for me is Joanna Macy. A scholar of eco-philosophy, systems theory and deep ecology, she writes

in her *The Work That Reconnects* about the need for us to tell our truth about what we see, know and feel is happening to our world. In order to remain able to continue in our work, we first must feel the pain of what is being done to the world:

Refusing to feel pain, and becoming incapable of feeling the pain, which is actually the root meaning of apathy, refusal to suffer – that makes us stupid, and half alive. It causes us to become blind to see what is really out there.

Carl Jung also has much to say about the nature of living. (In the following quote I avoid his use of ‘man’). Writing at a dark time of war in Europe:

Those who know that whatever is wrong in the world is in themselves, and... learn to deal with their own Shadow... have succeeded in shouldering ... part of the gigantic, unsolved social problems of our day. One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious.

The current dominant Western culture does not give us a language to talk openly and authentically about feeling depressed or anxious, of losing interest and pleasure in life, or of our despair at the state of the world. Ours is a cut-it-out or fix-it society. Indigenous cultures, by contrast, have different views of emotional distress, seeking to learn from how these relate to outer realities.

The need for affirmation

A culture of denial suppresses our capacity for awareness – of ourselves, of complexity and of the early signs when things go awry. We may become violent, or turn inwards, turning legitimate distress into depression. Up to one-quarter of people in the UK, my own country, are depressed or anxious, and the World Health Organization estimates that depression will be the number 1 world sickness by 2020. This is no way to face the future of humanity and the planet. No way!

As Joanna Macy and Carl Jung indicate, the answers we seek lie in the darkness itself. Curiosity is a good beginning. We can gain perspective in times of crisis by asking ourselves: What is its purpose? What creative possibility is hidden within? What might I learn through this? By not rushing to soothe, we allow ideas to emerge that move us on from a sense of void and helplessness, to find meaning and gain strength. In this process, heart and mind are entwined, mutually supportive. The process of confronting our fear, whatever forms it takes, mindfully and with compassion for others and for ourselves, generates clear thinking and creativity.

A colleague of mine, a corporate coach and an ex-army general, tells me that a good soldier lives with fear, and that to be fearless is to be reckless. Courageous people accept and manage their fear and are thus more likely to act effectively. The same goes for the other hard-to-handle aspects of our humanity, such as feelings of envy or shame, of uselessness and despair. We need to bring these dark sides of ourselves into the light. This is what Joe Duggan and Nick Bowers, and all the courageous scientists who responded to their invitation, have achieved. Touched with light our terrors become more bearable – they can serve us not paralyse.

Bearing witness



Shauna Murray
Biological scientist, University of New South Wales, Sydney
Fear: Reaching the 4 degrees of warming

Tony McMichael
Australian National University, Canberra, ACT

It's hard to imagine that people are doing so much damage to the natural world. It's sad when a society like ours can't see further than its bank balance and stumbles blindly into a future when children won't be able to enjoy the flowing rivers, mountain snow, coloured birds and bush animals. Don't we have any responsibility for other creatures, forests and rivers? I'm rather ashamed of our behaviour.

It seems so silly to go on behaving like this – though, from hearing our politicians speak, it seems that making and consuming more and more is the point of life. Surely the dreadful heat we have suffered from in recent heatwaves, and the awful bush fires that have terrified rural communities in the past couple of years, tell us that something is going very wrong. Scientist friends say it's probably because we're making the world hotter by adding 'greenhouse gases' into the air. So we are seriously harming the world around us and yet we understand how!

It's really sad that some of our local children seem quite puzzled and worried by what they see on TV about this and hearing what adults say. I hope my family and our community can try and help solve these frightening problems.



Tim Flannery

Mammalogist, palaeontologist, University of New South Wales, Sydney

Fear: Disruption of global civilisation

Helen McGregor

Australian National University, Canberra

I feel perplexed at why many of our politicians, business leaders, and members of the public don't get it, that increased CO₂ in the Earth's atmosphere is a problem. The very premise that CO₂ traps heat is based on fundamental physics – the very same physics that underpins so much of modern society. The very same physics that has seen higher CO₂ linked with warmer periods in the geological past. And sure, there have been warm periods in the past, but back then there weren't millions of people, immovable infrastructure, or entire communities in harm's way.

I feel astonished that some would accuse me of being part of some global conspiracy to get more money – if I was in it for the money I would have stayed working as a geologist in the mining industry. No, I do climate research because I find climate so very interesting, global warming or not.

I feel both exasperation and despair in equal measure, that perhaps there really is nothing I can do. I feel vulnerable, that perhaps by writing this letter I expose myself to trolling and vitriol – perhaps I'm better off just keeping quiet.



Sarah Perkins

Extreme weather researcher, University of New South Wales, Sydney

Fear: Increase in extreme weather events

David Griggs

Monash University, Melbourne, Victoria

I feel confused that many people seem unable to see what seems so obvious to me, that we need to act urgently on climate change.

I feel occasionally optimistic when I see progress in renewables or companies embracing sustainable practice.

I feel more often feel depressed when I think how much we need to do and how little time we have to tackle climate change.

I feel guilty about not achieving more to solve the problem and helplessness to know what more to do.

I feel a great sense of loss for the species that have become extinct on our watch and the many more we are set to lose.

I feel privileged to have worked with so many intelligent, hard working, ethical and thoroughly nice people who have dedicated their lives to making the world a better place

I feel so very sorry for my children's and my (hypothetical) grandchildren's generation, for all the beautiful things in the world that they will miss.



Peter Macreadie
Marine ecologist, Deakin University, Melbourne, Victoria
Fear: Global catastrophe

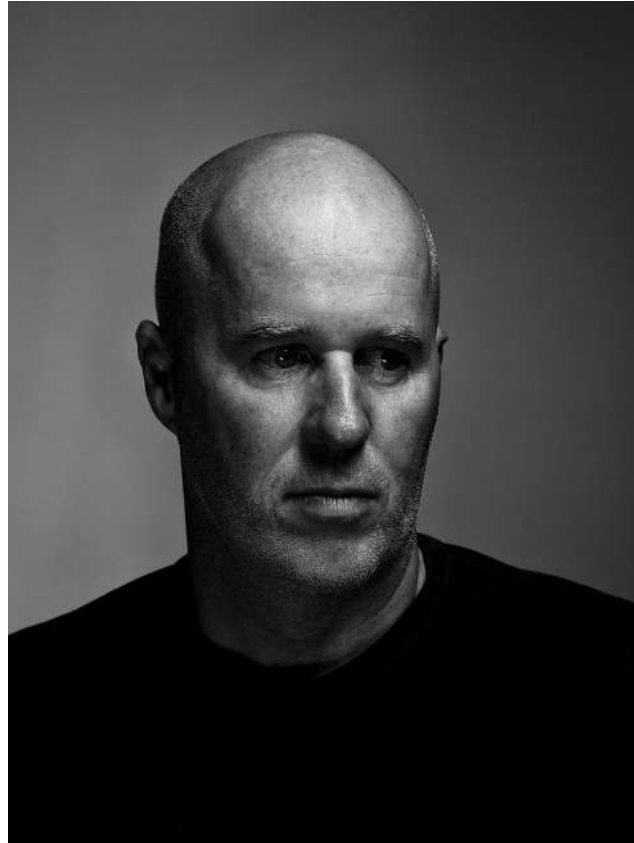
Will Steffen

Australian National University, Canberra, ACT

On a recent visit to Arnhem Land, I was struck by the beauty of the landscapes and seascapes, the rich variety of species, and the staggering amount of art going back 60,000 years that permeates the landscape. The first Australians clearly learned how to live in tune with the land, understanding and respecting the great cycles of planet Earth that provide the goods and services that support human life.

We think we have come a long way from them, but in one very important respect we have regressed. The first Australians were intimately connected with the biosphere around them, and made sure that future generations had the same stable life support system they had. But Australians now have increasingly cut themselves off from the biosphere, ignorant of its functioning and importance, and rapidly eroding its integrity.

Climate change is one of many global changes that are destabilising our planetary life support system. It is ultimately a question of core values. Can we change our core values rapidly enough – and decisively enough – to halt our slide towards collapse? That is humanity's most important question in the 21st century.



Matthew England
Oceanographer, University of New South Wales, Sydney
Fear: Climate induced global conflict

Michael Raupach
Australian National University, Canberra, ANU

My feelings are a mix of awe, hope, despair, frustration, and anger.

Awe: Climate change is part of climate and climate is part of the natural world that sustains us. It is majestic and beautiful

Hope: Humans are incredibly smart. We have the capabilities to repair climate and to lighten our footprints to what the planet can sustain.

Despair: Humans are incredibly dumb. We find it very hard to think beyond me, here and now. Yet our task is to fix a generation of problems that are global and centennial – to learn to share a finite planet.

Frustration: The situation has been clear for two decades, and we're no further forward now than then.

Anger: Climate has become everybody's lightning rod, a way to conduct vast charges. Contrarians want to use it to beat up the left; the left want to use it to beat up capitalism; despair junkies want to use it to beat up everybody. Truth doesn't stand a chance.

Einzig H. Speaking, acting from our hearts and souls. Facing the facts of this century
[Climate disruption. Balance] *World Nutrition* May 2014, 6, 5, 372-382



Lesley Hughes
Ecologist, Macquarie University, Sydney, New South Wales
Fear: Human species extinction

Corey Bradshaw
University of Adelaide, South Australia

My overwhelming emotion is anger; anger that is fuelled not so much by ignorance, but by greed and profiteering at the expense of future generations. I am speaking as a father of a seven year-old girl who loves animals and nature in general. As a biologist, I see irrefutable evidence every day that human-driven climate disruption will turn out to be one of the main drivers of the Anthropocene mass extinction event now well under way.

Public indifference and individual short-sightedness aside, I am furious that politicians are stealing the future from my daughter, and laughing about it while they line their pockets with the figurative gold proffered by the fossil-fuel industry.

My frustration with these greedy, lying bastards is personal. Human-caused climate disruption is not a belief – it is one of the best-studied phenomena on Earth. Even a half-wit can understand this. As any father would, anyone threatening my family will be on the receiving end of my ire and vengeance. This anger is the manifestation of my deep love for my daughter, and the sadness I feel in my core about how others are treating her future.

Mark my words, you plutocrats, denialists, fossil-fuel hacks and science charlatans – your time will come when you will be backed against the wall by the full wrath of billions who have suffered from your greed and stupidity, and I'll be first in line to put you there.

Ethics come first

Joe Duggan, a student at the Australian National University in Canberra, together with the photographer Nick Bowers, has created a work of essential importance for us all as we face the terrifying prospects of climate disruption, and other crises in public, professional and private life. Together with the scientists who have responded to his invitation in their own handwriting, he has affirmed the social responsibility of science in our age. He reminds us that science is not merely technical. It must think about its meaning. It must be governed and guided by ethical principles. It must be dedicated to the public good, now and for the future.

Joe Duggan's work validates researchers in many inter-related fields – trade, economics, development, public health, nutrition, as well as climate – who no longer delay action by saying that more research is needed. Academics are becoming advocates, activists, even agitators. Thus the economics professor Yanis Varoufakis, now the minister of finance for the socialist Syriza Greek government, is facing down the bankers of Europe and the International Monetary Fund, and at the same time accounting for his work to his peers and public in scintillating blogs.

The nature of public life is shifting now. The negative reason is the obvious ignominious failure and blatant disaster of corporatism let rip by governments that have forgotten to represent their electors. The positive reason, which shines through the testimonies collected by Joe Duggan, is that people with status who count are committing themselves to fight for justice, equity, and a world that will work for our children and grandchildren. Joe Duggan, and Nick Bowers, and all those who have responded to them, should be very proud.

Status

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