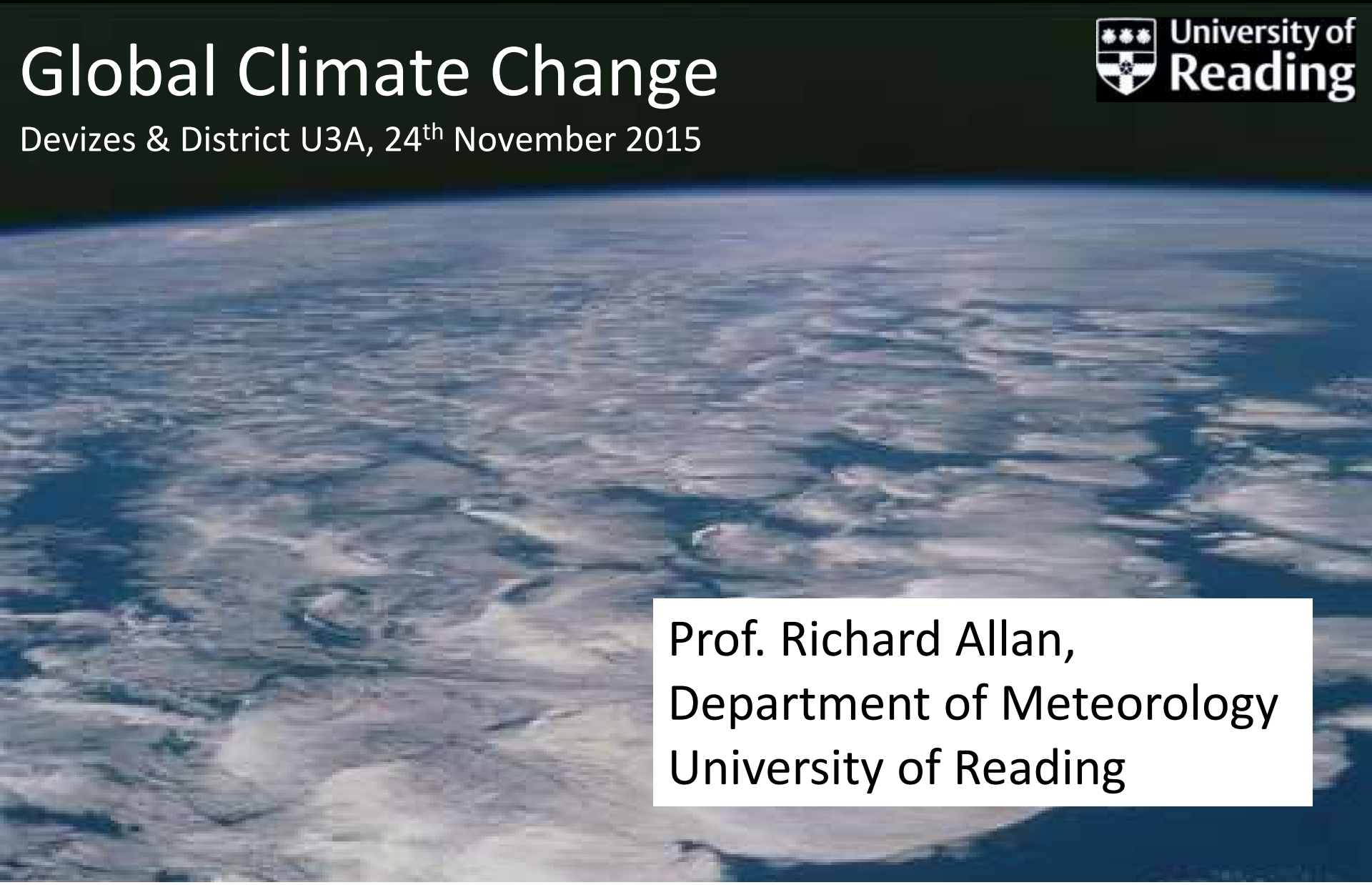
Global Climate Change

Devizes & District U3A, 24th November 2015



Prof. Richard Allan,
Department of Meteorology
University of Reading

University of Reading

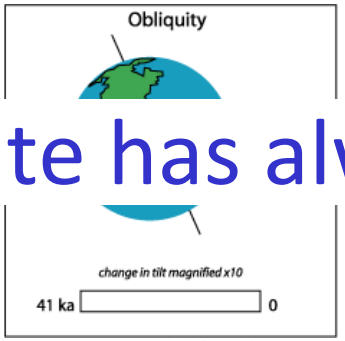
Walker Institute

National Centre for Atmospheric Science
Natural Environment Research Council

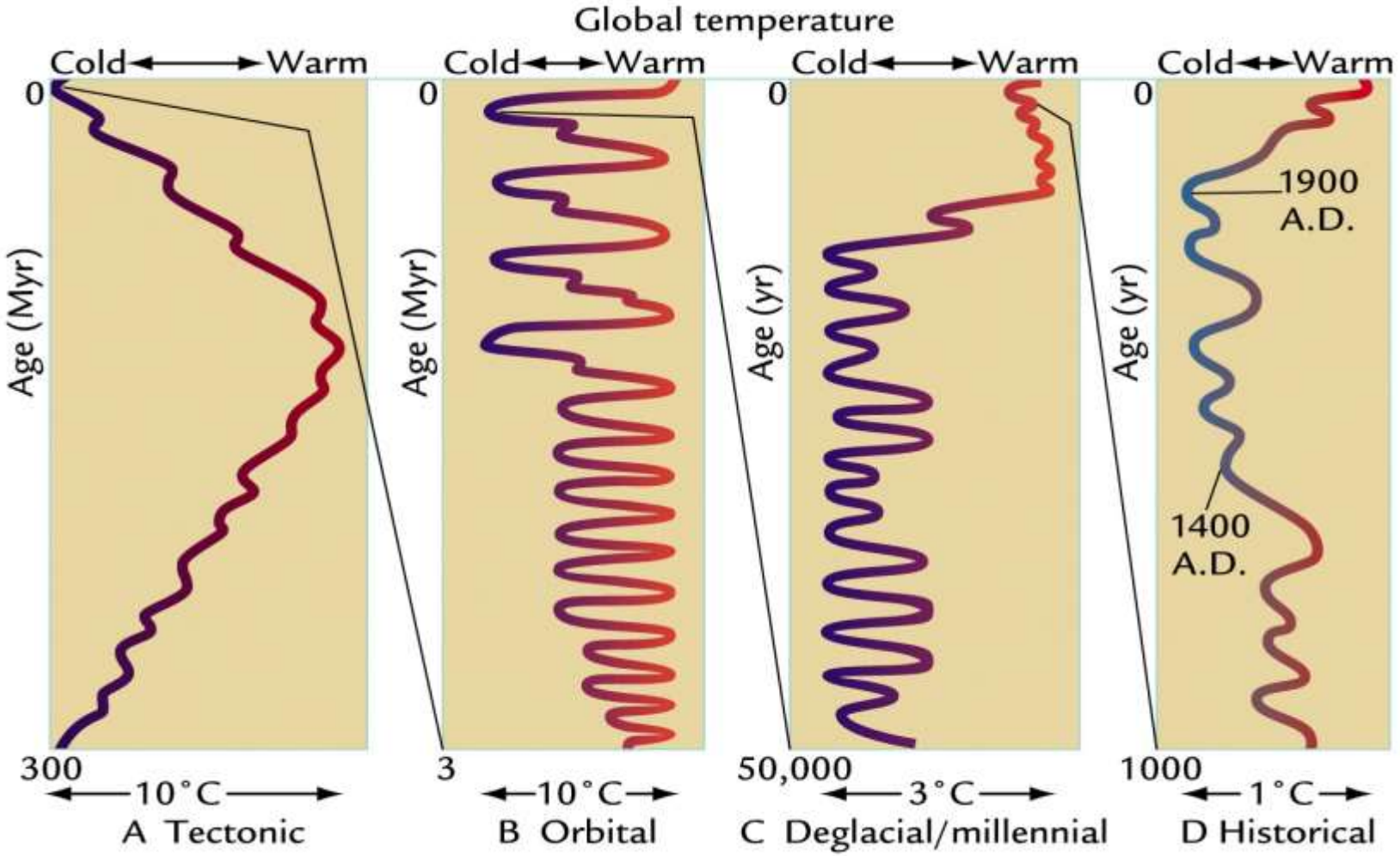
National Centre for Earth Observation
Natural Environment Research Council

NERC Science of the Environment

Why does Earth's climate change?



Earth's Climate has always been changing



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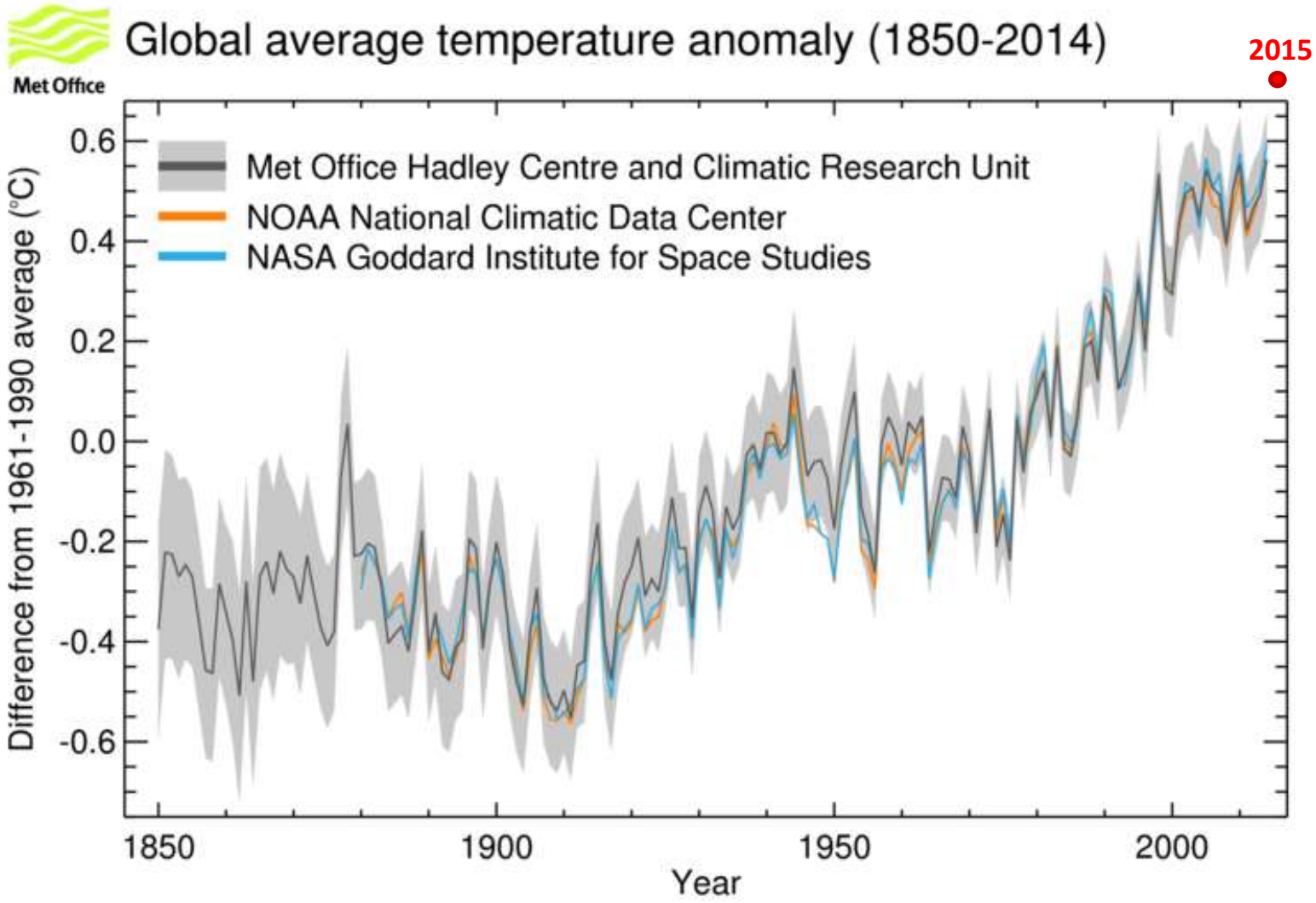
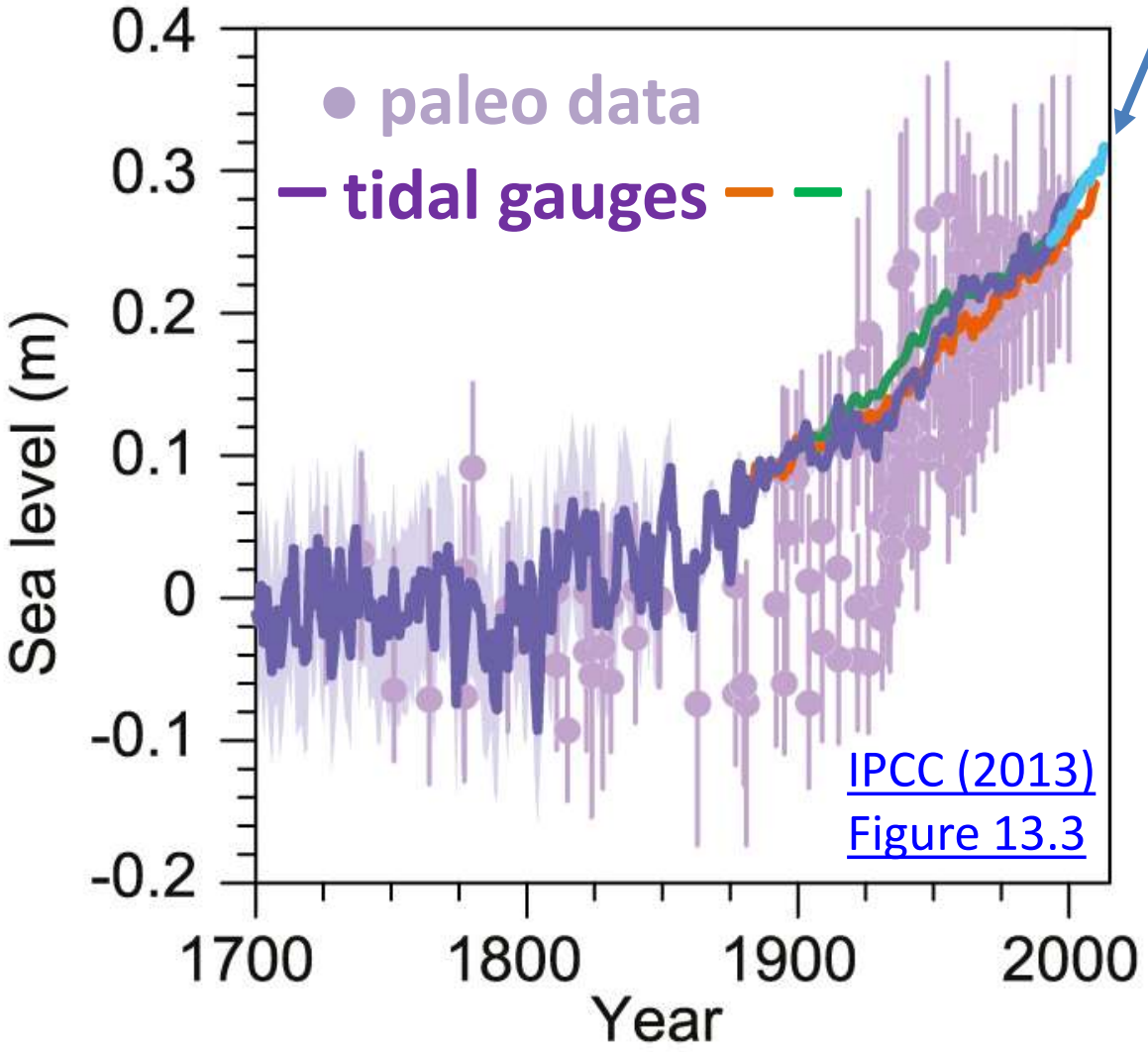
1) Is climate changing now?

The planet is warming



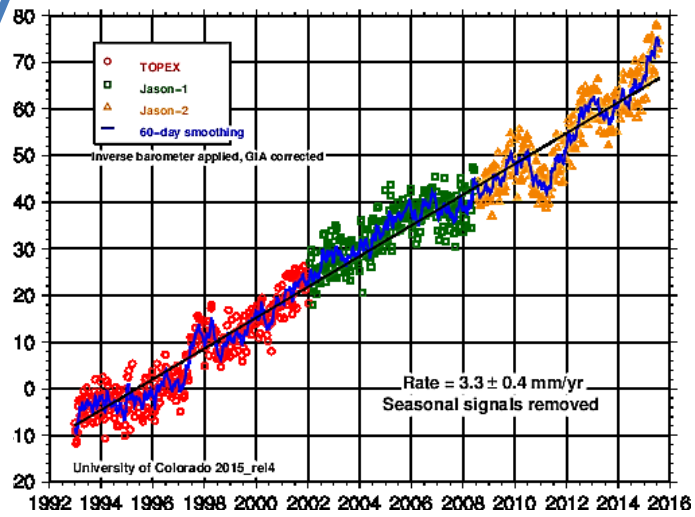
www.metoffice.gov.uk/research/monitoring/climate/surface-temperature

Global average sea level is rising…



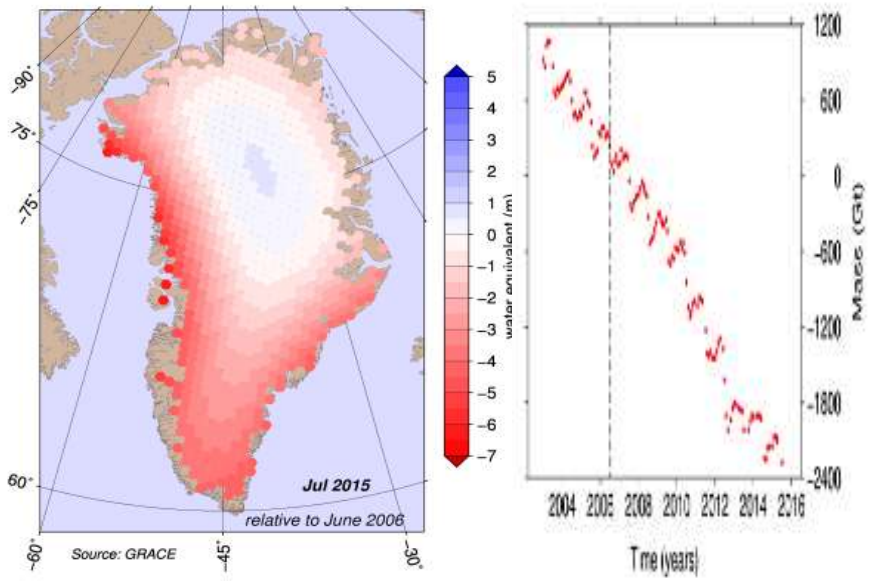
IPCC (2013)
Figure 13.3

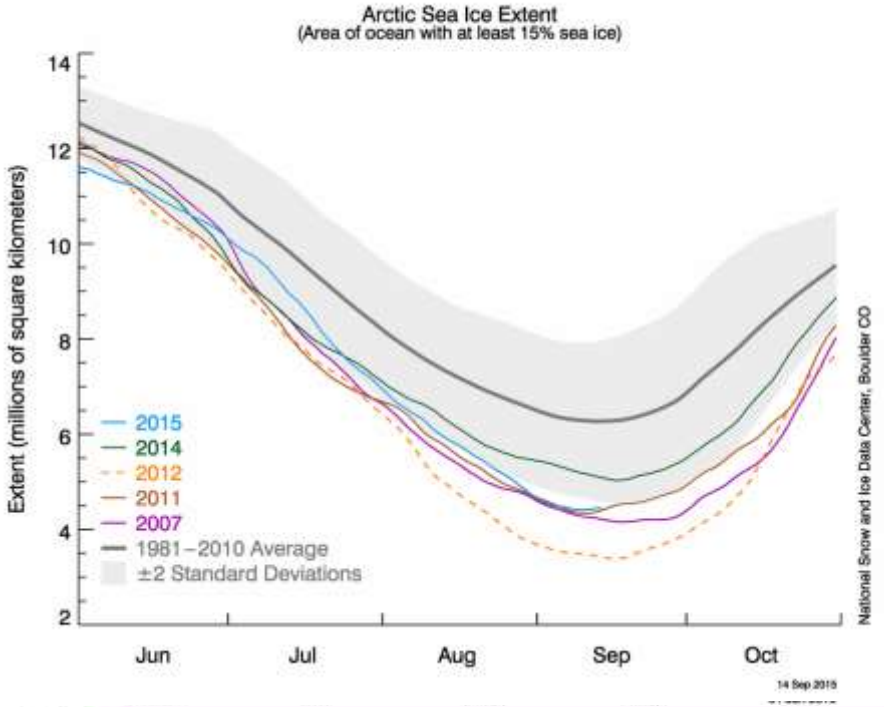
Satellite Altimeter data

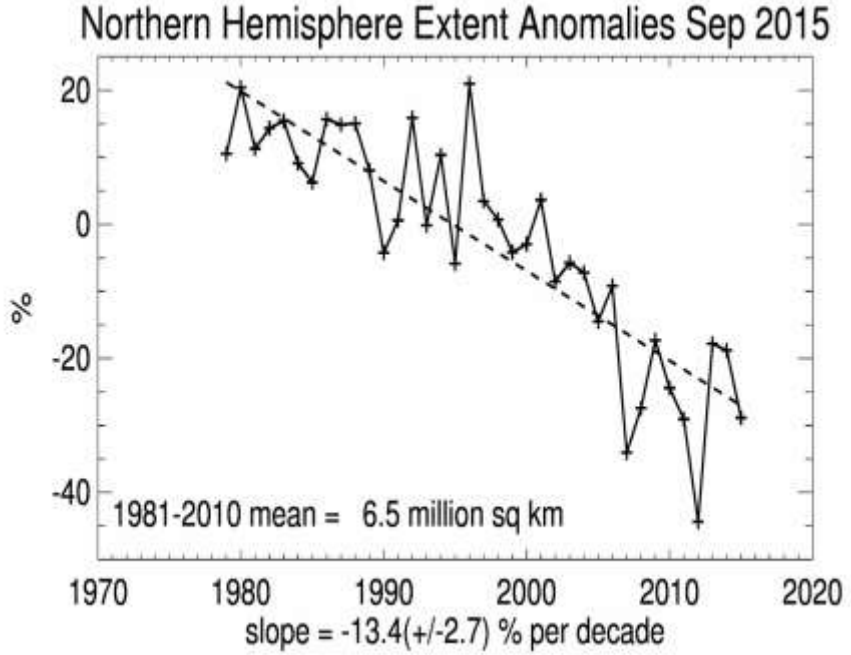


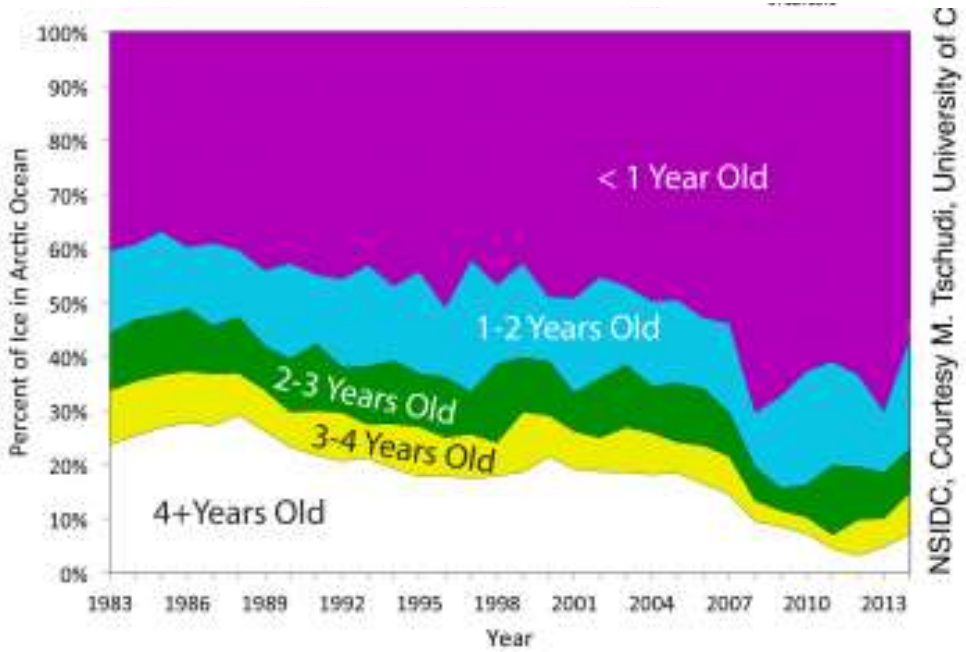
http://sealevel.colorado.edu/

Melting of Arctic Ice



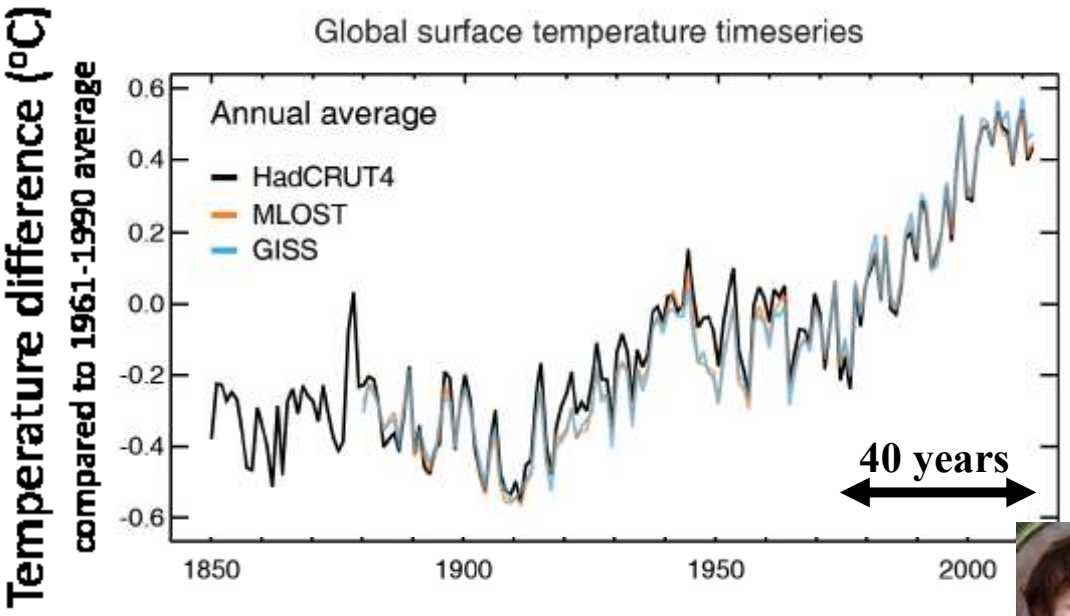






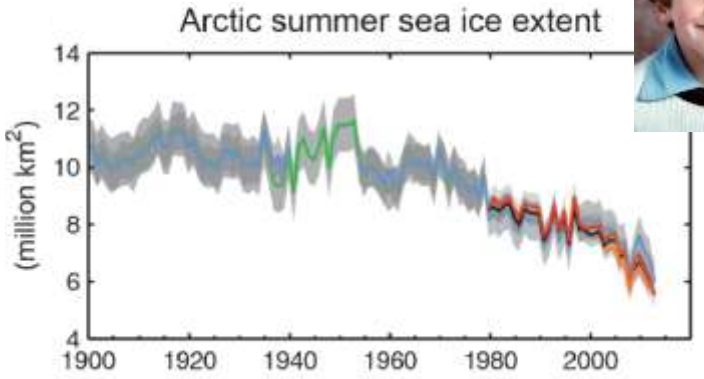
Evidence for current climate change

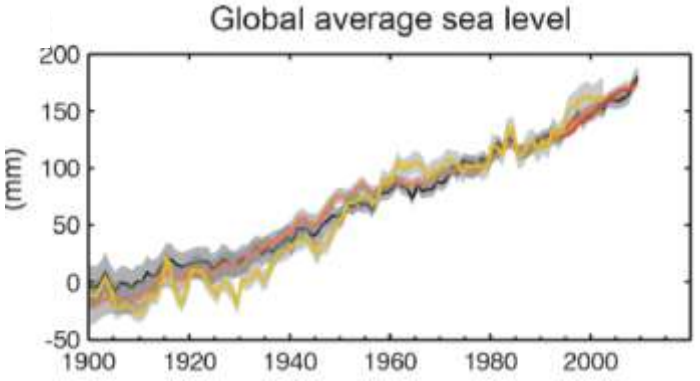
"Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, and since the 1950s, many of the observed changes are unprecedented over decades to millennia. The atmosphere and ocean have warmed, the amounts of snow and ice have diminished, sea level has risen, and the concentrations of greenhouse gases have increased." IPCC (2013)



ifferences in global average surface temperature compared to the 1961-1990 average **Middle:** Changes in the July-September average summer Arctic sea ice extent **Bottom:** Changes in global average sea level compared with 1900-1905 average

Source: IPCC WGI (2013) SPM





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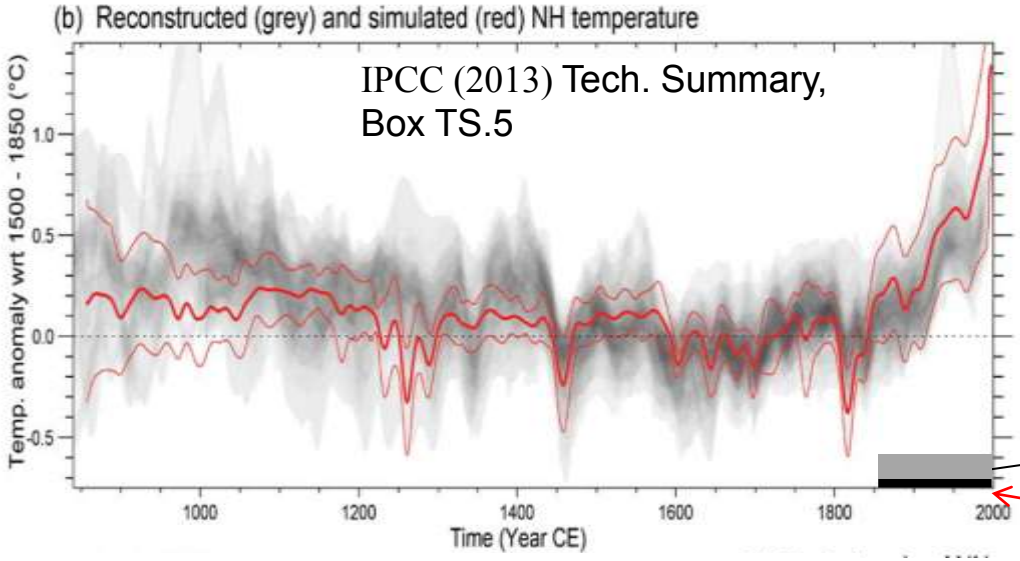
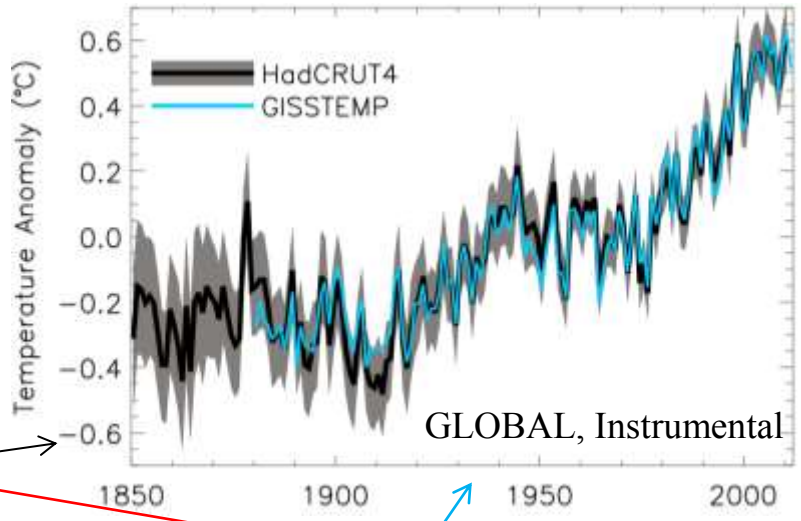
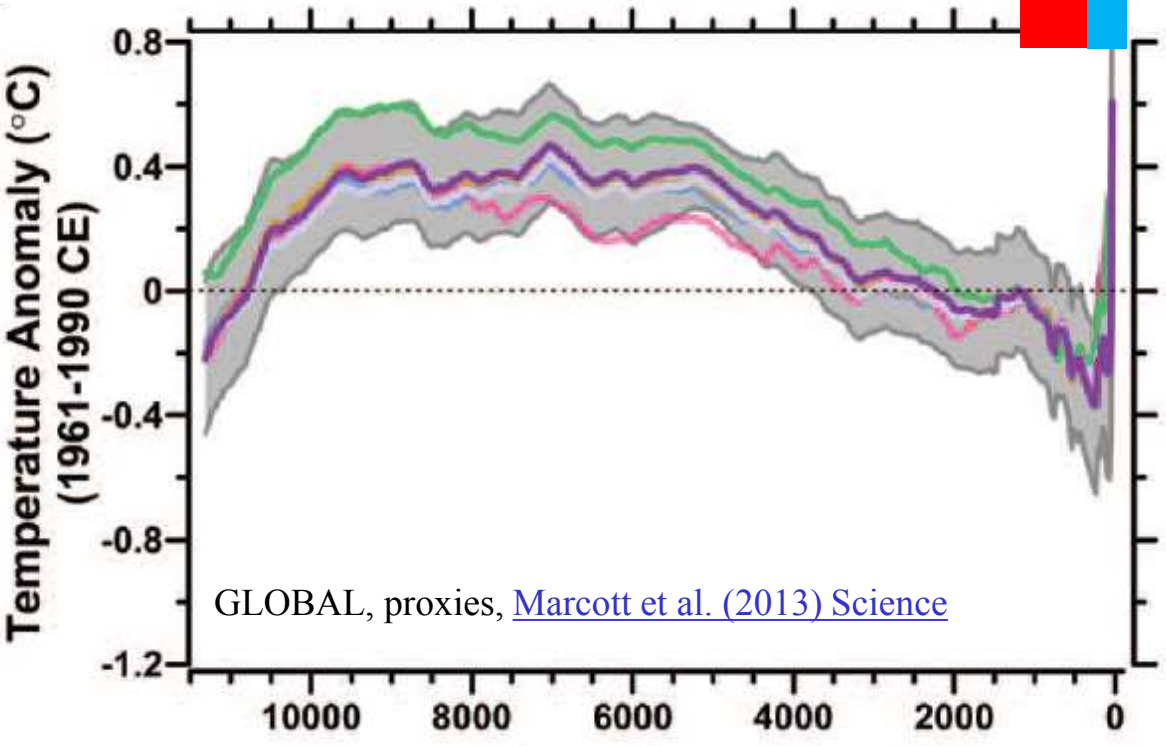
2) Is the warming unusual?

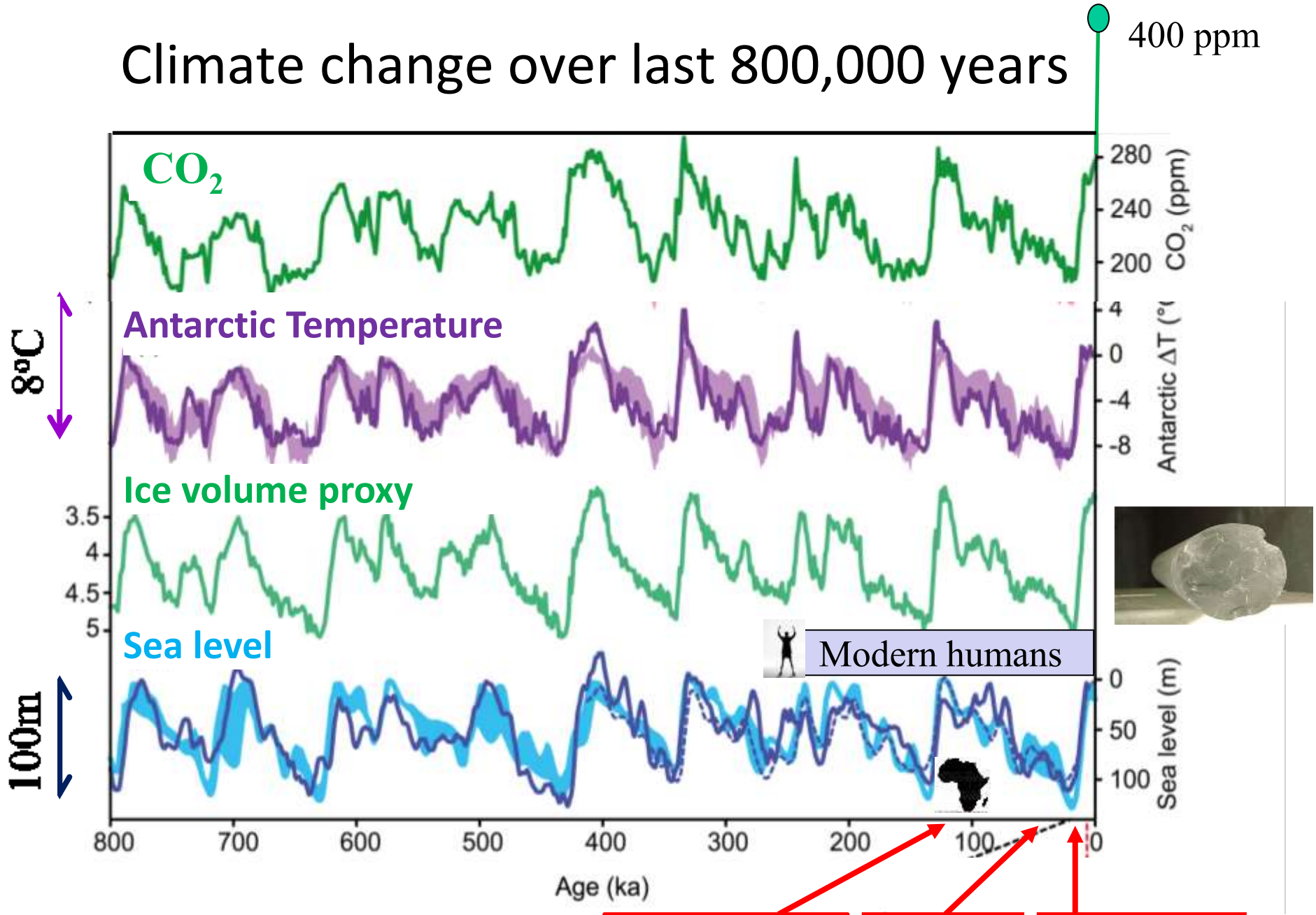




Northern hemisphere proxies



Climate change over last 800,000 years



IPCC (2013) Chap. 5 Fig 5.3

Is the warming unusual?

- Over the last 100 years the globe has warmed by around 0.9°C
- 1983-2012 likely the warmest 30 year period in N. Hemisphere in past 1400 yrs
  - Comparable warmth in last 1400 years not as coherent in space or time as now
- Last time Arctic was warmer than today was probably 125,000 years ago
  - Previous (very different) interglacial when sea level was 4-7m higher than today

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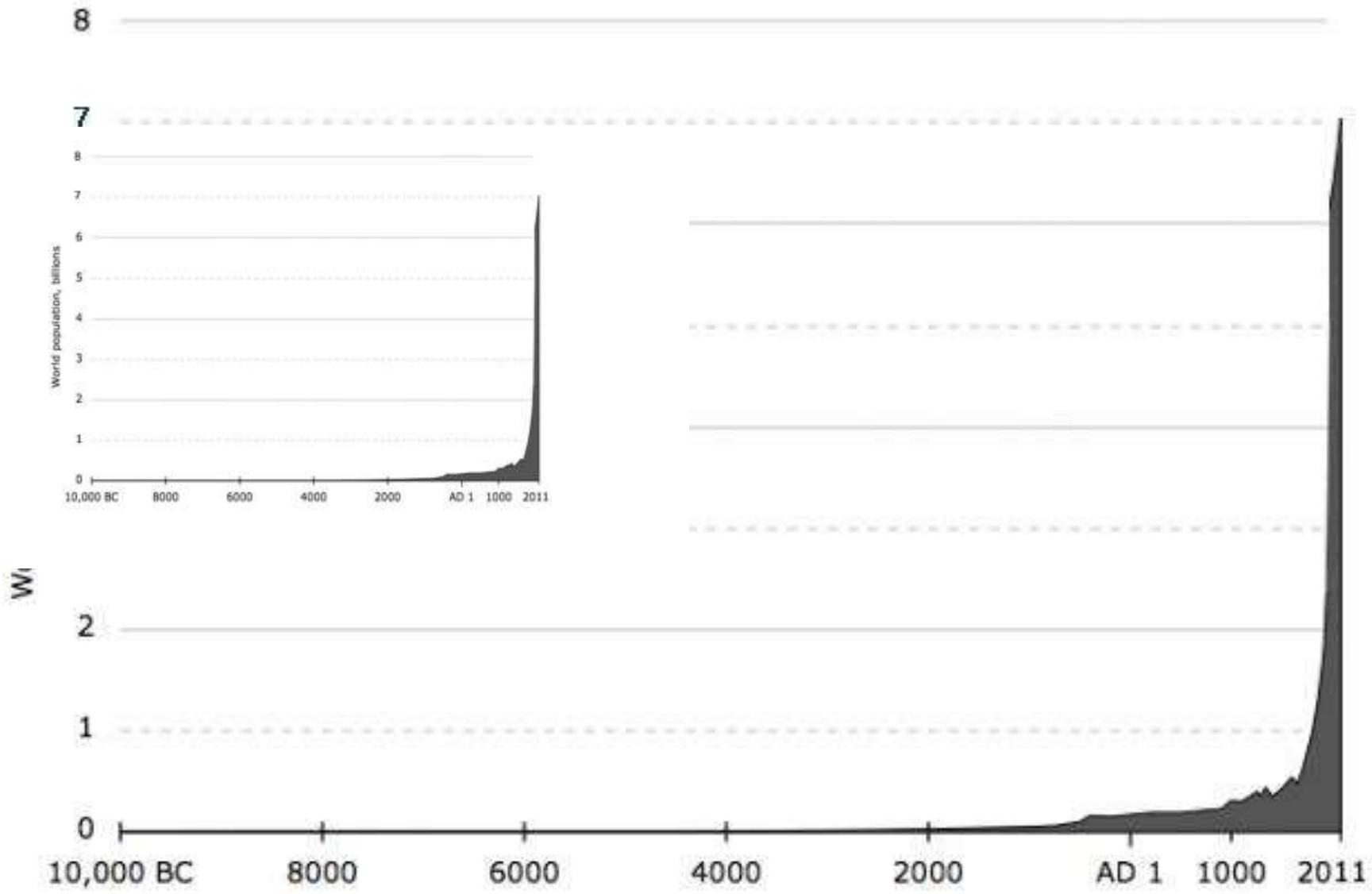
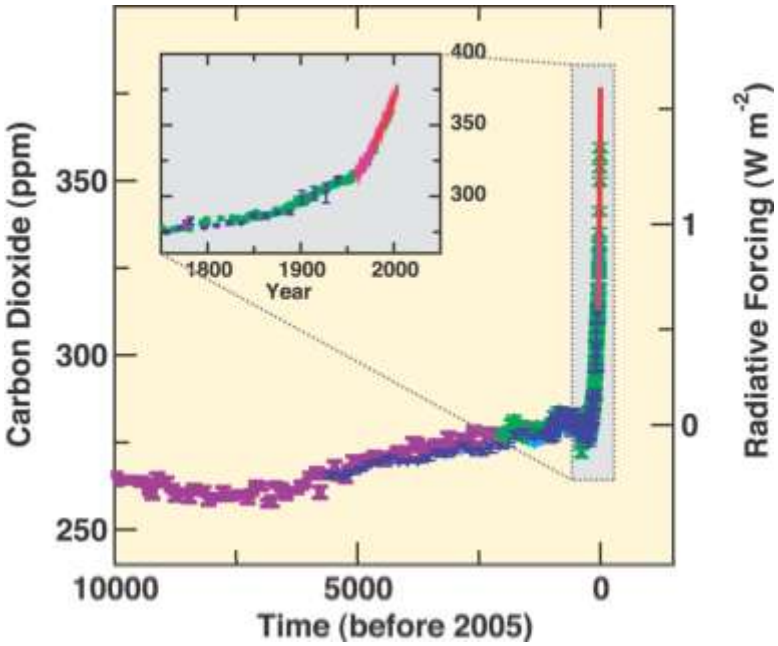
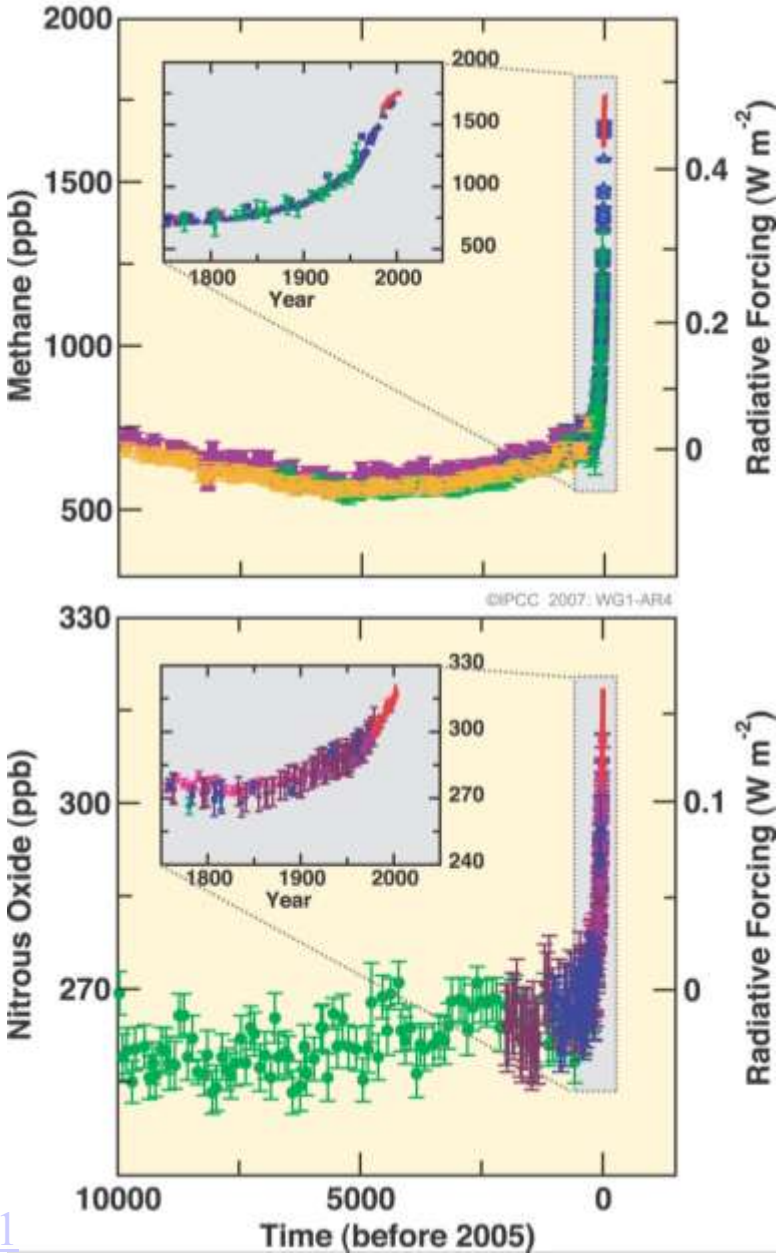
3) Why is it warming?


8
7
2
1
0
10,000 BC
8000
6000
4000
2000
AD 1
1000
2011
World population, billions

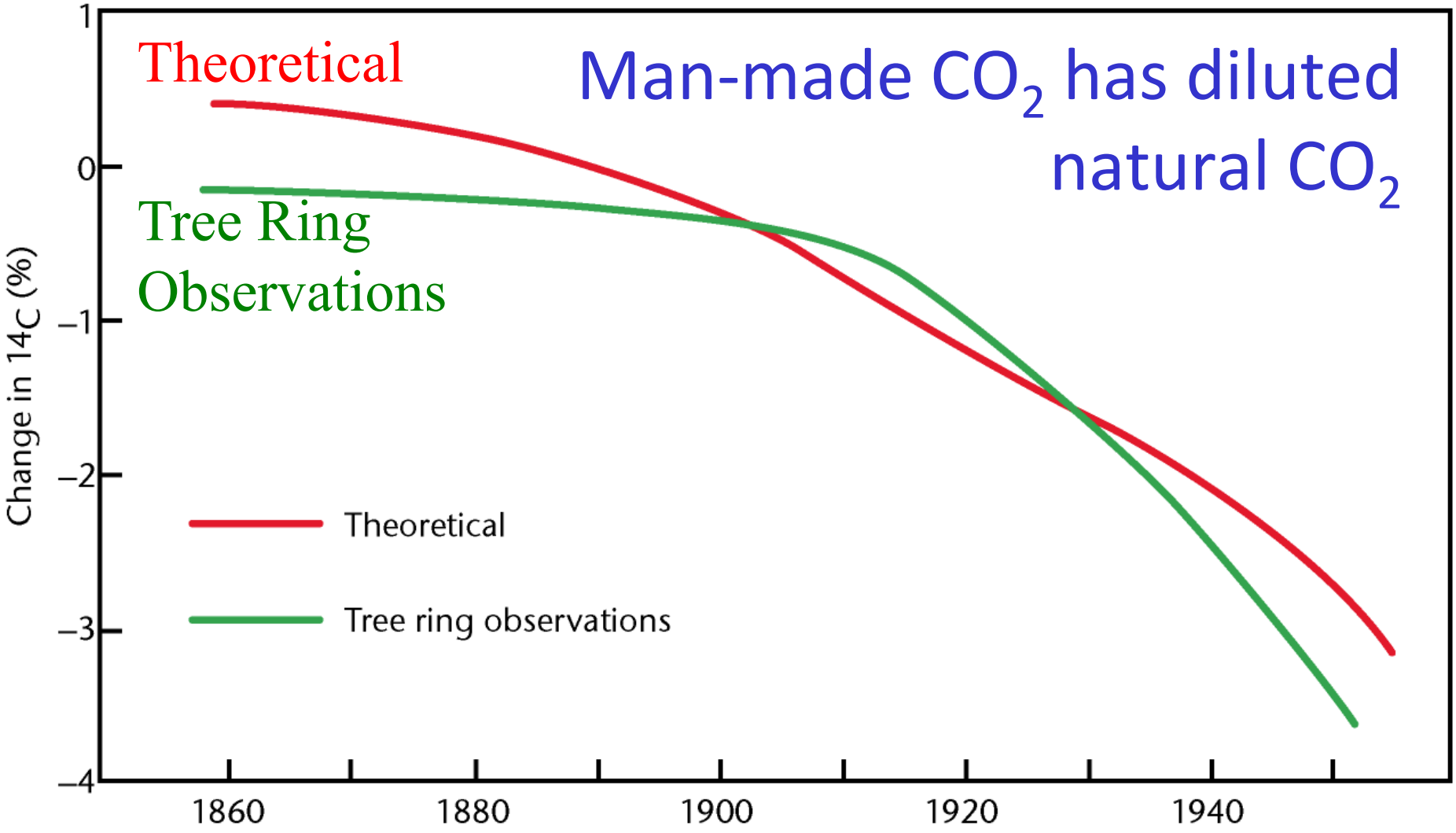
Changes in greenhouse gases from ice core and modern data



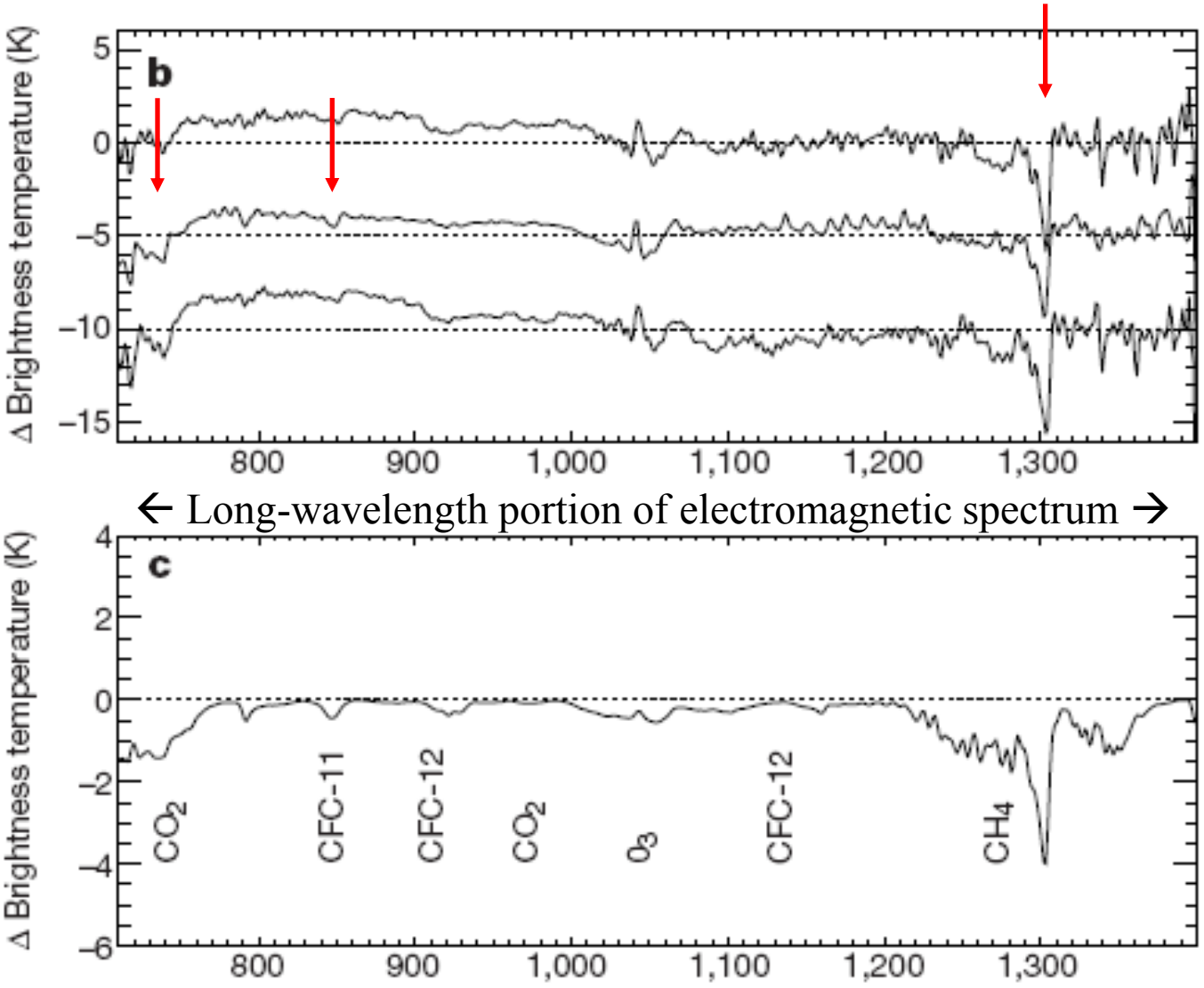


Carbon dioxide, **methane** and **nitrous oxide**

IPCC (2007) Summary for Policy Makers Fig. SPM.1


Theoretical
Man-made CO_2 has diluted natural CO_2
Tree Ring Observations
Change in ^{14}C (%)
1
0
−1
−2
−3
−4
1860
1880
1900
1920
1940
Theoretical
Tree ring observations

Satellite observations detect enhanced greenhouse effect: 1997-1970 Harries et al. 2001, Nature

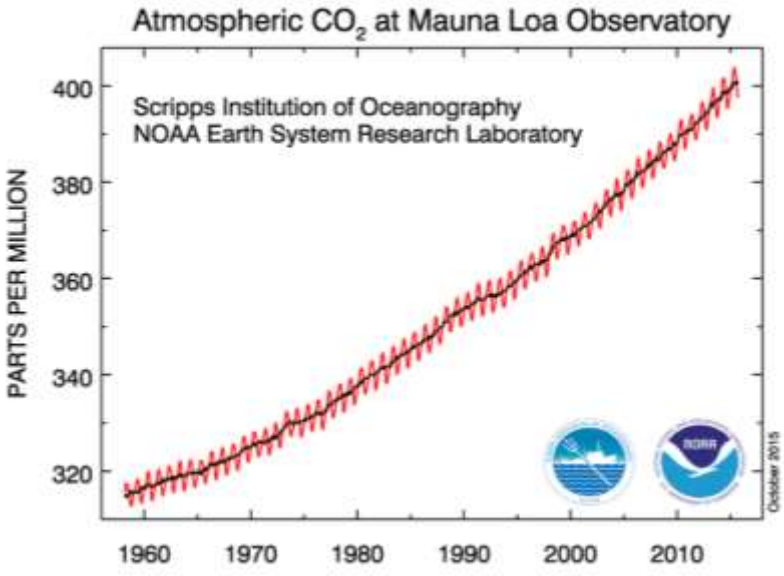


These results showed for the first time experimental confirmation of the significant increase in the greenhouse effect from trace gases such as carbon dioxide and methane

“Radiative forcing” of climate

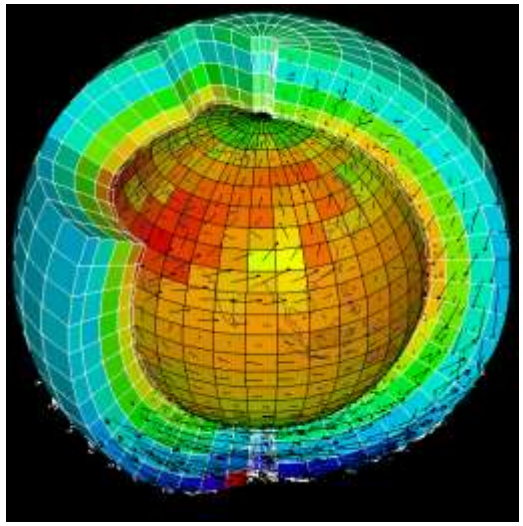
- Increases in greenhouse gases heat the planet by reducing how easily Earth can cool to space through infra-red emission
- More small pollutant “aerosol” particles cool the planet by reflecting sunlight
- If more energy is arriving than leaving, Earth should heat up…

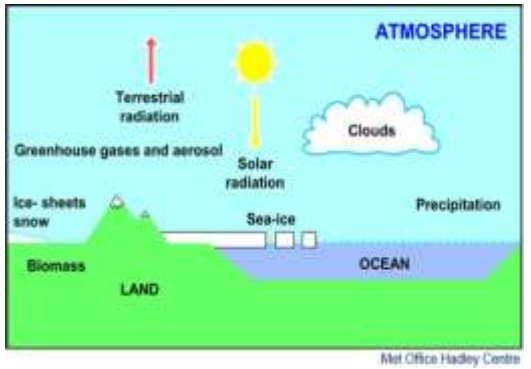
Currently energy is accumulating at rate equivalent to every person currently alive using 20 kettles (2kW) each to boil oceans (or about 300 trillion watts) Allan et al. (2014)



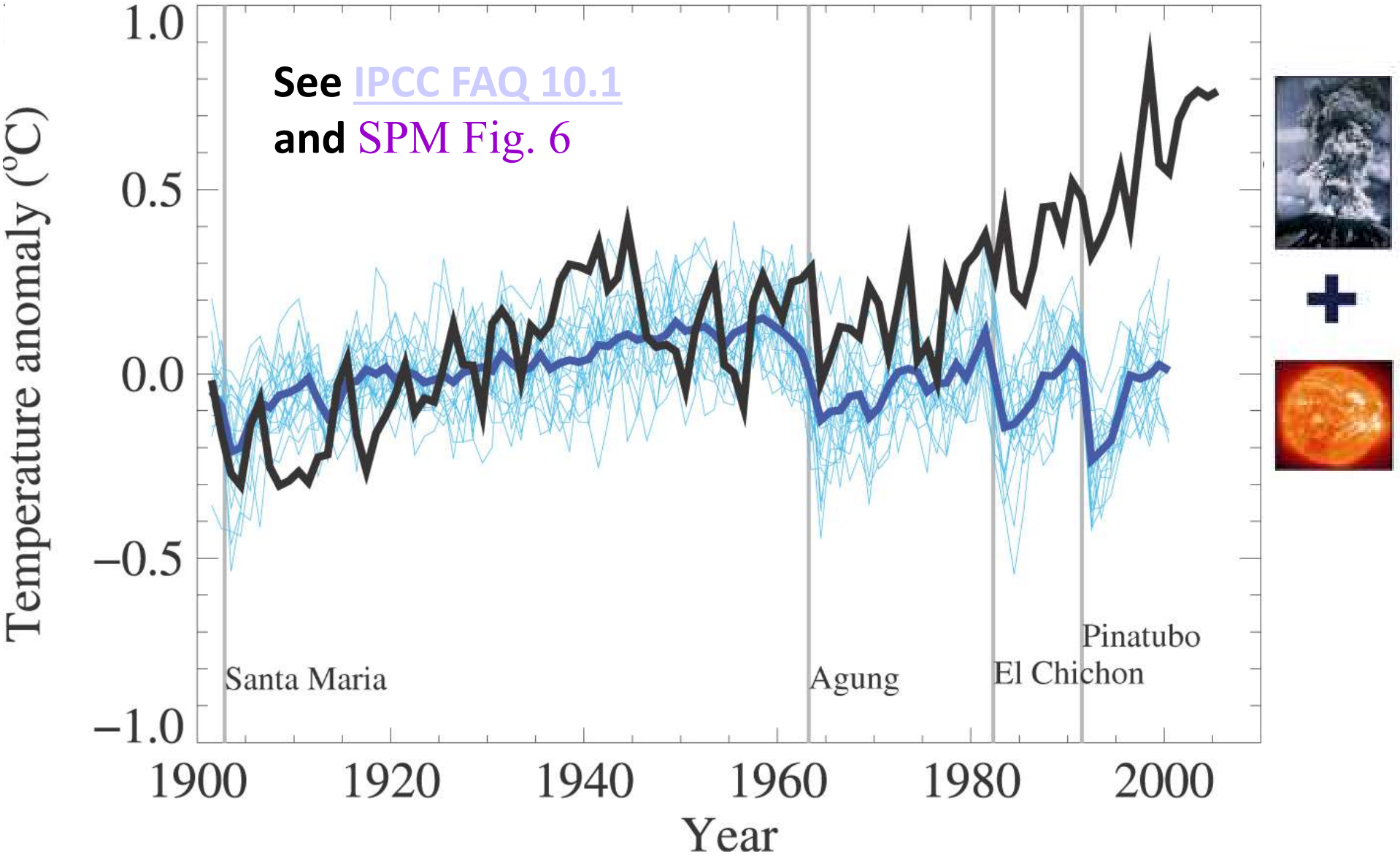
Attributing causes of climate change

- How much of recent warming is explained by natural effects?
- To answer such questions, experiments can be performed with climate simulations
  - including just natural factors (ocean circulation, volcanic eruptions, changes in the sun, …)
  - including natural and anthropogenic factors (e.g. greenhouse gas emissions which cause heating + sulphate aerosol pollutant particles which cause cooling)

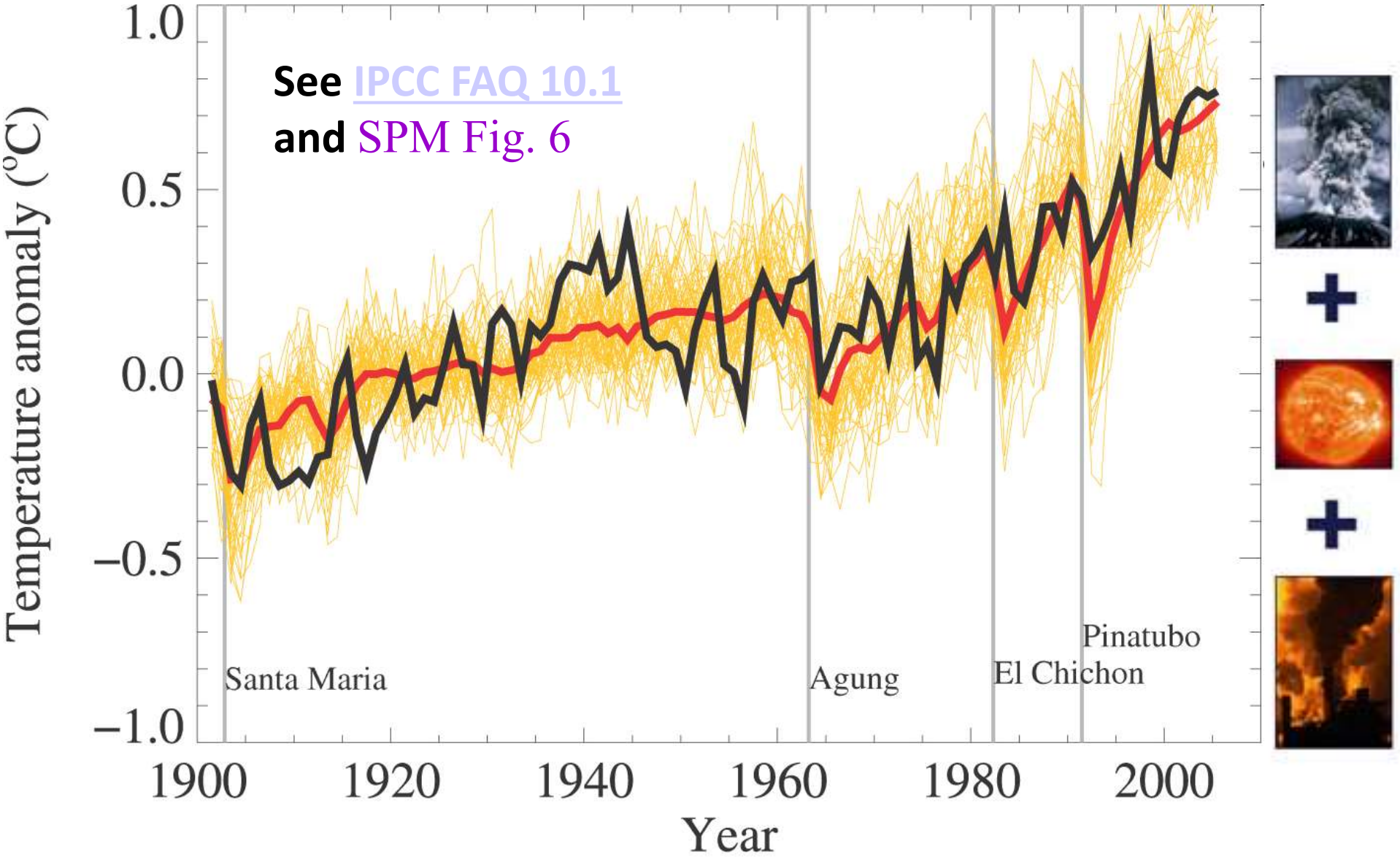




Natural factors cannot explain recent warming



Recent warming can be simulated when man-made factors are included



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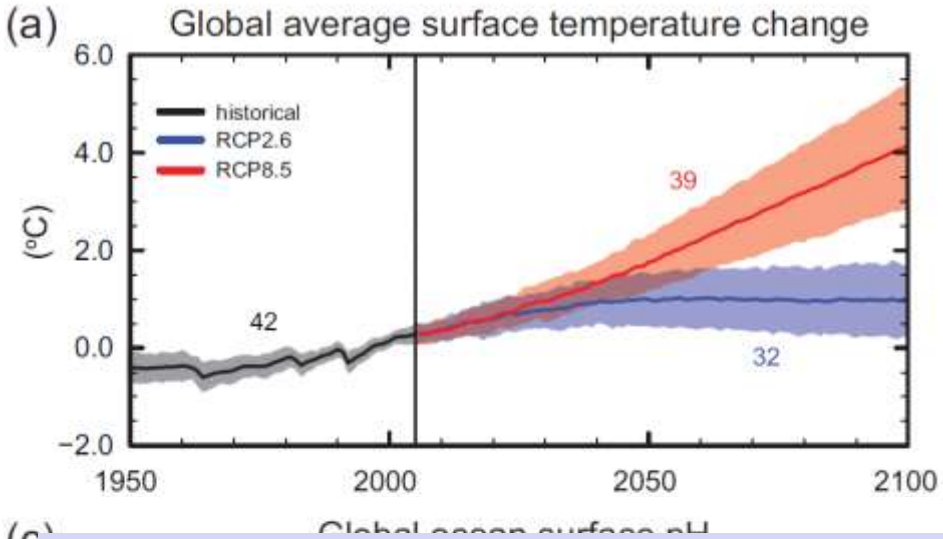
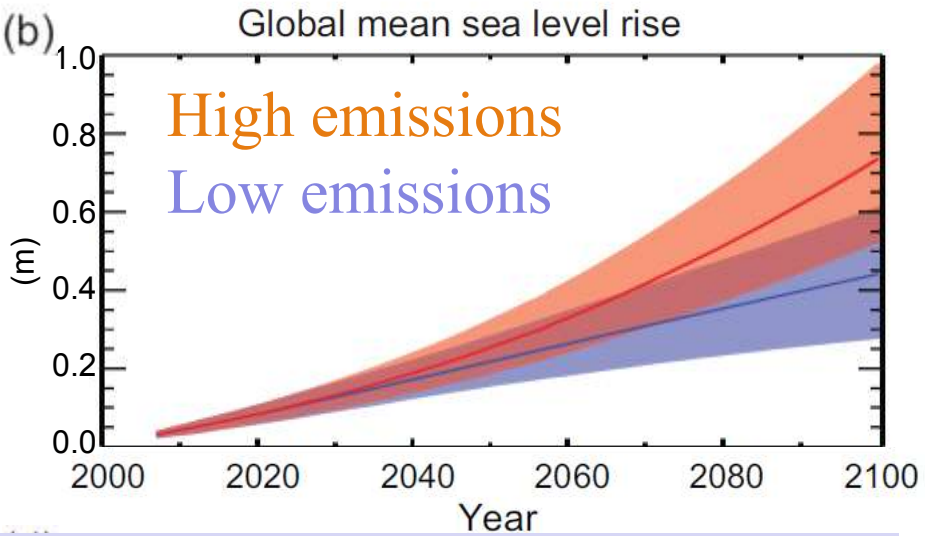
4) What are the predictions?

Future projections to 2100 from climate models

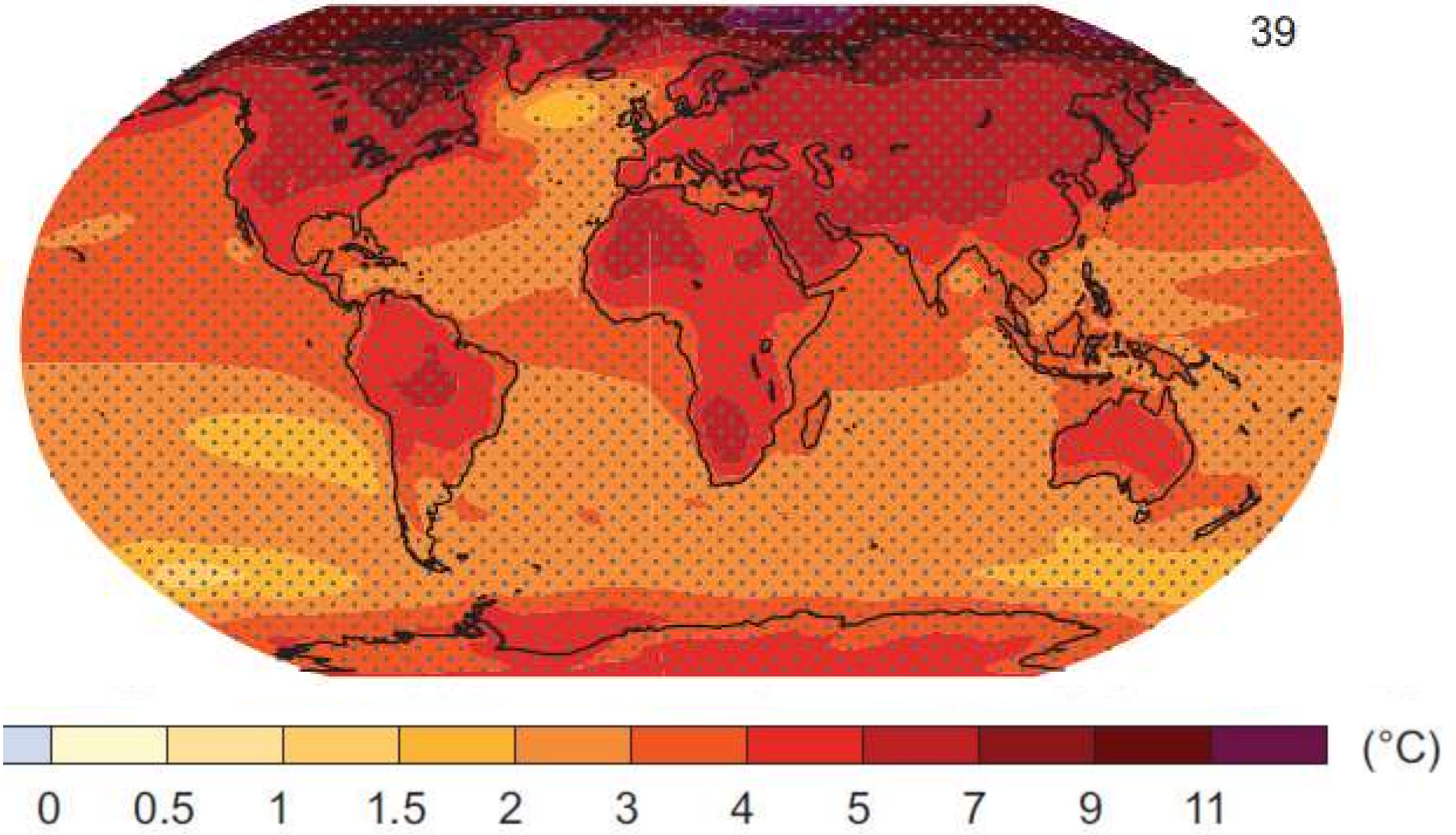




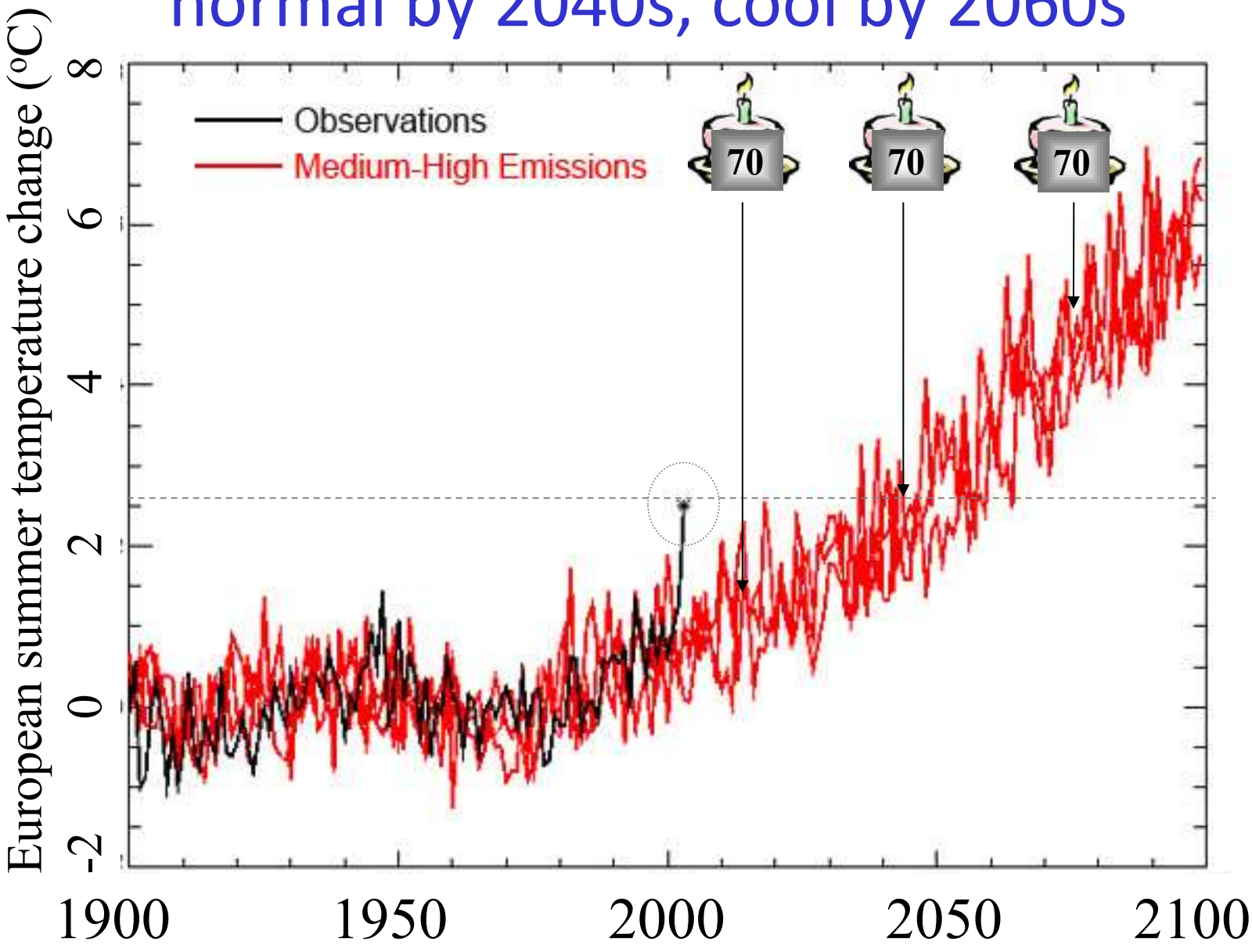
"Continued emissions of greenhouse gases will cause further warming and changes in all components of the climate system. Limiting climate change will require substantial and sustained reductions of greenhouse gas emissions." [IPCC 2013 SPM]

IPCC (2014) WG1 Summary for Policy Makers

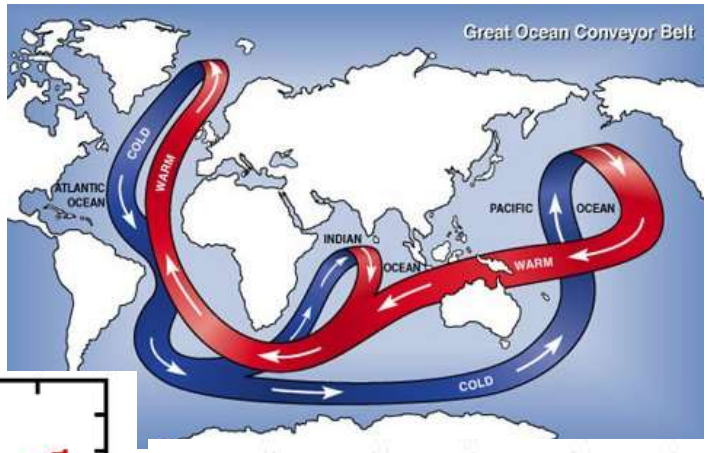
Change in average surface temperature (1986–2005 to 2081–2100) RCP 8.5 Scenario

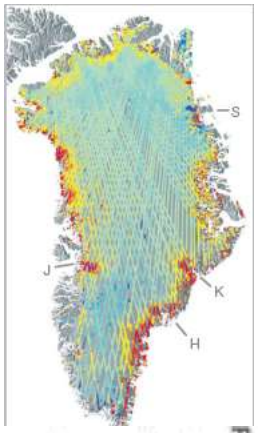


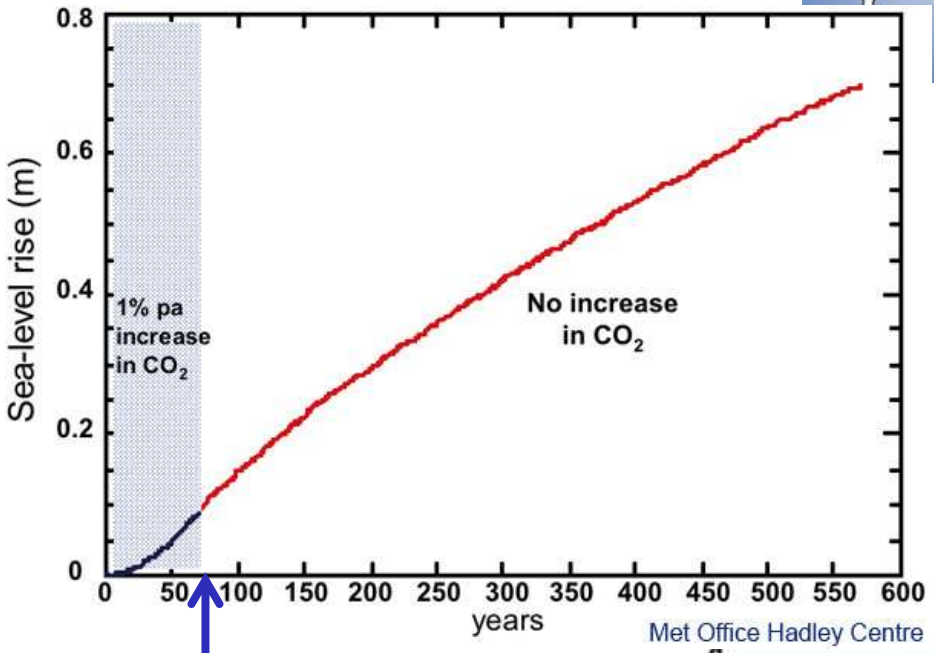
European 2003 summer temperatures could be normal by 2040s, cool by 2060s



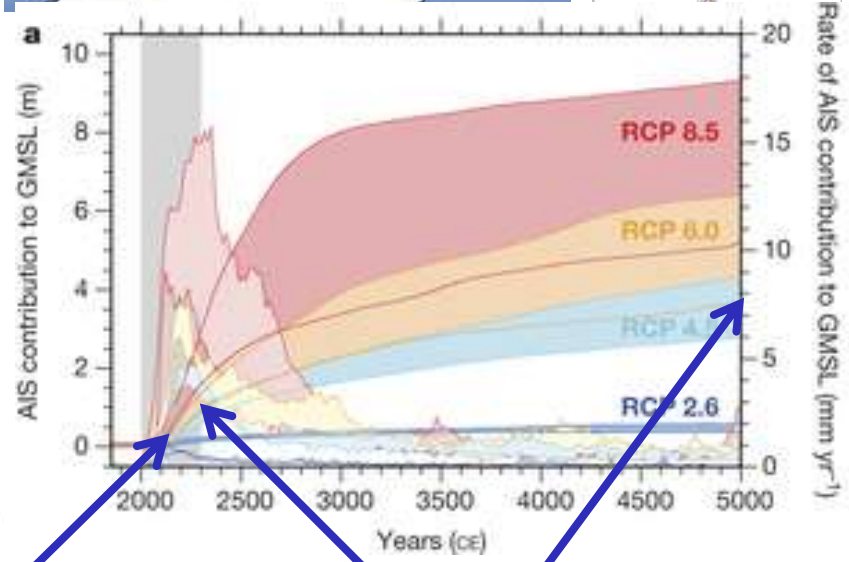
Long-term commitment to sea-level rise



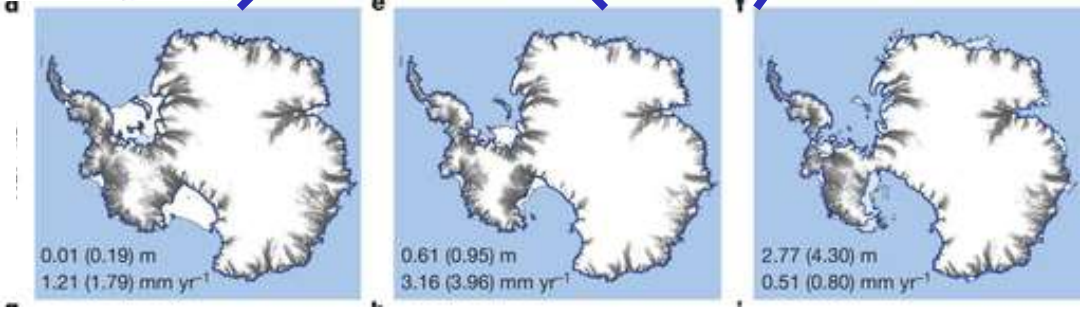




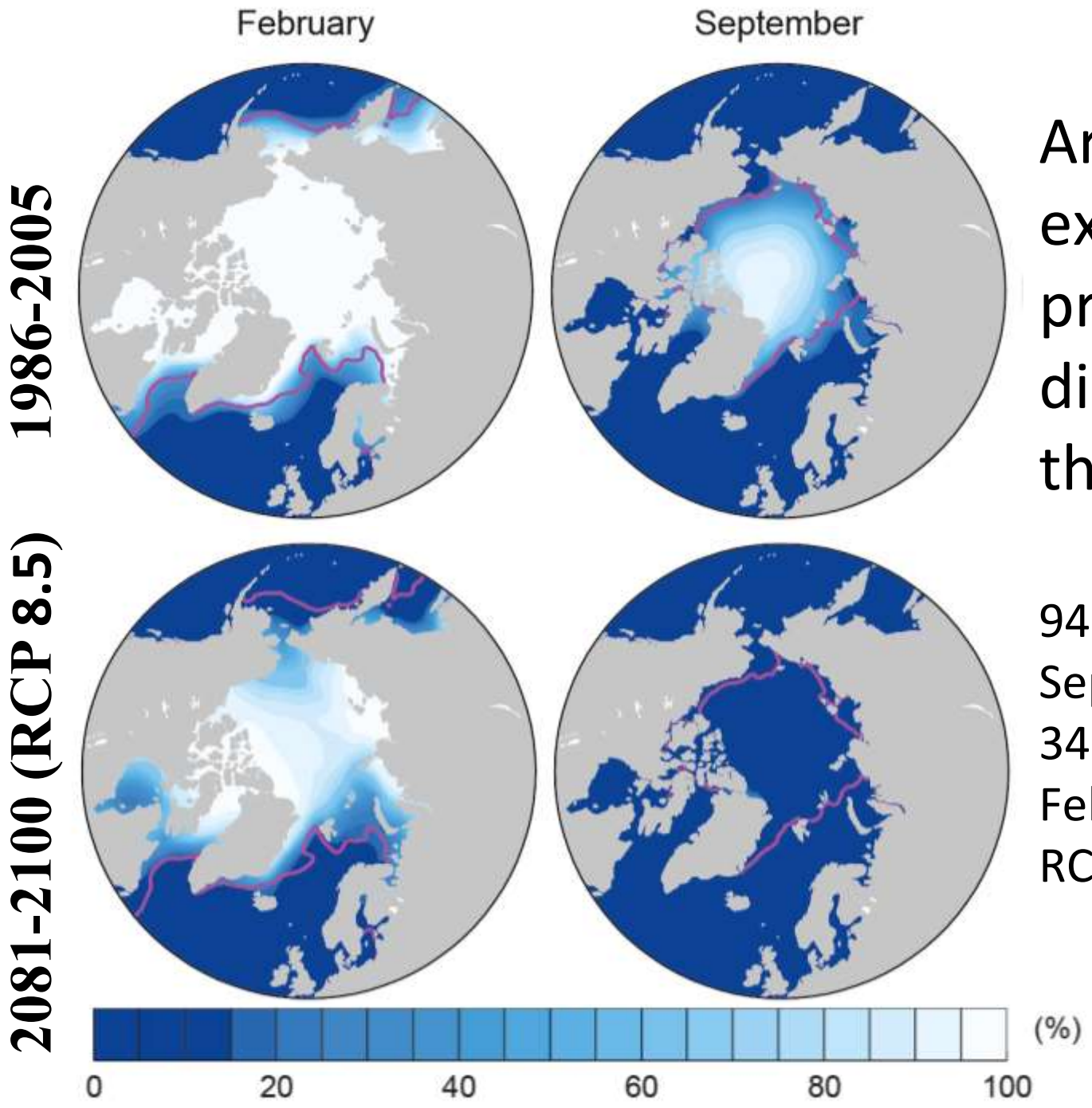
CO_2 increase stops here



Mid/low emissions scenario: RCP4.5



Golledge et al. (2015) Nature



Arctic sea ice extent is projected to diminish over the 21st century

94% decrease in September and 34% decrease in February for the RCP8.5 scenario

IPCC (2013)
WG1 Fig. 12.29

Projections of the water cycle

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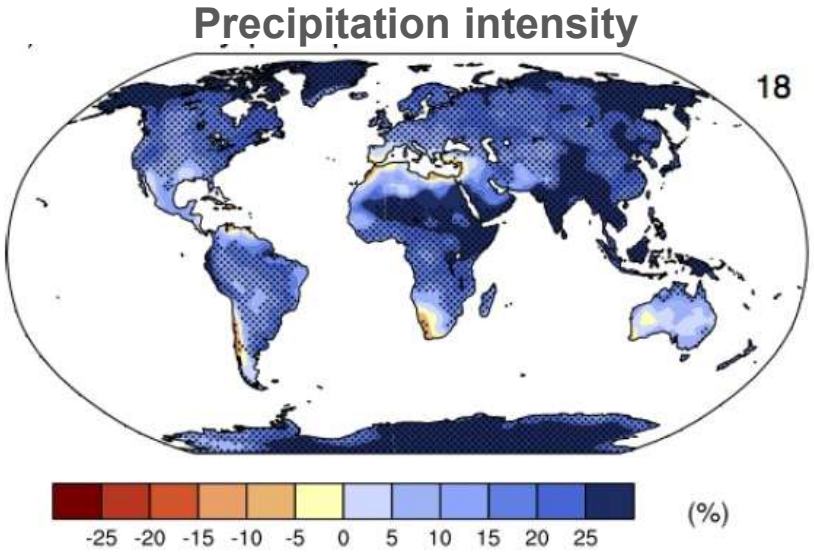
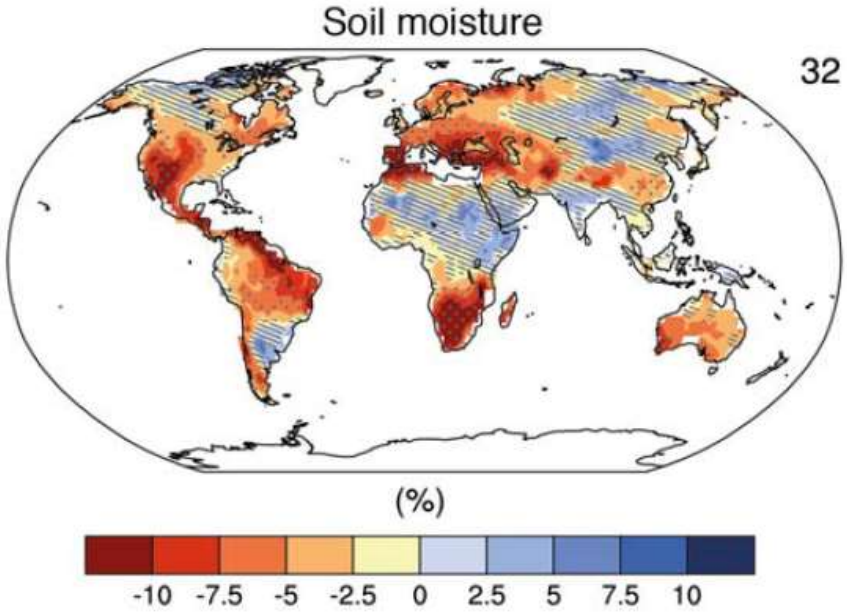
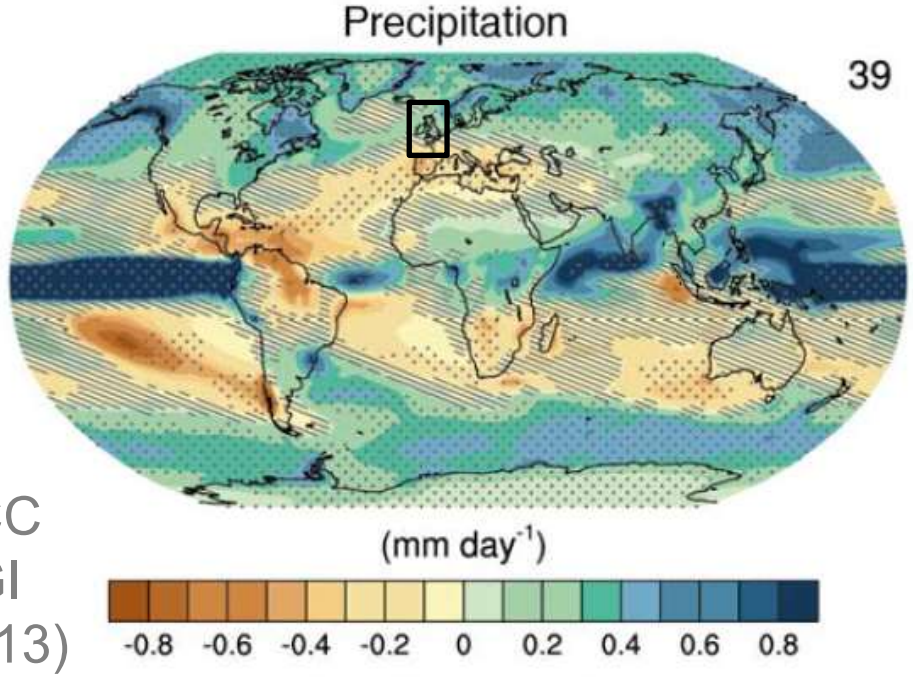
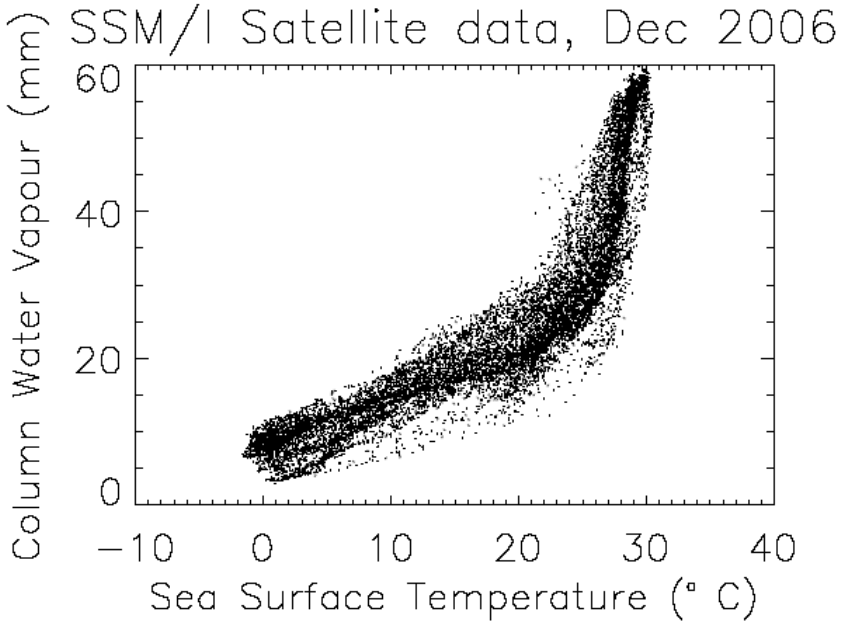


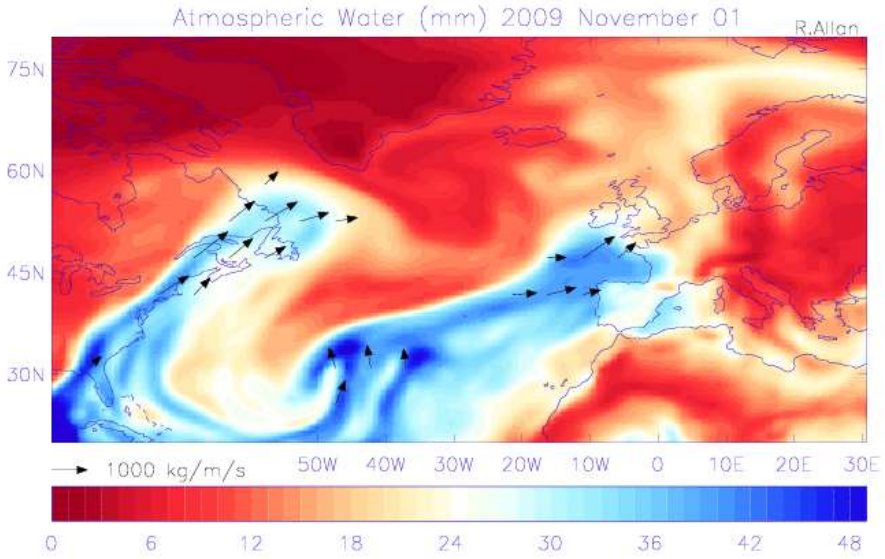


- Increased Precipitation
- More Intense Rainfall
- More droughts
- Wet regions get wetter, dry regions get drier?
- Regional projections??



IPCC WGI (2013)





Lavers et al. (2013) Environ. Res. Lett.

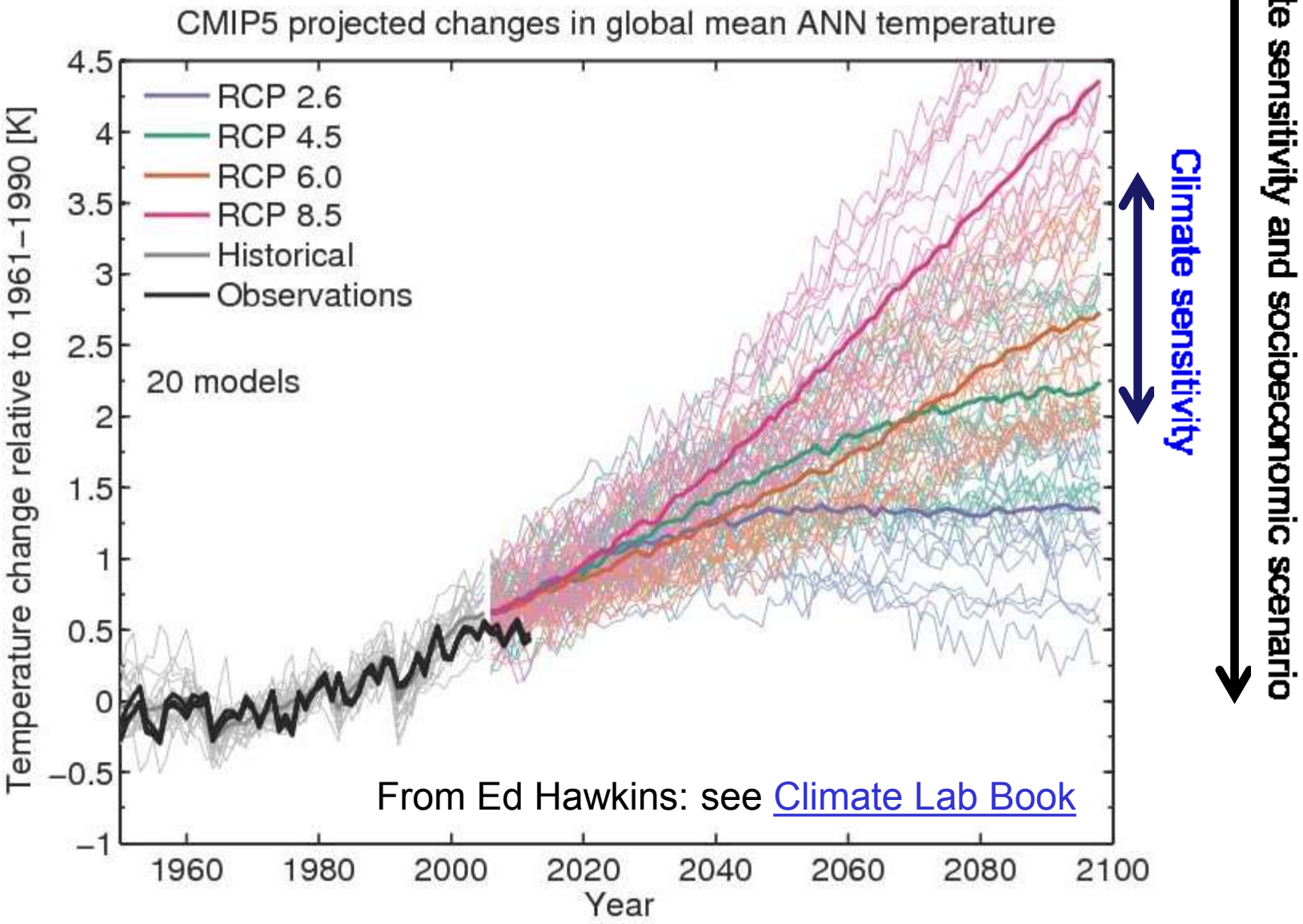
Water vapour & climate change

- Water vapour is a powerful greenhouse gas
- Water vapour in the air increases with warming
- This increases magnitude of climate change
- Also drives intensification of extreme rainfall events

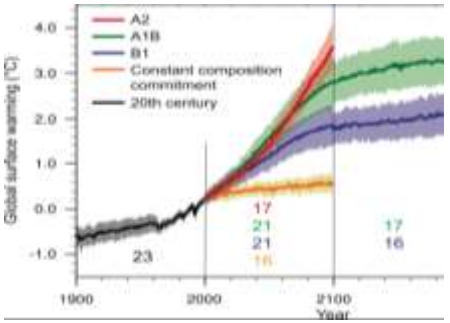
← Nov 2009 Cumbria flooding event

The weather will always generate extreme rainfall events but warming of climate will increase their severity

How much will planet warm?



Summary



- The planet is warming and this is primarily attributable to rising greenhouse gas concentrations
- Greenhouse gases at highest levels for > 800,000 yrs
- Physics of greenhouse effect well understood
- Substantial changes in global temperature and rainfall patterns are projected using computer simulations
- Predicting regional climate change is a challenge…
  - Will substantial greenhouse gas emissions continue?
  - Are "knock on effects" of warming amplifying or reducing the magnitude of change (e.g. clouds, land surface, …)?
  - Changes in atmospheric and oceanic circulations change are crucial for local impacts yet challenging to predict

See Reading MOOC on Our Changing Climate Change