



“TWENTY COUNTIES...ONE VOICE”

TO: NC 20 Members
FROM: Tom Thompson, Chairman
DATE: April 26, 2012
RE: Sea Level Rise

At the recent Coastal Resources Commission meeting in Beaufort, the Science Panel presented their rebuttal to the critique issued by NC 20 many months ago. They are continuing their push for a 39" sea level rise for inclusion in land use planning and that would impact construction of any kind, including roads. The economic consequences of adding 39" to our already existing flood levels are obvious: The cost of building would escalate rapidly if, indeed, a building permit could be obtained at all on many thousands of acres in the NC 20 region.

Our science advisor, John Droz, has been extremely articulate and methodical in analyzing their response, and I am including that here:

http://www.nc-20.com/pdf/CRC_Addendum_Commentary.pdf

At the meeting in Beaufort, both Larry Baldwin and I spoke and attempted to dissuade the CRC from accepting or endorsing this report from the Science Panel. As you read John Droz' paper, I think you will agree that their report and their defense of that report are simply without scientific merit at all.

Larry Baldwin, in his initial comments, made most of the points that you will read in John Droz' paper, but he also produced a document from Newsweek magazine in 1975

<http://www.nc-20.com/pdf/newsweek-coolingworld.pdf>

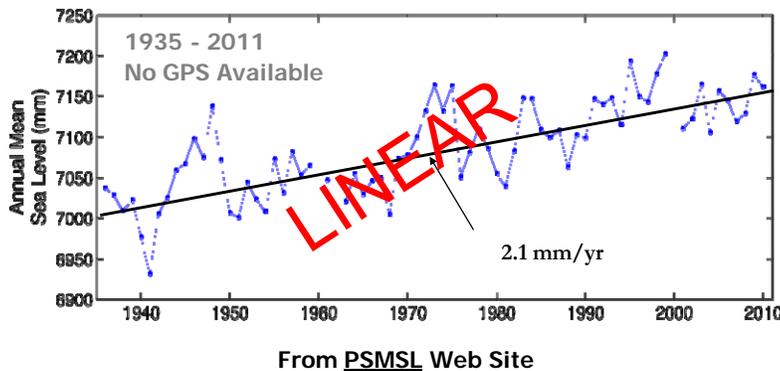
which documented a group of distinguished scientists proclaiming that global cooling was an eminent threat to the earth! My comments centered on the economic consequences of being wrong. My main comments, and I hope that they will be yours if you have a chance to speak publicly on this issue, is that the flawed science behind this report is not just onerous from the standpoint of being bad science, but it's a recipe for economic disaster. This whole episode reminds me of the "Chicken Little" story which I remember from my youth. We all know the sky is not falling and we all know sea level is not rising precipitously as the global warming advocates maintain. Again, the John Droz report which now forms the official response from NC 20 says it all.

I made one additional comment to Dr. Overton during the question and answer period and I would encourage any of you speaking on this to pick up this refrain up and use it whenever you

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have an opportunity to speak with CRC or Science Panel members, legislators, etc. I very politely suggested to Dr. Overton that in my statistics classes if I had ever used historic data to project the future and ended up with one finite number whether it was four pounds, \$300 million or 39", I would have failed. The reason simply is that statistics are not accurate enough to predict a finite number. Projections, to be statistically correct, have to include confidence limits or standard deviations. That's because rarely is data purely linear. That's certainly the case with sea level rise. A plot of sea level rise, (such as the Wilmington data shown below), shows a sea level rise up and down of several millimeters per year. The trend line goes essentially through the statistical middle of this data to project the future. However, the variation, or the ups and downs on an annual basis, are totally impossible to predict and therefore it's impossible to say that sea level rise will be 39" by the year 2100. It might be 39" plus or minus an inch, plus or minus two inches or whatever, but the Science Panel committed a statistical blunder by issuing a finite number.



Dr. Robert Dean, Presentation to NC 20

Additionally, because their own sea level estimates range from 16" (at Duck, NC) to 56" (a very aggressive projection by Dr. Stefan Rahmstorf), trying to pick the middle is a fool's errand. Yet that's exactly what 39" is. My question to Dr. Overton very simply was this: 39" plus or minus what? If we adopt 39" as a planning benchmark and use it for future land use planning, and we construct buildings, roads and other infrastructure to that standard and we get 56", then what? Conversely, if we implement construction practices to only accommodate 16" and it turns out to be 39", we've just planned to inundate large amounts of land through a planning guideline that's far too low. I essentially concluded my remarks with a question to her, "Dr. Overton, what is the confidence level around 39 inches?" Her response, and I'm paraphrasing both her remarks and mine, was fairly succinct. She said "Point well taken."

In conclusion, we will be pursuing aggressively any and all actions to replace the Science Panel's report with the best science available. That science, according to numerous scientists including Dr. Robert Dean who presented at our symposium in New Bern several months ago, is that sea level is rising very slowly in a linear fashion, it has been for centuries, and now we are beginning to see a weak deceleration, meaning that it's beginning to drop off, not accelerate. If we were going to choose a motto for our actions regarding this, it might be "Death to the Hockey Stick!" The hockey stick, by now infamous because of

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the earliest projections of drastic global warming, is certainly not a sound basis for our land use planning in coastal North Carolina.

My sincere thanks to John Droz for his excellent research on this topic, my thanks to Larry Baldwin and Bud Stilley, both of whom have personally been involved in this dialogue, and to all the NC 20 members who have been taking an active role in communicating their concerns to legislators and keeping me far better informed than I would be otherwise. Lastly, I'd like to thank Bob Emory, the Chair of the Coastal Resources Commission. He has been extremely accessible and very willing to listen to our position. Bob is in the unenviable position of being the Chair of an organization with divergent viewpoints within its own ranks and, at the same time, a public servant that has to take into account the concerns of the public and certainly that would include NC 20. Throughout this dialogue, he has been a gentleman and I personally thank him.

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