



Climate science consensus and climate policy – how great expectations fail

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It is often claimed that there exists a consensus in climate science, that this consensus is robust, and that it should inform policy making. Some have attempted to quantify this consensus but it is doubtful if this kind of information is useful, relevant, or effective. The scientific consensus in question is about minimalist claims such as ‘humans cause global warming’. If we consider climate research more broadly, there are many topics in which scientific debate takes place (to name but three: climate sensitivity, extreme weather events, negative emissions and geo-engineering). Acknowledging scientific controversy in these matters is not the same as rejecting climate change as a global policy problem. Climate science is complex and findings often contradictory and, most importantly, the science does not tell us anything about what to do about climate change. I will argue that the concepts of tame and wicked problems help us understand the nature of the science/policy relation and the limits of a view which puts all hope in a robust scientific consensus as tool for successful climate policy.