

CLIMATE PESSIMISM - THE BACKGROUND

World Schools, Round Five, prepared • University of Kentucky (Sept 11-13)

HMDC Forensics Team (Grades 3-6)

World Schools, Round Five, prepared. This House welcomes climate pessimism.

HMDC Forensics Team

THE INFORMATION SLIDE, WHICH WE READ TWICE

Climate pessimism is the viewpoint that catastrophic global heating and severe ecological breakdown cannot be fully prevented, and that we should make decisions based on this fact.

That slide is binding, which means it is part of the motion. A judge will expect us to argue inside it rather than around it, and a team that ignores it has already lost ground before it speaks.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING ON THIS PAGE

This debate is not about whether climate science is frightening. Both sides can agree that the findings are serious, and most skilled teams will agree openly, because arguing with the science wastes a speech and annoys a judge.

The question is narrower and more interesting. The slide says we should make our decisions based on the fact that catastrophe cannot be fully prevented. So we are arguing about whether taking that outlook as our starting point leads to better choices or to worse ones.

There is one word in the slide that decides a great deal, and we should notice it before anyone points it out to us. The slide says catastrophe cannot be FULLY prevented. It does not say that nothing can be prevented. The team arguing against the motion will build a great deal on that single word, and the team arguing for the motion has to be ready for it.

WHAT THE SCIENCE ACTUALLY SAYS

We need enough of this to speak confidently, and no more, because this is not a science round.

Some outcomes now appear to be settled regardless of what we choose next. Scientists at the British Antarctic Survey published work in 2023 finding that warming of the ocean around West Antarctica, and the sea level rise that follows it, appears committed under every scenario they tested, including scenarios they described as unrealistically ambitious.

In 2025, a report written by one hundred and sixty scientists concluded that warm-water coral reefs are now passing a tipping point, and that widespread dieback is happening rather than approaching. Nearly a billion people depend on those reefs.

At the same time, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change states that harm rises with every increment of warming, and that the harm at 1.5 degrees is lower than the harm at 2 degrees. That sentence matters enormously, because it means that even where some damage is settled, the amount of damage is still ours to decide.

Both of those things are true together. Holding them together is what makes a strong speech on this motion.

WHAT DECISIONS CHANGE IF WE ACCEPT IT

The side arguing for the motion needs real decisions rather than a mood, so these are the decisions that only get made once permanence is accepted.

Money moves toward preparing for damage rather than only toward preventing it. Under the Paris Agreement, wealthy countries promised to balance the money spent on cutting emissions with the money spent on adaptation, and they have not done so. Adaptation finance to developing countries was 25.9 billion dollars in 2023, which was less than the year before.

A fund gets built for harm that cannot be averted. The United Nations created the loss and damage fund on exactly the premise this motion describes, and one of the IPCC's own lead authors has stated that some losses and damages are not preventable because a level of warming is already locked in.

Communities move inland instead of building higher walls. Researchers call this managed retreat, and it is a decision nobody makes while they still believe the coastline can be saved.

Worst cases get studied instead of avoided. A group of scientists from Cambridge, Potsdam and Exeter argued in 2022 that the habit of erring on the side of least drama has left the worst outcomes dangerously underexamined.

WHAT HARM COMES FROM ACCEPTING IT

The side arguing against the motion has material that is just as concrete, and we should know it whichever side we are given.

Believing a problem is beyond our control tends to stop people acting on it. Researchers at Sapienza University in Rome describe this directly, naming helplessness as the belief that climate change is beyond personal control, and linking it to people doing less rather than more.

The number of people who oppose action because they think it is hopeless has now overtaken the number who oppose it because they doubt the science. That is a finding about where the resistance now comes from, and it is uncomfortable for the side arguing for the motion.

Prevention is working better than the motion assumes. In 2024, solar power was on average 41 percent cheaper than the cheapest fossil alternative, and onshore wind was 53 percent cheaper. China, the largest emitter in the world, has held its emissions flat or falling for twenty-one months because clean power is now growing faster than demand.

Somebody benefits when people give up. Researchers writing in Global Sustainability list this outlook among the recognised ways that action gets delayed, and they file it under the heading Surrender.

VOCABULARY WE WILL NEED

Mitigation means reducing emissions so that less warming happens.

Adaptation means preparing for the warming that happens anyway, such as building flood defences or changing which crops are planted.

Loss and damage means harm that neither mitigation nor adaptation prevented, and it is also the name of the United Nations fund created to pay for it.

A tipping point is a threshold in a natural system which, once crossed, does not easily reverse.

Managed retreat means deliberately moving people and buildings away from a place that can no longer be defended.

Doomism is the word used in the research for the belief that action is pointless because the outcome is already fixed. Both sides should know it, because the opposing team may use it.

Proposition and Opposition are the World Schools names for the two sides.

A WORD ABOUT HOW THIS TOPIC FEELS

This motion is about a serious subject, and it is normal to find some of it heavy. We handle it the way debaters handle every difficult topic, which is by staying at the level of what countries and governments decide rather than at the level of how any of us feel about the future.

If any of this sits badly with anyone on the team, I would rather hear about it than have somebody carry it quietly. Come and talk to me. That matters more to me than the round does.

HOW WE PREPARE FROM HERE

We read the evidence pack and pick the three cards each of us can say most naturally out loud.

We practise saying the information slide in our own words in two sentences, because whoever explains it most clearly usually controls the debate.

We each write one sentence explaining the word "fully," and we compare them, since that single word is where this round is won.