

CLIMATE PESSIMISM - THE FULL ARGUMENT, BOTH SIDES

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

HMDC Forensics Team (Grades 3-6)

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WHY THIS DOCUMENT EXISTS

The evidence packet gives us cards. This document gives us the round. For every argument on both sides it sets out the claim we make, the evidence that carries it, the mechanism that turns the evidence into harm or into help, the strongest answer the other side will give us, and the reply we give back to that answer.

We are prepared on both sides because the sides switch, which means every argument written here will at some point be argued against us by a team that has read the same research we have.

THE MOTION AND THE SLIDE THAT BINDS IT

This House welcomes climate pessimism. The information slide is binding, which means it is part of the motion rather than commentary on it, and it reads:

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.

Three things follow from that slide, and a team that misses any of them will lose to a team that has read it carefully.

THE SCIENCE IS NOT THE QUESTION. Whether global heating is severe is not what either side argues. Both sides can accept every bleak finding in the research and still disagree completely about the motion, because the motion is about what we should decide once we accept them.

THE DECISION RULE IS THE QUESTION. The slide says we should make decisions based on the fact that catastrophe cannot be fully prevented. So the round is about whether adopting that as our basis for deciding produces decisions that help or decisions that harm.

READ THE WORD FULLY. The slide says catastrophe cannot be FULLY prevented, which is not the same as saying nothing can be prevented. That single word is where the whole Opposition case lives, and a Proposition team that lets it pass without argument will be punished for it in the very next speech.

WHAT EACH SIDE MUST PROVE

The Proposition must prove that accepting permanence unlocks decisions that help real people, and that those decisions are not being made while we continue to believe the harm can still be prevented.

The Proposition does NOT have to prove that cutting emissions is pointless, that effort is wasted, or that the situation is beyond repair. Every one of those is a position the Opposition would rather we defended.

The Opposition must prove that welcoming this viewpoint leads to decisions that harm, either because outcomes remain open enough that effort still pays, or because the viewpoint itself reduces the effort.

The Opposition does NOT have to dispute any finding in climate science, and should never try. The Opposition case is strongest when it accepts the science completely and argues about what follows from it.

HOW THIS ROUND IS WEIGHED

THE FIRST CLASH IS THE WORD FULLY. The Proposition needs permanence to be decision-relevant. The Opposition needs the remaining margin to be large enough that effort still changes the outcome. The IPCC line that harm escalates with every increment is the Opposition's answer to this, and the Proposition must meet it directly rather than restating that some harm is locked in.

THE SECOND CLASH IS WHETHER THE VIEWPOINT CHANGES BEHAVIOUR. The Proposition says accepting permanence unlocks preparation. The Opposition says it produces helplessness and reduces effort. Both have peer-reviewed evidence. The team that explains the mechanism rather than citing the study wins this exchange.

THE THIRD CLASH IS WHO BENEFITS. The Opposition will say that surrender helps whoever profits from delay. The Proposition will say that hope has already cost a decade. Neither side should let this become an argument about motives, because a round decided on motives is a round nobody learns anything from.

PROPOSITION ARGUMENT ONE - THE PREPARING HALF IS STARVED

THE CLAIM. The half of the work that deals with harm already happening is going short, and it is going short on purpose.

THE EVIDENCE. According to Carbon Brief, October 29 2025, reporting the UNEP Adaptation Gap Report 2025, developed countries agreed under Article 9 of the Paris Agreement to achieve a balance between climate finance raised for cutting emissions and finance raised for preparing for damage, and more money has been raised for cutting emissions than for preparing. Adaptation finance to developing countries was 25.9 billion dollars in 2023, down from 27.9 billion in 2022. The Grantham Research Institute at the London School of Economics states on August 14 2024 that adaptation has historically been deprioritised in favour of mitigation and remains significantly underfunded.

WHY IT MATTERS. This is the argument that turns the motion from a mood into a budget line. A world that believes catastrophe can still be prevented spends on prevention, and a world that accepts some of it cannot spend on preparation as well. The figure is falling rather than rising, which means the imbalance is getting worse at exactly the point the harm is arriving.

WHAT THEY SAY BACK. They will say that adaptation funding is rising in absolute terms over the longer run, that a single year of decline is not a trend, and that the shortfall is a failure of political will rather than a consequence of optimism about prevention.

HOW WE ANSWER. We answer that the London School of Economics does not describe an accident. It describes a deprioritisation, meaning a decision, and a decision taken because prevention was believed to be the thing that mattered. That is the belief this motion asks us to set aside.

PROPOSITION ARGUMENT TWO - GOVERNMENTS HAVE ALREADY AGREED WITH US

THE CLAIM. The world has already acted on the premise the motion describes.

THE EVIDENCE. According to the United Nations, Last Accessed August 2026, Dr. Adelle Thomas, lead author of the IPCC 2022 report on Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability, states that for some people and in some places it is too late to attempt to adapt, and that the IPCC has warned that even if effective actions to limit warming to 1.5 degrees were put in place, losses and damages are not preventable because there is a locked-in level of warming already causing unavoidable consequences.

WHY IT MATTERS. This argument matters because it removes the charge of defeatism. We are not asking the world to adopt a new and gloomy premise. The loss and damage fund was built on this premise by the governments of the world, which means the position the Opposition wants to call surrender is the position those governments already hold in their own institutions.

WHAT THEY SAY BACK. They will say that creating a fund for unavoidable harm is entirely compatible with fighting hard to prevent the avoidable harm, and that governments doing both proves the two are not in conflict.

HOW WE ANSWER. We answer that this is the strongest form of our case rather than an objection to it. We have never asked anyone to stop preventing. We have asked that the unavoidable half be planned for openly, and their own answer concedes that the unavoidable half exists.

PROPOSITION ARGUMENT THREE - MOVING PEOPLE BEFORE THE WATER ARRIVES

THE CLAIM. A decision that saves lives is only made once permanence is accepted.

THE EVIDENCE. According to Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B, May 16 2022, Tayanah O'Donnell of the Australian National University writes that with climate tipping points

now reached and vulnerable areas including coastlines at increasing risk, we must explicitly acknowledge that not all of these locations can be saved through protect or accommodate options, and that retreat is difficult but is a must have in terms of design, process and conversations.

WHY IT MATTERS. This is the clearest example in the pack of a decision that belongs to us. Nobody plans a retreat from a coastline they still believe can be defended. Planned retreat, done early, is orderly, funded and dignified. Retreat forced by a storm is none of those things, and the difference between the two is entirely a difference in when permanence was accepted.

WHAT THEY SAY BACK. They will say that planned retreat is already policy in many places without anybody adopting pessimism as a decision rule, which shows the decision does not require the viewpoint.

HOW WE ANSWER. We answer that where retreat is already policy it is policy precisely because permanence was accepted for that coastline, which is our mechanism working rather than an exception to it. The question is why that acceptance is granted one shoreline at a time, after the argument has been lost, rather than adopted as the basis for planning.

PROPOSITION ARGUMENT FOUR - A THRESHOLD THAT HAS ALREADY BEEN CROSSED

THE CLAIM. Our planning rests on an assumption the science has already left behind.

THE EVIDENCE. According to the Stockholm Resilience Centre, October 13 2025, reporting the second Global Tipping Points Report, warm-water coral reefs, on which nearly a billion people and a quarter of all marine life depend, are now passing their tipping point, and widespread dieback is occurring. The same page notes that current policy thinking does not usually take tipping points into account.

WHY IT MATTERS. The second half of that evidence is the argument. It is not that a threshold has been crossed, which is a fact about the world. It is that our planning does not have a place to put that fact, which is a failure of the decision rule we currently use. A policy framework that can only handle gradual change will keep producing plans for a world that no longer exists.

WHAT THEY SAY BACK. They will read the rest of the same paragraph, which says that small refuges may survive and must be protected, and argue that a report urging protection is a report about effort rather than about surrender.

HOW WE ANSWER. We answer that protecting refuges is exactly the kind of decision that only gets made once the larger loss is accepted. You do not identify refuges in a world you still believe you can save whole. Their own quotation describes planning that begins after permanence is admitted.

PROPOSITION ARGUMENT FIVE - ONE OUTCOME THAT DOES NOT CHANGE

THE CLAIM. There is a result that stays the same whatever we choose.

THE EVIDENCE. According to Nature Climate Change, October 23 2023, Kaitlin Naughten and Paul Holland of the British Antarctic Survey and Jan De Rydt of Northumbria University write that substantial ocean warming and ice-shelf melting is projected in all future climate scenarios, including those considered to be unrealistically ambitious, and that a baseline of rapid twenty-first-century ocean warming and consequent sea-level rise appears to be committed.

WHY IT MATTERS. This is the strongest single card on the Proposition side, and the reason is the phrase including those considered to be unrealistically ambitious. Every other argument in this round can be met with the reply that effort changes outcomes. This one cannot, because the scientists tested the most ambitious scenario available and the outcome did not move. It is the cleanest possible statement that some part of the future is already decided.

WHAT THEY SAY BACK. They will say that this is one region and one process, that the paper does not say all outcomes are fixed, and that generalising from the Amundsen Sea to the whole climate is exactly the leap the motion needs and the paper does not support.

HOW WE ANSWER. We answer that we do not need all outcomes to be fixed. We need one to be, because the motion asks whether we should decide on the basis that catastrophe cannot be FULLY prevented. A single committed outcome establishes the word fully, and the sea level that follows from it arrives on coastlines everywhere rather than only in Antarctica.

PROPOSITION ARGUMENT SIX - OPTIMISM ALREADY BOUGHT DELAY

THE CLAIM. Hope has a cost, and we have already paid it.

THE EVIDENCE. According to The Conversation, April 22 2021, James Dyke of the University of Exeter, Robert Watson of the University of East Anglia and a former chair of the IPCC, and Wolfgang Knorr of Lund University write that they have arrived at the painful realisation that the idea of net zero has licensed a recklessly cavalier burn now, pay later approach which has seen carbon emissions continue to soar, and that it has also hastened the destruction of the natural world by increasing deforestation today.

WHY IT MATTERS. The Opposition case rests on the claim that pessimism reduces effort. This card is the mirror of that claim, made by people who cannot be accused of wanting the answer. Three senior scientists, one of whom chaired the IPCC, are saying that their own optimistic framing produced delay. If a hopeful framework has already licensed decades of postponement, then the harm the Opposition fears from our position has already been caused by theirs.

WHAT THEY SAY BACK. They will say that the article criticises one specific policy device, being net zero accounting with offsets, rather than optimism in general, and that the authors go on to argue for faster action rather than for acceptance.

HOW WE ANSWER. We answer that the authors' remedy is not the point we are borrowing. The point we are borrowing is their diagnosis, which is that a framework built on the promise that harm can still be prevented was used to postpone the preventing. That is a cost of optimism, established by people who still hold it.

OPPOSITION ARGUMENT ONE - THE WORD FULLY, AND WHY IT ENDS THE ROUND

THE CLAIM. Outcomes are not fixed, and effort still changes the result.

THE EVIDENCE. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2023, in the Sixth Assessment Synthesis Report Summary for Policymakers at section B.2.2, risks and projected adverse impacts and related losses and damages from climate change will escalate with every increment of global warming, with very high confidence, and are higher for global warming of 1.5 degrees than at present, and even higher at 2 degrees, with high confidence.

WHY IT MATTERS. This card belongs in every Opposition speech, and it is the answer to the binding information slide. The slide says catastrophe cannot be FULLY prevented. It does not say the amount of catastrophe is settled. The IPCC states that the amount is not settled and that it responds to every increment of effort, which means the decision rule the motion proposes is being applied to a question where the answer is still open. Deciding as though the outcome is fixed, when the highest authority in the field says it is not, produces decisions that harm.

WHAT THEY SAY BACK. They will say that accepting permanence for the locked-in portion is entirely compatible with fighting for every increment of the rest, and that the motion asks for both rather than for surrender.

HOW WE ANSWER. We answer that the motion does not say make decisions about the locked-in portion. It says make decisions based on the fact that catastrophe cannot be fully prevented, which is a rule about all our decisions rather than a carve-out for one part of the problem. If they now want to limit their rule to the committed harm, they have abandoned the slide they are bound by.

OPPOSITION ARGUMENT TWO - THE CHEAPER CHOICE IS ALREADY HERE

THE CLAIM. The tools for acting are not scarce.

THE EVIDENCE. According to the International Renewable Energy Agency, July 22 2025, in 2024 solar photovoltaics were on average 41 percent cheaper than the lowest-cost fossil fuel alternatives, while onshore wind projects were 53 percent cheaper, with onshore wind the most affordable source of new renewable electricity at 0.034 dollars per kilowatt hour, followed by solar at 0.043.

WHY IT MATTERS. This argument matters because it addresses the premise rather than the conclusion. A decision rule built on the belief that prevention has failed is being adopted at the exact moment the cheapest way to generate electricity became the clean way. The obstacle to acting is no longer cost, which means the case for treating failure as settled is weaker now than at any point when it was previously argued.

WHAT THEY SAY BACK. They will say that cheap clean electricity has coexisted with rising emissions, that price is not deployment, and that the motion is about harm already committed rather than about the cost of future generation.

HOW WE ANSWER. We answer that a world where prevention has genuinely failed does not look like a world where the preventive technology just became the cheapest one available. The price collapse is evidence that the future is still being decided, which is the only thing this card needs to establish.

OPPOSITION ARGUMENT THREE - THE LARGEST EMITTER HAS STOPPED GROWING

THE CLAIM. The picture is still changing.

THE EVIDENCE. According to Carbon Brief, February 12 2026, reporting analysis by Lauri Myllyvirta of the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air, developments in 2025 extended the trend of clean-power generation growing faster than power demand overall, a trend that started in 2023 and is the key reason why China's emissions have been stable or falling since early 2024. Solar output rose 43 percent year on year, wind 14 percent, and coal generation fell 1.9 percent.

WHY IT MATTERS. The Proposition needs the trajectory to be settled. This is the single largest emitter on earth, and its emissions have stopped growing, for a structural reason rather than a temporary one. A decision rule that treats the outcome as determined is being proposed while the largest input to that outcome is moving in the opposite direction from the one the rule assumes.

WHAT THEY SAY BACK. They will say that flat emissions are not falling emissions, that stability at a very high level still adds to the total every year, and that one country's plateau does not touch the committed warming already in the system.

HOW WE ANSWER. We answer that we are not claiming the problem is solved. We are claiming the trajectory is open, which is all the Opposition needs, because the motion asks us to decide as though it is closed.

OPPOSITION ARGUMENT FOUR - FEAR DOES NOT RELIABLY PRODUCE ACTION

THE CLAIM. Welcoming this viewpoint can cost us the effort we need.

THE EVIDENCE. According to BMC Psychology, November 20 2024, Jialing Huang and Huyue Guo of Shenzhen University write that because fear can induce either adaptive or maladaptive coping strategies depending on an individual's perceived ability to alter the situation, fear appeals can either motivate action or drive people away, and may trigger counterproductive defense mechanisms such as denial, apathy and avoidance. Frontiers in Psychology, February 29 2024, adds that inducing high levels of fear may lead to denial and apathy and to climate change helplessness, which the authors define as the belief that climate change is beyond personal control, resulting in behavioural inhibition.

WHY IT MATTERS. Read the conditional in the first source carefully, because it is the argument. Fear motivates action when a person believes they can alter the situation, and drives

them away when they believe they cannot. The motion asks us to adopt, as our decision rule, the belief that the situation cannot be altered. That is the precise condition under which the research says fear stops producing action.

WHAT THEY SAY BACK. They will say that these studies are about individual psychology rather than government decisions, and that the motion is about how states plan rather than about how people feel.

HOW WE ANSWER. We answer that states plan under the pressure their populations create, and that a population which has adopted helplessness applies none. The mechanism runs from belief to inaction, and the motion asks for the belief.

OPPOSITION ARGUMENT FIVE - THIS NOW OUTNUMBERS DOUBT

THE CLAIM. The harm we describe is already the larger one.

THE EVIDENCE. According to Frontiers in Communication, May 3 2024, Caitlin Johnstone and Elise Stickles of the University of British Columbia write that the fall in skepticism has been accompanied by a rise in the number of individuals reporting doomist attitudes, citing findings that more people opposed action because of doomist beliefs than opposed it due to skepticism, and that more respondents believed humans cannot address global warming even if it is happening than denied its existence.

WHY IT MATTERS. This converts the Opposition case from a prediction into a measurement. We are not warning that welcoming this viewpoint might one day reduce effort. We are reporting that it already has, and that it now blocks more action than climate denial does. Whatever weight the round gives to obstruction of climate action, this card assigns the larger share of it to the very viewpoint the motion asks us to welcome.

WHAT THEY SAY BACK. They will say that unstructured public doomism, absorbed from headlines, is a different thing from a deliberate decision rule adopted by people who have read the evidence, and that the motion asks for the second rather than the first.

HOW WE ANSWER. We answer that a motion which welcomes a viewpoint welcomes its spread, and that the version that spreads is the popular version rather than the careful one. A House that welcomes climate pessimism gets the doomism the research measured, not the disciplined planning they describe.

OPPOSITION ARGUMENT SIX - RESEARCHERS FILE THIS UNDER DELAY

THE CLAIM. We are not calling this unhelpful ourselves. We are reporting where the research already places it.

THE EVIDENCE. According to Global Sustainability, Cambridge University Press, July 1 2020, William Lamb of the Mercator Research Institute and the University of Leeds and colleagues write that doomism argues any actions we take are too little, too late, and that catastrophic climate change is already locked in, and that such statements evoke fear and can result in a

paralysing state of shock and resignation. The authors file this under the heading Surrender, within a peer-reviewed taxonomy of discourses of climate delay.

WHY IT MATTERS. The authority here is categorical rather than empirical. A peer-reviewed paper mapping the recognised ways that climate action gets postponed includes this viewpoint as one of them, by name, under a heading the authors chose. The motion asks the House to welcome something that the literature on delay classifies as a form of delay.

WHAT THEY SAY BACK. They will say that a taxonomy is a description of rhetoric rather than a finding about consequences, that the paper is classifying how arguments are used rather than proving harm, and that our own position is distinguished from the rhetorical version it describes.

HOW WE ANSWER. We answer that the distinction they draw is one they will not be able to hold in the world. The paper describes the form this viewpoint takes when it is actually used, and the motion welcomes the viewpoint rather than the carefully qualified version of it that appears in a debating chamber.

OPPOSITION ARGUMENT SEVEN - A LEADING SCIENTIST SAYS THE SAME

THE CLAIM. The viewpoint is questioned by the very people studying the harm.

THE EVIDENCE. According to the Harvard Gazette, April 3 2024, Michael E. Mann, Presidential Distinguished Professor at the University of Pennsylvania, speaking at the Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center, said that he pushes back on doomism because he does not think it is justified by the science and because he thinks it potentially leads down a path of inaction. On the same page he adds that it is not too late to take the actions to keep warming below 1.5 Celsius, and that the obstacles at this point are not physical and not technological but entirely political.

WHY IT MATTERS. This card closes both halves of the Opposition case in one speaker. On the science, a leading climate scientist states that the viewpoint is not justified by the evidence. On the consequence, the same speaker states that it leads toward inaction. The second quotation is the more useful one in a summary speech, because it names the obstacle as political, which means it is the kind of obstacle that effort removes.

WHAT THEY SAY BACK. They will say that one scientist's opinion is not a finding, that other equally serious scientists take the opposite view, and that the second quotation is an expression of hope rather than a measurement.

HOW WE ANSWER. We answer that we are not offering it as a measurement. We are offering it as the reply to the charge that our side is refusing to face the science, made by somebody who has spent a career facing it.

THINGS THAT WILL LOSE US THE ROUND

Disputing any climate finding, on either side. Both cases here are built entirely on accepted science, and a team that starts arguing about the science has abandoned the motion.

Letting the word fully pass unargued, as Proposition. It is the hinge of the motion and the Opposition will put its whole weight on it.

Arguing that nothing can be prevented, as Proposition. The slide does not say that, and defending it hands the round away.

Arguing that the situation is not serious, as Opposition. Nobody in the research believes it, and the Opposition case does not need it.

Turning the third clash into an argument about motives. Whoever says the other side is secretly helping polluters has stopped debating and started accusing, and judges notice.

Saying any claim is wrong. The word for a claim that does not hold is incorrect. In this round both sides are accurate about their own evidence, which is exactly what makes the motion worth arguing.