# 'It's a crisis, not a change': the six Guardian language changes on climate matters

A short glossary of the changes we’ve made to the Guardian’s style guide, for use by our journalists and editors when writing about the environment

In addition to providing updated guidelines on which images our editors should use to illustrate the climate emergency, we have updated our [*style guide*](https://www.theguardian.com/info/series/guardian-and-observer-style-guide) to introduce terms that more accurately describe the environmental crises facing the world. Our editor-in-chief, Katharine Viner, said: “We want to ensure that we are being scientifically precise, while also communicating clearly with readers on this very important issue”. These are the guidelines provided to our journalists and editors to be used in the production of all environment coverage across the Guardian’s website and paper:

**1.) “climate emergency” or “climate crisis” to be used instead of “climate change”**

[Climate change](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/climate-change) is no longer considered to accurately reflect the seriousness of the overall situation; use climate emergency or climate crisis instead to describe the broader impact of climate change. However, use climate breakdown or climate change or global heating when describing it specifically in a scientific or geophysical sense eg “Scientists say climate breakdown has led to an increase in the intensity of hurricanes”.

**2.)** **“climate science denier” or “climate denier” to be used instead of “climate sceptic”**

The OED defines a sceptic as “a seeker of the truth; an inquirer who has not yet arrived at definite conclusions”. Most “climate sceptics”, in the face of overwhelming scientific evidence, deny climate change is happening, or is caused by human activity, so ‘denier’ is more accurate.

**3.) Use “global heating” not “global warming”**‘Global heating’ is more scientifically accurate. Greenhouse gases form an atmospheric blanket that stops the sun’s heat escaping back to space. **4.) “greenhouse gas emissions” is preferred to “carbon emissions” or “carbon dioxide emissions”.** Although carbon emissions is not inaccurate, if we’re talking about all gases that warm the atmosphere, this term recognises all of the climate-damaging gases, including methane, nitrogen oxides, CFCs etc.

**5.) Use “wildlife”, not “biodiversity”**We felt that ‘wildlife’ is a much more accessible word and is fair to use in many stories, and is a bit less clinical when talking about all the creatures with whom we share the planet.

**6.) Use “fish populations” instead of “fish stocks”**

This change emphasises that fish do not exist solely to be harvested by humans – they play a vital role in the natural health of the oceans.

Since we announced these changes, they have been [reported widely](https://www.niemanlab.org/2019/05/from-climate-change-to-climate-emergency-crisis-or-breakdown-the-guardian-is-changing-the-environmental-language-it-uses/), [shared across social media](https://www.facebook.com/theguardian/posts/language-matters-climate-emergency-crisis-or-breakdown-instead-of-climate-change/10157838274841323/) channels, and even [prompted some other media outlets to reconsider the term](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/may/24/media-outlets-guardian-reconsider-language-climate)s they use in their own coverage.

The update to the Guardian’s style guide, originally announced earlier this year, followed the addition of the [global carbon dioxide level to the Guardian’s daily weather pages](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/apr/05/why-the-guardian-is-putting-global-co2-levels-in-the-weather-forecast) – the simplest measure of how the mass burning of fossil fuels is disrupting the stable climate. To put it simply, while weather changes daily, climate changes over years and decades. So alongside the daily carbon count, we publish the level in previous years for comparison, as well as the pre-industrial-era baseline of 280ppm, and the level seen as manageable in the long term of 350ppm.

In order to keep below 1.5C of warming, the aspiration of the world’s nations, we need to [halve emissions by 2030](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/oct/08/global-warming-must-not-exceed-15c-warns-landmark-un-report) and reach zero by mid century. It is also likely we will need to remove CO2 from the atmosphere, perhaps by the [large-scale restoration of nature](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/apr/03/let-nature-heal-climate-and-biodiversity-crises-say-campaigners). It is a huge task, but we hope that tracking the daily rise of CO2 will help to maintain focus on it.

Viner said: “People need reminding that the climate crisis is no longer a future problem – we need to tackle it now, and every day matters.”

## As the climate crisis escalates...

… the Guardian will not stay quiet. This is our pledge: we will continue to give global heating, wildlife extinction and pollution the urgent attention and prominence they demand. The Guardian recognises the climate emergency as the defining issue of our times.

You've read 7 articles in the last four months. We chose a different approach: to keep Guardian journalism open for all. We don't have a paywall because we believe everyone deserves access to factual information, regardless of where they live or what they can afford to pay.

Our editorial independence means we are free to investigate and challenge inaction by those in power. We will inform our readers about threats to the environment based on scientific facts, not driven by commercial or political interests. And we have made several important changes to our style guide to ensure the language we use accurately reflects the environmental catastrophe.

The Guardian believes that the problems we face on the climate crisis are systemic and that fundamental societal change is needed. We will keep reporting on the efforts of individuals and communities around the world who are fearlessly taking a stand for future generations and the preservation of human life on earth. We want their stories to inspire hope. We will also report back on our own progress as an organisation, as we take important steps to address our impact on the environment.