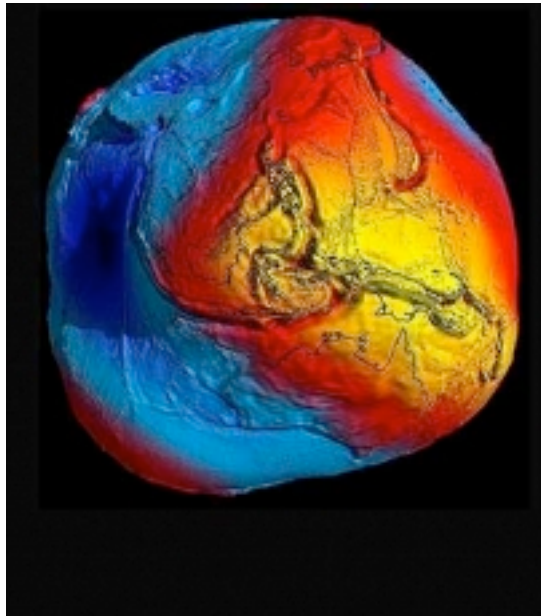




## Scientists give chilling warnings on climate

By Online Editor

1:43 pm GMT+12, 01/04/2011, New Zealand



Earth

New Zealanders have been issued with a stark warning to expect “surprises” by scientists who say they cannot keep up with extreme weather events linked to climate change.

Scientists opened a climate change conference in Wellington yesterday by stating that changes in climate being experienced around the globe were beyond their worst-case scenarios.

The founding director of the Climate Change Research Institute, Martin Manning, said policy-makers needed to stop waiting for scientists to come up with answers about trends for the future, or definite measurements for how much sea levels or temperatures would rise by.

Almost simultaneously, devastating floods battered Sri Lanka, Brazil and Queensland earlier this year. Professor Manning said policy-makers should start getting prepared for greater risks, instead of waiting for the lengthy process of scientists linking events together.

Extreme rainfall around the world had been more than scientists had been predicting from climate models.

“Society needs to take over from science when we're talking about global risk management.

“We can't wait till the scientists understand everything.”

In New Zealand, there was too much inertia in dealing with the risk, and settlements continued to be built on low-lying coastal land – as did transport corridors, Professor Manning said.

“I'm not saying its catastrophe looming. I'm saying it's uncertainty.”

Melbourne University's David Karoly, who like Professor Manning worked on the IPCC's fifth climate change assessment report, said the effects of climate change now being observed were at or above the expectations of scientists.

“Recent observations confirm that the science is changing rapidly and the observed climate change is happening at about the worst-case IPCC scenario trajectories,” Professor Karoly said.

A global reduction in greenhouse gas emissions 75 per cent below 1990 levels by 2050 was needed, and though the technology existed to move towards zero carbon emissions, the political will was not there, he said.

The Climate Futures conference, organised by Victoria University's Climate Change Research Institute, was opened by Climate Change Minister Nick Smith.

He announced the Government was delivering on its 2008 election promise and gazetting a target of a 50 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from 1990 levels by 2050.

Halving emissions would require significant changes in the economy, and the Government's existing programme included the emissions trading scheme, support for home insulation, biofuels, and major research initiatives.

New Zealand's contribution to global emissions was small, and the target set the right balance, he said.

“It has New Zealand doing our fair share and is comparable with the targets set by our major trading partners.”

However, Green Party co-leader Russel Norman said the announcement was green-washing and the Government, as well as weakening the ETS, was not taking steps to achieve the target.

“They are subsidising irrigation schemes to enable even greater expansion in intensive industrial dairy, which will increase our greenhouse gas emissions.

SOURCE: DOMINION POST/PACNEWS