

The First Royal Meteorological Society Climate Change Forum

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THE FIRST ROYAL METEOROLOGICAL SOCIETY CLIMATE CHANGE FORUM

As the UK's professional and learned society for weather and climate science, the Royal Meteorological Society (RMetS) has become a leader in advancing our understanding of anthropogenic climate change. On the 4th of June this year, the Society will host its first [Climate Change Forum](#), which will run under the theme 'Risks and Resilience: Emerging challenges in a post Paris world'. By bringing together UK climate scientists, business leaders and government officials, this seminal event will offer a platform to discuss current needs, research challenges and policy requirements. In this exclusive interview, we speak to Professor Liz Bentley, Chief Executive of RMetS, who discusses how the Forum aims to facilitate effective dialogue between government, business and science, and encourage decision makers to take action towards mitigating climate change.



To begin, please tell us a little bit about the history of RMetS. How has the Society's mission changed over the past few years in this new era of climate change?

The Royal Meteorological Society was founded in 1850 and its mission throughout that time has remained broadly similar – to advance the understanding of meteorology. And although it has remained unchanged, it also recognises significant changes in the meteorological community with an expansion in both the science and application of this interdisciplinary field.

Our mission is still as relevant today as it was 170 years ago.

When we talk about climate change, we often refer to a 'pre-industrial' baseline. Some would suggest that when the Society was founded, it fell into that 'pre-industrial' period. So, over the course of the Society's lifetime the climate has changed – for example, global temperatures have increased by approximately 1°C above pre-industrial levels and sea-levels have risen by more than 20 centimetres. These numbers may seem small to some people but they are global averages and the impacts of these changes on ecosystems and the increase in extreme weather can be much more dramatic.

Since the Society is the learned and professional body for weather and climate in the UK, our focus has been on the climate as much as it has been on the weather. We have groups that oversee our activities on climate science communication, such as [briefing papers](#)

[and statements](#) and meetings and conferences.

On the topic of conferences, this year will see the Society host the first RMetS Climate Change Forum. Tell us a bit about this event.

The idea to bring the climate science community together actually evolved from the community itself. We have a 'Climate Science Special Interest Group' here at the Society that was formed a few years ago. This group brought the idea for this event forward.

Climate change is an extremely complex topic, covering many scientific disciplines and affecting all sectors locally and globally. There is a clear need to provide an opportunity for the community to meet, to discuss research challenges not isolated from each other, but across the disciplines, and to also involve decision makers. The Society is very happy to facilitate this event. About 130 participants are expected to attend.

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The RMetS Climate Change Forum will offer a new space for UK climate scientists to collaborate and discuss evidence-based ideas for tackling climate change. However, if their ideas are to be put into practice, government officials, business leaders and other decision makers will need to be involved too. How do you aim to facilitate *effective dialogue* between scientists, industry and government?

Effective dialogue is indeed key to bring ideas across, and our team here at the Society tries its best to facilitate this. We expect a very diverse audience including scientists, journalists, policy and decision makers and people from industry to attend our event. All are invited to share their contributions related to climate change during the poster session. To facilitate an effective dialogue at the conference, we encourage contributions to be written and presented in plain language. This means avoiding jargon that is specific to the respective scientific disciplines, giving some extra background information, highlighting wider implications of the research findings and keeping it simple.

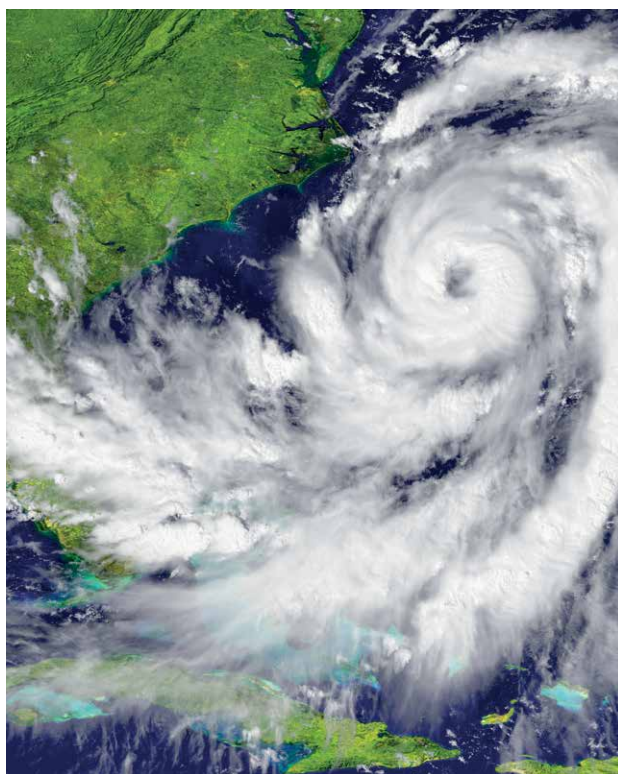
The interactive round table discussion in the afternoon are also designed to engage all participants. We are currently looking for two co-chairs for each of the tables, who both offer different perspectives. For example, the round table on sea level rise could be chaired by an academic and somebody from an engineering company.

Climate change affects the environment, biodiversity and human society in countless ways. How do the event's organisers plan to effectively address the challenges posed by climate change?

The first part of the event, in the morning, will include keynote talks followed by a panel discussion. These will be led by representatives of government, business and research highlighting key emerging requirements for scientific evidence to guide the responses to climate change. This part of the day will introduce the audience to the variety of challenges the community is facing. The following interactive poster session will encourage informal discussions of the challenges and possible solutions.

The sessions in the afternoon – the round table discussions – are then dedicated to different hot topics in the climate change community. The topics for the first round of the round table discussions include ‘Risks of Weather and Climate Extremes’, ‘Risks of Sea Level Rise’, ‘Water Cycle Risks’ and ‘Global Climate Response’. All of these topics require the whole spectrum of scientific disciplines and the involvement of decision makers.

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Much of the responsibility for tackling the challenges posed by climate change will inevitably fall on today's young scientists and students. How does the Climate Change Forum plan to support and empower young climate scientists?

In the afternoon, we will have one round table dedicated to 'Supporting Young Scientists'. The next generation of scientists is facing numerous challenges – funding, job insecurity, work-life balance, to name only a few. The chairs of this round table will include an early career researcher as well as a scientist at senior level to provide a basis for a wide-ranging discussion. We would also like to explore solutions and how the Society can help in implementing them.

Science communication and public outreach will be a large focus of this year's Forum. Please explain why effective communication and outreach are particularly important in the field of climate research.

Climate change will not stop at country borders. Everybody on this planet will be affected by it in some way or another. Many scientists are still confronted with the question from the general public whether climate change is real, despite so many years of climate change communication. Thus, it is essential to communicate this topic in a way that is tangible to everybody, while at the same time remaining scientifically accurate. In order to mitigate climate change and to adapt to it, we will need the general support from everybody.

Finally, what *tangible* changes within government and industry do you hope the Climate Change Forum might lead to?

Over the past few years, we have recognised that the discussion at government and industry level has shifted quite a bit. Since the last Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) assessment report ([AR5](#)) was released, the question is not anymore about the scientific evidence and whether it is really happening, but more about how government, industry and society can mitigate and adapt. The Climate Change Forum will only help to cement that shift and allow scientists to focus more on the impacts and solutions rather than the need to provide evidence that climate change is happening.

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