



A number of reports to stir up the environmental lobby have been published recently – some officially and at least one not so.

The eagerly-awaited second part of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report into the effects of global warming, due for publication at the end of the month, has had a premature airing thanks to a report by *The Independent* that it has seen a leaked draft of the document. It makes grim reading, by all accounts, forecasting widespread crop failures and flooding, with consequential mass migrations. That, say the panel's experts, will result in conflict and tensions.

Crop yields are forecast to reduce by an average of 2% per decade for the rest of the century, against a rise in demand of 14% per decade, *The Independent* reports. That will be the result of a 2.50C increase in temperature compared to the fall of 20C required to stave off disaster.

The 2% per decade fall in crop yields was also predicted in a report published in the journal *Nature Climate Change*

. The research, carried out by scientists in Australia, the UK and US, also postulated that the temperature rise over the century could be as much as 4%.

The Guardian quoted one of the report's authors, Australian scientist Dr Mark Howden, who said: "The impacts are consistently negative beyond 20C of warming. There will be greater and greater impacts upon crop yields in future decades. Maize is the most sensitive, but also crops grown in tropical environments such as wheat and rice."

- Here the authorities have taken up the cudgels – metaphorically, at least – in the cause of the environment by merging it with one of its favourite activities: getting tough on crime. New sentencing guidelines for magistrates and judges advise that fines for companies in particular found guilty of polluting watercourses or the atmosphere or wanton waste flagrances should be heftier than at present. The rationale for the financial penalty to be increased is that the motive for the offence is financial and the result is financial outlay for the taxpayer. For individuals, the prospect of prison is heightened.

In its release announcing the guidelines, issued on 26 February, the Sentencing Council states: “Fines are the most common sentences passed as the offences are motivated by making a profit or saving money. However, custody remains the starting point for the most serious types of individual offenders who deliberately commit a crime that causes significant or major harm. Jail sentences obviously cannot be applied to organisations.”

I can’t say that has ever been that obvious to me. The term ‘company’ implies a group of people, all of whom are capable of taking responsibility for their actions.

- And no; the frackers haven’t been immune this past couple of weeks, either. A report from six wildlife and countryside groups proposes banning fracking in areas that are environmentally sensitive. The report, *Are We Fit to Frack?*, was produced jointly by the Angling Trust, the National Trust, RSPB, the Salmon and Trout Association, The Wildlife Trusts and the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust. It is based on a more comprehensive research document which has been peer reviewed by the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology.

The document carries 10 recommendations to protect sensitive areas from the effects of fracking. They include setting up shale gas extraction exclusion zones and imposing strict monitoring and best practice.

Sounds a bit like the thud of a stable door shutting against a background of galloping hoofs.

Chris Stokes