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Pearce, W., & Hollin, GJS. (2015). Reply to clarity of meaning in an IPCC press conference. *Nature Climate Change*, 5, 963. [Joint first authorship].

Scientific information about climate change has proved to be a relatively poor motivator for meaningful public action^{1,2}. That Jacobs et al³ attempt to critique our Letter⁴ about public meanings attached to abstract scientific knowledge with more abstract scientific knowledge reaffirms this central point: that some in the climate science community fail to understand that scientific knowledge alone, no matter how certain, is poorly equipped to meaningfully communicate climate change⁵.

Continuing this misplaced focus upon certainty, much of the correspondence Jacobs et al gives supporting scientific evidence for the claims of certainty made by speakers during the press conference for the Working Group 1 contribution to the Fifth Assessment Report of the IPCC. However, such evidence is superfluous, as we do not argue in our Letter that short-term events such as ‘the pause’ undermine any well-established certainty. Rather, we examine, first, the attempts of press conference speakers to make well-established certainty meaningful and, second, the resulting confusion among journalists as to what constitutes valid scientific evidence. This confusion appears to leave Jacobs et al untroubled as they ignore it in their Correspondence.

Instead, we highlight that the confusion stems from the flexible use of the ‘30-year rule’ during the press conference. Emphasising the last decade, as IPCC speakers do, may well help to make anthropogenic global warming meaningful and potentially motivational for action⁶. However, this emphasis upon the decadal scale also seems to make journalists’ questions about ‘the pause’ both reasonable (because it is also decadal in scale) and meaningful (for it might appear to demotivate action). If asking about the decade-long pause is an “ill-posed scientific question”, as asserted by Michel Jarraud during the press conference, then using the past decade of heat and extremes to emphasise the meaningfulness of anthropogenic global warming is not scientifically appropriate. It is the resulting confusion amongst journalists, caused by the flexible application of the ‘30-year rule’, that illuminates the tension between certainty and meaning faced by climate communicators.

We also disagree that we misrepresent particular quotes in our Letter. First, a quote from former IPCC chair Rajendra Pachauri is said by Jacobs et al to require contextualisation. This particular portion of transcript was selected because it is illustrative of references to the warmest decade made by all three speakers. Second, Jacobs et al suggest that we present a quote as concerning ‘the pause’ when it does not. This is not the case. The quote appears within a general discussion of technical uncertainty^{7,8} (within Supplementary Information C) that does not refer exclusively to the pause.

We hope that through restating our central argument this response has assisted in clarifying our original analysis. Excellent examples do exist of making climate change publicly meaningful through the acceptance and accommodation of uncertainties in science⁹⁻¹². Sadly, the press conference in question was not such an example.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

To follow

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3. Jacobs, P. Clarity of meaning in an IPCC press conference. *Nat. Clim. Change*
4. Hollin, G. J. S. & Pearce, W. Tension between scientific certainty and meaning complicates communication of IPCC reports. *Nat. Clim. Change* **5**, 753–756 (2015).
5. Demeritt, D. The construction of global warming and the politics of science. *Ann. Assoc. Am. Geogr.* **91**, 307–337 (2001).
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9. Marvel, K. The Hidden Importance of Clouds. *Nautilus* (2015). at
<<http://nautil.us/issue/25/water/the-hidden-importance-of-clouds>>
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12. Hulme, M. Climate change and virtue: an apologetic. *Humanities* **3**, 299–312 (2014).