**I won’t go on the BBC if it supplies climate change deniers as ‘balance’**

**The Guardian – Rupert Read – 02.08.18**

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Like most Greens, I typically jump at opportunities to go on air. But this Wednesday, when I was rung up by BBC Radio Cambridgeshire and asked to come on air to debate with a climate change denier, something in me broke, and rebelled. Really? I thought. [This summer](https://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2018/aug/01/july-global-weather-extremes-wildfires-heatwave-flooding-in-pictures), [of all times](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/jul/27/heatwave-made-more-than-twice-as-likely-by-climate-change-scientists-find)?

So, for almost the first time in my life, I turned it down. I told it that I will no longer be part of such charades. I said that the BBC should be ashamed of its [nonsensical idea of “balance”](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/apr/02/mps-criticise-bbc-false-balance-climate-change-coverage), when the scientific debate is as settled as the “debate” about whether [smoking causes cancer](https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/climate-risks-as-conclusive-as-link-between-smoking-and-lung-cancer/). By giving climate change deniers a full platform, producers make their position seem infinitely more reasonable than it is. This contributes to the spread of misinformation and miseducation around climate change that fuels the inaction producing the [long emergency we are facing](https://www.greenhousethinktank.org/facing-up-to-climate-reality.html).

From a public service broadcaster, this is simply not good enough.

What makes it so frustrating is that there are important debates to be had around climate change. And so I told the Beeb that I would be very happy to come on and take part in[a different debate](https://medium.com/@GreenRupertRead/apollo-earth-a-wake-up-call-in-our-race-against-time-5f8121687966). For example, we should be debating whether the Paris climate accord is going to be enough, or [if we need to do more](https://www.thelondoneconomic.com/opinion/climate-change-once-we-no-longer-deny-it-then-we-just-might-have-the-will-to-try-drastically-to-change-course/14/03/). Or discussing just how radically our society needs to change to meet the challenges of the climate crisis, and [how we should rethink our activism](http://www.truthandpower.com/rupert-read-some-thoughts-on-civilisational-succession/).

But I will no longer put up with the absurd notion that a straight debate about the science can be justified, especially given the fundamental truth that we’ve known for decades: that even if there were any real room for doubt about the science, we should still take radical action to safeguard a liveable climate, on the basis of the [Precautionary Principle](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MfsVlkaExF8). This [principle of international law](https://arxiv.org/pdf/1410.5787.pdf) states that even the absence of certainty about the risk of widespread and catastrophic harm to the environment or public health ought not to stop us from taking preventive action to head off such potentially ruinous harms.

In the end, the broadcast [went ahead without me](https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p06djwc2). Much of it [wasn’t bad](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V3lSRh-I2ZQ). The scientists interviewed were excellent. But the framing of the debate was awful, and [framing is everything](https://citizensclimatelobby.org/americas-linguistics-how-we-talk-about-climate-change-politics-morals/), so far as [the message that most listeners receive](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/nov/13/emergencytalk) is concerned. The presenter introduced the segment by asking, “Is climate change real?” And, of course, a climate change denier was given a huge and undeserved platform on an equal basis to his opponent.

However, here’s the exciting thing. If we get more momentum behind the idea of refusing to participate, it will force a change of coverage methods by the BBC, which experts have been calling for for years. For if we all refuse to debate with the climate change deniers on public platforms, and press the BBC to catch up with the 21st century, it will be forced to change its ways, because the BBC cannot defend the practice of allowing a climate change denier to speak unopposed. If we truly want to see change on this issue, we need to be willing to let it know exactly how we feel. So, now I’m going to get on with filing my [official complaint](http://www.bbc.co.uk/complaints/) to the BBC.