

# Climate experts at war over prediction of ice-free Arctic

- BEN WEBSTER
- The Times
- 11:30AM August 25, 2016
- A Cambridge University professor has been accused of “crying wolf” by predicting the imminent disappearance of Arctic ice.

Peter Wadhams has been criticised by scientists who fear that he could undermine the credibility of climate science by making doom-laden forecasts.

He repeatedly predicted that the Arctic would be “ice-free” by last summer, by which he meant it would have less than one million sq km of ice. His forecasts, reported around the world, turned out to be wrong.

Satellite measurements revealed there was a minimum of 4.6 million sq km of Arctic ice last summer, well below the long-term average but above the record low in 2012 of 3.6 million sq km.

In June this year, Professor Wadhams, head of the Polar Ocean Physics Group at Cambridge, predicted that Arctic ice “may well disappear” this September. He added: “Even if the ice doesn’t completely disappear, it is very likely that this will be a record low year.”

A recent press release promoting his new book, *Farewell to Ice*, claimed that there was a “greater than even chance” that the North Pole could be ice-free for the first time next month.

The US National Snow and Ice Data Center, which monitors Arctic ice, said last week: “It is unlikely that Arctic sea ice extent this September will fall below the record minimum set in 2012.” Ed Hawkins, a climate scientist at the University of Reading, analysed Professor Wadhams’ forecasts on a climate science website and questioned whether they should be taken seriously.

He wrote: “There are very serious risks from continued climatic changes and a melting Arctic but we do not serve the public and policymakers well by exaggerating those risks. We will soon see an ice-free summer in the Arctic but there is a real danger of ‘crying wolf’.”

Dr Hawkins said the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the UN's climate science advisory body, had forecast that the Arctic would be "reliably ice-free", meaning more than five consecutive years below one million sq km, by the mid-21st century.

Dr Hawkins said: "Putting a precise date on when we see the first days or weeks that are 'ice-free' is unwise because of the chaotic nature of the climate system and uncertainties in future greenhouse gas emissions."

Richard Betts, head of climate impacts at the Met Office Hadley Centre, also expressed concern. Writing on the same climate science website, he said: "When someone talks up imminent catastrophe, they might think they are getting a quick win by getting a scary story out there, but in the long term it will be an own goal."

Last year, Professor Wadhams claimed that assassins may have murdered three British scientists who were seeking to reveal how rapidly global warming was melting Arctic ice. He complained about a report in *The Times* on his claims, saying he had been misquoted. The Independent Press Standards Organisation dismissed his complaint, stating "the article had accurately reported his position as he had explained it to the journalist".

Professor Wadhams declined to comment apart from suggesting that he knew more about the Arctic than Dr Hawkins because he had been there on many research trips.

*The Times*