

Invitation to virtual DK Guest Lecture

Climate change attribution and legal contexts: evidence and the role of storylines

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1:30 to 3:00 pm

<https://unimeet.uni-graz.at/b/sch-rap-ka3>

Abstract

In a recent very influential court case, *Juliana v. United States*, climate scientist Kevin Trenberth used the ‘storyline’ approach to extreme event attribution to argue that greenhouse warming had affected and will affect extreme events in their regions to such an extent that the plaintiffs already had been or will be harmed. The storyline approach to attribution takes certain factors as contingent and assesses the role of climate change conditional on those factors. The US Government’s opposing expert witness argued that Trenberth had failed to make his case because “all his conclusions of the injuries to Plaintiffs suffer from the same failure to connect his conditional approach to Plaintiffs’ local circumstances.” The issue is whether it is possible to make statements about individual events based on general knowledge. A similar question is sometimes debated within the climate science community. We argue here that proceeding from the general to the specific is a process of deduction and is an entirely legitimate form of scientific reasoning. We further argue that it is well aligned with the concept of legal evidence, much more so than the more usual inductive form of scientific reasoning, which proceeds from the specific to the general.

The talk is co-authored by Elisabeth A. Lloyd and Theodore Shepherd.