https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-018-0181-4

The many possible climates from the Paris Agreement's aim of 1.5 °C warming

Sonia I. Seneviratne[1]*, Joeri Rogelj[1,2,3,4], Roland Séférian[5], Richard Wartenburger[1], Myles R. Allen[3], Michelle Cain[3], Richard J. Millar[3], Kristie L. Ebi[6], Neville Ellis[7], Ove Hoegh-Guldberg[8], Antony J. Payne[9], Carl-Friedrich Schleussner[10,11,12], Petra Tschakert[7] & Rachel F. Warren[13]

The United Nations' Paris Agreement includes the aim of pursuing efforts to limit global warming to only 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels. However, it is not clear what the resulting climate would look like across the globe and over time. Here we show that trajectories towards a '1.5 °C warmer world' may result in vastly different outcomes at regional scales, owing to variations in the pace and location of climate change and their interactions with society's mitigation, adaptation and vulnerabilities to climate change. Pursuing policies that are considered to be consistent with the 1.5 °C aim will not completely remove the risk of global temperatures being much higher or of some regional extremes reaching dangerous levels for ecosystems and societies over the coming decades.

Since 2010, international climate policy under the United Nations moved the public discourse from a focus on atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases to a focus on distinct global temperature targets above the pre-industrial period[1,2]. In 2015, this led to the inclusion of a long-term temperature goal in the Paris Agreement[1] that makes reference to two levels of global mean temperature increase: 1.5 °C and 2 °C. The former is set as an ideal aim ("pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C") and the latter is set as an upper bound ("well below 2 °C")[1]. This change in emphasis allows a better link between mitigation targets and the required level of adaptation ambition[3,4].

Assessing the effects of the reduction of anthropogenic forcing through a single qualifier—namely, global mean temperature change compared with the pre-industrial climate—however, also entails risks. This deceptively simple characterization may lead to an oversimplified perception of human-induced climate change and of the potential pathways to limit the impacts of greenhouse gas forcing. We highlight here the multiple ways in which a 1.5 °C global warming may be realized. These alternative '1.5 °C warmer worlds' are related to (a) the temporal and regional dimension of 1.5 °C pathways, (b) model-based spread in regional climate responses, (c) climate noise and (d) a range of possible options for mitigation and adaptation. We also highlight potential high-risk temperature outcomes of mitigation pathways currently considered to be consistent with 1.5 °C owing to uncertainties in relating greenhouse gas emissions to subsequent global warming, and to uncertainties in relating global warming to associated regional climate changes.

Definition of a '1.5 °C warming'

Global mean temperature is a construct: it is the globally averaged temperature of Earth that can be derived from point-scale ground observations or computed in climate models. Global mean temperature is defined over a given time frame (for example, averaged over a month, a year or multiple decades). As a result of climate variability, which is due to internal variations of the climate system and temporary naturally induced forcings (for example, from volcanic eruptions), a climate-based global mean temperature typically needs to be defined over several decades (at least 30 years according to the World Meteorological Organization)[5]. Hence, to determine a 1.5 °C global temperature warming, one needs to agree on a reference period (assumed here to be 1850–1900 inclusive, unless otherwise indicated), and on a time frame over which a 1.5 °C mean global warming is observed (assumed here to be of the order of one to several decades). Comparisons of global mean temperatures from models and observations are also not straightforward: not all points over Earth's surface are continuously observed, leading to methodological choices about how to deal with data gaps[6] and with the mixture of air temperature over land and surface water temperatures of oceans[7] when comparing full-field climate models with observational products.

Temporal and spatial dimensions

There are two important temporal dimensions of 1.5 °C warmer worlds: (a) the time period over which the 1.5 °C warmer climate is assessed; and (b) the pathway followed before reaching this temperature level, in particular whether global mean temperature returns to the 1.5 °C level after previously exceeding it for some time (also referred to as 'overshooting'; see Fig. 1a). As highlighted hereafter, for some components of the coupled human–Earth system, there are substantial differences in risk between 1.5 °C of warming in the year 2040, 1.5 °C of warming in 2100 either with or without earlier overshooting, and 1.5 °C warming after several millennia at this warming level.

The time period over which 1.5 °C warming is reached is relevant because some slow-varying elements of the climate system respond with a delay to radiative forcing and to the associated temperature anomalies. Hence the status of such slow-varying elements will change over time, even if the warming is stabilized at 1.5 °C over several decades, centuries or millennia. This is the case with the melting of glaciers, ice caps and ice sheets and their contribution to future sea level rise, as well as the warming and expansion of the oceans, so that a substantial component of contemporary sea-level rise is a response to past warming. In

[1]Institute for Atmospheric and Climate Science, ETH Zurich, Zurich, Switzerland. [2]International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), Laxenburg, Austria. [3]Environmental Change Institute, School of Geography and the Environment, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK. [4]Grantham Institute, Imperial College London, London, UK. [5]Centre National de Recherches Météorologiques, Météo-France/CNRS, Toulouse, France. [6]Department of Global Health, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, USA. [7]School of Agriculture and Environment, University of Western Australia, Perth, Western Australia, Australia. [8]Global Change Institute, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia. [9]University of Bristol, Bristol, UK. [10]Climate Analytics, Berlin, Germany. [11]IRITHESys, Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany. [12]Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, Potsdam, Germany. [13]Tyndall Centre for Climate Change, School of Environmental Sciences, University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK. *e-mail: sonia.seneviratne@ethz.ch

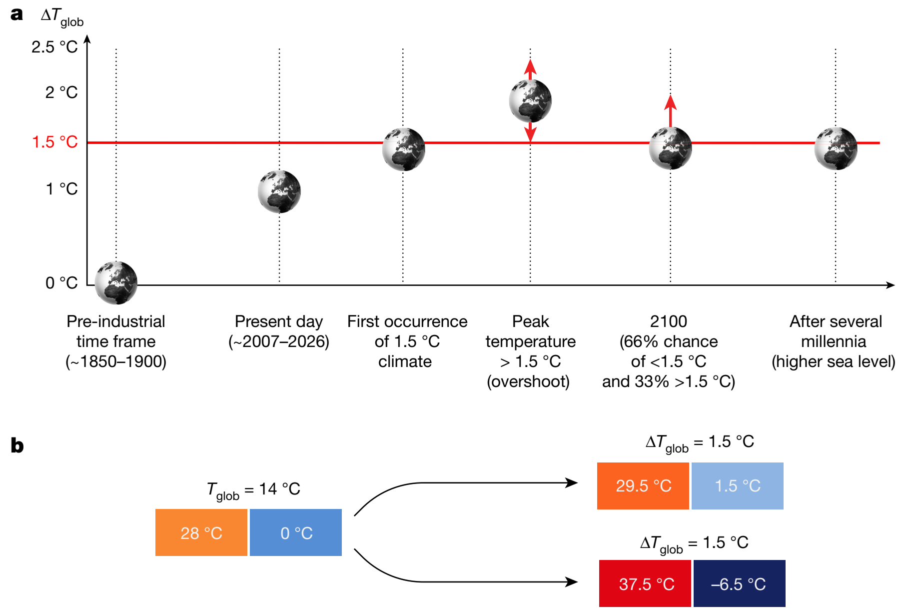

Fig. 1 | Temporal and spatial dimensions of 1.5 °C warmer worlds. **a**, Typical pathways of Earth's climate towards stabilization at 1.5 °C warming. Pre-industrial climate conditions are the reference for the determined global warming. Present-day warming corresponds to 1 °C compared to pre-industrial conditions. All emissions pathways compatible with 1.5 °C warming that are available in the literature[12–15] include overshooting over 1.5 °C warming before stabilization or further decline. We here illustrate the example of temperature stabilization at 1.5 °C in the long term, but temperatures could also decline further below 1.5 °C. **b**, Not all conceivable 1.5 °C warmer climates are equivalent. These conceptual schematics illustrate the importance of the spatial dimension of distributed impacts associated with a given global warming, in the example of a simplified world with two surfaces of equal area (the given temperature anomalies are chosen for illustrative purposes and do not refer to specific 1.5 °C scenarios). Left, a reference world (without warming); top right, a world with 1.5 °C mean global warming that is equally distributed on the two surfaces; bottom right, a world with 1.5 °C mean global warming with high differences in regional responses.

addition, the rate of warming is also an important element of imposed stress for resulting risks, because it may affect adaptation or lack thereof[8–10]. For example, the faster the rate of change the fewer taxa (and hence ecosystems) can disperse naturally to track their climate envelope across Earth's surface[8,11]. Similarly, in human systems, faster rates of change in climate variables such as sea level rise present increasing challenges to adaptation to the point where attempts may be increasingly overwhelmed.

Whether mean global temperature temporarily overshoots the 1.5 °C limit is another important consideration. All currently available mitigation pathways projecting less than 1.5 °C global warming by 2100 include some probability of overshooting this temperature, with some time period during the twenty-first century in which warming higher than 1.5 °C is projected with a probability[12–15] of greater than 50%. This is inherent to the difficulty of limiting warming to 1.5 °C given that Earth at present is already very close to this warming level (about 1 °C warming for the current time frame relative to 1851–1900[16]). The implications of overshooting are essential for projecting future risks and for considering potentially long-lasting and irreversible impacts in the time frame of the current century and beyond, for instance associated with ice melting[17] and resulting sea level rise, loss of ecosystem functionality and increased risks of species extinction[11], or loss of livelihoods, identity and sense of place and belonging[18]. Overshooting might cause some impact thresholds to be temporarily exceeded. This might be sufficient to cause permanent loss of ecosystems, or those systems and species able to adapt rapidly enough to cope with a particular rate of change would be faced with the challenge of adapting again to a lower level of warming post-overshoot. The chronology of emission pathways and their implied warming is also important for the more slowly evolving parts of the Earth system, such as those associated with sea level rise (see above). The remaining carbon budget available for emissions is very small, implying that deeper global mitigation efforts are required immediately if the duration and magnitude of the overshoot (exceeding the 1.5 °C level of warming) is to be minimized; see below and Table 1 and Box 1.

The spatial dimension of 1.5 °C warmer worlds is also important. Two worlds with similar global mean temperature anomalies may have very different risks depending on how the associated regional temperature anomalies are distributed (Fig. 1b). Differential geographical responses in temperature are induced by: (a) spatially varying radiative forcing (for example, associated with land use[19–21] or aerosols[22]; (b) differential regional feedbacks to the applied radiative forcing (for example, associated with soil moisture, snow, or ice feedbacks[4,23]); and (c) regional climate noise[24] (for example, associated with modes of variability or atmospheric weather variability). Similar considerations apply to regional changes in precipitation means and extremes, which are not globally homogeneous[3,4]. These regional temperature and precipitation anomalies and their rates of change determine the regional risks to human and natural systems and the challenges to adaptation which they face.

We note that mitigation, adaptation and development pathways may result in spatially varying radiative forcing. Although the greenhouse gases are well mixed, changes in land use or air pollution may strongly affect regional climate. Land-use changes can be associated, for example, with the implementation of increased bioenergy plantations[25], afforestation, reforestation, or deforestation, and their resulting impacts on local albedo or evapotranspiration. Levels of aerosol concentrations may vary as a result of decreased air pollution[22]. Considering these regional forcings is essential when evaluating regional impacts, although there is still little available literature for 1.5 °C warmer worlds, or low-emissions scenarios in general[22,26–28]. The spatial dimension of regional climates associated with a global warming of 1.5 °C is also crucial when assessing risks associated with proposed climate engineering schemes based on solar radiation management (SRM, see below). Besides the geographical distribution of changes in climate, non-temperature-related changes are important, particularly where atmospheric CO_2 has additional and serious impacts through phenomena such as ocean acidification.

Uncertainties of emissions pathways

Emissions pathways that are currently considered to be compatible with limiting global warming to 1.5 °C[12–15] are selected on the basis of their

Table 1 | Description of different 1.5 °C and 2 °C warmer worlds

		SCEN_1p5C emissions pathways currently considered compatible with a 66% chance of keeping warming below 1.5 °C in 2100 (allowing for a higher peak in temperature earlier)		SCEN_2C emissions pathways currently considered compatible with a 66% chance of keeping warming below 2 °C during the entire twenty-first century	
		'Probable' (66th percentile) outcome[a]	'Worst-case' 10% (90th percentile) outcome[b]	'Probable' (66th percentile) outcome[a]	'Worst-case' 10% (90th percentile) outcome[b]
General characteristics of pathway	Overshoot 1.5 °C in twenty-first century with >50% likelihood[c]	**Yes (13/13)**	**Yes (13/13)**	**Yes (10/10)**	**Yes (10/10)**
	Overshoot 2 °C in twenty-first century with >50% likelihood	**No (0/13)**	**Yes (10/13)**	**No (0/10)**	**Yes (10/10)**
	Cumulative CO_2 emissions up to peak warming (relative to 2016)[d] (Gt CO_2)	720 (650–750)	690 (650–710)	1,050 (1,020–1,140)	1,040 (930–1,140)
	Cumulative CO_2 emissions up to 2100 (relative to 2016)[d] (Gt CO_2)	320 (200–340)		1,030 (910–1,140)	
	Global greenhouse gas emissions in 2030[d] (GtCO_2 yr^{-1})	22 (19–31)		28 (24–30)	
	Years of global net zero CO_2 emissions[d]	2070 (2067–2074)		2088 (2085–2092)	
Possible climate range at peak warming (regional + global)	**Global mean temperature anomaly at peak warming (°C)**	**1.75 (1.65–1.81)**	**2.13 (2.0–2.2)**	**1.93 (1.9–1.94)**	**2.44 (2.43–2.46)**
	Warming in the Arctic[e], $T_{night,min}$ (°C)	5.04 (4.45–5.66)	6.29 (5.47–7.21)	5.70 (4.90–6.53)	7.25 (6.51–8.24)
	Warming in the contiguous USA[e], $T_{day,max}$ (°C)	2.57 (2.04–2.95)	3.09 (2.71–3.58)	2.83 (2.34–3.27)	3.63 (3.23–3.98)
	Warming in Central Brazil[e], $T_{day,max}$ (°C)	2.74 (2.39–3.22)	3.34 (3.05–3.92)	3.01 (2.62–3.50)	3.82 (3.44–4.15)
	Drying in the Mediterranean region[e] (std[f])	−1.27 (−2.43 to −0.45)	−1.40 (−2.64 to −0.52)	−1.14 (−2.18 to −0.50)	−1.42 (−2.74 to −0.67)
	Increase in heavy precipitation events[f] in Southern Asia[e] (%)	9.69 (6.79–14.90)	12.87 (7.90–22.78)	10.01 (6.97–17.11)	17.45 (10.15–24.03)
Possible climate range in 2100 (regional + global)	**Global mean temperature warming in 2100 (°C)**	**1.44 (1.44–1.48)**	**1.88 (1.85–1.93)**	**1.89 (1.88–1.91)**	**2.43 (2.42–2.46)**
	Warming in the Arctic[g], $T_{night,min}$[f] (°C)	4.21 (3.65–4.71)	5.55 (4.80–6.35)	5.58 (4.82–6.38)	7.22 (6.49–8.16)
	Warming in the contiguous USA[g], $T_{day,max}$ (°C)	2.03 (1.64–2.49)	2.73 (2.21–3.22)	2.76 (2.23–3.24)	3.64 (3.23–3.97)
	Warming in central Brazil[g], $T_{day,max}$[f] (°C)	2.25 (2.02–2.60)	2.92 (2.55–3.44)	2.94 (2.58–3.47)	3.80 (3.43–4.12)
	Drying in the Mediterranean region[g] (std[f])	−0.96 (−1.94 to −0.28)	−1.09 (−2.16 to −0.48)	−1.10 (−2.15 to −0.46)	−1.41 (−2.69 to −0.64)
	Increase in heavy precipitation events[f] in Southern Asia[g] (%)	8.29 (4.52–11.98)	10.59 (6.75–16.64)	10.55 (6.83–16.64)	17.21 (10.24–24.03)

Data are based on scenarios currently considered compatible with 1.5 °C and 2 °C warming[15], including projections of changes in regional climate associated with resulting global temperature levels derived following previous studies[4,37] (see Supplementary Information for corresponding estimates from scenarios assessed in the IPCC AR5[12,14] and for median estimates).
[a]66th percentile for global temperature (that is, 66% likelihood of being at or below values)
[b]90th percentile for global temperature (that is, 10% likelihood of being at or above values)
[c]All 1.5 °C scenarios include a substantial probability of overshooting above 1.5 °C global warming before returning to 1.5 °C.
[d]The values indicate the median with the interquartile range in parentheses (25th percentile and 75th percentile)
[e]The regional projections in these rows provide the median and the range [q25, q75] associated with the median global temperature outcomes of the considered mitigation scenarios at peak warming (see Box 1 and Supplementary Information).
[f]'std' indicates drying of soil moisture expressed in units of standard deviations of pre-industrial climate (1861–1880) variability (where −1 is dry; −2 is severely dry; and −3 is very severely dry); $R_{max,5\text{-}day}$ is the annual maximum consecutive 5-day precipitation.
[g]As for footnote e, but for the regional responses associated with the median global temperature outcomes of the considered mitigation scenarios in 2100 (see Box 1 and Supplementary Information for details).

probability of limiting warming to below 1.5 °C by 2100 given current knowledge of how the climate system is likely to respond. Typically, this probability is set at 50% or 66% (the chance of limiting warming in 2100 to 1.5 °C or lower). The adequacy of these levels of probability is more a political than a scientific question. This implies that even when diligently following such 1.5 °C pathways from today onwards, there is considerable probability that the 1.5 °C limit will be exceeded. This also includes some possibilities of warming being substantially higher than 1.5 °C (see discussion below of the 10% worst-case scenarios). These risks of alternative climate outcomes are not negligible and need to be factored into the decision-making process.

Table 1 provides an overview of the outcomes of emissions pathways that are currently considered 1.5 °C- and 2 °C-compatible with a specific probability[15] (and broadly consistent with the literature assessed in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Fifth Assessment Report (IPCC AR5)[12,14], see Box 1 and Supplementary Information). Both 'probable' (66th percentile of scenarios, which remains below the respective temperature targets, that is, with two-thirds of the scenarios having lower or equal global warming) and 'worst-case' (90th percentile, that is, with 10% of scenarios having higher or equal global warming) outcomes of these pathways are presented, including the resulting global temperatures and regional climate changes (see below and Box 1 for details, and the Supplementary Information for median outcomes). The reported net cumulative CO_2 emissions characteristics for these scenario categories include the effects of carbon dioxide removal options (also termed "negative emissions"[29]), which explains the decrease in cumulative CO_2 budgets after peak warming. Possible proposed carbon dioxide removal approaches include bioenergy use with carbon capture and storage (BECCS) or afforestation and changes in agricultural practice increasing carbon sequestration on land[29]. We note that the use of these approaches is controversial and could entail separate risks, for instance those related to competition for land use[30,31]. Their implementation is at present also still very limited, and the feasibility of their deployment as simulated in low-emissions scenarios has been questioned[32]. Current publications[12,14,15] indicate that scenarios in line with limiting year-2100 warming to below 1.5 °C require strong and immediate mitigation measures and would require some degree of carbon dioxide removal. Alternative scenario configurations can be considered to limit the amount of carbon dioxide removal[32,33]. The current scenarios[15] as well as recent publications[34–36] provide updated

Box 1

Emissions budgets and regional projections for 1.5 °C and 2 °C warming

The emissions budget estimates of Table 1 are based on scenarios currently considered compatible with limiting global warming (ΔT_{glob}) to 1.5 °C and 2 °C, either in 2100 or during the entire twenty-first century[15]. The emissions pathways are determined based on their probability of limiting ΔT_{glob} below 1.5 °C or 2 °C by 2100 using the probabilistic outcomes of a simple climate model (MAGICC[71]) exploring the range of climate system response as assessed in the IPCC AR5[72]. The 50th (Supplementary Information), 66th and 90th percentile (Table 1) MAGICC global transient climate response values in the scenarios are 1.7 °C, 1.9 °C and 2.4 °C, respectively, which is consistent overall with the range assessed for this parameter (>66% in the 1–2.5 °C range, less than 5% greater than 3 °C) in the IPCC AR5[72]. The current airborne fraction (ratio of accumulated atmospheric CO_2 to CO_2 emissions over the decade 2011–2020) in these scenarios with this MAGICC version has been estimated at 0.55, which is 20% higher than the central estimate for the most recent decade given in refs [73,74], but ref. 74 emphasizes that this quantity is uncertain and subject to variability over time. The estimates provided are consistent with corresponding values from scenarios assessed in the IPCC AR5[12,14] (see Supplementary Table 1), but have slightly larger estimates for the remaining cumulative CO_2 budgets, consistent with other recent publications[34–36]. Both sets of scenarios imply that for limiting ΔT_{glob} below 1.5 °C by 2100 strong near-term mitigation measures are needed, supported by technologies capable of enabling net-zero global CO_2 emissions near to mid-century.

Table 1 and Figs. 2 and 3 also provide estimates of regional responses associated with given ΔT_{glob} levels (at peak warming and in 2100). The values are computed based on decadal averages of 26 CMIP5 global climate model simulations and all four RCP scenarios following the approach from refs [4,37] (see Supplementary Information for more details). Decades corresponding to a 1.5 °C or 2 °C warming are those in which the last year of the decade reaches this temperature, consistent with previous publications[3,4,37]. Corresponding regional responses for the median estimates of the scenarios considered are provided in Supplementary Table 2 and Supplementary Figs. 1 and 2. The respective estimates of spread for recent (0.5 °C) and present-day (1 °C) global warming are provided in Supplementary Fig. 3.

Figure 4 is based on the same subset of the 26 CMIP5 models as was used for Table 1 and Figs. 2 and 3, but uses RCP8.5 simulations only. For each simulation, the ensemble percentiles are calculated for the time step corresponding to the decade at which a 1.5 °C warming occurs for the first time. Statistics are computed over all 26 climate models and all years within the given decade.

cumulative CO_2 budget estimates, which have larger remaining budgets than earlier estimates[12,14]. These, however, do not fundamentally change the need for strong near-term mitigation measures and technologies capable of enabling net-zero global CO_2 emissions near to mid-century if the considered emissions pathways are to be followed.

Global and regional climate responses

Considering a subset of regions and extremes shown to retain particularly strong changes under a global warming of 1.5 °C or 2 °C[4,37], Table 1 provides corresponding regional responses for the evaluated 1.5 °C- and 2 °C-compatible emissions pathways. Figures 2 and 3 display associated regional changes for a subset of considered extremes: temperature extremes (coldest nights in the Arctic, warmest days in the contiguous USA) and heavy precipitation (consecutive 5-day maximum precipitation in Southern Asia). Changes in hot extremes in central Brazil and in drought occurrence in the Mediterranean region are also provided in Table 1. We note that the spread displayed for single-scenario subsets in Figs. 2 and 3 corresponds to the spread of the global climate simulations of the 5th phase of the Coupled Model Intercomparison Project (CMIP5), underlying the derivation of the regional extremes for given global temperature levels[4,37] (see Box 1 for details).

In terms of the resulting global mean temperature increase, Fig. 2 shows that the difference between the 10% 'worst-case' and the 66% 'probable' outcomes of the scenarios is substantial, both for the 1.5 °C and 2 °C scenarios. Interestingly, the worst outcomes of the 1.5 °C scenarios are similar to the probable outcomes of the 2 °C scenarios. Indeed, both of these types of outcome show less than 2 °C warming by 2100, and approximately 2 °C warming in the overshoot phase, although the warming in the overshoot phase can be slightly higher for the worst-case 1.5 °C scenario than for the probable 2 °C scenarios assessed here. Hence, the scenarios aiming at limiting global warming to 1.5 °C also have a clear relevance for limiting global warming to 2 °C[13], in that they ensure that the 2 °C threshold is not exceeded at the end of the twenty-first century. This contrasts with pathways designed to keep warming to 2 °C, but that have a 10% high-end ('worst-case') warming of more than 2.4 °C. This result is important when considering 2 °C warming as a 'defence line' that should not be exceeded[2].

Assessing changes in regional extremes illustrates the importance of considering the geographical distribution of climate change in addition to the global mean warming. Indeed, the average global warming does not convey the level of regional variability in climate responses[4]. By definition, because the global mean temperature is an average in time and space, there will be locations and time periods in which 1.5 °C warming is exceeded even if the global mean temperature rise is restrained to 1.5 °C. This is already the case today, at about 1 °C of global warming compared to the preindustrial period[16]. Similarly, some locations and time frames will display less warming than the global mean.

Extremes at regional scales can warm much more strongly than the global mean. For example, in scenarios compatible with 1.5 °C global warming, minimum night-time temperatures ($T_{night,min}$) in the Arctic can increase by more than 7°C at peak warming if the 'probable' (66th percentile) outcome of scenarios materializes, and more than 8 °C if the 'worst-case' (highest 10%, that is, 90th percentile) outcome of the scenarios materializes (Fig. 2). For the 'worst-case' outcome of scenarios considered to be compatible with warming of 2 °C, the changes in these cold extremes is even larger, and can reach more than 9 °C at peak warming (Fig. 2). Although the change is more limited for hot extremes (annual maximum mid-day temperature, $T_{day,max}$) in the contiguous USA, it is nevertheless substantial. At peak warming, these hot extremes can increase by more than 4 °C for the probable 1.5 °C scenarios (the maximum in 66% of the cases), reaching 5 °C warming for the 'worst-case' 1.5 °C scenarios and slightly less for the highest 'probable' 2 °C scenarios. If the 10% 'worst-case' temperature outcome materializes after following a pathway that is considered compatible with 2 °C warming today, the temperature increase of the hottest days ($T_{day,max}$) could exceed 5 °C at peak global warming in that region (Fig. 2).

These analyses also reveal the level of inter-model range in regional responses, when comparing the full spread of the CMIP5 distributions (Fig. 2). This interquartile range reaches about 2 °C for $T_{night,min}$ in the Arctic and 1 °C for $T_{day,max}$ in the contiguous USA at peak warming, that is, it is 2–4 times larger than the difference in global warming at 1.5 °C versus 2 °C. The intermodel range is also very large for changes in heavy precipitation in Southern Asia (Fig. 2), with an approximate doubling of the response at peak warming for the 75th quantile in the most sensitive models compared to the 25th quantile in the least sensitive models. This highlights that uncertainty in regional climate sensitivity to given global warming levels is an important component of uncertainty in impact projections in low-emissions scenarios (like uncertainty in mitigation pathways or the global transient climate response). Indeed, in cases showing a high regional climate sensitivity (either owing to model specificities or internal climate variability), the tail values of the climate model distributions for 'probable' 1.5 °C-scenario outcomes overlap or even exceed likely values for the 'worst-case' 2 °C-scenario outcome (Fig. 2). This thus shows that even under the most stringent mitigation (1.5 °C) pathways, some risk of dangerous changes in regional extremes (that is, equivalent to or stronger than expected responses at 2 °C global warming) cannot be excluded.

While most climate change risk assessments factor in the inter-model range of regional climate responses, relatively few consider the effects of extreme weather, such as the temperature increase of the hottest days ($T_{day,max}$). Recent literature highlights how these extreme events strongly influence levels of risk to human and natural systems, including crop yields[38] and biodiversity[39], suggesting that the majority of risk assessments based on mean regional climate changes alone are conservative in that they do not incorporate the effects of extreme weather events. In addition, the co-occurrence of extreme events is also highly relevant for accurately assessing changes in risk, although analyses in this area are still lacking[40,41].

Hence, the regional analyses of changes in extremes for scenarios aiming at limiting warming to 1.5 °C and 2 °C highlight the following main findings:

(1) Some regional responses of temperature extremes will be much larger than the changes in global mean temperature, by a factor of up to three ($T_{night,min}$ in the Arctic).

(2) The regional responses at peak warming for scenarios that are today considered to be compatible with limiting warming to 1.5 °C (that is, having a 66% chance of stabilizing at 1.5 °C by 2100) can still involve an extremely large increase in temperature in some locations and time frames, in the worst case more than 8 °C for extreme cold night-time temperatures or up to 5 °C for daytime hot extremes (Fig. 2). We note that these numbers are substantially larger than present-day variability (see Supplementary Information).

(3) The 10% highest-response ('worst-case') temperature outcome of pathways currently considered compatible with 1.5 °C warming is comparable with the 66th percentile ('probable') outcomes of scenarios that are considered compatible with limiting warming to below 2 °C, at global and regional scales. This indicates that pursuing a pathway compatible with warming of 1.5 °C can be considered a high-probability 2 °C pathway[13] that strongly increases the probability of avoiding the risks of a 2 °C warmer world.

Realization at single locations and times

The analyses of Figs. 2 and 3 represent the statistical response over longer time frames. Several dominant patterns of response are documented in the literature[4], for instance that land temperatures tend to warm more than global mean temperature on average, in particular with respect to hot extremes in transitional regions between dry and wet climates and with respect to coldest days at high latitudes (see also Figs. 2 and 3). Nonetheless, owing to internal climate variability (and in part model-based uncertainty), there may be large local departures from such a typical response at single points in time (any given year within a 10-year time frame), as displayed in Fig. 4. Many locations show a fairly large probability (25% chance) of temperature anomalies below 1.5 °C, and in some cases even smaller anomalies (mostly for the extreme indices). On the other hand, there is a similar probability (25%, or 75th percentile) that some locations can display temperature increases of more than 3 °C, and in some cases up to 7–9 °C for cold extremes. This illustrates that highly unusual and even unprecedented temperatures may occur even in a 1.5 °C climate. Although some of the patterns reflect what is expected from the median response[4], the spread of responses is large in most regions.

Aspects insufficiently considered so far

The integrated assessment models used to derive the mitigation scenarios discussed here did not include several feedbacks that are present in the coupled human–Earth system. This includes, for example, biogeophysical impacts of land use[26,27,28], potential competition for land between negative emission technologies and agriculture[29,31], water availability constraints on energy infrastructure and bioenergy cropping[30,31], regional implications of choices of specific scenarios for tropospheric aerosol concentrations, or behavioural and societal changes in anticipation of or in response to climate impacts[33,42]. For comprehensive assessments of the regional implications of mitigation and adaptation measures, such aspects of development pathways would need to be factored in.

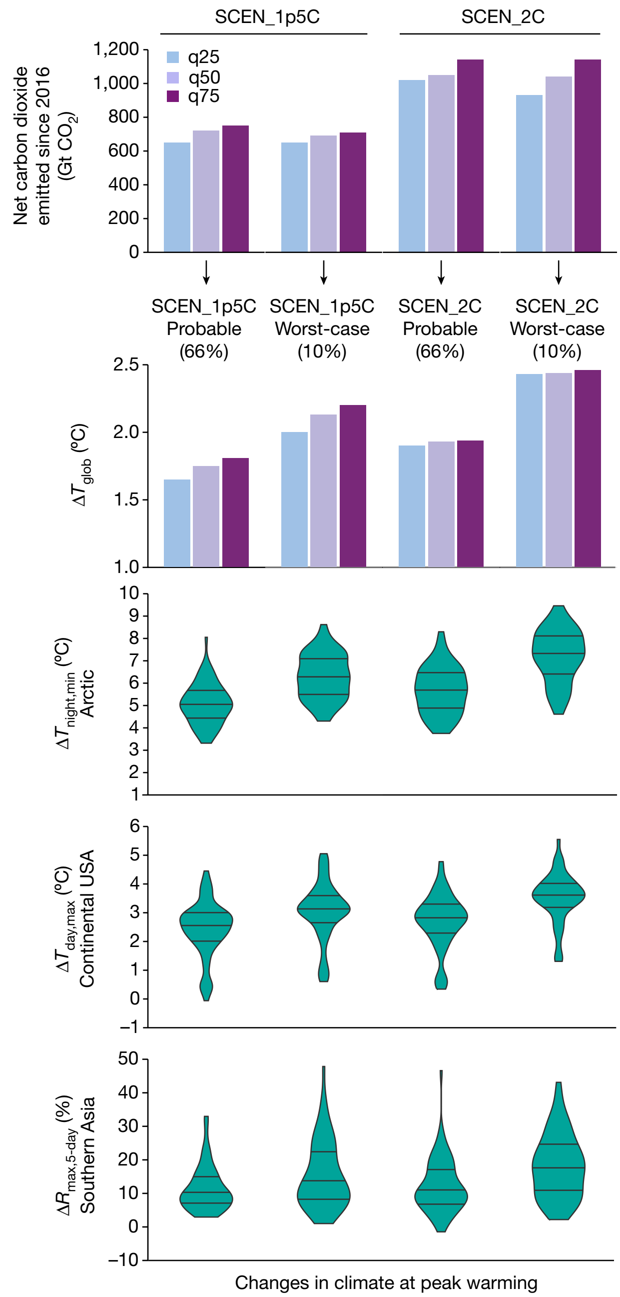

Fig. 2 | Possible outcomes with respect to global temperature and regional climate anomalies from typical scenarios compatible with 1.5 °C warming and 2 °C warming at peak warming. a, Net gigatonnes of CO_2 emitted until time of peak warming relative to 2016 (including carbon dioxide removal from the atmosphere) in scenarios from Table 1 (25th quantile (q25), median (q50), and 75th quantile (q75)). **b**, Global mean temperature anomaly at peak warming (q25, q50, q75). **c–e**, Regional climate anomalies at peak warming compared to the pre-industrial period corresponding to the median global warming of the second row (full range associated with different regional responses within CMIP5 multi-model ensemble displayed as violin plots; the median and interquartile ranges are indicated with horizontal dark grey lines). See Table 1 for more details.

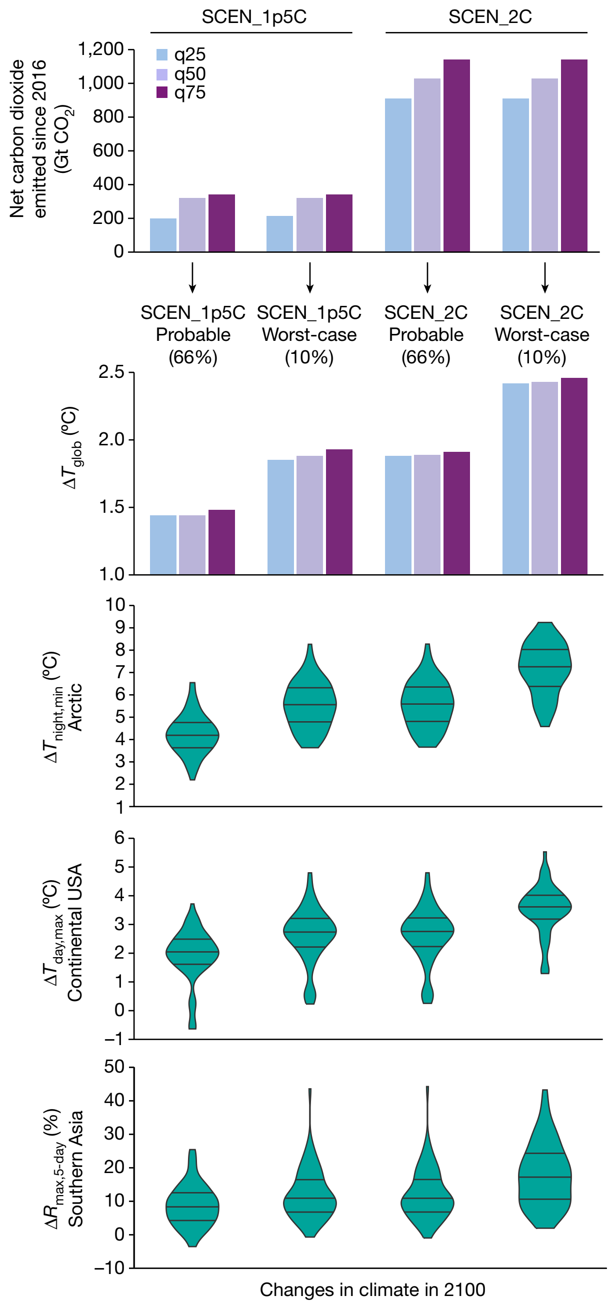

Fig. 3 | Possible outcomes with respect to global temperature and regional climate anomalies from typical scenarios compatible with 1.5 °C warming and 2 °C warming in 2100. a, Net gigatonnes of CO_2 emitted by 2100 relative to 2016 (including carbon dioxide removal from the atmosphere) in scenarios from Table 1 (q25, q50, q75). **b**, Global mean temperature anomaly in 2100 (q25, q50, q75). **c**–**e**, Regional climate anomalies at peak warming compared to the pre-industrial period corresponding to the median global warming of the second row (full range associated with different regional responses within CMIP5 multi-model ensemble displayed as violin plots; the median and interquartile ranges are indicated with horizontal dark grey lines). See Table 1 for more details.

We note also that non-CO_2 greenhouse gas emissions need to be reduced jointly with CO_2. The numbers in Table 1 consider budgets for cumulative CO_2 emissions taking into account consistent evolution of non-CO_2 greenhouse gas emissions. To compare the temperature outcome of pathways from many different forcings (such as methane and nitrous oxide), a CO_2-only emission pathway that has the same radiative forcing can be found, which is termed 'CO_2-forcing equivalent emissions'[43,44]. Hence, stronger modulation in non-CO_2 greenhouse gas emissions could be considered in upcoming scenarios.

Furthermore, a continuous adjustment of mitigation responses based on the observed climate response (which can, for example, reduce present uncertainties regarding the global transient climate response) might be necessary to avoid undesired outcomes. Pursuing such 'adaptive' mitigation scenarios[34] would be facilitated by the global stocktake mechanism established in the Paris Agreement. Nonetheless, there are limits to possibilities for the adaptation of mitigation pathways, notably because some investments (for example, in infrastructure) are long-term, and also because the actual departure from a desirable pathway will need to be detected against the backdrop of internal climate variability. This variability can be large on decadal timescales—as illustrated by the recent so-called "hiatus" period[45]—but its effect on the assessment of mean global temperature anomalies can be minimized by using robust estimates of human-induced warming[16]. Hence, although adaptive mitigation pathways could provide some flexibility with which to avoid the highlighted 'worst-case' scenarios (Table 1), it is not yet clear to what extent they could be implemented in practice.

For a range of indicators, global mean temperature alone is not a sufficient indicator to describe climate impacts. CO_2-sensitive systems, such as the terrestrial biosphere and agriculture systems, respond not only to the impact of warming but also to increased CO_2 concentrations. Although the potentially positive effects of CO_2 fertilization are not well constrained[46], it appears that the impacts of anthropogenic emissions on those systems will depend not only on the warming inferred, but also on the CO_2 concentrations at which these warming levels are reached. Similarly, impacts on marine ecosystems depend on warming as well as on changes being driven by ocean acidification[47].

Impacts on ocean and cryosphere will respond to warming with a substantial time lag. Consequently, ice sheet and glacier melting, ocean warming and as a result sea level rise will continue long after temperatures have peaked[48]. For some of these impacts, this may imply that the detectable effects of mitigation pathways may be limited in the short-term, but may turn out to be major effects in the long-term[49]. Large-scale oceanic systems will also continue to adjust over the coming centuries. One study identified a continued increase of extreme El Niño frequency in a peak-and-decline scenario[50]. The imprints on such time-lagged systems for different 1.5 °C worlds are not well constrained at present.

Assessing SRM

Compared to any mitigation options, climate interventions such as global SRM do not intend to reduce atmospheric CO_2 concentration itself but solely to limit global mean warming. Some studies[51–53] proposed that SRM may be used as a temporary measure to avoid global mean temperature exceeding 2 °C. However, the use of SRM in the context of limiting temperature overshoot might create a new set of global and regional impacts, and could substantially modify regional precipitation patterns as compared to a world without SRM[54,55]. It would also have a high potential for cross-boundary conflicts because of positive, negative or undetectable effects on regional climate[56], natural ecosystems[57] and human settlements. Hence, while the global mean temperature might be close to a 1.5 °C warming under a given global SRM deployment, the regional implications could be very different from those of a 1.5 °C global warming reached with early reductions of CO_2 emissions and stabilization of CO_2 concentrations. In some cases, some novel climate conditions would be created because of the addition of two climate forcings with different geographical footprints. Hence, a similar mean global warming may have very different regional implications (see Fig. 1b for an illustration) and in the case of SRM would be associated with substantial uncertainties in terms of regional impacts. Furthermore, SRM would not counter ocean acidification, which would continue unabated under enhanced CO_2 concentrations. Finally, there is also the issue that the sudden discontinuation of SRM measures would lead to a "termination problem"[52,58], that is, a very rapid increase in global temperature and associated climate changes, which would have even greater impacts than a situation without SRM, owing to the rate of change. Together, this implies that the aggregated

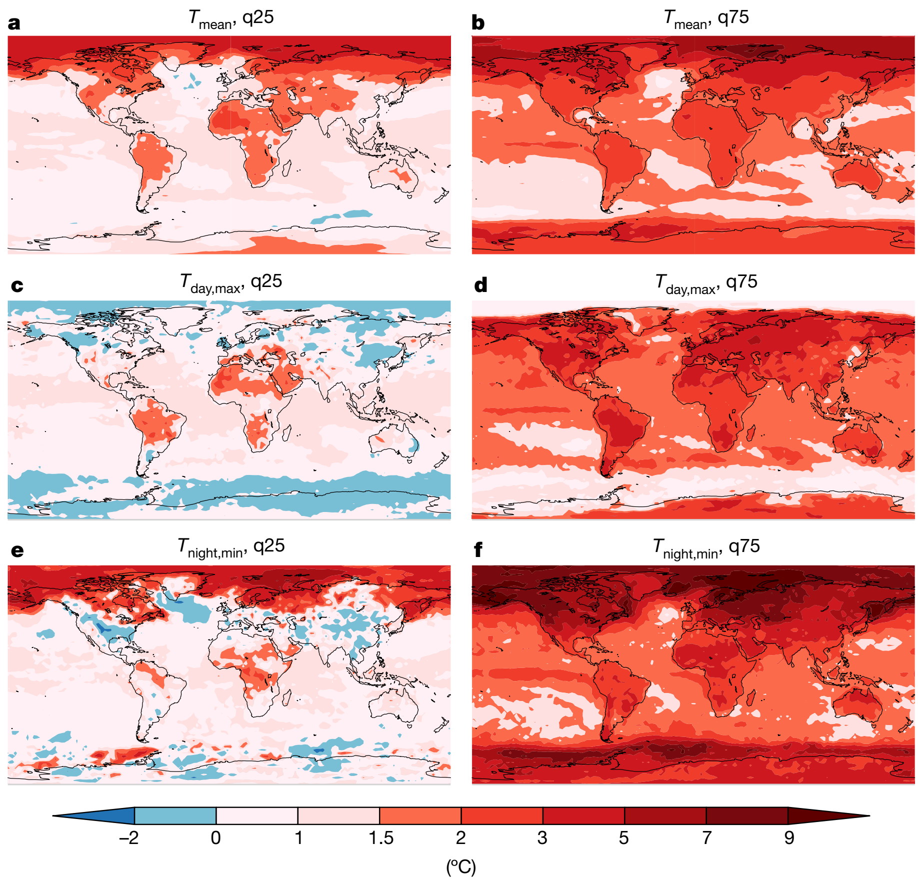

Fig. 4 | The stochastic noise and model-based uncertainty of realized climate at 1.5 °C. Temperature with 25% chance of occurrence at any location within 10-year time frames corresponding to $\Delta T_{glob} = 1.5$ °C (based on CMIP5 multi-model ensemble). The plots display at each location the 25th percentile (q25; **a**, **c**, **e**) and 75th percentile (q75; **b**, **d**, **f**) values of mean temperature (T_{mean}; **a**, **b**), yearly maximum day-time temperature ($T_{day,max}$; **c**, **d**), and yearly minimum night-time temperature ($T_{night,min}$; **e**, **f**), sampled from all time frames with $\Delta T_{glob} = 1.5$ °C in all Representative Concentration Pathway (RCP) 8.5 model simulations of the CMIP5 ensemble (see Box 1 for details).

environmental implications of an SRM world with 1.5 °C mean global temperature warming would probably be very different, and probably more detrimental and less predictable, from those of a 1.5 °C warmer world in which the global temperature is limited to 1.5 °C through decarbonization alone. Nonetheless, regional-scale changes in surface albedo may be worthwhile considering in order to reduce regional impacts in cities or agricultural areas[21], although in-depth assessments on this topic are not yet available, and such modifications would be unlikely to affect global temperature substantially.

Risks in 1.5 °C warmer worlds

1.5°C warmer worlds will still present climate-related risks to natural, managed and human systems, as seen above. The magnitude of the overall risks and their geographical patterns in a 1.5 °C warmer world will, however, not only depend on the uncertainties in the regional climate that results from this level of warming. The magnitude of risk will also strongly depend on the approaches used to limit warming to 1.5 °C and on the wider context of societal development as it is pursued by individual communities and nations, and global society as a whole. Indeed, these can result in substantial differences in the magnitude and pattern of exposures and vulnerabilities[59,60].

For natural ecosystems and agriculture, low-emissions scenarios can have a high reliance on land-use modifications (either for bioenergy production or afforestation[25,29,61]) that in turn can affect food production and prices through land-use competition effects[29,31,62]. The risks to human systems will depend on the ambition and effectiveness of implementing accompanying policies and measures that increase resilience to the risks of climate change and the potential trade-offs of mitigation. For example, large-scale deployment of BECCS could push Earth closer to the planetary boundaries for land-use change and freshwater, biosphere integrity and biogeochemical flows[30] (in addition to pressures associated with development goals[63]).

Also, the timing of when warming can be stabilized to 1.5 °C or 2 °C will influence exposure and vulnerability. For example, in a world pursuing a strong sustainable development trajectory, large increases in resilience by the end of the century would make the world less vulnerable overall[59]. Even under this pathway, rapidly reaching 1.5 °C would mean that some regions and sectors would require additional preparation to manage the hazards created by a changing climate.

Commonalities of all 1.5 °C warmer worlds

Because human-caused warming linked to CO_2 emissions is now nearly irreversible for more than a thousand years[64,65], the cumulative amount of CO_2 emissions is the prime determinant of long-lived permanent changes in the global mean temperature rise at Earth's surface. All 1.5 °C stabilization scenarios require net CO_2 emissions to be zero and non-CO_2 forcing to be capped to stable levels at some point[64,66,67]. This is also the case for stabilization scenarios at higher levels of warming (for example, at 2 °C); the only differences would be the time at which the net CO_2 budget becomes zero, and the cumulative CO_2 emissions emitted until that time. Hence, a transition to a decarbonization of energy use is necessary in all scenarios.

Article 4 of the Paris Agreement calls for net zero global greenhouse gas emissions to be achieved in the second half of the twenty-first century, which most plausibly requires some extent of negative CO_2 emissions to compensate for remaining non-CO_2 forcing[13]. The timing of when net zero global greenhouse gas emissions are achieved strongly determines the peak warming. All presently published scenarios compatible with 1.5 °C warming include carbon dioxide removal to achieve net-zero CO_2 emissions, to varying degrees. CO_2-induced warming by 2100 is determined by the difference between the total amount of CO_2 generated (which can be reduced by early decarbonization) and the total amount permanently stored out of the atmosphere, for example by geological sequestration. Current evidence indicates that at least some measure of carbon dioxide removal will be required to follow a emissions trajectory compatible with 1.5 °C warming.

Towards a sustainable 1.5 °C warmer world

Emissions pathways limiting global warming to 1.5 °C allow us to avoid risks associated with higher levels of warming, but do not guarantee an absence of climate risks at the regional scale, and are also associated with their own set of risks with respect to the implementation of mitigation technologies, in particular related to land-use changes associated with for example, BECCS or competition for food production[29–31,33].

Important aspects to consider when pursuing the goal of limiting warming to or below a global mean temperature level relate to how this goal is achieved and to the nature of emerging regional and sub-regional risks[68–70]. Also relevant are considerations of how the policies influence the resilience of human and natural systems, and which broader societal pathways are followed in terms of human development. Many but not all of these can be influenced directly through policy choices[68–70]. Internal climate variability as well as regional climate sensitivity, which display a substantial range between current climate models, are also important components of how risk will be realized. Explicitly illustrating the full range of possible outcomes of 1.5 °C warmer worlds is important for an adequate consideration of the implications of mitigation options by decision makers.

The time frame within which major mitigation measures need to be initiated varies with the scenario (Table 1). However, given the current state of knowledge about both the global and regional climate responses and the availability of mitigation measures, if the potential to limit warming to below 1.5 °C or 2 °C is to be maximized, emissions reductions in CO_2 and other greenhouse gases would need to start as soon as possible, leading to a global decline in emissions following 2020 at the latest. At the same time, if potential competition for land and water between negative emission technologies, agriculture and biodiversity conservation is to be avoided, mitigation would need to be carefully designed and regulated to minimize such competition, which could otherwise act to increase food prices and reduce ecosystem services (such as biodiversity, recreational uses and environmental functions). The remaining uncertainties underscore the need for continuous monitoring not just of global mean surface temperature, but also of the deployment and development of mitigation options, the resulting emissions reductions, and in particular of the intensity of global and regional climate responses and their sensitivity to climate forcing. Together with the choices made towards overall societal development, these various elements strongly co-determine the regional and sectoral magnitudes and patterns of risk at 2 °C and 1.5 °C of global warming.

Code availability

The R code used to analyse MAGICC outputs in this paper is available from R.S. (roland.seferian@meteo.fr) on reasonable request. The scripts used for the regional analyses provided in Table 1 and Figs. 2 and 4 are available from R.W. (richard.wartenburger@env.ethz.ch) and S.I.S. (sonia.seneviratne@ethz.ch) upon request.

Data availability

The data underlying the analyses of Table 1 and Figs. 2 and 3 are available on request. Emission data are available from the database accompanying ref. [15], which presents pathways in line with 1.9 W m^{-2} of radiative forcing in 2100, limiting warming to below 1.5 °C by 2100. Regional changes in climate extremes for different global warming levels derived following the methodology of refs [4,37] can be obtained from the associated database associated with the ERC DROUGHT-HEAT project (http://www.drought-heat.ethz.ch) and the software developed under ref. [37].

Received: 1 November 2017; Accepted: 5 April 2018;
Published online 6 June 2018.

1. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). *Adoption of the Paris Agreement FCCC/CP/2015/L.9/Rev.1* http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2015/cop21/eng/l09r01.pdf (UNFCCC, 2015).
2. UNFCCC. *Report on the Structured Expert Dialogue on the 2013–2015 Review* http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2015/sb/eng/inf01.pdf (UNFCCC, 2015).
This document prepared in advance of the Paris Agreement provides the underlying rationale for setting changes in global temperature as climate targets.
3. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in *Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (eds Stocker, T. F. et al.) 3–29 (Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge, 2013).
4. Seneviratne, S. I., Donat, M. G., Pitman, A. J., Knutti, R. & Wilby, R. L. Allowable CO_2 emissions based on regional and impact-related climate targets. *Nature* **529**, 477–483 (2016).
This article highlights the large regional spread in climate model responses associated with given global temperature levels for specific regions and variables.
5. Rogelj, J., Schleussner, C.-F. & Hare, W. Getting it right matters—temperature goal interpretations in geoscience research. *Geophys. Res. Lett.* **44**, 10662–10665 (2017).
6. Cowtan, K. & Way, R.G. Coverage bias in the HadCRUT4 temperature series and its impact on recent temperature trends. *Q. J. R. Met. Soc.* **140**, 1935–1944 (2014).
7. Richardson, M., Cowtan, K., Hawkins, E. & Stolpe, M. B. Reconciled climate response estimates from climate models and the energy budget of Earth. *Nat. Clim. Chang.* **6**, 931–935 (2016).
8. Loarie, S. R. et al. The velocity of climate change. *Nature* **462**, 1052–1055 (2009).
9. LoPresti, A. et al. Rate and velocity of climate change caused by cumulative carbon emissions. *Environ. Res. Lett.* **10**, 095001 (2015).
10. Bowerman, N. H. A., Frame, D. J., Huntingford, C., Lowe, J. A. & Allen, M. R. Cumulative carbon emissions, emissions floors and short-term rates of warming: implications for policy. *Phil. Trans. R. Soc. A* **369**, 45–66 (2011).
11. Settele, J. et al. in *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (eds Field, C. B. et al.) 271–359 (Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge, 2014).
12. Rogelj, J. et al. Energy system transformations for limiting end-of-century warming to below 1.5°C. *Nat. Clim. Chang.* **5**, 519–527 (2015).
13. Schleussner, C.-F. et al. Science and policy characteristics of the Paris Agreement temperature goal. *Nat. Clim. Chang.* **6**, 827–835 (2016).
This article provides a discussion of the Paris Agreement from both scientific and policy perspectives.
14. Clarke, L. et al. in *Climate Change 2014: Mitigation of Climate Change. Contribution of Working Group III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (eds Edenhofer, O. et al.) 413–510 (Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge, 2014).
This chapter provides an overview of the scenarios considered compatible with limiting warming to 1.5 °C or 2 °C at the time of the IPCC AR5 report.
15. Rogelj, J. et al. Scenarios towards limiting global mean temperature increase below 1.5°C. *Nature Clim. Chang.* **8**, 325–332 (2018).
This article provides an overview on 1.5 °C scenarios from multiple models and under a wide range of socio-economic futures, revealing overall consistent results with previous publications[12,14] (see Box 1 and Supplementary Information).
16. Haustein, K. et al. A real-time Global Warming Index. *Sci. Rep.* **7**, 15417 (2017).
17. Robinson, A., Calov, R. & Ganopolski, A. Multistability and critical thresholds of the Greenland ice sheet. *Nat. Clim. Chang.* **2**, 429–432 (2012).
18. Adger, W. N. et al. in *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (eds Field, C. B. et al.) 755–791 (Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge, 2014).
19. Lawrence, D. M. et al. The Land Use Model Intercomparison Project (LUMIP) contribution to CMIP6: rationale and experimental design. *Geosci. Model Dev.* **9**, 2973–2998 (2016).
20. Pitman, A. J. et al. Uncertainties in climate responses to past land cover change: first results from the LUCID intercomparison study. *Geophys. Res. Lett.* **36**, L14814 (2009).
21. Seneviratne, S. I. et al. Land radiative management as contributor to regional-scale climate adaptation and mitigation. *Nat. Geosci.* **11**, 88–96 (2018).
22. Wang, Z. et al. Scenario dependence of future changes in climate extremes under 1.5 °C and 2 °C global warming. *Sci. Rep.* **7**, 46432 (2017).
23. Vogel, M. M. et al. Regional amplification of projected changes in extreme temperatures strongly controlled by soil moisture-temperature feedbacks. *Geophys. Res. Lett.* **44**, 1511–1519 (2017).
24. Deser, C., Knutti, R., Solomon, S. & Phillips, A. S. Communication of the role of natural variability in future North American climate. *Nat. Clim. Chang.* **2**, 775–779 (2012).
25. van Vuuren, D. P. et al. RCP2.6: exploring the possibility to keep global mean temperature increase below 2°C. *Clim. Change* **109**, 95–116 (2011).
26. Hirsch, A. L., Wilhelm, M., Davin, E. L., Thiery, W. & Seneviratne, S. I. Can climate-effective land management reduce regional warming? *J. Geophys. Res. Atmos.* **122**, 2269–2288 (2017).

27. Hirsch, A. L. et al. Biogeophysical impacts of land-use change on climate extremes in low-emissions scenarios: results from HAPPI-Land. *Earth's Future* **6**, 396–409 (2018).
28. Seneviratne, S. I. et al. Climate extremes, land-climate feedbacks, and land use forcing at 1.5°C. *Phil. Trans. R. Soc. A* **376**, https://doi.org/10.1098/rsta.2016.0450 (2018).
29. Smith, P. et al. Biophysical and economic limits to negative CO_2 emissions. *Nat. Clim. Chang.* **6**, 42–50 (2016).
30. Heck, V., Gerten, D., Lucht, W. & Popp, A. Biomass-based negative emissions difficult to reconcile with planetary boundaries. *Nature Clim. Chang.* **8**, 151–155 (2018).
31. Boysen, L. R. et al. The limits to global-warming mitigation by terrestrial carbon removal. *Earth's Future* **5**, 463–474 (2017).
32. Obersteiner, M. et al. How to spend a dwindling greenhouse gas budget. *Nat. Clim. Chang.* **8**, 7–10 (2018).
33. Van Vuuren, D. P. et al. Alternative pathways to the 1.5°C target reduce the need for negative emission technologies. *Nat. Clim. Chang.* **8**, 391–397 (2018).
34. Millar, R. J. et al. Emission budgets and pathways consistent with limiting warming to 1.5 °C. *Nat. Geosci.* **10**, 741–747 (2017).
35. Matthews, H. D. et al. Estimating carbon budgets for ambitious climate targets. *Curr. Clim. Change Rep.* **3**, 69–77 (2017).
36. Goodwin, P. et al. Pathways to 1.5° C and 2° C warming based on observational and geological constraints. *Nat. Geosci.* **11**, 102–107 (2018).
37. Wartenburger, R. et al. Changes in regional climate extremes as a function of global mean temperature: an interactive plotting framework. *Geosci. Model Dev.* **10**, 3609–3634 (2017).
This article is an extension of ref. [4], providing changes in a range of regional extremes as a function of global temperature changes based on simulations assessed in the IPCC AR5[72].
38. Deryng, D., Conway, D., Ramankutty, N., Price, J. & Warren, R. Global crop yield response to extreme heat stress under multiple climate change futures. *Environ. Res. Lett.* **9**, 034011 (2014).
39. McDermott-Long, O. et al. Sensitivity of UK butterflies to local climatic extremes: which life stages are most at risk? *J. Anim. Ecol.* **86**, 108–116 (2017).
40. AghaKouchak, A., Cheng, L., Mazdiyasni, O. & Farahmand, A. Global warming and changes in risk of concurrent climate extremes: insights from the 2014 California drought. *Geophys. Res. Lett.* **41**, 8847–8852 (2014).
41. Zscheischler, J. & Seneviratne, S. I. Dependence of drivers affects risks associated with compound events. *Sci. Adv.* **3**, e1700263 (2017).
42. Beckage, B. et al. Linking models of human behaviour and climate alters projected climate change. *Nature Clim. Chang.* **8**, 79–84 (2018).
43. Jenkins, S., Millar, R. J., Leach, N. & Allen, M. R. Framing climate goals in terms of cumulative CO_2-forcing-equivalent emissions. *Geophys. Res. Lett.* **45**, 2795–2804 (2018).
44. Fuglestvedt, J. et al. Implications of possible interpretations of "greenhouse gas balance" in the Paris Agreement. *Phil. Trans. R. Soc. A* **376**, https://doi.org/10.1098/rsta.2016.0445 (2018).
45. Medhaug, I., Stolpe, M. B., Fischer, E. M. & Knutti, R. Reconciling controversies about the 'global warming hiatus. *Nature* **545**, 41–47 (2017).
46. Smith, K. et al. Large divergence of satellite and Earth system model estimates of global terrestrial CO_2 fertilization. *Nature Clim. Chang.* **6**, 306–310 (2016).
47. Gattuso, J.-P. et al. Contrasting futures for ocean and society from different anthropogenic CO_2 emissions scenarios. *Science* **349**, aac4722 (2015).
48. Clark, P. U. et al. Consequences of twenty-first-century policy for multi-millennial climate and sea-level change. *Nat. Clim. Chang.* **6**, 360–369 (2016).
49. Marzeion, B., Kaser, G., Maussion, F. & Champollion, N. Limited influence of climate change mitigation on short-term glacier mass loss. *Nature Clim. Chang.* **8**, 305–308 (2018).
50. Wang, G. et al. Continued increase of extreme El Niño frequency long after 1.5 °C warming stabilization. *Nature Clim. Chang.* **7**, 568–572 (2017).
51. Boucher, O., Lowe, J. A. & Jones, C. D. Implications of delayed actions in addressing carbon dioxide emission reduction in the context of geo-engineering. *Clim. Change* **92**, 261–273 (2009).
52. Keith, D. W. & MacMartin, D. G. A temporary, moderate and responsive scenario for solar geoengineering. *Nature Clim. Chang.* **5**, 201–206 (2015). (2015).
53. Tilmes, S., Sanderson, B. M. & O'Neill, B. C. Climate impacts of geoengineering in a delayed mitigation scenario. *Geophys. Res. Lett.* **43**, 8222–8229 (2016).
54. Ferraro, A. J. & Griffiths, H. G. Quantifying the temperature-independent effect of stratospheric aerosol geoengineering on global-mean precipitation in a multi-model ensemble. *Environ. Res. Lett.* **11**, 34012 (2016).
55. Davis, N. A., Seidel, D. J., Birner, T., Davis, S. M. & Tilmes, S. Changes in the width of the tropical belt due to simple radiative forcing changes in the GeoMIP simulations. *Atmos. Chem. Phys.* **16**, 10083–10095 (2016).
56. Lo, Y. T. E., Charlton-Perez, A. J., Lott, F. C. & Highwood, E. J. Detecting sulphate aerosol geoengineering with different methods. *Sci. Rep.* **6**, 39169 (2016).
57. Muri, H., Kristjánsson, J. E., Storelvmo, T. & Pfeffer, M. A. The climatic effects of modifying cirrus clouds in a climate engineering framework. *J. Geophys. Res.* **119**, 4174–4191 (2014).
58. Trisos, C. H. et al. Potentially dangerous consequences for biodiversity of solar geoengineering implementation and termination. *Nat. Ecol. Evol.* **2**, 475–482 (2018).
59. O'Neill, B. C. et al. The roads ahead: narratives for shared socioeconomic pathways describing world futures in the 21st century. *Glob. Environ. Change* **42**, 169–180 (2017).
60. Byers, E. A. et al. Global exposure and vulnerability to multi-sector development and climate change hotspots. *Environ. Res. Lett.* **13**, 055012 (2018).
61. Popp, A. et al. Land-use futures in the shared socio-economic pathways. *Glob. Environ. Change* **42**, 331–345 (2017).
62. Muratori, M., Calvin, K., Wise, M., Kyle, P. & Edmonds, J. Global economic consequences of deploying bioenergy with carbon capture and storage (BECCS). *Environ. Res. Lett.* **11**, 95004 (2016).
63. O'Neill, D. W., Fanning, A. L., Lamb, W. F. & Steinberger, J. K. A good life for all within planetary boundaries. *Nat. Sustain.* **1**, 88–95 (2018).
64. Matthews, H. D. & Caldeira, K. Stabilizing climate requires near-zero emissions. *Geophys. Res. Lett.* **35**, L04705 (2008).
65. Solomon, S., Plattner, G.-K., Knutti, R. & Friedlingstein, P. Irreversible climate change due to carbon dioxide emissions. *Proc. Natl Acad. Sci. USA* **106**, 1704–1709 (2009).
66. Matthews, H. D., Gillett, N. P., Stott, P. A. & Zickfeld, K. The proportionality of global warming to cumulative carbon emissions. *Nature* **459**, 829–832 (2009).
67. Allen, M. R. et al. Warming caused by cumulative carbon emissions towards the trillionth tonne. *Nature* **458**, 1163–1166 (2009).
68. Denton, F. et al. in *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (eds Field, C. B. et al.) 1101–1131 (Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge, 2014).
69. Fleurbaey, M. et al. in *Climate Change 2014: Mitigation of Climate Change. Contribution of Working Group III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (eds Edenhofer, O. et al.) 283–350 (Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge, 2014).
70. O'Brien, K. et al. in *Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation* (eds Field, C. B. et al.) *A Special Report of Working Groups I and II of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)* 437–486 (Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge, 2012).
71. Meinshausen, M., Raper, S. C. B. & Wigley, T. M. L. Emulating coupled atmosphere-ocean and carbon cycle models with a simpler model, MAGICC6—part 1: model description and calibration. *Atmos. Chem. Phys.* **11**, 1417–1456 (2011).
72. IPCC. *Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (eds Stocker, T. F. et al.) 1–1535 (Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge, 2013).
73. Le Quéré, C. et al. Global carbon budget 2016. *Earth Syst. Sci. Data* **8**, 605–649 (2016).
74. Keenan, T. F. et al. Recent pause in the growth rate of atmospheric CO_2 due to enhanced terrestrial carbon uptake. *Nat. Commun.* **7**, 13428 (2016).

Acknowledgements S.I.S. and R.W. acknowledge the European Research Council (ERC) 'DROUGHT-HEAT' project funded by the European Community's Seventh Framework Programme (grant agreement FP7-IDEAS-ERC-617518). J.R. acknowledges the Oxford Martin School Visiting Fellowship programme for support. R.S. acknowledges the European Union's H2020 project CRESCENDO "Coordinated Research in Earth Systems and Climate: Experiments, kNowledge, Dissemination and Outreach" (grant agreement H2020-641816). O.H.G. acknowledges support of the Australia Research Council Laureate program. This work contributes to the World Climate Research Programme (WCRP) Grand Challenge on Extremes. We acknowledge the WCRP Working Group on Coupled Modelling, which is responsible for CMIP, and we thank the climate modelling groups for producing and making available their model output. For CMIP the US Department of Energy's Program for Climate Model Diagnosis and Intercomparison provides coordinating support and led development of software infrastructure in partnership with the Global Organization for Earth System Science Portals.

Reviewer information *Nature* thanks S. Davis, K. Tachiiri and the other anonymous reviewer(s) for their contribution to the peer review of this work.

Author contributions S.I.S. coordinated the design and writing of the article, with contributions from all co-authors. J.R. provided the emissions scenario data processed in Table 1. R.S. computed the scenario summary statistics of Table 1. R.W. computed the regional projections statistics of Table 1, as well as Figs. 2–4. S.I.S. prepared Fig. 1, with support from P.T. and J.R. J.R., R.S., M.A., M.C. and R.M. co-designed the analyses of emissions scenarios. K.L.E., N.E., O.H.G., A.J.P., C.F.S., P.T. and R.F.W. provided assessments on physical, ecosystem and human impacts. S.I.S. drafted the first version of the manuscript, with inputs from J.R., R.S. and M.A. All authors contributed to and commented on the manuscript.

Competing interests The authors declare no competing interests.

Additional information

Supplementary information is available for this paper at https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-018-0181-4.
Reprints and permissions information is available at http://www.nature.com/reprints.
Correspondence and requests for materials should be addressed to S.I.S.
Publisher's note: Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.