

# Reality Check

**Climate change: our Quaker response**

**Laurie Michaelis**

**Living Witness Project –  
Quakers for Sustainability**

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# Whose Reality?

- Scientific reality: climate change
- Market reality: resourcing our lifestyle
- Psychological reality: people and change
- Quaker reality: what can we bring?

# Key messages from IPCC 2007

- Human activity is causing climate change
- Impacts are already well-documented.
- Severe impacts on food and forest production expected in Africa and South Asia by 2020.
- Limiting temperature rise to 2°C means reducing emissions 85% globally by 2050; **more in OECD.**

**But...**

# **New observations: climate feedbacks/tipping points**

- Loss of arctic sea ice
- Methane from permafrost and deep oceans
- Reduced CO<sub>2</sub> absorption in Southern Ocean and tropical vegetation
- Breakdown of tropical soils

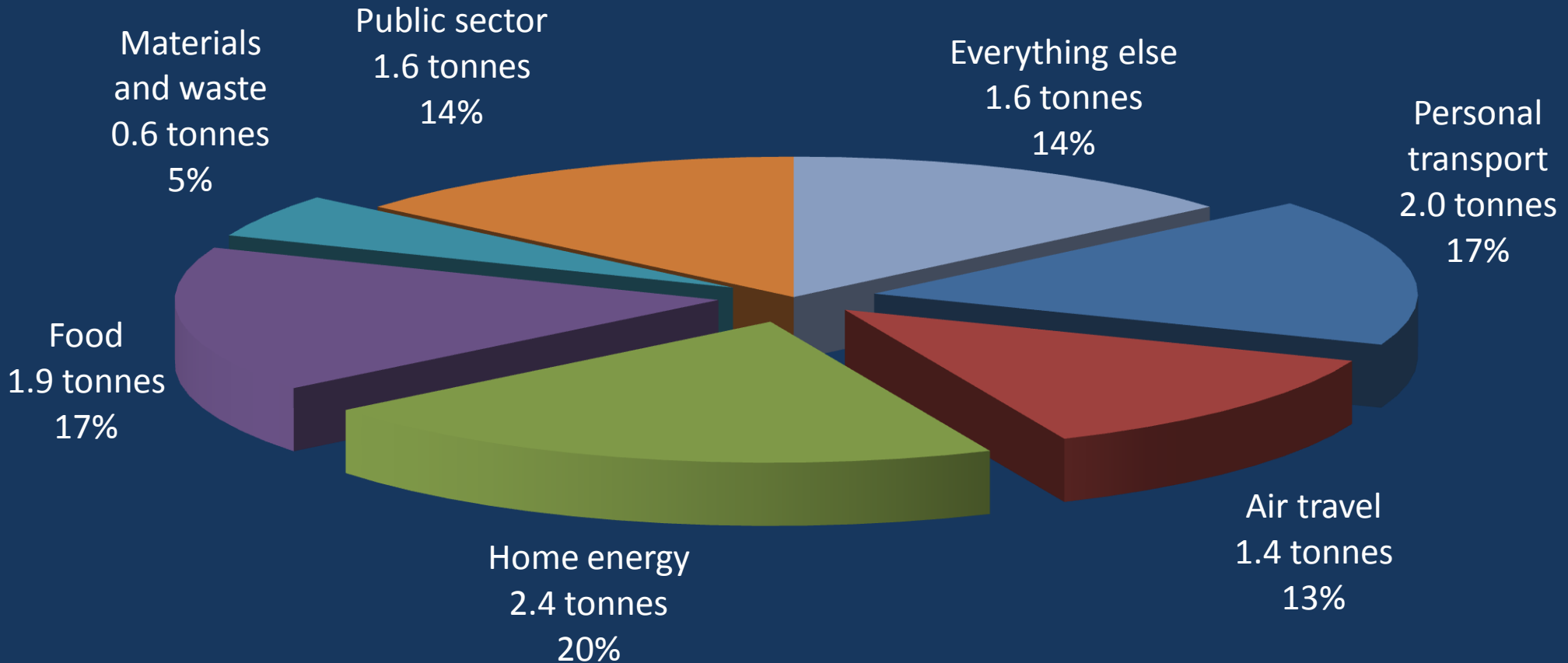
**Calls to reduce emissions faster and sooner to get  
CO<sub>2</sub> down to 300-350ppm (currently 385ppm)  
(see [climatesafety.org](http://climatesafety.org))**

# What does that really mean?

- Avoiding 2°C warming requires **at least 5%** cut per year in **global** emissions over 40 years
- If GDP grows 3%/year that's 8% reduction per year in emissions/GDP
- History of productivity improvements → maximum is less than 3%/year
- New technology is vital but not enough
- We must consume less energy – perhaps by a factor of three

# Most greenhouse gas emissions can be traced to lifestyles

Emissions per average UK resident - total 11.5 tonnes/year CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent



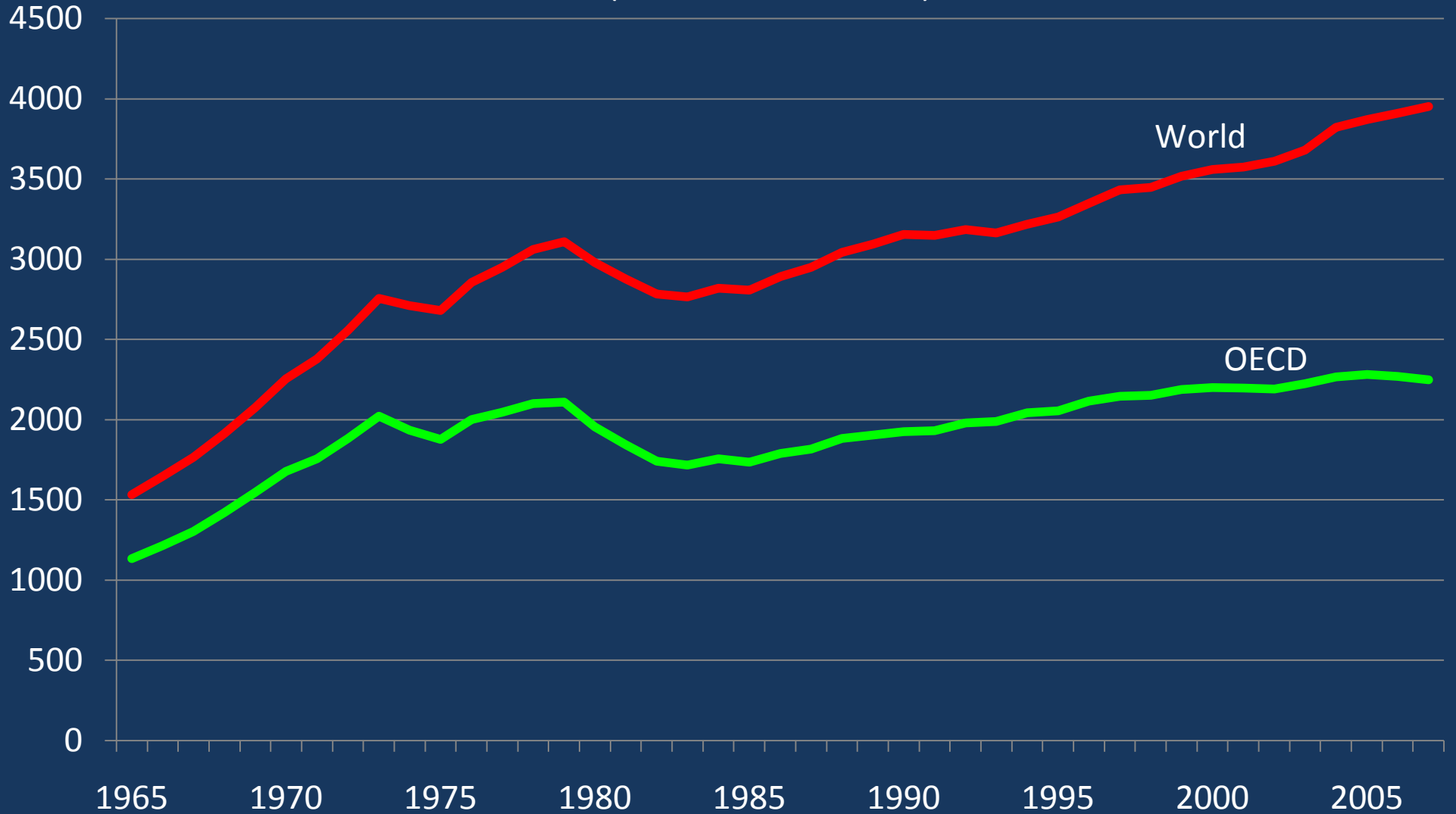
"Materials and waste" includes only materials thrown out in household collections -- not cars, building/DIY waste, large appliances etc.

Public sector includes schools, hospitals, government buildings, the military etc.

"Everything else" includes supply of clothing, furniture, electrical equipment, house building, and services such as telecoms, finance and entertainment.

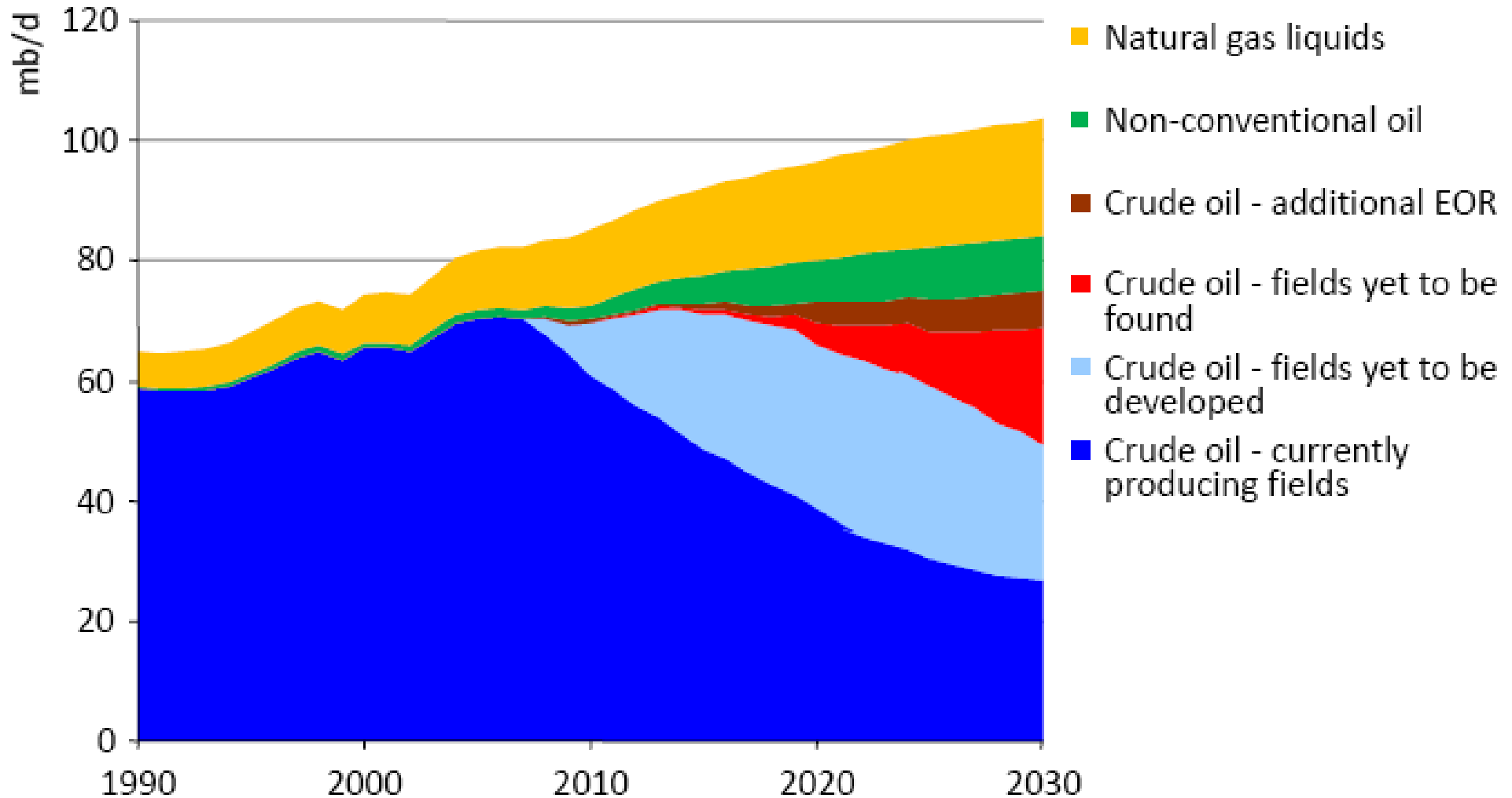
# World Oil Consumption, Million Tonnes

(BP Statistical Review)



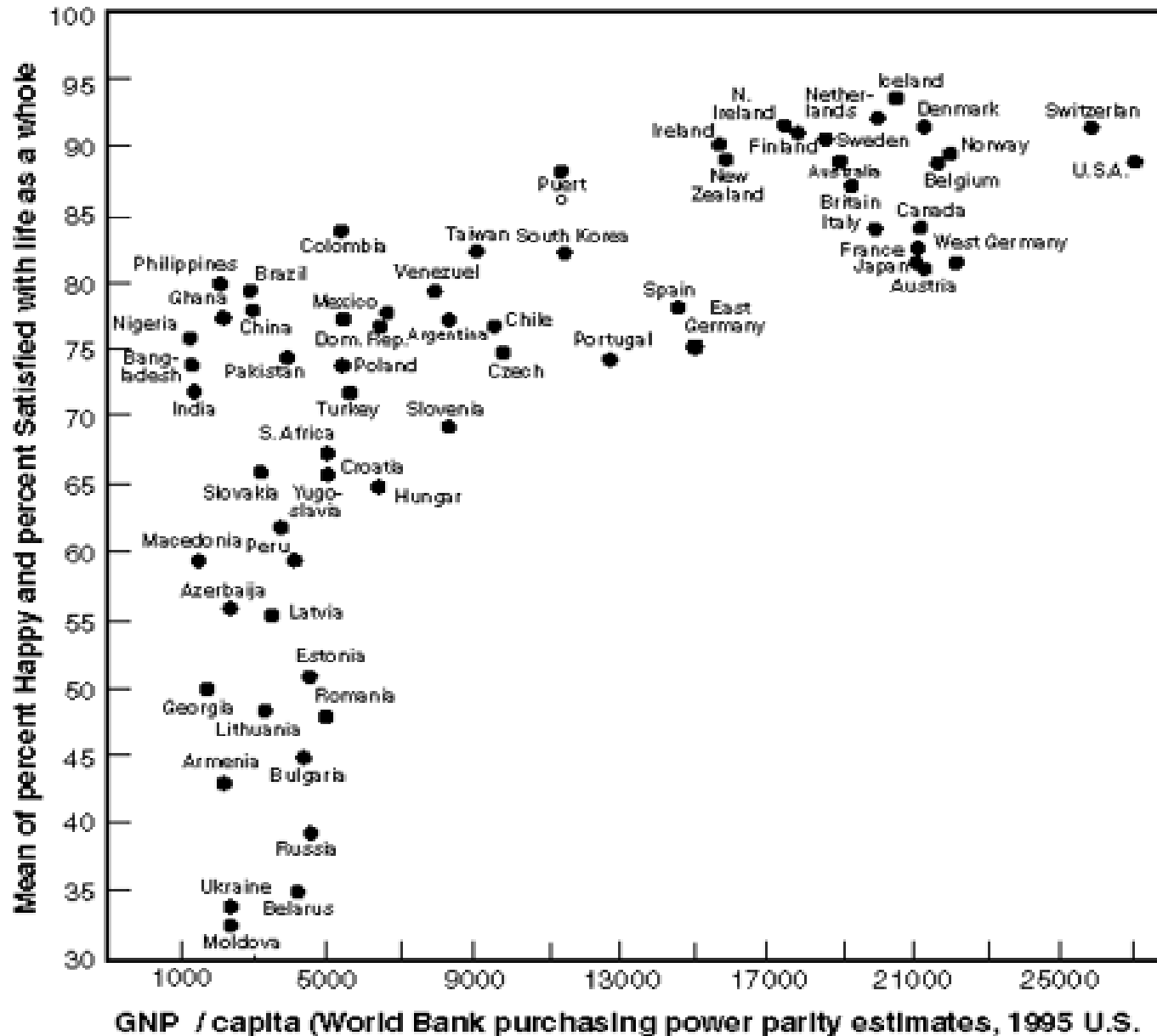
# World Oil Supply to 2030

(IEA World Energy Outlook 2008: reference scenario, leading to 550-600ppm CO<sub>2</sub> by 2100 and up to 6°C warming)



# Life Satisfaction vs. National GDP

Graphic from: R. Inglehart, Modernization and Postmodernization (Princeton, 1997).



# Denial narratives

- It's just natural variation – sunspots, ocean currents etc.
- It's someone else's fault – industry, government, neoliberal economists, third world population
- “They” will fix it with new technology
- I'm already doing my bit (recycling, saving plastic bags)
- The plane was going anyway
- I'll wait 'til we are all forced to change (by government regulation, oil running out, etc.)
- I will if you will
- It's too late so lets party

# The consumer society: three realms of unreality

**Individual  
self**

Loss of touch with meaning  
and quality of life.  
Consumption in response  
to social & psychological  
needs that it cannot meet.

Loss of touch  
with community.  
Declining trust & mutual  
support. Inequality.  
Mass migration. War  
over resources and  
ideologies.

**Community/  
society**

Loss of contact with  
nature, which is treated  
as a resource.  
Destruction of natural  
systems and  
biodiversity.

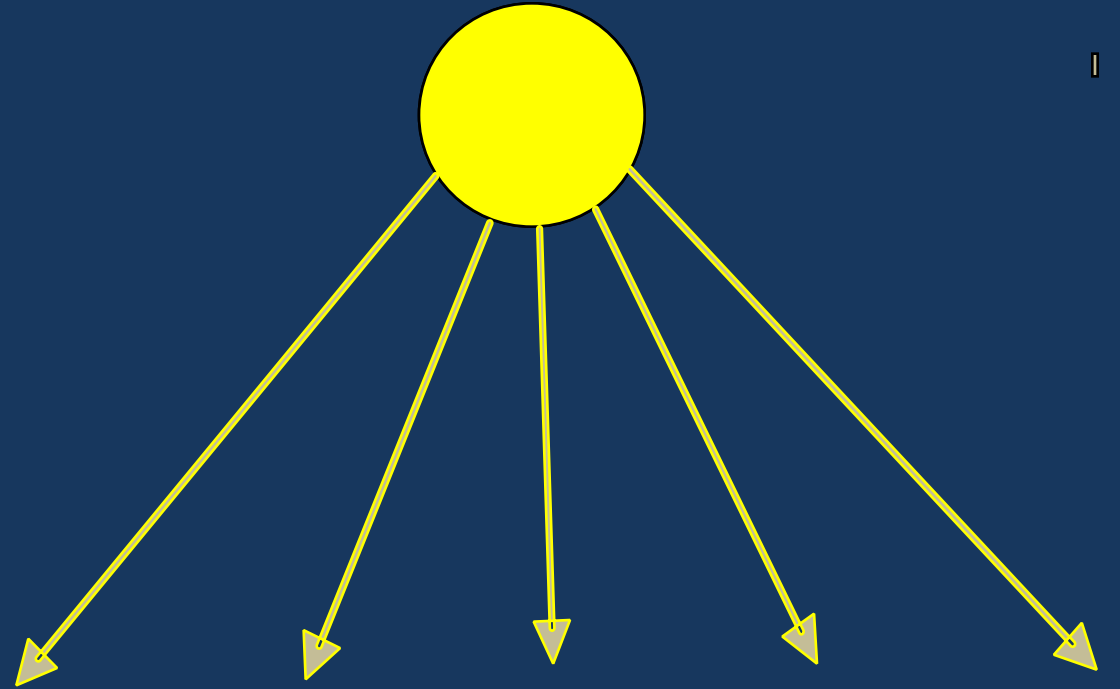
**The Earth**

# Community matters

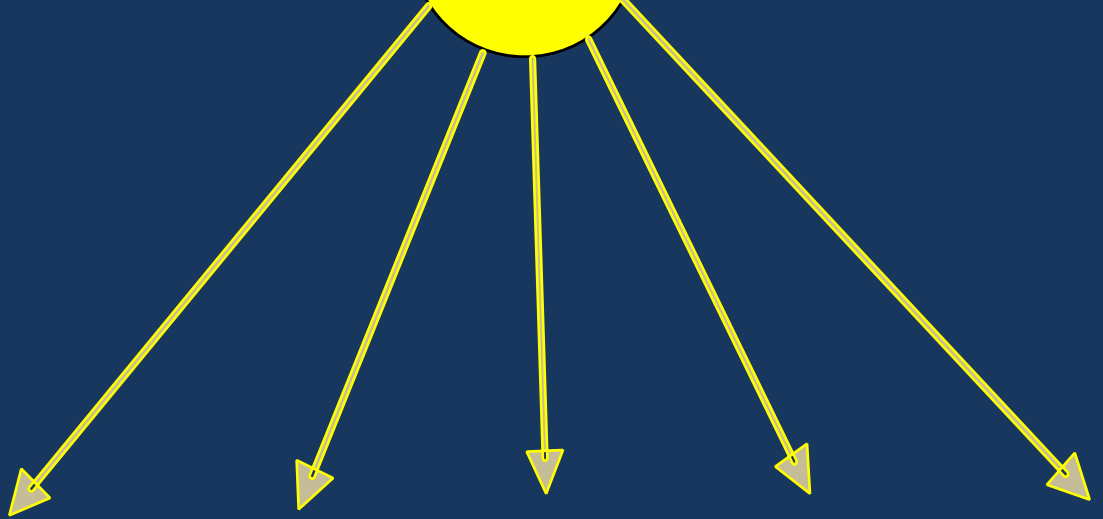
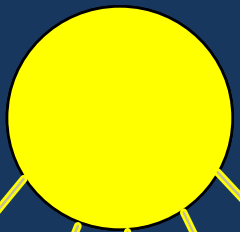
- Real source of well-being
- Community is where ethics and norms develop, spread and consolidate
- Dynamic tension between people with different ideas, world-views
- Develop understanding, compassion and sense of identity with others
- Practical and social support: peer group solidarity

Watching our own sense of reality –  
how we think change happens...

**Top down control: regulation & planning**



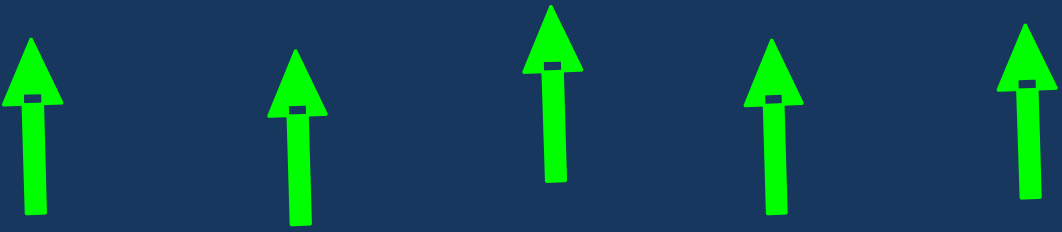
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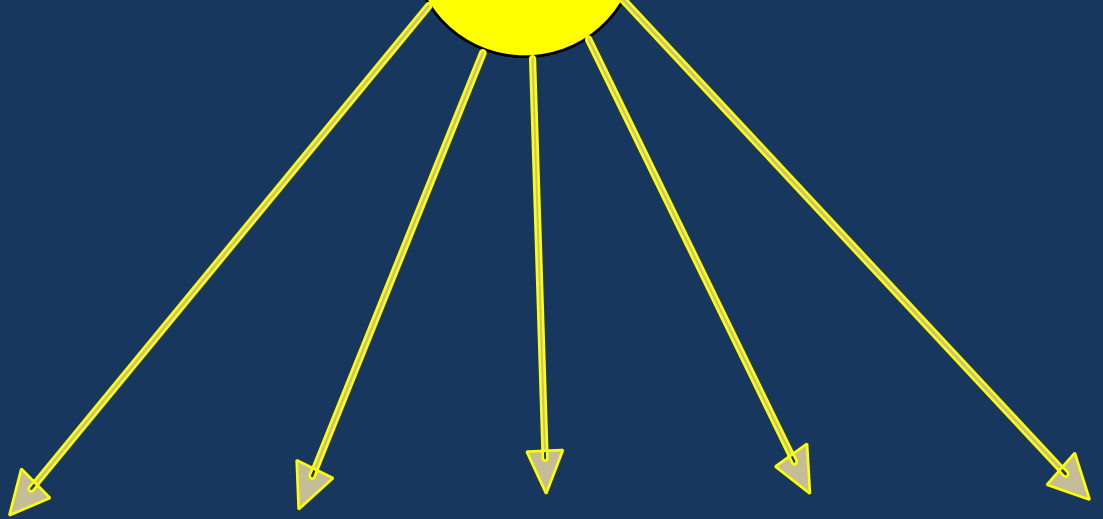
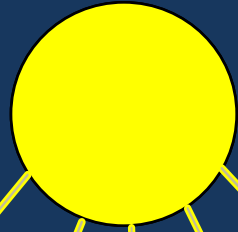
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**Top down** control: regulation & planning

**Bottom-up** creativity:  
innovation in technology & behaviour;  
government role setting the market and legal framework



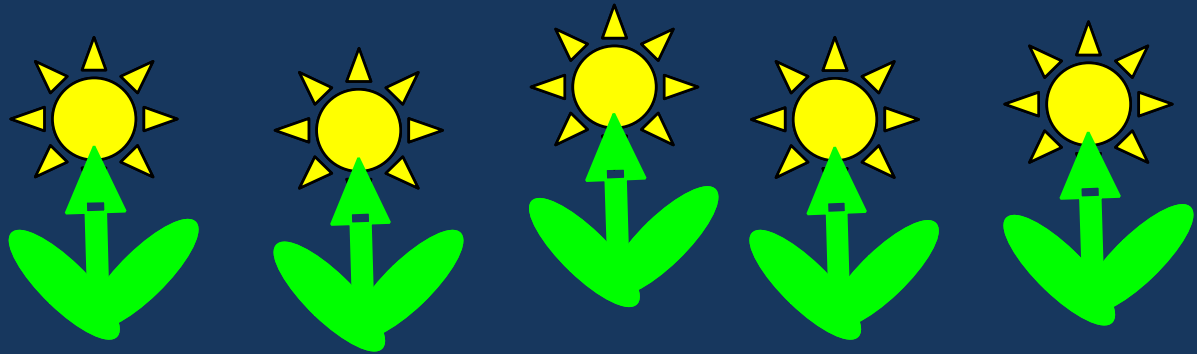
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**Top down** control: regulation & planning

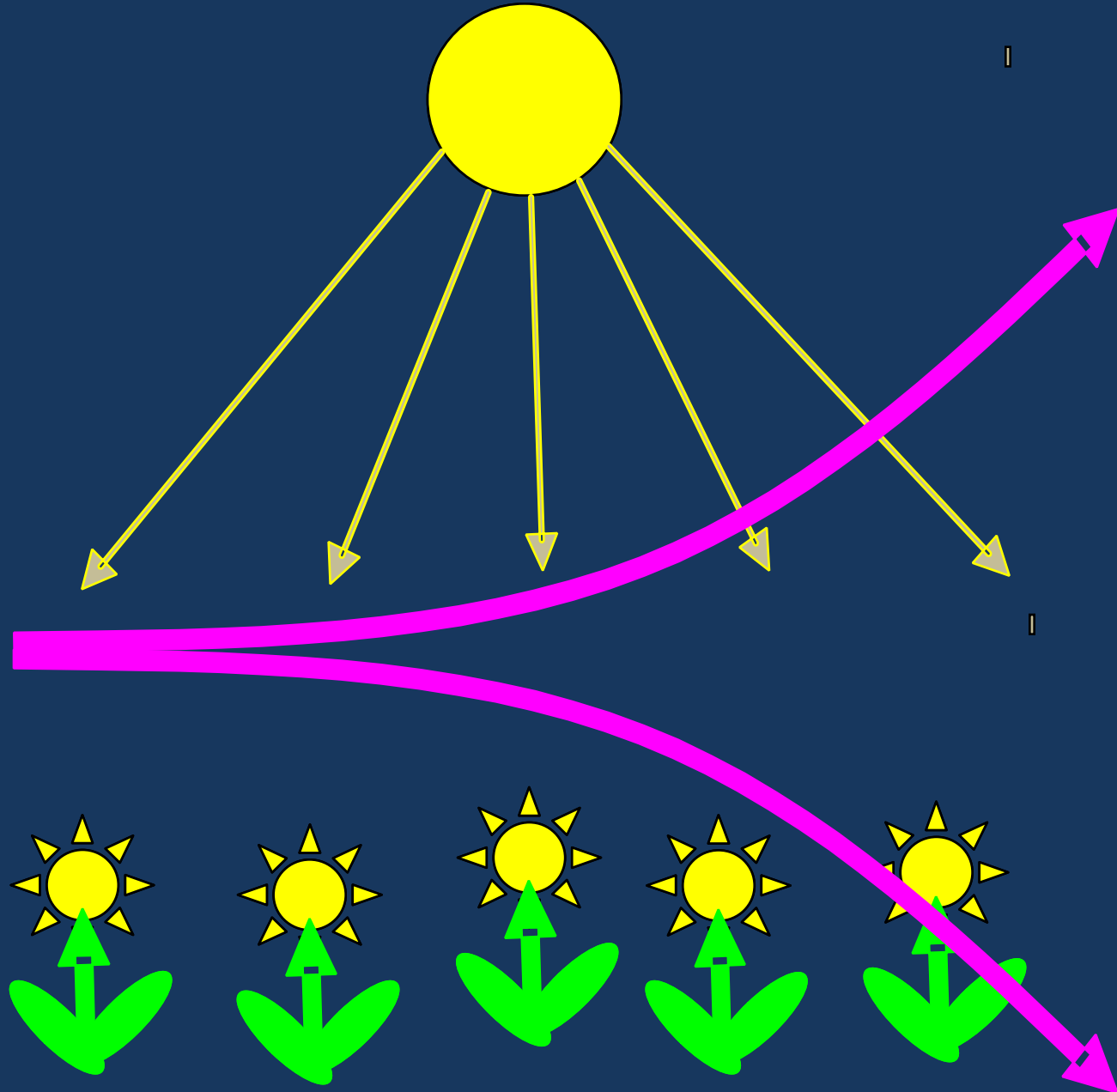
**Bottom-up** creativity:  
innovation in technology & behaviour;  
government role setting the market and legal framework



**Top down** control: regulation & planning

**Awakening** consciousness:  
“we are the change”; individual  
and collective responsibility for  
the problem and the solution

**Bottom-up** creativity:  
innovation in technology &  
behaviour; government role  
setting the market and legal  
framework



# Transforming feelings



# Quaker gifts in the sustainability agenda

- listening spirituality: grounded in experience; answering that of God in the other
- discernment of the greater good: working with difference, finding collective values, visions and pathways
- experience of striving to live according to that discernment: self-change and “wrestling with the angel”

# Living Witness Project experience

80+ Quaker meetings in Britain – national gatherings, local workshops and resources to develop corporate witness

It feels slow and hard but when it works it can bring:

- Low-impact lifestyles: 60-80% cuts in GHG by a few
- Collective action and stronger communities
- Political and social engagement
- Personal enjoyment

# Lessons learned

Most successful groups have:

- inclusive, listening culture, valuing diversity, no “right” approach – everyone is needed.
- shared leadership
- mixture of activities – discussion, learning, action etc.
- action at many levels – own lives, the meeting, community etc.
- regular meetings
- shared food, often on LOAF principles

Best outcomes have come from regular social events setting up and hearing reports from smaller, short-term action groups.

It takes a lot of time and consistent support