



Lucy Siegle
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Lucy Siegle is an accomplished Guardian, Observer and BBC journalist and broadcaster, with a passion for environmental and social justice. She is also the go-to environment expert for Sky News and Good Morning Britain.



World of bright green promise

Listen to the planet (and we should all do this much more) and you'll hear a faint drumbeat. It's a beat that will grow louder over the next two years. Because humanity really has just two years to make good on climate emissions otherwise the great dream of the Paris Climate Accord will evaporate.

The Paris Climate Accord is the globally agreed framework that will allow humanity to decouple growth from greenhouse gas emissions rapidly. (Decoupling, by the way, is a favourite phrase of the modern environmental movement and is just one technical remove away from 'conscious uncoupling').

To my mind the Paris Climate Accord is a very clever piece of architecture indeed. At its core is the threshold that we must all meet to allow the average global temperature to remain below two degrees (some still aim for 1.5 degrees although this seems very optimistic) above pre-industrial levels. This will give us the best chance of facing down catastrophic climate change. In fact I revere the Paris Climate Accord for a number of reasons, not least, because it is able to withstand the flouncing-off of President Donald Trump whose oft-stated commitment to 'beautiful, clean coal' obviously runs counter to humanity's globally agreed objectives, and the security and stability of Planet Earth. As Columbia University Professor Jeffrey Sachs puts it, getting rid of fossil fuels by mid-century and switching to large-scale renewable energy sources, 'much faster, much more dramatically' than political leaders understand is the only way we're going to make it.

But in order to achieve this, the faint drumbeat must grow to a thudding, persistent thunderclap of awareness and

action. As I say, that is happening. I can practically hear the engines warming up on the tarmac as the executive assistants of the climate A-listers, Al Gore, Leonardo DiCaprio and Christiana Figueres book their diaries solid with UN summits and pre-summits.

...we should put the cynicism to one side and jump on board.

Given those jet engines are powered by kerosene (and that aviation emissions are amplified by a phenomenon known as radiative forcing) it's easy to point out the obvious flaws in high profile humans speeding around the world to save the planet. But, at this juncture I think we should put the cynicism to one side and jump on board.

It's not that I haven't done the cynicism myself. To scramble some Joni Mitchell lyrics: over ten years I've written about the environment from both sides, and in front and behind all manner of clouds. I've written about my frustrations that posh environmentalism gave out the message that you have to be minted to be green, and equally railed at the ecological purists who don't own TVs or have any idea about popular culture and therefore what anyone is talking about. They are both as bad as each other.

This is a bums-on-seat scenario. Everybody is not only welcome, but absolutely necessary. As the drumbeat builds we must now enter into a series

of global stocktakes, so we can check in on how we're doing, that will attempt to move forward from the niggling climate action to more central conceit of common responsibility. I concede that 'global responsibility' and 'carbon stocktakes' do not have automatic sex appeal, so it's probably a good thing that so many celebrities are involved as we need some glitz and glamour.

Received wisdom tells us that environmental issues are too hard for the general public to grasp, require too much effort and that there's no appetite to switch from comfortable lives. But recent events suggest that is not necessarily true.

...by 2050 there will be more pieces of plastic in the ocean than fish.

The plastic pandemic gives me hope that we can forge ahead. If it seems odd that any pandemic can pep someone's spirit, least of all one that strangles albatrosses, kills whales and has resulted in plastic fragments infiltrating the entire food chain, let me clarify. The plastic crisis is real and very frightening: by 2050 there will be more pieces of plastic in the ocean than fish. I wish it had not happened obviously. But it has, very much on our watch: between 2002-2012 more plastic was produced than at any other time in history.

...we just couldn't go on littering the ocean with plastic...

But my new book, *Turning the Tide on Plastic* (Trapeze books), published 26 July 2018, follows my own attempts to follow plastic pollution over the last decade. It also charts the type of Great Awakening that followed the broadcast of an episode of *Blue Planet II* in the winter of 2017 that

showed a whale ingesting what looked to be a plastic bucket. The outpouring that followed Attenborough's serious and direct observation that we just couldn't go on littering the ocean with plastic was huge. It confirmed that when David Attenborough speaks, we pay attention but it also showed that the mainstream response to the planet's crisis could be committed and sustained.

Unlike atmospheric gases (the great carbon crisis that is every bit as perilous) it's a little easier to get a grip on plastics for an individual. I have used my own observations developed over 10 years following plastic around from design, to bin, to landfill and to incinerators and recycling facilities to devise a strategy so that we can all get a grip. My strategy is based on 'Record, Replace, Refuse, Refill, Rethink' guide for change. It includes a reappraisal of your bin and an uncoupling from plastic supermarket packaging that is highly conscious. If just 12 people follow it they could ditch up to 15K single items of plastic a year. So the question is, can you influence 12 people? See what I mean about a numbers game? But as significant as delinking lives from plastic, which can be easily done, and preventing any more plastic entering the marine environment (an urgent tactic), is the community action that the plastic pandemic has created. The foreword to my book is by Hugo Tagholm, CEO of Surfers Against

Sewage. A quarter of a century ago this organisation was set up to tackle the very real and literal problem of sewage hitting surfer's boards and making them ill.

But SAS has become an NGO on marine issues with global clout, especially when it comes to plastic. This summer Meghan and Harry selected SAS as one of their wedding list charities, in lieu of gifts. "Plastic is also becoming an extraordinary unifier," writes Tagholm, a veteran of community beach cleans that these days attracts thousands of people across the UK. "The qualities which make it so useful and so problematic make it the pollutant that everyone can see, identify and respond to in their everyday lives. The millions of tonnes that people interact with every day in our shops, restaurants, homes and offices".

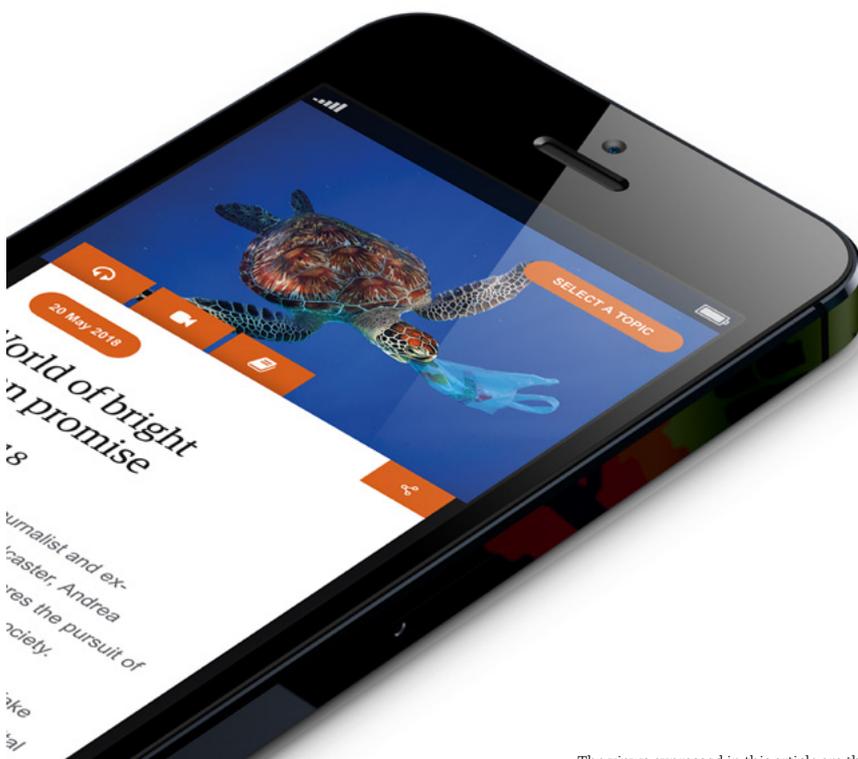
...we can turn the tide on plastic pollution...

I believe we can turn the tide on plastic pollution and end this age of plastic. Furthermore I believe we are going to do it. Can we undo the damage of legacy plastic by scooping it out of the ocean? Probably not, but we can minimise the damage of adding to it and creating a tipping point from which the Earth cannot bounce back. Similarly I believe with 30 years of Earth science data, methodology, systems

modelling and science-led impact studies we can strategise our way to the Paris goals too. Indeed that is what the Climate Accord is for. Some will undoubtedly think this is Pollyanna thinking. As Paul Hawken, the climate expert and writer who has developed *Drawdown – The Most Comprehensive Plan Ever Proposed to Reverse Global Warming* puts it (again I paraphrase), given the scientific data you'd have to be nuts not to be pessimistic. But then you look at the talent and the energy and the signals of change and factor in our ability to adapt, innovate and scale ideas, and it's impossible not to be optimistic.

...we must let the planet set the limits.

We are operating in an 11th hour zone where the stakes could not be higher, and still taking a long time to learn that we must let the planet set the limits. However, within this zone there are clear opportunities. It's confusing yet energising, terrifying yet filled with opportunity. There are rumours that the UK will bid to hold the 2020 UN climate talks – the do-or-die stocktake that will tell us whether we are likely to make it. In which case, expect that drumbeat to get very loud indeed, and I recommend the best course of action is that we all get behind it.



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