

Introduction

This report discusses the effects of climate change on Switzerland to the year 2050. More than 100 experts from the most varied fields were involved. Their wide range of knowledge was collected, discussed and brought together in numerous workshops and meetings.

A regional climate scenario forms the basis of the report and is discussed in the Background chapter. Based on this, the report discusses the impacts of climate change on land ecosystems, agriculture, water management, health, the energy sector, tourism, buildings and infrastructure, urban Switzerland and insurance. These topics are not treated exhaustively; rather an attempt is made to estimate the climate-induced changes we can expect based on current knowledge, to assess their severity and to determine what kind of decisions must be taken in order to adapt to the changes.

The year 2050 was chosen because at that time, all the global climate scenarios proposed by the IPCC show a distinct warming but are still relatively close together. This allows us to discuss the effects of climate change without distinguishing between the different scenarios. Then again, many readers will live to see the effects of climate change described in this report. 2050 therefore has the advantage that we cannot shirk our responsibility and leave the solution of the problem to the next generation, as would be possible in the case of a long-term scenario for 2100.

In 2050, the effects of climate change will be superimposed by socio-economic and political changes that are almost impossible to estimate. In order to make clear the difficulties and uncertainties associated with this, it may suffice to think about how a person in the year 1950 would have pictured life in our country today. Many developments that have taken place within the past 50 years were not foreseeable – consider the progress in gene technology or the spread of computers. In spite of this difficulty, it is important to look ahead and to try to recognise important

climatic changes in good time. Climate change is a very slow process, the negative effects of which will be discernible over many decades or even centuries. Forward-looking actions are in the interests of humankind.

The report shows that Switzerland is in a favourable situation in many areas and that the effects will still be relatively small by 2050. This should not lead us to take climate change lightly, since the year 2050 is only a short phase in a long-term development, which will speed up and bring about many, much greater changes. Moreover, many countries will be hit much harder by the consequences than Switzerland. The authors of this report are convinced that constraining greenhouse gas concentrations through systematic climate policy represents the simplest and most effective possibility to limit the damage and adaptation costs due to climate change nationally and abroad.

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Roland Hohmann



Projektleiter, OcCC, Bern