

## **Trump walks away from Paris climate agreement. Should we be blaming Greenpeace?**

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**Shortly after President Trump was inaugurated, Greenpeace won headlines and a global thumbs-up for hanging a massive banner saying 'Resist' from a crane close to the White House. Which is ironic, since over the previous twenty years, Greenpeace unwittingly created the conditions that enabled Trump's most dramatic anti-environmental decision to date: reversing America's participation in the 2015 Paris climate change agreement.**

Since 1997 Greenpeace has been running an anti-GMO campaign in Europe and other parts of the world that has been mirrored almost play for play by climate sceptics in the United States. Greenpeace and its allies showed American climate sceptics that it was acceptable, and more importantly effective, to cast doubt on consensus science, to cite fringe science, however flaky, as the "truth" that "mainstream scientists want to suppress", to harass academics who publicly disagree with you, to attack and undermine regulatory agencies that won't reach your conclusions, and if all else fails, to use blatant nationalism and protectionism to attract populist supporters (GMOs are American "poisons" destroying Europe's food culture, climate pacts are European/Chinese "plots" destroying America's economy).

Greenpeace has persisted in making nebulous and scientifically unsubstantiated claims against GMOs for nearly twenty years (in the last two years our data shows that it has greatly scaled back campaigning against GMOs, refocusing instead on its original *bête-noire*, pesticides, and glyphosate in particular). In Europe, which in the late nineties was still recovering from the food safety disaster of Mad Cow Disease, Greenpeace's campaign was singularly effective at turning politicians of all ideologies against biotech and thus preventing GMOs from ever being seriously cultivated in the EU zone.

Today, in Donald Trump, a climate sceptic not by reason but by political expediency, we have the apotheosis of Greenpeace's GMO campaigning strategy gone bad. Greenpeace and its allies are wasting their breath trying to convince him and US politicians that they should follow the scientific consensus on climate, while reserving the right to do the exact opposite on GMOs. The very fact that European politicians have aligned with Greenpeace against GMOs and other American-originated agricultural technologies has made any policy reversal almost impossible. Why should America listen to Europe on climate when Europe refuses to listen to America on agriculture?

In fact there is an additional irony here, since Greenpeace never had to invoke 'alternative science' to fight GMOs. Its anti-GM campaign was conceived out of a perfectly legitimate concern, that GMOs and patented seeds would create global monopolies over agricultural innovation and bolster the power of chemical and pesticide companies. However when these arguments failed to get much traction from the public or the media, Greenpeace rapidly retooled its messaging to focus on "protecting" consumers from "unsafe - (Greenpeace to fill in the details later)" novel foods.

In responsive countries like Germany, this approach not only boosted Greenpeace's reputation, it filled its coffers. The high profile anti-biotech campaign played a major part in increasing Greenpeace Deutschland's annual income to over EUR50m and expanding its paying membership to over half a million, making it one of the three largest environmental campaigning NGOs in Germany.

One would like to think that Greenpeace was not cynically pushing food scares merely to boost its income. But if it was, one has to ask if the price, in terms of Trump's disavowal of the Paris agreement, was worth it.