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Letter to the Editor of „NATURE“, 1992

Printed in:

NATURE

Volume 360, 26 November 1992, page 292 **Letter to the Editor**

Climate change

SIR – The Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro and the earlier struggle for a Convention on Climate Change may serve as a reminder that the 1982 Convention on the Law of the Sea has its tenth anniversary on 10 December. It is not only one of the most comprehensive and strongest international treaties ever negotiated but the best possible legal means to protect the global climate. But sadly, there has been little interest in using it for this purpose. For too long, climate has been defined as the average weather and Rio was not able to define it at all. Instead, the Climate Change Convention uses the term ‘climate system’, defining it as “the totality of the atmosphere, hydrosphere, biosphere and geosphere and their interactions”. All that this boils down to is ‘the interactions of the natural system’. What is the point of a legal term if it explains nothing? For decades, the real question has been who is responsible for the climate. Climate should have been defined as ‘the continuation of the oceans by other means’. Thus, the 1982 Convention could long since have been used to protect the climate. After all, it is the most powerful tool with which to force politicians and the community of states into actions.

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