

2024 Tyler Prize Goes to Johan Rockström for Environmental Work

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It is our pleasure to announce that long-time IIASA collaborator and Director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK), Johan Rockström, will receive the 2024 Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement.

Established in 1973, the Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement recognizes global leaders in environment and sustainability. Often called the "Nobel Prize for the Environment", past winners include Jane Goodall, Michael Mann, Daniel Pauly, and Gretchen Daily, among others.

Rockström will receive the award for his work in sustainable development and the influential Planetary Boundaries framework, which he continues to develop with colleagues from around the world, including several IIASA researchers. The framework, first introduced in 2009, identifies nine critical systems supporting human life on Earth, such as clean water, stable climate, and biodiversity. The research indicates that humanity has exceeded safe limits in six of these nine boundaries, posing significant risks to Earth's life-support systems.

Transgressing too many Planetary Boundaries could, according to Rockström, risk "reaching tipping points that will undermine the Earth's life-support systems." The science of tipping points is at the heart of his work as it is a key metric used to determine safe Planetary

Boundaries.

"Push the Earth system too far and we risk that critical biological and physical systems, like forests and ice sheets, cross a tipping point, fundamentally shifting their state and functions," Rockström said in a statement on the Tyler Prize's website. "Systems that can tip between different states and regulate the environmental conditions on Earth are dominated by feedbacks that buffer and dampen stress from global warming. Push them too far and they cross tipping points, making them shift from dampening to self-reinforcing, from cooling to warming. This is a serious concern. Crossing enough tipping points would risk irreversibly shifting the planet from a place that supports humanity as we know it to a state that no longer helps us."

The Planetary Boundaries framework has catapulted Rockström's scientific work into the public sphere and impacted public policy, being used to support the European Union's legal instruments and included in United Nations official documents. Several of his online talks have gone viral, generating millions of views and helping shape public discourse on environmental stewardship.

"This recognition bestowed upon Johan Rockström is well-deserved. His tireless efforts have been pivotal to illuminating the sobering reality that we have already transgressed six of the nine Planetary Boundaries, underscoring the pressing need for immediate corrective action. We congratulate him on receiving this prestigious prize and look forward to continued collaboration on this and other important topics in the future," notes IIASA Director General John Schellnhuber.

Rockström will deliver a public presentation on his work at the University of Potsdam in Germany on 17 May 2024, where the prize will also officially be awarded.

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