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Summer ice is melting at a faster rate in the Antarctic peninsula than at any time in the last 1,000 years, [new research](http://www.nature.com/ngeo/journal/vaop/ncurrent/abs/ngeo1787.html) has shown.

The evidence comes from a 364-metre ice core containing a record of freezing and melting over the previous millennium.

Lead researcher Dr Nerilie Abram, from the Australian National University and British Antarctic Survey (BAS), said: "We found that the coolest conditions on the Antarctic peninsula and the lowest amount of summer melt occurred around 600 years ago.

"Summer melting at the ice core site today is now at a level that is higher than at any other time over the last 1,000 years. And while temperatures at this site increased gradually in phases over many hundreds of years, most of the intensification of melting has happened since the mid-20th century."

Levels of ice melt on the Antarctic peninsula were especially sensitive to rising temperature during the last century, he said.

"What that means is that the Antarctic peninsula has warmed to a level where even small increases in temperature can now lead to a big increase in summer melt," Abram added.

The ice core record suggested a link between accelerated melting and man-made global warming. But a different and more complex picture has emerged from another region of [Antarctica](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/antarctica%22%20%5Co%20%22More%20from%20guardian.co.uk%20on%20Antarctica).

A separate US study, published in the same journal, shows that thinning ice from the West Antarctic Ice Sheet Divide cannot confidently be blamed on greenhouse gas emissions.

An ice core record from this site indicates a strong influence from unusual conditions in the tropical Pacific during the 1990s.

In that decade, an El Niño event – a cyclical system of winds and ocean currents that can affect the world's weather – caused rapid thinning of glaciers in the West Antarctic.