

E-news update June 18 2007

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CLIMATE

- 1.1. U.N. Bali meeting should map out new climate treaty

15 June 2007, Reuters

Environment officials from 28 nations meeting in Sweden agreed on Thursday that December's United Nations climate conference should be used to craft a firm timetable for talks on a pact to replace the Kyoto agreement.

Swedish Environment Minister Andreas Carlgren said delegates were united in saying rich nations must lead the fight against greenhouse gases blamed for global warming while encouraging poorer ones to adopt achievable, voluntary targets.

"We should create stimulus for a future climate strategy, for them (developing countries) to really be able to do measurable and reportable emission cuts," he said by video link from the meeting.

The world's eight richest nations agreed earlier this month to make substantial cuts in emissions and to work to clinch a new deal to fight global warming by 2009. The Kyoto pact on greenhouse emissions expires in 2012.

The Kyoto protocol obliges 35 rich nations to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 5 percent below 1990 levels by 2008-12. Nations concerned about climate change are working to find a replacement deal for the post-2012 era.

The U.N.-led Bali meeting should be the first step toward a new agreement, delegates agreed.

Carlgren said officials agreed the Bali conference "should establish a Road Map with a timetable and concrete steps for the negotiations with a view to reaching an agreement by 2009."

Delegates at the Swedish meeting said the G8 summit in the German resort of Heiligendamm constituted a breakthrough because it had successfully aligned the United States -- the world's biggest polluter and a Kyoto opponent -- more closely into global efforts to curb emissions.

1.2. Climate change: A burning topic

Michael Zammit Cutajar

Climate change is in the news this year. Propelled by scientific evidence, the topic has risen in political geography from technocratic lowlands to presidential summits. Owing to its projected implications for the economy, energy, food production, water supplies, natural disasters and migration from climate-stressed regions, it has become a factor of national and global security.

Climate change is a fact. It results from the accumulation in the atmosphere of "greenhouse gases" (GHGs) produced by human activity, notably carbon dioxide (CO₂) emitted by burning fossil fuels - coal, oil and gas - and by deforestation. These emissions are raising global mean surface temperature above normal and destabilising our climate, compared to historic trends over millennia. The evidence is unequivocal. The debate is about what to do, when and by whom.

There are three main trends in the debate among governments:

The European Union urgently seeks multilateral agreement, in a United Nations framework, on targets and timetables to limit and reduce GHG emissions, with timeframes to 2020 and 2050 and a global warming limit of 2°C.

The US Administration prefers voluntary partnerships among selected major economies, focusing on technological development while eschewing quantified emission limits. (Meanwhile, encouraged by initiatives from states, cities and corporations, Congress is considering approaches to a Federal law that would cap and reduce national emissions - for approval by the next President, if not by the incumbent.)

The emerging giants - notably Brazil, China and India - pursue emission limitation in the context of poverty reduction and insist on the primary responsibility of the rich countries to redress the atmospheric imbalance caused by their historical growth.

This diversity will colour next week's summit in Germany of the G8+5 - eight economic powers of the industrialised world plus five developing counterparts - that will try to forge common positions to advance a global climate strategy. Tensions have been rising. Will there be a positive result at all? Will the interest of departing leaders in enriching their political legacies produce a "quick and dirty" deal? Or will those with longer political life expectancy hold out for a better outcome when new players come to the table?

Before and after this summit, there will be no shortage of headlines, opinions and arguments about climate change. What pointers can help to interpret them?

1. Doomsday scenarios do not help. The impacts of warming unfold gradually over time, modifying patterns of temperature, rainfall and drought and raising sea levels, even though some effects can be fierce (like stronger hurricanes) and others may become irreversible (say, melting of glaciers and ice caps). These changes, however, are happening faster than foreseen. They justify effective preventive action in the next two or three decades.

2. Such action must be integrated in national development perspectives. All countries must assess the impact of climate change - negative or positive - on their welfare and development prospects, review their changing priorities and prepare for adaptation to change. All can look for win-win combinations of climate and development policies (like, say, use of climate-friendly energy results in cleaner air), (In Malta, for example, the likelihood of less rainfall and of contamination of the aquifer by rising sea level must put a new drive behind an effective water policy that will cut distribution losses, reduce stormwater run-off, re-use treated waste water, and fight water theft. The win-win: Serious promotion of wind and solar power will limit imports of energy for desalination.)

3. A strategy to contain global warming must address the power generation and transport sectors, improving economy and efficiency in the use of fossil fuels and boosting the share of renewable energy sources (hydro, wind, solar, bio-fuels and nuclear in the right conditions). Nevertheless, since coal - the "dirtiest" fuel - will remain a principal energy source for the US, China and India, among others, technologies to "clean" coal must be put on a fast track. Reducing deforestation emissions is also important.

4. It is estimated that it will cost less globally for us to invest now to protect the climate than to leave others to clean up our mess later in the century. Prevention is better than cure.

In the end, a global strategy to contain the growth of GHG emissions must be both effective and fair, and on both counts inclusive. The countries that are now on top of the world economy produced the bulk of historical emissions getting there, the US in the lead. These countries have accepted the political responsibility to lead the response; the US must take its rightful place at their head.

But the countries that are now climbing the economic ladder will account for the bulk of future emissions. China's current emissions will soon overtake those of the US. These countries are

responsible for managing the future. Without their commitment, motivated by substantial transfers of capital and technology, effective and fair global action will remain out of reach.

1.3. Emissions fell slightly in the EU during '05

13 June 2007, IHT

Greenhouse gas emissions from the European Union dropped slightly in 2005, the latest year for which full data is available, the European Environment Agency is reporting.

It was the first drop since 2001. But officials were quick to say that they were unsure whether the data, being published Thursday, reflected a turnaround brought about by new legislation and heightened environmental consciousness, or was a random variation.

There were wide fluctuations reported, with big drops in Finland and Germany masking increases in many other nations, especially Spain and Lithuania.

Over all, emissions are a bit lower than in 1990, and about equal to the levels of 1992. At this rate, progress is not nearly sufficient to meet the goals set by the Kyoto Protocol or the European Commission.

"This is a good step, but if you look at the absolute levels, we're where we were in 1992, so you have to put this in context," said Andreas Barkman, the report's coordinator, who works for the European Environment Agency in Copenhagen. "We will need to see changes of at least this magnitude sustained for the next few years to meet European emissions targets."

Under the Kyoto Protocol, the countries then belonging to the European Union committed to reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 8 percent over the levels of 1990. So far, emissions are down about 1.5 percent over 1990 levels in the original 15 EU countries, the report said.

Beyond Kyoto, the EU has established a goal for member states of reducing emissions 20 percent by the year 2020.

According to the new report, the 15 original members of the EU reduced emissions by eight-tenths of a percentage point between 2004 and 2005. The tally was seven-tenths of a point if new member states were included. This data is part of the annual greenhouse gas inventory report of the European Community submitted to the United Nations as part of the international efforts to track climate change.

Finland decreased emissions by 14.9 percent and Germany by 2.3 percent, the report found, putting 11.9 and 23.5 fewer tons of CO₂ into the air, respectively. In both cases, much of the reduction was obtained by switching from coal-burning power plants to cleaner energy sources.

At the other end of the spectrum, the report said, emissions rose in Austria, Greece, Italy, Ireland, Portugal and Spain. Spain had the worst increase of the Western European states, 3.6 percent. But Lithuania topped the overall list with an annual increase of 7.2 per cent.

"To me these figures - even those in Germany - say that a lot more needs to be done," said Antje Von Broock, who campaigns for international environment policy at Friends of the Earth Germany, in Berlin. "We need to show the world that industrialized countries are willing to contribute to the effort."

She noted that Sigmar Gabriel, the German environment minister, has proposed reducing German emissions by 40 percent over 1990 levels by 2020, a goal that will take aggressive action. But, she complained, Germany still has plans to build new coal power plants and the German auto industry is not meeting voluntary EU standards for greater engine efficiency.

Many of the countries that still have rising emissions, including Spain and Ireland, have enjoyed rapid economic development in the last decade, with increasing industrialization and living standards, Barkman said. That has meant an increase in suburban living as well as more car use, both of which promote large jumps in greenhouse gas emission, studies have shown.

While encouraged by the new report, experts are unsure whether the drop will be sustained.

In many countries, like Germany and the United Kingdom, a big drop was noted in emissions from households and services - 7 million tons less across the EU. But that might simply reflect a mild winter that year, so that less energy was needed for heating.

Many of the statistics in the report had to be interpreted cautiously, experts said.

For example, the report notes that emissions in the expanded 27-nation EU are down by 7.9 percent compared with 1990. But much of that reduction occurred more than a decade ago when economic collapse in the former Eastern Bloc countries resulted in massive factory closure. Now that countries like Lithuania and Slovenia are gaining economic clout, emissions are rebounding.

Also, the latest statistics do not include airplane emissions on international flights that leave the EU. Air travel is the fastest-growing source of greenhouse gas emissions.

"It is difficult to say that we're at a turning point," Barkman said. "And it's clear that the European Union has to step up emissions reduction, to meet its long-term targets."

1.4. EU still not on track to meet Kyoto targets

14 June 2007, Friends of the Earth Europe

New emissions data shows EU must drastically step up climate change efforts.

Friends of the Earth Europe has demanded an urgent acceleration of action to fight climate change by European governments, after new data released by the European Commission today reveals that overall EU emissions are still not on track to meet Kyoto targets.

EU emissions slightly decreased in 2005 relative to the previous year, by 0.7 percent – the first decrease since 2001. But in 2005, the combined EU-15 emissions were still only 1.5 percent below 1990 levels, meaning that the EU-15 is not on course to meet its international Kyoto Protocol obligations to cut greenhouse gas pollution by 8 percent by 2012.

Spain, Luxembourg, Austria, Portugal, Italy and Ireland are still furthest from their Kyoto emissions targets.

Sonja Meister, Climate Campaigner at Friends of the Europe said:

"The new data clearly shows that the EU is still way off course to meet its Kyoto target. The slight drop in emissions in 2005 is a decrease over only one year and is by no means a trend yet. European governments have to seriously increase their efforts to combat climate change, with drastic measures now to set the EU's emissions on a downward path into the long term."

The slight reduction in emissions in 2005 was mainly due to large emissions reductions from Germany, Finland and the Netherlands, which masked increases in many other countries, like Spain and Lithuania. The reduction in Germany and Finland results partly from a shift from coal to cleaner energy sources in the production of public electricity. But at the same time, Friends of the Earth Europe highlights that the decrease in household emissions in Germany and also the Netherlands could be a result of warmer weather conditions, especially since these countries experienced particularly warm winters in 2005.

"Several EU countries are still emitting more greenhouse gases than they did in 1990 or even increased their emissions from 2004 to 2005. The EU keeps on saying that it cares about climate change, but the overall data shows that this is not kicking yet," Sonja Meister added.

ENERGY

2.1. Nuclear Power Can't Curb Global Warming – Report

18 June 2007, Planet Ark Reuters

Nuclear power would only curb climate change by expanding worldwide at the rate it grew from 1981 to 1990, its busiest decade, and keep up that rate for half a century, a report said on Thursday.

Specifically, that would require adding on average 14 plants each year for the next 50 years, all the while building an average of 7.4 plants to replace those that will be retired, the report by environmental leaders, industry executives and academics said.

Currently, the United States, the world's top nuclear power producer, has 104 plants that generate 20 percent of the country's electricity.

Nuclear power, which has near-zero emissions of carbon dioxide, has recently come back into fashion as an alternative to generating electricity from coal and other carbon-based sources that contribute to global warming.

While the report also supported storing US nuclear waste at power plants until the long-stalled Yucca Mountain repository opens, 10 dumps the size of Yucca Mountain would be needed to store the extra generated waste by the needed nuclear generation boom.

That outlook was too optimistic in light of how many new nuclear plants are currently on the drawing board, the report said.

The needed rate of expansion would be faster than during the industry's first 40 years and than the Energy Information Administration's forecast for the next 30 years in the United States.

Some individuals differed, though, on how much the industry will expand, and said it could still make some type of impact.

Twenty-seven individuals from organizations spanning a broad ideological spectrum, including the Natural Resources Defense Council and GE Energy, spent nine months on the report, called "The Nuclear Power Joint Fact-Finding."

The group, which was brought together by the nonprofit Keystone Center, said that as companies limit generating electricity from coal and other fossil fuels, there will be more financial incentives to build nuclear power plants.

Spreading nuclear arms

The Keystone panelists also said that President George W. Bush's Global Nuclear Energy Partnership could help countries and groups interested in building nuclear weapons obtain plutonium, the key ingredient in those munitions, which could help spread nuclear weapons.

While the Union of Concerned Scientists, a nonprofit organization of scientists focused on the environment and security, had trouble with most of the report, it agreed with assertions on GNEP.

"By promoting the commercial production and use of plutonium, the Bush administration is facilitating the spread of nuclear bomb materials around the world," said Edwin Lyman, a scientist working on security issues for the group.

2.2. Cogeneration on the rise

14 June 2007, COGEN Challenge

COGEN Challenge Achieves an Important Milestone - 500 Cogeneration Units from 19 European Countries Registered.

As the 500th cogeneration unit is registered in the on-line database, the COGEN Challenge project team claims that cogeneration in Europe is more reliable and widely applied than previously assumed. The use of small-scale cogeneration in homes, swimming pools and hotels is better accepted than people may think. Policy-makers should therefore be more confident in the promotion of cogeneration and include it as a central part of their energy planning.

COGEN Challenge is the European information campaign on small-scale cogeneration. The project, which is financed by the Intelligent Energy Programme of the European Union, aims to have a database of 1,000 existing small-scale cogeneration units (<1MWe) by the end of 2007. In addition, the project partners offer guidance with the development of small-scale cogeneration projects through a complete set of tools and support materials.

The 500th installation to register with COGEN Challenge is a new small-scale cogeneration plant in Liège (Belgium). Verlac, the host company, needs both the electricity and the heat from the 50kWe for the production of plastic covers for brochures and magazines. The installation runs on rapeseed oil and receives a bonus of 150 Euros for each MWh of electricity, based on the green certificates mechanism in place in Wallonia - instead of about 30 Euros for a cogeneration system running on natural gas. In addition the micro-cogeneration saves 156,000 kilograms of CO2 emissions per year.

"Cogeneration is a very efficient way to produce energy", COGEN Challenge project manager Stefan Craenen points out. "If you generate electricity and heat together the primary energy is used to the fullest. In the current move towards energy efficiency and CO2 reduction, cogeneration is a mature technology which can contribute significantly to EU aims to cut greenhouse gas emissions by at least 20 percent until 2020. On the basis of the findings of COGEN Challenge the EU should be more assertive in promoting and accelerating its pro-cogeneration policy."

2.3. A calculator to help save the planet

17 June 2007, The Observer

Official website will tell us how much carbon dioxide we are each producing and how to cut it.

An official calculator that enables every person in Britain to work out how much they are contributing to global warming will be launched by the government this week.

The special website will calculate how people's home heating, appliances and personal transport add to the carbon emissions blamed for causing climate change.

The calculator, conceived by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), will allow people to work out how much carbon they produce at home, when driving and when flying. Questions range from whether homes are insulated to how they dry their clothes and how much water people put in their kettle for a cup of tea.

Users will be able to compare their results to the UK average, and then be given 'tailored' advice about how to reduce their energy use and emissions.

Other organisations already publish similar tools on the internet, but new research for Defra has revealed widespread public confusion about whether and how they can help tackle climate change. The poll of more than 3,000 adults, conducted by ICM Research, found that two thirds of people believe climate change is entirely or mainly a result of human behaviour, but only one in five correctly named carbon dioxide as the main problem, and nearly one in 10 said they could have no influence on limiting the damage.

There was also uncertainty about what were the best things to do to cut carbon emissions - half said they should recycle more, one-third suggested driving less and only four per cent thought they should fly less often. Ministers hope a more detailed calculator and personalised recommendations will help to rectify such uncertainty.

'Just as people are increasingly looking for advice in areas of their life like fitness, diet or lifestyle, we need to give them this support in reducing their carbon footprint,' said David Miliband, the Environment Secretary. 'I hope that in time it will come to be seen as the gold standard for carbon calculators.'

Environment campaigners will welcome any move to encourage people to think about reducing energy use, but there is likely to be some concern about how many areas of life are omitted from the calculations. These include food consumption, public transport and the overall share of emissions generated by public services - from street lights to schools and health care to military spending.

The UK average 'carbon footprint' for the activities covered by the calculator is 4.48 tonnes of CO₂, a little under half of each person's actual share of the national total.

Martyn Williams, a climate change campaigner for Friends of the Earth, warned that carbon calculators should not be used to suggest that individuals should bear the brunt of changes. 'They have a tendency to focus on what people can do and they do, to some extent, let the government off the hook,' he said. 'For many things people want to do it's hard unless, for example, government has got a good public transport system.'

James Smith, Shell UK's chairman, says the next 18 months are critical to getting international agreements in place to reduce carbon emissions. Smith told The Observer: '[For] physically slowing the increase in emissions, stopping the increase and reducing emissions, we have got eight or 10 or 15 years - there's a variety of opinions but not terribly long. But in order for that to happen there's a lot of policy to put in place.'

'A momentum has been built up - it's so important we get that momentum maintained over the next 18 months or so.'

Smith said Shell wanted an international agreement on how much emissions would be cut by, an international carbon trading system, public funding for new technology, and regulations to set standards for everything from vehicle emissions to building design.

CONFERENCES

3.1. Mobilising the energy saving potentials in local authorities - How to put into practice energy efficiency services

20 June 2007 in Brussels

More info: http://www.fedarene.org/events/Fedarene_events/2007-06-20/home.htm.

3.2. Espace - Planning in a Changing Climate

29 June 2007 in London

More info: <http://www.espace-project.org/publications/final%20conference/invitationv4.pdf>.

3.3. IEW meeting 2007

25-27 June 2007 at Stanford University in Stanford, California

More at http://www.iiasa.ac.at/Research/ECS/IEW2007/index_1stannouncement.html.

3.4. Energy for a Clean Environment

2 - 4 July 2007 in Póvoa de Varzim, Portugal

More info: <http://rgesd.ist.utl.pt/cleanair>.

3.5. "Adapting to Climate Change - Launching a public debate on options for EU Action"
3 July 2007 in Brussels.

To register for this event, please go to: <https://www.synergyregistrations.com/registrations/eccp>.

3.6. Scientific framework of environmental and forest governance -- The role of discourses and expertise

27 and 28 August 2007 in Goettingen, Germany

Further information at: <http://www.iufro.org/science/divisions/division-6/60000/61200/61202/activities/> or <http://www.iufro.org/download/file/1648/3058/goettingen07-call-for-paper.doc>.

3.7. COP 13, COP/MOP3

Venue of the thirteenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 13) and the third session of the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP 3) Nusa Dua, Bali, 3 to 14 December 2007.

The Bureau of the UNFCCC met on Tuesday, 13 February 2007 and decided to accept with gratitude the offer by the Government of Indonesia to host COP 13 and COP/MOP 3 at the Bali International Conference Centre and the adjacent facilities and services in Nusa Dua.

The Bureau requested the secretariat to complete the corresponding host country agreement with Indonesia in time for the sessions of the Subsidiary Bodies in May 2007.

Further information on the Conference will appear on the UNFCCC website.

PUBLICATIONS

4.1. Annual European Community greenhouse gas inventory 1990-2005 and inventory report 2007

Technical report No 7/2007: This report is the annual submission of the greenhouse gas inventory of the European Community to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. It presents greenhouse gas emissions between 1990 and 2005 by individual Member State and by economic sector. The report shows that between 2004 and 2005 emissions in the 15 pre-2004 Member States decreased by 35.2 million tonnes or 0.8% and total EU-27 emissions decreased by 0.7%. EU-15 emissions in 2005 were 2% below base year levels under the Kyoto Protocol and EU-27 emissions were 7.9% below 1990 levels.

More at: http://reports.eea.europa.eu/technical_report_2007_7/en.

4.2. Emission Impossible: access to JI/CDM credits in phase II of the EU Emissions Trading Scheme

WWF UK released a report on access to JI/CDM credits in phase II of the EU ETS. Report can be downloaded at: http://assets.panda.org/downloads/emission_impossible_final.pdf.

ANNOUNCEMENT

5.1. E-mail action: Tell the EU to make cars more fuel-efficient!

Making cars more fuel-efficient is one of the best ways to cut carbon emissions from transport.

Key decisions on improving fuel efficiency are taken by the EU, which is currently asking for your opinion on its policy. Car manufacturers have failed to meet their self-imposed targets to improve fuel efficiency and reduce CO2 emissions. The EU has proposed to make its 12 year old targets mandatory for the year 2012.

Car manufacturers strongly oppose this deadline for mandatory standards.

The EU's proposal that biofuels and better air conditioning should be included in these standards reduces what car makers need to achieve on fuel efficiency and reflect the result of their earlier lobbying against the original target of 120gCO2/km in 2012. As they use to do when obligations to adapt car technology for environmental or safety reasons are being proposed, the car lobby speaks of intolerably high compliance costs. Remember the introduction of the 3-way catalyst? It was said to

