

E-news update June 4 2007

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CLIMATE POLICY

- 1.1. Bush is moving. G8 must push him further
3 June 2007, The Observer

George W Bush's announcement last week that he wants to convene a global summit on climate change would have been laudable had it come earlier in his presidency. Much earlier. His stated goal of setting fixed targets for reducing carbon-dioxide emissions might have looked like leadership, were it not for the awkward fact that most of the world's developed nations already have targets. That is because, unlike the US, they signed the 1996 Kyoto Protocol.

What is more, the leading developed nations already have a summit. Leaders of the G8 are meeting this week to discuss, among other things, implementing a more stringent regime of emissions cuts. Kyoto expires in five years' time and Germany, which is chairing the G8 summit, wants a new commitment to a 50 per cent reduction in carbon dioxide by 2050.

This raises one obvious question. If the stage is already set, if all of the key players, including the new generation of polluters from the developing world such as China, India and Brazil, have been invited, and if all are ready to do a deal now, why wait? What need is there for Mr Bush's alternative summit?

The answer lies in the Bush administration's scorn for any international agreement that is not brokered by the US. The White House despises Kyoto not because the deal itself has flaws (although it has many), but because it originates from the United Nations, which the White House tends to see as a conspiracy against American power. Since the US is the world's biggest polluter, any deal to cut emissions will put disproportionate pressure on Washington. So if Mr Bush is going to be seen to acquiesce to anything, for face-saving reasons he needs it to be something ostensibly American in origin.

Fortunately, there are now domestic US forces pushing for action on climate change. Public opinion was way ahead of President Bush in accepting the scientific evidence that the planet is in peril. Several US states, most notably California, have responded by taking measures of their own to curb emissions. That, in turn, has led US business, anticipating ever more stringent controls, to stop lobbying for climate-change denial and start investing in alternative energy. Demand for green technology is growing. Agile American capitalists do not need to be motivated by ecological principle to get into that market.

But it is not enough for there to be incentives to go green. Continuing to pollute must be made onerously costly.

That means a tax on emissions. Existing carbon-trading schemes, by which high-polluting companies buy the right to emit carbon dioxide from more virtuous rivals, have only limited effect and often have perverse, unintended consequences. They can, for example, encourage companies to pollute intensively when the price for emissions permits happens to be low. They also encourage big, rich energy companies to buy excess permits, regardless of their carbon output, betting that, over time, the price will go up and they can sell them to small businesses at a profit. The effect that has on reducing carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is minimal.

But if there's one thing Mr Bush resists more than submitting to UN authority, it is taxing big energy companies.

That doesn't mean that the rest of the G8 should snub the US President and reject his alternative summit. The G8 is a talking shop. Its members sign memoranda, not treaties.

This week presents an opportunity to turn Mr Bush's newfound interest in climate change into a commitment to do something about it soon. That is better than confirming his fear that environmental talks are just an excuse to vilify America.

Mr Bush may want to claim he is taking the lead in fighting global warming, when in fact he is playing catch-up. It is a pretence that can be indulged. At least he acknowledges that it is time to act.

1.2. Bush kills off hopes for G8 climate change plan

Bush kills off hopes for G8 climate plan. US recognises global warming danger but wants to lead response outside UN.

1 June 2007, The Guardian

George Bush yesterday threw international efforts to control climate change into confusion with a proposal to create a "new global framework" to curb greenhouse gas emissions as an alternative to a planned UN process.

The proposal came less than a week before a G8 summit in Germany and appeared to hit European hopes that the world's industrialised nations would commit to halving their emissions by 2050.

A UN-brokered meeting in Bali in December, at which it had been hoped to agree to keep climate change to a 2C increase in temperature, is supposed to provide a successor to the Kyoto protocol. All that was thrown in doubt by the initiative announced yesterday by President Bush.

"By the end of next year, America and other nations will set a long-term global goal for reducing greenhouse gases. To help develop this goal, the United States would convene a series of meetings of nations that produced most greenhouse gas emissions, including nations with rapidly growing economies like India and China," Mr Bush said.

Under the Bush proposal, the 15 countries responsible for the overwhelming bulk of greenhouse gas emissions would meet in the autumn with the aim of striking a deal by the end of next year. But it was unclear how this new grouping would be able to agree on a scheme so rapidly, when there are such pronounced differences within the smaller G8, largely between the US and its partners.

British and German officials have stressed in recent weeks that a new climate agreement should be based on binding caps on carbon pollution for developed nations, similar to those set up under the UN's Kyoto protocol. President Bush has consistently opposed such restrictions, which he argues would damage the US economy. He prefers voluntary targets and his administration is keen to measure the carbon intensity of polluting activities - a measure of their efficiency - rather than tot up their overall emissions.

Yesterday's announcement contained only a reference to an unspecified long-term goal.

Tony Blair hailed the Bush initiative as an important step forward. "For the first time America's saying it wants to be part of a global deal," the prime minister told Sky News while on a tour of South Africa.

"For the first time it's setting its own domestic targets. For the first time it's saying it wants a global target for the reduction of emissions, and therefore for the first time I think [there is] the opportunity for a proper global deal."

Angela Merkel, the German chancellor and host of next week's G8 summit, also welcomed the initiative. "I think it is positive, and the US president's speech makes it clear that no one can avoid the question of global warming any more," Ms Merkel said of the proposal. "This is common ground on which to act."

However, Bernd Pfaffenbach, the chief German negotiator or "sherpa" on climate change was blunter. He told the *Süddeutschen Zeitung* newspaper that excluding the UN or weakening its role was a "red line" that Ms Merkel "will never cross".

"The leading role of the UN on climate change is non-negotiable," he added. Another German official described the proposal as a "poison pill" aimed at undermining G8 and UN efforts to tackle global warming. "With one stroke you say goodbye to the UN," the official said. "This is a fundamentally different approach, and I'd be very surprised if the other G8 countries abandon the UN course."

Environmentalists were also furious. Daniel Mittler, an analyst at Greenpeace International, said: "It's not even too little too late, but a dangerous diversionary tactic. He doesn't need to start a new process. There already is one. This is meant to slow down the UN process."

The Bush administration moved to dispel the impression that it was an attempt to undermine Europe's position on climate change, or that it represented a transatlantic breach. Jim Connaughton, the former energy lobbyist who heads the Council on Environmental Quality at the White House and is lead negotiator on climate change, claimed that the process the president was advocating was not intended to undercut the influence of the Bali climate conference. "It will run in parallel and reinforce Bali," Mr Connaughton said.

However, he was critical of using emission caps or setting temperature control, the main instruments of Europe's approach, and repeated Washington's opposition to the European goal of limiting climate change to 2C. "We don't think that's a very practical approach," he said. "You can't manage the temperature."

Coming days after the Bush administration's opposition to the 2C goal became public, the new proposal has all but killed off hopes of an agreement on basic principles for combating climate change at the G8 meeting. German officials had hoped the gaps could be narrowed in a meeting between Ms Merkel and Mr Bush on Wednesday but in yesterday's speech the US president appeared to commit himself to an alternative course.

European hopes that the US establishment was now convinced that combating climate change was an urgent global task were also knocked yesterday when the chief of the US space agency said global warming was not an issue of pressing concern. "I have no doubt that a trend of global warming exists," Michael Griffin of Nasa told a radio station. "I am not sure that it is fair to say that it is a problem we must wrestle with."

1.3. UN climate executive welcomes Bush initiative; says it exceeds most optimistic timetable

31 May 2007, The Associated Press

The U.N. official steering international negotiations on global warming said Thursday that U.S. President George W. Bush's proposal to summon major greenhouse gas emitters for discussions will accelerate an arrangement for controlling climate change.

"It's really good that the U.S. is showing leadership in energizing the debate" on a new agreement to succeed the Kyoto Protocol when it expires in 2012, said Yvo de Boer, executive secretary of the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change.

By proposing a meeting of major emitting countries this autumn with the goal of reaching an agreement within 18 months, Bush is setting a timetable even faster than the most optimistic plans of U.N. negotiators.

"This is actually more ambitious than my wildest dreams," De Boer told The Associated Press.

Following Bush's speech, de Boer said White House officials had assured him that Bush's plan was intended to feed into existing U.N.-led efforts to plot out a successor to the 1997 Kyoto agreement, and was not meant to launch a separate negotiating track.

The Kyoto accord set binding targets on 35 industrial countries to reduce carbon emissions by an average 5 percent from 1990 levels by 2012. What happens after that was left open for subsequent negotiations. The Bush administration rejected the Kyoto approach of binding national targets with sanctions for failure.

On Thursday, Bush suggested a meeting with 15 of the heaviest emitting countries this autumn, several months before the next major international climate meeting scheduled in December in Bali, Indonesia.

It would bring in key players that have stayed outside the collaborative effort to control carbon dioxide emissions, including India, China and the United States itself.

The U.N. had hoped the Bali convention would launch formal negotiations on a new climate agreement, but until now U.S. opposition had cast doubt that would happen.

De Boer said the Bush proposal for a prior meeting would boost the prospects for the Bali talks.

"I find this to be very encouraging," de Boer said from his home in the Dutch city of Maastricht.

He also welcomed Bush's support for the broader objectives of adapting to climate change, limiting deforestation and transferring technology to poor countries that would help them limit emissions.

1.4. US told to toe line on climate

3 June 2007, The Observer

Britain and Germany yesterday joined forces to warn President George Bush that talks on climate change must take place within a United Nations framework and not in an ad hoc process floated last week by Bush.

As violent protesters clashed with police in Rostock ahead of next week's G8 summit in Germany, Washington was warned that Britain and Europe will not tolerate a separate process.

'For me, that is non-negotiable,' the German Chancellor Angela Merkel said of the need to ensure that climate change negotiations take place within the existing UN framework.

Her remarks were echoed by Hilary Benn, Britain's international development secretary. 'I think it is very important that we stick with the framework we've got,' Benn told The Observer.

Their comments came as 146 police officers were injured when up to 2,000 protesters threw bottles, sticks and stones at riot police in the Baltic port of Rostock, near Heiligendamm, the location of this week's G8 summit. The rioting erupted after a much larger demonstration, attended by 25,000 people, passed off peacefully. Bush was the subject of the usual taunts.

Merkel underlined deep European unease with the President when she told Der Spiegel: 'In a process led by the United Nations, we must create a successor to the Kyoto agreement which ends in 2012. But it is important that they flow from the United Nations.'

Benn offered limited support for Bush's declaration as 'some progress'. But he highlighted deep misgivings in Europe at the President's call for a parallel process to the UN that would see the world's biggest carbon emitters 'establish a new framework on greenhouse gases' by the end of next year in time for the expiry of the Kyoto protocol.

'In the end, we have to have one framework for reaching agreement,' Benn said. 'I think that is very clear.'

Tony Blair will today hold talks in Berlin with Merkel, who wants the world's richest nations to agree to prevent temperatures rising by more than 2C - an ambition that would lead to major cuts in emissions over the next two decades. Merkel admitted yesterday that she may not achieve that goal, but insisted she would not accept a 'lazy compromise'.

Blair will tell Merkel that the G8 should be encouraged by Bush's speech, as it is the President's most serious intervention on climate change. But he will make clear that massive progress still needs to be made. He believes carbon trading schemes will help bridge the gap between America and Europe, but only if they are compatible.

The Blair meeting comes as the UK prepares for a bruising battle over aid. Britain, which is living up to its commitments, issued a blunt call for other countries to fall into line. 'I am disappointed there is slippage,' Benn told The Observer. 'But we've just got to keep up the struggle. I think every country that signed up to those commitments has a moral obligation to honour them.'

1.5. US climate change statement is a delaying tactic, WWF

31 May 2007, WWF Statement

The announcement of the White House on climate change casts a long dark shadow over the G8. The US offers nothing but delaying tactics, says WWF.

"After first ignoring the reality of climate change, President Bush now aggressively moves to block the G8 from reaching agreement and showing leadership," says Hans Verolme, Director of WWF's Global Climate Change Programme. "The White House 'proposal' is trying to cast a long dark shadow over the climate process, well beyond the President Bush's exit from the Oval Office."

"This last minute conversion is nothing but a diversion. The US Administration has repeatedly deleted all climate change language from the text of the upcoming G8 Summit, and has refused to talk about emission reduction targets, carbon markets, and even about increases in energy efficiency," adds Verolme. "Do you honestly believe they will negotiate in good faith? It is all just a delaying tactic. Empty promises from an embattled President Bush will not stop the climate crisis."

1.6. G8: Campaigners demand alternative approach

31 May 2007, Friends of the Earth International

Campaigners warned today that the leaders of the eight most industrialised nations (or G8) are not tackling the root causes of poverty and climate change at upcoming G8 talks in Heiligendamm, Germany from 6-8 June.

Friends of the Earth International believes that the G8 acts primarily in the interest of the world's most powerful nations and their business interests and is thus the wrong body to decide the future of the planet.

Friends of the Earth International Climate Change campaigner Yuri Onodera said: "Last year, heads of state at the G8 summit in Russia failed to take up the urgency of climate change and went on promoting investments in fossil fuels. With the threat of climate change happening now, G8 nations must commit to the United Nations climate talks that take place later this year. G8 leaders must also recognize their responsibility for transforming their societies to ensure long-term sustainability by investing heavily in energy efficiency and clean, renewable energies. They should also provide resources for the vulnerable communities whose lives and livelihoods are threatened by climate change."

The G8 summit is expected to reaffirm previous commitments on renewable energies and energy efficiency. However, such welcome statements are overshadowed by the focus given to investment in unsustainable energy sources such as fossil fuels, biofuels, and nuclear power.

Collectively the G8 nations, which represent just 13 per cent of the world's population, are responsible for 45 per cent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions.

Friends of the Earth International wants G8 heads of state to commit to keeping the increase in global average temperatures below two degrees centigrade from pre-industrial levels and to commit to investing in renewables and energy efficiency. G8 nations must also take their historical responsibilities seriously and pay the ecological debt they owe to the people in poorer countries who are suffering from the consequences of the current unsustainable development model.

Friends of the Earth Trade Campaigner Joe Zacune said: "Blair and Bush will use the G8 to push for a world trade deal despite all the evidence showing that current proposals would hurt the world's poorest countries and open up their natural resources to corporate interests. We desperately need to end this anti-democratic, global economic decision-making and develop an alternative approach that ensures developing countries are given policy space to protect their economies and environment. G8 leaders talk the language of sustainable development while promoting the corporate takeover of the global economy and natural resources at the expense of poor communities."

An increasing body of evidence shows that current proposals at the World Trade Organisation would have a detrimental impact on the poorest developing countries and their environment.

Furthermore, G8 states are negotiating trade deals outside the WTO that campaigners claim are set to do even more damage to developing country economies and their environment than the current proposals.

1.7. Germany Fails to Convince Japan on Kyoto Pact Pre-G8

30 May 2007, Planet Ark Reuters

EU efforts to speed action on climate change took a blow on Tuesday when Japan refused to follow the EU line on how to establish a new international regime once the Kyoto Protocol expires in 2012.

A statement from EU president Germany, which chaired a gathering of EU and Asian foreign ministers in Hamburg ahead of next week's meeting of Group of Eight (G8) leaders, said talks to establish a new regime should be completed by 2009.

But Japan said it could not accept a 2009 target, saying big polluters such as the United States, China and India should be included before any such target was set.

"Japan cannot agree with this because we should think about how we can invite non-Kyoto members such as the US, China and India and others," Japanese Foreign Ministry spokesman Mitsui Sakaba told reporters.

"We should work first for the inclusion of those countries. Fixing the target should come much later."

Germany is leading a drive to persuade the United States to follow Europe's lead on climate change before a June 6-8 summit of the Group of Eight industrial nations.

Chancellor Angela Merkel wants the G8 to agree concrete steps that would prepare the ground for an extension of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which commits signatories to reducing emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.

"We need the Asians as well," said a spokeswoman for EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner. "Global warming is something that is global and we need all continents participating in the post-Kyoto plan."

The EU has agreed to cut its greenhouse gas emissions by at least 20 percent from 1990 levels by 2020, challenging industrial and developing countries to go further with a 30 percent cut that it promises the EU would then match.

Post Kyoto

The German statement said the Hamburg meeting -- which brought together the 27 EU states with the 10 countries in the Association of South East Asian Nations, as well as China, Japan, South Korea, India and Pakistan -- had stressed the need for "a global and comprehensive post-2012 climate regime".

It said this should be "in accordance with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities" - - indicating that not all countries would be expected to move at the same pace.

It said the meeting had acknowledged the role of targets for the use of energy from renewable sources and improved energy efficiency, "taking national circumstances into account".

Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi said a balance had to be struck between the right to develop and the environment, but developing countries could help by allowing more transfers of clean technology.

"All countries should work together in terms of exploring new sources of energy, alternative energy and clean technology," he told a news conference.

"In this respect, perhaps the developed countries can do more ... we are moving towards the same goal and we should each contribute in our own way to environmental protection."

The Association of South East Asian Nations said its 10 members needed time but action was required.

"If we go on arguing about whether this number or this standard is fair or not fair we will never agree on what to do, and in the meantime the earth is getting warmer and more things are happening," said ASEAN Secretary General Ong Keng Yong.

1.8. China to enact action plan on climate change

3 June 2007, The Economic Times

China, which is world's second largest carbon dioxide emitter, has announced its first national action plan to respond to climate change under which it would adhere to the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities". The decision was taken at a Cabinet meeting chaired by Premier Wen Jiabao here yestersay.

The action plan describes climate change effects and outlines policies and measures China will adopt, said a statement from the Cabinet, without describing specific policies and measures. Chairman of the National Reform Development Commission, the top planning body, Ma Kai, is expected to detail the action plan on Monday, ahead of the Outreach Session of the G-8 Summit in Germany.

Climate change is one of the key topics to be discussed at the Outreach Session of the G-8 Summit which is also being attended by Chinese President Hu Jintao. Also in the plan, China clarified its basic stance on global warming and called for international cooperation. China would adhere to the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the statement said.

Climate change should be dealt with under the framework of sustainable development, it said. Global warming was affecting China's ecological system and natural resources as well as life of the public. To cope with it, China had been taking a series of measures, including changing the economic growth pattern by adjusting economic structure and energy mix and controlling population growth.

The meeting emphasised joint efforts by international community to address this issue. The meeting also urged governments and sectors at all levels to implement the action plan and called for a public awareness campaign on environment protection.

As a developing country, China is not obligated to meet targets set by the Kyoto Protocol, under which 38 industrialised countries must reduce their gas emissions by an average of 5.2% below 1990 levels, during the period 2008 to 2012.

But China has realised it must do its part to slow global warming as the country has become the world's second largest carbon dioxide emitter and is likely to overtake the US in the near future. The Chinese government has set a goal of reducing energy consumption per unit of gross domestic product by 20% by 2010, while pollutant discharge should drop by 10%.

1.9. Abuse and incompetence in fight against global warming

2 June 2007, The Guardian

A Guardian investigation has found evidence of serious irregularities at the heart of the process the world is relying on to control global warming.

The Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), which is supposed to offset greenhouse gases emitted in the developed world by selling carbon credits from elsewhere, has been contaminated by gross incompetence, rule-breaking and possible fraud by companies in the developing world, according to UN paperwork, an unpublished expert report and alarming feedback from projects on the ground.

One senior figure suggested there may be faults with up to 20% of the carbon credits - known as certified emissions reductions - already sold. Since these are used by European governments and corporations to justify increases in emissions, the effect is that in some cases malpractice at the CDM has added to the net amount of greenhouse gas in the atmosphere.

The problems focus on the specialist companies that validate and verify the projects in the developing world which produce the certified emission reductions. Three of those companies have failed spot checks, which revealed a catalogue of weakness.

Separately, one of the CDM's experts calculates that as many as one third of the projects registered in India are commercial ventures which do not produce any additional cut in greenhouse gases and were wrongly approved.

There are only 17 of these validating and verifying companies. Most of them have a clean track record and will have approved reliable emissions reductions, but three of them have been performing so poorly that the CDM's executive board ordered spot checks - and all three companies failed on multiple grounds. The findings on one company, which is believed to have validated dozens of projects and verified millions of tonnes of carbon reductions, were so bad that the board considered suspending its right to work.

The chairman of the CDM board, Danish energy consultant Hans Jørgen Stehr, insisted that in the end the problem was not bad enough to require any of the companies to be suspended. However, he said: "This has been serious. We are talking about competence and the ability of the company to do a proper job." He ruled that none of the three companies be named.

In the formal language of the UN, the minutes record findings for each of the three companies variously of "non-conformities regarding...its competencies to perform validation and verification functions, its quality assurance and quality control mechanisms and compliance with the CDM requirements...procedural and operational requirements, such as its management and operational structure, contract control...and compliance with its own stipulated procedures." The board has called for a new regime of surveillance of their work.

One source who has been working closely with the CDM board had seen some companies filing reports with "all kinds of basic errors which make you wonder if they have any idea what they're doing". They included an entire report in a foreign language when basic rules require it to be in English; submitting a report containing remarks such as "we must check this before we submit the report".

Other errors are said to be more serious, including conjuring up numbers when projects on the ground failed to provide them; giving a green light to commercial projects which make no contribution to reducing greenhouse gases; and approving existing projects which cannot claim to be part of the drive to cut emissions.

Most of the concern is around the crucial CDM test of "additionality" - proof that a project is delivering cuts in greenhouse gases that would not otherwise have happened. In an unpublished report, one of the CDM board's expert advisers, Axel Michaelowa, examined all 52 Indian projects which had been registered up to May 2006 and found that a third of them failed this additionality test.

Mr Michaelowa found evidence of projects supplying false information which was then accepted by the companies who were supposed to check it. In one case cited in the report, he accuses an Indian company of making statements which were "blatantly false". Despite his protests, that scheme was approved.

CONFERENCES

2.1 Cities for Mobility - Mobility for Citizens

11 June 2007 in Stuttgart, Germany

