



CARBON JUSTICE!

Developing an equitable global solution to stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations at a safe level in accordance with the Climate Convention

KEY POINTS

Far greater global limitation and reduction efforts will be needed over the coming century than the 5 per cent reduction relative to 1990 levels agreed at Kyoto. The world community must come up with a strategy that ultimately helps all countries to combat climate change for the benefit of present and future generations, on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities.

Annex 1 Countries must accept the need for progressively stronger reductions in the future. They must take the lead in cutting greenhouse gas emissions because industrialised countries have much higher emissions than developing countries and industrialised countries possess the economic, technical and institutional capacity to address climate change. The overriding priority for developing countries must be to meet their development goals and alleviate poverty.

However, Parties should begin discussions on how to agree an equitable global solution that can stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations at a safe level in accordance with the Climate Convention. In the medium term Parties must develop an approach based on environmental limits and equitably determined burden sharing, which allows developing countries a substantial increase in emissions, before stabilising their emissions later, while industrialised countries start working on the new cuts immediately. Effective and rapid implementation of the Kyoto Protocol, including closing the loopholes presented by the flexible mechanisms, and

INTRODUCTION

The Kyoto Protocol, while only a small step forward in averting the threat of climate change, does provide an historic turning point by agreeing legally-binding targets for all Annex 1 Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change.

However, there is unanimous recognition among Parties that existing commitments alone will fail to deliver the ultimate objective of the Convention under Article 2, namely the stabilisation of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.

Far greater global limitation and reduction efforts will be needed over the coming century than the 5 per cent reduction relative to 1990 levels agreed at Kyoto. Annex 1 Countries must accept the need for progressively stronger reductions in the future. Prevention not cure is key to reducing the threat of climate change impacts, especially for vulnerable countries such as small island nations, those with low-lying coastal areas and those most vulnerable to drought and natural disasters.

THE SECOND REVIEW OF THE ADEQUACY OF COMMITMENTS

leaving out air and bunker fuels, must be a major priority for the Parties to the Convention. At the same time, it is critical for all Parties to

assess how to meet its ultimate objective over the longer term.

Under the Climate Convention Annex 1 Parties agreed to stabilise their emissions at 1990 levels by 2000. The first review of these commitments was a critical step in climate negotiations, underscoring their inadequacy and leading to the Berlin Mandate. This, in turn, resulted in the Kyoto Protocol. The second review of the adequacy of commitments under the Convention, contained in Articles 4.2(a) and 4.2(b), is to take place no later than 31 December 1998 (Article 4.2(d)).

Early indications are that most Annex 1 Parties are likely to overshoot their 1990 levels by 2000. It is of critical importance, then, that the second review of commitments gets Annex 1 Parties back on track to meet their existing commitments.

While there is no debate that the current commitments must be strengthened over time, there is considerable controversy over what the objective of a near-term second review should be. Some industrialized countries (e.g. Australia and the US) see the review as an opportunity for introducing new commitments for developing countries, a position hotly contested by G-77 countries and China.

FUTURE EMISSION REDUCTION TARGETS AND DEVELOPING COUNTRY PARTICIPATION

Even though the industrialized countries carry the responsibility for the bulk of historic and present day greenhouse gas emissions, they are increasingly pressing developing countries to take on commitments. Industrialized countries have more than exceeded their fair share of fossil fuel consumption, on the back of which lies their development. It should come as little surprise if developing countries are loathe to even discuss future commitments when there is little evidence that industrialized nations really are taking the lead on cutting greenhouse gases. This is reflected in their poor performance in meeting their current commitments, coupled with their enthusiasm for the flexible mechanisms rather than taking domestic action

on emission reductions. Yet the US has threatened that it will not ratify the Protocol in the absence of "meaningful participation" from developing countries. This North-South deadlock seriously threatens ratification of the Protocol. In the absence of verifiable domestic action to cut emissions by Annex 1 parties and an equitable approach to developing long term targets, it will be of little surprise if developing countries refuse to come to the negotiating table.

Annex 1 countries must make progress on meeting their commitments principally through domestic action. Additionally, a proactive strategy is required to break the deadlock and agree on an equitable global solution that can stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations at a safe level in accordance with the Climate Convention. To achieve this level equitably, first a "safe limit" to total atmospheric greenhouse gas emissions must be calculated¹. This quota is then shared between countries on the basis of their populations. A gradual transition towards the target can then be calculated, which allows developing countries a substantial increase, before stabilising their emissions later, while industrialised countries start working on the new cuts immediately.

¹Calculation of such a limit is admittedly a difficult task and over time, with changes in scientific understanding, is likely to be re-adjusted.

A number of models have been developed along these lines such as the contraction and convergence model of the Global Commons Institute [1]. Under this model a global greenhouse gas emissions budget is calculated - "contraction" - which is the limit under which atmospheric greenhouse gas concentration must stay. Each nation's share of the budget is then determined equitably on an equal per capita basis, termed "convergence". Friends of the Earth, as part of its work on sustainable societies, has developed a similar approach based on two concepts, "environmental space"² and "fair shares".

Such approaches, based on environmental limits and equitably determined burden sharing, are consistent with the purpose of the Convention and the Kyoto protocol.

The world community must come up with a strategy that ultimately helps all countries to combat climate change for the benefit of present and future generations, on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. These are key guiding principles set out by Article 3 of the Convention. The review must uphold these guiding principles along with others set out in Article 3:

- developed country Parties should take the lead in combatting climate change and its impacts
- the specific needs of developing country Parties, especially those that are most vulnerable, should be given full consideration
- all Parties should promote sustainable development

The Convention explicitly recognizes in Article 4.7 that social development and poverty eradication are the first and overriding priorities of the developing country Parties. Industrialized countries must take the lead in combatting climate change and its impacts. Furthermore

²Environmental space is the sustainable rate at which environmental resources can be used without causing irreversible environmental damage or depriving future generations of the resources they need.

they must assist developing countries through technology transfer and provide capacity building and institutional support with due attention to socio-economic conditions and development priorities.

SCIENTIFIC INPUT TO THE REVIEW

Critical to the review of the adequacy of commitments is the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the publication of its Third Assessment report due in 2001. The review provides the opportunity to re-inject the science into the process, as this will inform decisions over future commitments. If the ultimate objective of the Convention is to be met the IPCC must deliver on key questions:

- how can ecological limits be defined (based on the rate of temperature change, sea level rise, extreme weather events, etc.) and their corresponding global emissions trajectories be constructed?
- what is the probability that potential catastrophic climate sensitivities could be triggered, such as collapsing of ice sheets, methane outgassing of permafrost, and radical changes to ocean circulation at various greenhouse gas concentrations?
- under what limits would the most vulnerable countries be protected?
- how can such limits be revised in relation to improvements in our scientific understanding?
- what are the technical prospects for much more effective greenhouse gas abatement strategies in the energy sector, transport, industry, etc?

RECOMMENDATIONS

Early ratification of the Kyoto Protocol is critical and potentially damaging loopholes must be closed. Furthermore, if the ultimate objective of the Convention is to be met there must be consideration of the longer term. Within a framework of environmental space and fair shares, progressively stronger reduction

targets for industrialized countries will be needed to ensure that atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations are kept within a safe limit.

Such progressively stronger emission reduction targets may be difficult for industrialized countries. The fourth Conference of Parties (COP 4) and a near-term review of commitments provides the needed opportunities to set stronger emission reduction targets for industrialized countries in the future, address equity concerns and re-inject the science into the process.

countries to accept politically. However, the reduction targets could be negotiated in successive commitment periods and phased in over time allowing Parties to move steadily towards their share of environmental space without disrupting their economies.

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Friends of the Earth International (FoEI) is a federation of organisations from all over the