

Special Report on the Paris Agreement, 12 December 2015

Purpose: This document provides a summary of the agreement adopted in Paris by 196 countries under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, and explores some reactions. It has been prepared by the ClimateXChange¹ Secretariat.

What has been agreed?

Under [the Paris Agreement](#) nearly 200 countries have committed to taking specific action to tackle climate change. This distinguishes Paris from previous agreements (such as the Kyoto Protocol in which "developed" countries took emission reduction targets but "developing" countries did not and the original UN Framework Convention of Climate Change [UNFCCC] under which a general but non-binding commitment was made). It can rightly be described as a big step forward.

The key elements of the Agreement include:

- Limiting global temperatures "well below" 2 degrees C above pre-industrial levels, and an "endeavour to limit" them to only 1.5 degrees C;
- Explicitly stating the need to get to a global net zero carbon target (greenhouse gas emissions are balanced by greenhouse gas absorption) at some point between 2050 and 2100;
- Reviewing each country's contribution to cutting emissions every five years, and including a ratchet which seeks to ensure that this contribution rises each time;
- Ensuring developed countries support the transition of developing countries by providing "climate finance" to the tune of US\$100b per year;

The Carbon Brief has produced a [concise analysis of the deal](#), focusing on the most significant articles and exploring what they mean.

How will it work?

In practice the Agreement is a confederation agreement, meaning that each country agrees to work together for common cause, but governs itself. National governments determine their own actions that will contribute to meeting the global target. No individual country targets have been set through the Paris Agreement, reflecting the practical impossibility of agreeing (or enforcing) binding targets. Instead, countries have offered to contribute towards the global target through the use of

¹ [ClimateXChange](#) is Scotland's Centre of Expertise on Climate Change, supporting the Scottish Government's policy development on climate change mitigation, adaptation and the transition to a low carbon economy. The centre delivers objective, independent, integrated and authoritative evidence in response to clearly specified policy questions.

"Intended Nationally Determined Contributions" or INDCs, which lay out each country's own plans for reducing emissions [and in some cases including an adaptation component].

If all the proposed INDCs are implemented in full – a large "if" – then the effect would only be to limit global temperature rise to about 2.7 – 3.0 degrees C above pre-industrial levels. In other words, countries are not yet committing collectively to the sort of emission reductions required to deliver the agreed global target. The hope is that the momentum created in Paris will build pressure on all parties to continue ratcheting up their commitments until a 1.5, or more likely, a 2 degrees C target is met. However, there is no mechanism to penalise countries that choose not to do so.

The Paris Agreement still allows for a distinction between developed and developing countries by noting that developed countries should continue taking a lead with economy-wide absolute emission reduction targets, while developing countries should continue "enhancing their mitigation efforts" and are encouraged to move over time towards economy-wide emission reduction or limitation targets.

The Paris Agreement provides for countries to take pretty much any sort of action that delivers emissions reductions: for example, countries can bilaterally agree trading of emission reductions, but no country is forced to take part in trading.

In summary, the Paris Agreement seems as good an agreement as was possible to get with nearly 200 countries in the room (from small island states to China, Saudi Arabia and the USA). The French authorities deserve huge credit for the way in which they handled the whole process, both before and during the meeting. The Agreement creates a framework, a target (net zero emissions) and a vision. But it relies entirely on national governments committing to, and delivering against, their own emission reduction targets. So the issue remains one of national delivery of emission reductions.

Reaction

The Agreement was generally well received, and has been widely covered in the media. The BBC asks [if history has been made](#) with a goal set and means identified by which to achieve it. The BBC also highlights the crucial role given to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in guiding implementation. The Guardian continues to update its [COP 21 section](#) with comment and reaction, noting that '... [not all of the agreement is legally binding](#)...' but hoping that peer pressure will deliver concerted action.

[Kevin Anderson of the Tyndall Centre](#) welcomed the Agreement in principle, but is critical of the reliance on 'negative emissions'. The Grantham Research Institute comments on the [credibility of the commitments](#) that have been made, while Nicholas Stern [praised the achievement of the deal](#), and challenged cities and businesses to meet its ambition with firm action. Stop Climate Chaos Scotland sent a team to Paris, and their series of blogs concludes by welcoming the Agreement as a [pivotal point](#) in the fight for climate justice. [WWF-UK](#) described it as '... a deal for both people and planet', while Friends of the Earth Scotland took a more critical stance, arguing that the [deal delays the necessary cuts in GHG emissions](#) and fails to commit sufficient finance.

Several commentators ask if the Agreement marks [the beginning of the end of the fossil fuel era](#). The Economist reflects that perhaps the most significant impact will be [the message it sends to investors](#). The [Brookings Institute](#) headlines this issue, and emphasises the need for an early move to clean energy, while [The Washington Post](#) quotes John Schellnhuber (Climate-KIC chairman) and his view that, whilst technologies such as bio-energy, CCS and afforestation can play a role, cutting carbon dioxide remains key. Closer to home, Lang Banks of WWF Scotland believes [the transition to a renewable future](#) is now unstoppable, while Bella Caledonia includes [a wide-ranging commentary](#) emphasising the importance of tangible action.

The [Confederation of British Industry](#) emphasised the importance of the deal to British industry describing it as ‘an exciting opportunity for business’. There has been no formal comment as yet by [OPEC](#), although all member countries are party to the Agreement.

Reuters explores [how the deal was done](#), referencing the failure of the Copenhagen summit of 2009 and detailing how the French government worked to ensure success.

Prior to the formal agreement, the Guardian outlined the [likely sticking points](#) to a final deal. While these were successfully overcome, they provide a useful insight to those issues that will be most challenging to deliver. A similar approach by the Huffington Post explores the [five key categories that matter most](#).

Both the [Scottish](#) and [UK Governments](#) have issued statements in response to the Agreement.

What’s next?

Following adoption the Agreement will be deposited at the UN in New York and will be open for one year for signature from 22 April 2016 (Mother Earth Day). It will enter into force after 55 countries that account for at least 55% of global emissions have deposited their instruments of ratification ([article 20, p30](#)).

In 2018 a [‘facilitative dialogue’](#) among the parties will be held ‘to take stock of collective efforts’ and the intention is to repeat this process every five years.

The UK Committee on Climate Change is considering whether the Agreement affects their advice to the UK Government on the 5th Carbon Budget, and will respond in detail early in 2016. In the meantime [the CCC has commented on](#) the ‘ratcheting up’ process, and on mitigation and adaptation activity.

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