

COP23: KEEPING THE PRESSURE ON TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE

Factsheet

UN Climate Talks 2017: What you need to know

Key Points:

- Tackling climate change requires global action, with every country contributing their fair share. Global temperature is over 1°C higher than temperatures before the industrial revolution, an unprecedented scale and rate of change for human societies.
- COP23 or the Bonn Climate Talks will serve as an opportunity for all parties to the Paris Agreement to update their progress and to clarify the 'rules' for the Paris Accord.
- Fiji, a close neighbour of Australia, will host COP23 in Bonn. For the Pacific islands – and all low-lying islands – are some of the most vulnerable nations to climate change. Pacific Islanders are already losing islands to rising seas and many struggle to adapt to costly extreme weather events, eroding coastlines and saltwater intrusion into water supplies and agricultural lands.
- Australia is highly vulnerable to many of the consequences of a changing climate, from worsening heatwaves, droughts and bushfire weather, to devastating coral bleaching, sea level rise and coastal flooding.
- Australia's greenhouse gas emissions have climbed upwards every quarter since March 2015, while much of the developed world has begun the journey towards net-zero emissions.
- Amongst the G20 countries, Australia's emissions reduction target – a reduction of 26-28% on a 2005 baseline – is unusually weak, nowhere near what is required for us to play our fair share in tackling climate change.
- Australia is failing to tackle climate change with emissions rising and a lack of any coherent, long-term national approach to reduce emissions in the short, medium or long term.

Bonn Climate Talks (COP 23) – The Facts

What is COP23 & the Paris Agreement?

In December 2015, world leaders, including Australia met in Paris (COP21) and agreed to work together to limit global temperature rise to well below 2°C, this formed the 'Paris Agreement'. One hundred and sixty-eight nations, including Australia, and the European Union have since ratified the Paris Agreement.

The landmark Paris climate talks cemented the world's commitment to tackling climate change. However, a lot of the finer details and the 'rules' surrounding the Paris Agreement remained to be worked out and this process will take place at COP23 in Bonn.

In addition, Australia's Pacific neighbour, Fiji, will preside over the COP (Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change). This will be the first time a Small Island Developing State presides over a COP.

Where is it being held?

COP23 will be hosted in Bonn, Germany from 6 – 17 November.

Who is representing Australia?

The Australian Federal Government will send the Minister for the Environment and Energy, Josh Frydenberg to speak during the event's High Level Segment presentations commencing on November 15 – 16.

The global climate challenge

Climate change is driven by rising greenhouse gas emissions, particularly from the burning of coal, oil and gas. Since the 1970s, global average temperature has trended strongly upwards (e.g. Rahmstorf et al. 2017), with a global temperature now more than 1°C above pre-industrial levels. Furthermore, since 1970 global temperature has been increasing at a rate 170 times faster than the background rate over the past 7,000 years (Steffen et al. 2016). 2016 was declared the hottest year ever, breaking previous records set in 2015 and 2014 (NOAA 2017). And 2017 is on track to be in the top three hottest years, which would mean that 2013-2017 is set to be the warmest five-year period on record (WMO 2017).

Australia & climate change

Rising temperatures and the accelerating impacts of climate change are affecting all nations, including Australia. Heatwaves are now hotter, lasting longer and occurring more often in Australia (Perkins and Alexander 2013; Climate Council 2014). The ocean is also warming. Rising sea surface temperatures, driven by climate change, are increasing the prevalence of "marine heatwaves" (Perkins et al. 2016), which can trigger coral bleaching events, like those seen in 2016 and 2017 on the Great Barrier Reef. The reef is an environmental treasure, as well as a key tourism and fisheries asset. Climate change has also increased extreme fire weather in the south and east of Australia since the 1970s (Clark et al. 2013; CSIRO and BoM 2016), threatening people and property, while climate change is likely making drought conditions in southwest and southeast Australia worse (CSIRO and BoM 2015; Climate Council 2015). At the same time, sea level has been rising rapidly, exposing coastal infrastructure and property to increasing coastal erosion and higher risk of inundation from storm surges (McInnes et al. 2015; Climate Council 2017).

Climate change is the biggest challenge facing humanity. It requires global action, with every country contributing their fair share.

Why does 2 Degrees Matter?

The Paris Agreement is important because anything more than 2°C warming is considered too dangerous for humanity, not only for unacceptably large increases in direct impacts such as extreme weather events, but also for crossing climate ‘tipping points’, where large, rapid and potentially irreversible changes occur in the climate system (Church et al. 2016). Examples of these tipping points are the loss of the Greenland and West Antarctic ice sheets, thawing of permafrost in Siberia and loss of the Amazon rainforest.

As of 4 November 2016, the Paris Agreement entered into force. As one of the world’s top 15 emitters, Australia is expected to do its part, yet our current actions and pledges are far from meeting that challenge. Our Paris pledge is very weak (26-28% emissions reduction by 2030 in relation to 2005 levels), and under current policies (e.g. Emissions Reduction Fund) we are unlikely to meet even that target (UNEP 2017).

How will the Paris Agreement get countries to increase their ambition?

The Paris Agreement provides a global framework for tackling climate change, reaffirming the 2°C goal, while urging efforts to limit the increase to 1.5°C. The agreement sets two other long-term mitigation goals: i) peaking of emissions as soon as possible (recognising that it will take longer for developing countries); then, ii) a goal of net greenhouse gas neutrality (“a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks”) in the second half of the century.

Why are international agreements and meetings important?

The aim is to keep the pressure on countries to raise their ambition over time. To promote rising ambition, the agreement has two linked processes, each on a five-year cycle. The first one is a “global stocktake” to assess collective progress toward meeting the agreement’s long-term goals. Parties will then submit new Nationally Determined Commitments (NDCs), “informed by the outcomes of the global stocktake”. Secondly, because the Paris Agreement is to apply post-2020, the first formal stocktake under the agreement will not take place until 2023 and therefore under a decision accompanying the Paris Agreement, parties will jumpstart the five-year cycle with a “facilitative dialogue” on collective progress in 2018, and the submission by 2020 of NDCs running through 2030.

How will Parties be held accountable?

Accountability will be achieved primarily through an “enhanced transparency framework.” All countries are required to submit emissions inventories and the “information necessary to track progress made in implementing and achieving” their NDCs. These reports will be subject to an independent review by technical experts and a “facilitative, multilateral consideration of progress” by fellow governments.

Unlike the [current transparency system](#) under the UNFCCC, which sets different requirements for developed and developing countries, the new transparency framework will

apply to all countries but provide “built-in flexibility” to accommodate varying national capacities. The aim is for all parties to work toward the same standards of accountability as their capacities strengthen over time.

Read more [here](#).

UNFCCC COP 23 – what’s the deal?

The UNFCCC COP in Bonn will be a technical working level conference rather than a high level political one. The goal of COP23 is to advance the aims and ambitions of the Paris Agreement and achieve progress on its implementation guidelines, including designing the process for the [Facilitative Dialogue](#) in 2018 - which is a mechanism to take stock of the collective efforts of Parties in relation to progress towards the long-term goal of the Agreement (i.e. to limit warming to no more than 2°C) and to inform the preparation of nationally determined contributions. COP23 will also showcase steps countries are taking toward a low-emissions, climate-resilient global economy.

The High-Level Segment of the UN Climate Change Conference to be attended by dignitaries, ministers and other senior officials, will be inaugurated in the afternoon of Wednesday, 15 November 2017 and will close on Friday, 17 November 2017. Each Party will have only one opportunity to deliver a national statement.

COP23 overview schedule [here](#).

Possible outcomes of Bonn COP:

1. Reaffirmation of Paris Agreement and global commitment to tackling climate change;
2. Demonstrable progress on ‘Paris Agreement Rulebook’ (e.g. rules on accountability and transparency).
3. Design and agreement of Facilitative Dialogue. It’s important for leaders to come together in 2018 to see what’s required to meet our targets and how to address gaps in targets. COP24 in Poland will be a political commitment to get together and to identify what are the pathways to close the emissions gap (i.e. to reach the 2°C target).

Why Fiji with Germany as hosts?

The developed world must support all nations – regardless of size, or location, or contribution to greenhouse gas emissions – in the effort to fulfil national climate plans and chart their own low-emission, highly resilient development path. For Fiji, this path is critical. Pacific islands – and all low-lying islands – are some of the most vulnerable nations. For many, the threat of climate change is existential. Pacific Islanders already losing islands to rising seas and many struggle to adapt to costly extreme weather events, eroding coastlines and saltwater intrusion into water supplies and agricultural lands.

COP23 in Bonn provides an opportunity to raise awareness of the vulnerability of islands and all nations to climate change while working on solutions.

Fiji's vision for COP23:

- Advance the work of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and preserve the multilateral consensus for decisive action to address the underlying causes of climate change, respecting climate science.
- Uphold and advance the Paris Agreement, ensure progress on the implementation guidelines and undertake consultations together with the Moroccan COP22 Presidency to design the process for the Facilitative Dialogue in 2018.
- Build greater resilience for all vulnerable nations to the impacts of climate change, including extreme weather events and rising sea levels; to enable access to climate adaptation finance, renewable energy, clean water and affordable climate risk and disaster insurance; and to promote sustainable agriculture.
- Harness innovation, enterprise and investment to fast track the development and deployment of climate solutions that will build future economies with net zero greenhouse gas emissions, in an effort to limit the rise of global temperatures to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.
- Draw a stronger link between the health of the world's oceans and seas and the impacts of, and solutions to, climate change as part of a holistic approach to the protection of our planet.

[Climate Action Statement by the Leaders of the Pacific Small Island Developing States](#)

3 – 4 July 2017, Suva, Fiji.

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