

# A decade of change: An interview with Joke Waller Hunter

**Joke Waller Hunter, Executive Secretary to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) speaks about achievements over the Convention's first 10 years, and considers future challenges for the decades ahead. As the world prepares for the 10th meeting of the Convention signatories' (the Conference of the Parties – COP), Ms Waller Hunter considers the future of the Kyoto Protocol, the impact of the EU Emissions Trading Scheme and the expanding role of clean technologies.**

**SDI:** The Kyoto Protocol will surely be in place soon with Russia's ratification a near certainty. Do you think the business community is fully aware of the impacts that the Protocol will have?

**JWH:** The markets have been reacting to headlines on the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol in the past. So, surely at least part of the business community is aware of what is happening. The entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol will provide the legal underpinning to emission trading at a global scale. This will give strong support to the markets, where trading is already happening. The Protocol is a first step in the longer process of bringing greenhouse gas emissions down and businesses recognising this. Those moving early will have a competitive advantage. Investors are also reacting and increasingly demanding companies to examine and disclose the climate risk that they face.

**SDI:** Since its drafting, the outstanding arguments on Kyoto are economic & political. If the UNFCCC's stated role is to 'provide organisation and technical expertise to the negotiations' what role has the convention played in preparation for the Protocol's entry into force?

**JWH:** Much is being done and a lot more can be done to work towards the long-term objective of the Convention, i.e. "to achieve (...) the stabilisation of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system".

Also, governments prioritised the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) of the Protocol and started work on it prior to entry into force of the Protocol. Work went full speed ahead and preparations have reached the point that registration of the first CDM projects is now under way.



**Joke Waller Hunter,**  
Executive Secretary to the UNFCCC

The CDM defined in Article 12 of the Kyoto Protocol, provides for Annex I Parties to implement projects that reduce emissions in non-Annex I Parties, in return for certified emission reductions (CERs), and assist the host Parties in achieving sustainable development and contributing to the ultimate objective of the Convention.

**SDI:** The EU Emissions Trading Scheme will start in January, and will be followed next year by Japan. Companies have already shown how quickly and efficiently internal trading systems can work, but can a regional scheme be effective if US emissions are not part of the trading market?

**JWH:** Notwithstanding the recent positive signals regarding ratification of The Protocol, there has been a very clear commitment from the European side to implement Kyoto before its entry into force. Of course there is the issue of competitiveness, this is why the Australian government chose not to sign the Protocol. At the same time, I believe there is a commercial advantage to being an 'early mover', as it is known, as the efficiency of an economy as a whole is raised. Emission trading within

companies has led to innovative solutions and enhanced efficiencies.

Also, earlier experience with emission trading in the US on pollutants other than CO<sub>2</sub> has proven that emission trading leads to most effective solutions.

It will also be interesting to see if the EU Lisbon Strategy, which aims at innovation through integration of economic, social and environmental concerns, will encourage business to take advantage of win-win opportunities. UK Prime Minister, Tony Blair, has prioritised climate change for the UK Presidency of the EU and for the UK in the Chairmanship of the G8 next year. Such support for climate policies will help to highlight how innovative solutions can play a key role in defining new competitive advantages in a global market.

**SDI:** The recent World Energy Congress explored a role for all forms of energy production. Realistically, should more focus be directed towards clean coal, gas and oil rather than to renewable energy sources, which are currently only able to play a limited role?

**JWH:** The choice between various fuels and approaches to energy is changing according to cost. There is no "one size fits all". Using fossil fuels in a cleaner manner, increasing the energy efficiency and enhancing the share of renewables in the energy mix are all part of a more sustainable energy future. Lessening the dependence on imports of fossil fuels, particularly for developing countries, has clear economic advantages. New technologies are emerging that could make the use of fossil fuels more benign. I am referring to carbon capture and storage. There are a number of technical issues that still need to be solved, but the mitigation possibilities are important. The Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has chosen to address this issue, and we will shortly be able to learn from its report quite how much this technology can contribute towards reducing emissions.

Yes, some sectors and regions may be economic losers. But for an economy as a whole, providing energy security and meeting energy needs through an intelligent fuel mix that also meets climate change objectives, will not necessarily have a negative impact.

**SDI:** Emissions reduction options include renewables, energy efficiency, clean carbon, emissions intensity, carbon trading, taxation and nuclear. How can business plot a responsible low-risk course with so much uncertainty about the international way forward?

**JWH:** If you look at the bottom-line, energy is a significant issue for many companies. The possibilities offered by emission trading will assist companies to reduce emissions in the most cost-effective manner. In addition, the CDM, as mentioned, has the potential to contribute to energy technology transfer to developing countries as part of emissions reduction strategies of developed countries.

Business has to recognise how the impacts of climate change and those of mitigation policies will affect it. As the price for carbon rises, investors will increasingly pay attention to the degree to which business is prepared.

**SDI:** Looking forward, next year Head of State will review progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set in 2000. Increasing sustainable energy supply will contribute significantly towards lifting people out of poverty, as the embodiment of the purpose of the Goals. What contribution can the UNFCCC make towards this process?

**JWH:** Firstly, let me highlight that the UNFCCC is part of the overall UN family, so our processes will be mutually supportive. The MDGs address issues of poverty reduction in an environmentally sustainable manner. In 2002 the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg addressed the importance of access to energy of the 1.5 billion people currently lacking supply. Solutions tabled included energy efficiency, clean fossil fuels and an enhanced share for renewables, all key elements of climate change policies.

The follow-up to the WSSD will go through the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), which will consider energy, industrial development, air pollution and climate change at its sessions in 2006 and 2007. With this in mind we will have these issues on the agenda at COP 10, where Parties will consider how the

Convention has contributed to the goals set out in Johannesburg.

Of paramount importance is that stakeholders, particularly from the business community, are involved. An indication of this importance is the increasing number of CDM projects, particularly in the fields of bio-fuels and renewables and the many other interesting initiatives coming forward from the private sector.

This is where we expect the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol to make a contribution to the MDGs. We have been talking about these issues since the Earth Summit in 1992, but now the policy is starting to become a reality.

**SDI:** What are your final thoughts on the 10th annual Session of the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties in December?

**JWH:** Our 10th birthday is an important opportunity for us to look back and reflect on what has been achieved. I think we can now say that the real actions we are seeing are leading to a common understanding of the way forward. The decision of the Russian cabinet to forward the Kyoto Protocol to the Russian Parliament for ratification is sure to act as an additional "energy booster" for the work to be done at COP 10.

#### ABOUT JOKE WALLER HUNTER

Since 1 May 2002, Joke Waller-Hunter has headed the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change based in Bonn, Germany, as its Executive Secretary.

Before joining the UNFCCC, from 1998-2002, Joke Waller-Hunter was the Director of the Environment Directorate of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, OECD in Paris. Integration of economic and environmental objectives in government policies was at the heart of the work. An Environmental Outlook to the year 2020 was developed and published under her leadership, which led to the adoption of a new Environmental Strategy for the Organisation and its member countries.

From 1994 to 1998, she was the United Nations' first Director for Sustainable Development, leading the division that provides the secretariat to the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, and co-ordinates the work of the UN in the field of sustainable development.

From 1984 to 1994 she worked for the Netherlands Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment. As Deputy Director for

International Environmental Affairs, she was actively involved in the preparations of the UN Conference in Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, 1992). From 1992 to 1994 she was Director for Strategic Planning, responsible for the preparations for the second National Environmental Policy Plan of the Netherlands.

Joke Waller-Hunter started her professional career in 1973 with the Provincial Government of North Holland where she worked as Environmental Information Officer and Co-ordinator for Environmental Planning.

#### ABOUT THE ORGANISATION

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is based in Bonn, Germany. The secretariat provides substantive and technical support and advice to the intergovernmental negotiations within the scope of the Convention, including those on its Kyoto Protocol. The secretariat team comprises some 170 staff members and manages resources of some \$ 20 million a year.

#### ENQUIRIES

Joke Waller-Hunter  
Executive Secretary  
Climate Change Secretariat  
Martin-Luther-King-Strasse 8  
D-53153  
Bonn  
Germany

Tel: +49 228 815 1100  
Fax: +49 228 815 1999  
E-mail: [secretariat@unfccc.int](mailto:secretariat@unfccc.int)  
Web site: [www.unfccc.int](http://www.unfccc.int)