

Australia

Dialogue on long-term cooperative action to address climate change by enhancing implementation of the Convention

First workshop, 15-16 May 2006, Bonn, Germany

Australia is firmly committed to the fight against climate change and finding a common path towards international cooperation that inclusive and environmentally effective.

The science

Climate change science is further advanced since the IPCC Third Assessment Report. Australia's current assessment of the science is that evidence that the earth is warming has grown stronger since the TAR and the impacts of climate change are becoming observable in some cases. That human activity is the primary cause of the observed warming has also become more evident. Many other countries, after careful study, are arriving at the same conclusions.

Our endeavours must continue to be firmly anchored in a shared scientific appreciation of the problem. We look forward keenly to the completion of IPCC's Fourth Assessment Report at the end of 2007, and its subsequent consideration by the UNFCCC at that time.

Cleaner Energy

The magnitude of the global effort needed to mitigate climate change is huge.

Energy use is, of course, the primary human source of greenhouse gases. And global demand for energy is increasing rapidly as we strive to improve the well being of people around the world. On present trends the International Energy Agency (IEA) expects energy demand to grow by over 50 per cent between now and 2030. That is thousands of extra power stations and millions of extra cars. The bulk of this growth in demand will be in industrialising countries.

Energy efficiency, renewable energy and nuclear power will all help dampen the prospect of an equally sharp rise in greenhouse gas emissions. But these means alone will not be enough to halt - let alone sharply reverse - global emissions.

Equally essential is the development, diffusion and uptake of new low- and zero carbon technologies.

This was the view taken at the inaugural meeting of the Asia-Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate or AP6. Ministers there recognised that fossil fuels underpin our economies, and will be an enduring reality for our lifetimes and beyond. Ministers said it was therefore critical that we work together to develop, demonstrate and implement cleaner and lower emissions technologies that allow for the continued economic use of fossil fuels while addressing emissions.

It is vital that this dialogue fully address how we can find fresh ways to work together to advance low- and zero- carbon technologies. We think that any efforts to address climate change will need to give due emphasis to the role key cleaner technologies will have in delivering increased economic growth while reducing the environment impact.

Markets

Governments can do a lot. The Federal Government in Australia has already earmarked some two billion dollars towards the fight against climate change with a heavy emphasis on developing and proving technologies. And our State Governments have also set aside hundreds of millions of dollars towards this same end.

But Governments cannot do it alone.

It is business that will drive the investment decisions that will determine our path towards low-carbon economies. And lending institutions, including the international financial institutions, will determine the degree of support business receives for implementing low-carbon technologies. And it is consumers that will support low-carbon choices for the future.

The private sector in Australia is increasingly taking up the climate change challenge. For instance, the Australian coal industry have just decided to provide up to three hundred million dollars over the next five years to demonstrate technologies for reducing emissions from coal-fired power stations.

This dialogue must consider how we can best further encourage public-private partnerships on low-carbon futures.

In doing so, we will need to be careful to foster and harness the enthusiasm of the private sector in true partnership. The departure point for our discussions should not be approaches we have tried before that has not garnered universal support or commitments. Imposing central planning-style arbitrary mandates and targets would inevitably lead to market distortions and dubious environmental effectiveness.

The Land

The way we use the land is also a significant source of greenhouse gases. Here technology solutions are less apparent. It is not easy, for example, to address methane from rice paddies or find effective solutions to enteric fermentation in cattle, sheep and pigs.

Managing our forests better, however, offers great promise. The World's forests contain more carbon than in our atmosphere. Australia has the sixth largest area under forest in the World. Since 1990 Australian governments have effectively stopped land clearing by implementing new legislation. This is a central element of Australia's climate change strategy and is part of a suite of programmes and measures targeted at the land sector. We should acknowledge that a ton of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has the same effect wherever it came from and likewise a ton avoided has the same impact whether it is from reduced energy use, carbon capture and storage, renewable energy or sequestration in the biosphere.

The total forest cover of Annex I countries has now stabilised and in some countries is increasing. In Australia our goal is to triple the area under plantation to 4 million hectares by 2010.

Unfortunately deforestation is still responsible for nearly a quarter of global greenhouse emissions. We therefore welcome the COP-11 decision to consider views on reducing emissions from deforestation in developing countries. And we welcome that this was an initiative of the developing countries, in particular the rainforest coalition, to place such a vital matter on our active agenda. We look forward to that separate dialogue also informing future UNFCCC consideration on long-term cooperative action to address climate change.

Adaptation

Another major priority for Australia is increased cooperation on adaptation. Climate change will impact on all countries, developed and developing alike.

Australia is particularly vulnerable to climate change. We occupy the driest inhabited continent with a highly variable climate and great susceptibility to drought. Shifting rainfall patterns in particular have severe environmental impacts in Australia and damage our agricultural industries. And we are acutely aware that the Great Barrier Reef, the World's largest coral formation, faces increased bleaching due to higher sea surface temperatures and increased ocean acidity.

Given the varied climate change impacts faced by countries, adaptation responses demand tailored and localised responses. Australia recognises the desire of countries to plan and undertake appropriate adaptation responses. In Buenos Aires, we together committed to a five-year programme of work in the UNFCCC that will assist all countries in their efforts. This is a major and welcome outcome and we look forward to the further elaboration and implementation of the programme.

Sustainable Development

Climate action should not be a matter of clean versus prosperity – but for us to be clean and prosperous.

Emissions are growing fastest in the developing world and is set to overtake the emissions of the developed world. But the developing world can not be expected to cut their growth rates given the priority of increasing standards of living. Therefore developing and deploying low-carbon technologies will have a vital role to play in slowing global emissions.

Equally solutions to mitigating climate change will require the commitment of us all to finding ways to transition towards low-carbon economies.

The Global nature of the threat of climate change requires a commitment by all countries to effective solutions. It is beyond the resources of any one country, or indeed even all of the Annex I countries, to put in place the mitigation and adaptation measures necessary to effectively combat climate change. To be environmentally effective and economically

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efficient, all major emitters must take action to curb emissions. We welcome the efforts of those developing countries that have taken national steps towards restraining greenhouse gas emissions. We look forward to such efforts being enhanced and the adoption of similar measures by a broader number of countries.

The dialogue will need to address how the UNFCCC can best encourage further action by all.

Thank you.

Jan Adams
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