

## Paris 2015. A fair, global climate deal: the role for the UK

On the 9<sup>th</sup> September 2014, the UK Government published its strategy for international climate: “Paris 2015: securing our prosperity through a global climate change agreement”<sup>i</sup>. In it, the UK Government rightly says that:

- “We need a global climate agreement to drive-up ambition levels across all parties, steering the world back toward the 2°C path”;
- “The new agreement should involve credible and fair emission reduction commitments from all countries”;
- “Countries will need to make the low-carbon transition in a way that reflects their national situation, the opportunities available to them, and both their relative past and future contributions to climate change”. [underlined = our emphasis]

The paper also highlights the UK’s targets – of reducing emissions by “at least 34% by 2020 and 80% by 2050 from 1990 levels and meeting a series of carbon budgets on the way”.

### A fair contribution?

The paper says that “these targets, based on the advice of the independent Committee on Climate Change, reflect the UK’s fair contribution towards the international goal to limit global warming to no more than 2°C above pre-industrial levels”.

However, this is not a fair contribution. The CCC said in their 2008 report that calculating an appropriate UK contribution can be done in a variety of ways. They explicitly said that “it is not part of the Committee’s remit to propose a specific methodology for the purposes of international negotiations. Nor do we make a judgement on which method is ethically preferable to another”. They nonetheless had to base their UK targets on some sort of approach, and their approach to fairness in target setting was to say that all countries would have broadly equal per capita emissions, but only by 2050<sup>ii</sup>.

There are however three arguments that this is far from being fair:

- 1) **It ignores historical responsibility.** Nothing before 2006 is included. This is hugely beneficial to the UK, who like the USA and other developed countries are more responsible for historical emissions.
- 2) **It gives a far greater share of what is still burnable to countries like the UK.** It is only by 2050 that emissions are equal – this means that from now to 2050, the UK and other developed countries take a far greater share of what is still safely burnable.
- 3) **It ignore capability.** The UK is far richer than most other countries. We have far more financial resources to be able to cut our emissions than other nations.

The UK’s paper effectively highlights that the UK’s approach is not exactly fair – it cites the IPCC’s review of effort sharing, which suggests a range of -33% to -75% cut by 2030 for OECD countries. The EU2030 target negotiations are heading towards just a -40% target, the low end of the IPCC range; this being based on the same straight-line-to-equal-per-capita-by-2050 approach as the UK uses.

The UK and the EU’s offers should not therefore be seen as a fair contribution – and both should set out how they will revise their offers to include both future and historical fairness, and capability. After all: the UK states the need for higher ambition from all parties. This includes the UK itself.

### So, what is fair?

In 2010, Friends of the Earth published “*Reckless Gamblers*”<sup>iii</sup>, which used C-ROADS<sup>iv</sup> data to calculate fair contributions for the UK and EU. The central scenario divided the remaining global carbon budget for a two-thirds probability of staying below 2 degrees equally by population. This gave the UK an 80% 2030 target, and the EU an 83% target. The report made clear that this dealt with issue 2) above, but it does not deal with either historical responsibility, or capability. Almost any treatment of historical responsibility gave the UK and the EU a negative remaining global carbon budget. The conclusion was that on top of domestic mitigation, countries like the UK would also need to provide financial and technology transfers to developing countries, to account for issues like historical responsibility.

Since 2010, the Stockholm Environment Institute and Ecoequity have constructed a far more sophisticated programme for allowing issues such as capability and responsibility to be considered. The 2014 Climate Equity Reference Calculator (CERC)<sup>v</sup> allows users multiple options for calculating how much of the global effort needed to move us from “business-as-usual” to a safer pathway should be made by individual countries. It also looks at economic efficiency, and compares what is a fair “national mitigation effort” with what is domestically achievable – with the difference being made up either by “supporting effort” in other countries, or receiving “support help” from other countries.

### **Results for the UK**

Business-as-usual (b-a-u) emissions for the UK in 2030 are 689MtCO<sub>2</sub>e. Using CERC the range of results for possible UK national mitigation effort is wide: from 437 to 1835 MtCO<sub>2</sub>e lower than b-a-u, depending on model inputs. But even the 437MtCO<sub>2</sub>e effort is a 67% cut on 1990 levels. Almost all other scenarios would require the UK to provide major financial and technological support to developing countries, as well as of the order 75% domestic cuts.

In addition, limiting the UK’s effort to 437MtCO<sub>2</sub>e would be an extreme stretch to call “fair” – it requires ignoring all historical emissions before 2010, ignoring all issues of capability, and greatly lowering the chances of sticking below 2 degrees.

### **Conclusion: a fair contribution for the UK**

The UK Government is right to call for “*fair emission reduction commitments*”. It should increase its own offer to a 75%+ 2030 target, champion similar targets for the EU, and offer far greater technological and financial help to developing countries to cut their own emissions.

This is an achievable goal. The UK’s climate change strategy currently assumes almost zero progress on reducing either oil or gas use by 2030<sup>vi</sup>, the UK is still planning on many major high-carbon infrastructure projects such as new roads and airports, is still pursuing a “maximise recovery” policy for North Sea Oil and Gas, is going all-out for fracking and other unconventional fossil fuels, is holding back renewables development and pays minimal regard to energy saving. All of these need to be reversed.

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<sup>i</sup> DECC, 2014. [Paris 2015: securing our prosperity through a global climate change agreement](#).

<sup>ii</sup> CCC, 2008. [Building a low-carbon economy](#). p30

<sup>iii</sup> Friends of the Earth, 2010. [Reckless Gamblers](#).

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.climateinteractive.org/tools/c-roads/>

<sup>v</sup> <http://gdrights.org/Calculator-about/>

<sup>vi</sup> DECC, 2013. [Updated energy and emissions projections](#). Annex H. Oil 6% decrease, gas 5% increase.