

# Briefing

## **The Paris climate agreement: what it means for the UK**

The Paris agreement is historic, and gives huge momentum and optimism that at the eleventh-hour humanity can step back from the brink of climate catastrophe. But to do this, actions by all nations need to be stepped up as soon as possible - for current pledges by nations, even if met, would still lead to around 3°C warming.

This note sets out what the Paris Agreement implies for the UK. It focuses solely on UK emissions cuts – further briefings will look at the UK’s role supporting developing countries coping with adaptation, moving to low-carbon economies, and coping with climate disasters.

It concludes that the Paris wording on both the temperature goal, and on the role of developed countries in meeting this goal, mean that the UK should strengthen its climate change targets. The Committee on Climate Change is investigating the implications of the Paris Agreement for the UK, and will report to the Government early in 2016<sup>1</sup>.

The UK's emissions cuts depend on 2 issues:

- The temperature goal set by the Paris agreement, and the Global Carbon Budget (GCB) compatible with such a goal;
- The share of that GCB appropriate for the UK.

### **Temperature goal and Global Carbon Budget**

The Paris Agreement<sup>2</sup> clearly states that its aim is to hold the increase in global temperatures “*to well below 2 degrees*” and “*to pursue efforts to limit increase to 1.5 degrees*”.

This is stronger wording than the UK's current climate targets, which are based on a 50-66% chance of staying under 2 degrees<sup>3</sup>.

There are good reasons for a 1.5 degree goal – we are already seeing severe climate impacts at the current 1 degree of warming<sup>4</sup>, and climate impacts increase dramatically from 1.5 to 2 degrees<sup>5</sup>.

The Paris Agreement stronger temperature goal implies a smaller safe global carbon budget, which in turn implies a smaller available budget for the UK.

The agreement is also clear that to meet these aims, the priority is short-term: “*global peaking of greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible, and ...rapid reductions thereafter*”. It is overwhelmingly what happens in the next 15 years which determines whether the world meets these temperature targets; there should not be distraction away from this urgent need for emissions cuts now.

### **Individual country action**

The Agreement explicitly recognises the “differentiated responsibilities” of nations. It states that “*peaking will take longer for developing countries*” that “*Developed country Parties should continue taking the lead*” and that each country's action should “*reflect its highest possible ambition, reflecting its common but differentiated responsibilities*”

The UK's targets do not yet adequately reflect these differentiated responsibilities. The CCC in its UK carbon budget setting makes strong links between UK and EU targets. In their 5<sup>th</sup> Carbon budget report pre-Paris they said<sup>6</sup>:

*“The EU 2030 target is also below estimates for a ‘fair’ EU share of a global 2°C pathway, and the UK’s likely contribution is at the low end of ambition compared to its global ‘fair’ share”*. They then assessed a range of methods to calculate a fair effort, and said: *“This indicates an indicative range for the EU of 45-71% below 1990 levels, and 53-80% for the UK. The UK takes on a slightly higher reduction than the EU as a whole, given its status as one of the wealthiest nations and high historic emissions”*. Even the high end of their range – the 80% target - is very generous to the UK – it ignores most of the UK’s historical responsibility. An October 2015 climate equity review<sup>7</sup> from Oxfam, WWF, Christian Aid, Friends of the Earth, CARE and others suggests that the EU 2030 target is only one fifth of its fair share of effort.

The CCC said that the EU should be *“prepared to raise its ambition as a contribution to closing a global emissions gap in 2030”* and that *“the UK Government has previously suggested a 50% reduction for the EU by 2030, which would entail a greater reduction for the UK.”* The EU is already on track to deliver 30% cuts by 2020<sup>8</sup> – it can easily increase its ambition.

The Prime Minister has committed to the UK making a fair contribution to tackling climate change<sup>9</sup>. Overall, a fair contribution for the UK and EU to just meeting the pre-Paris temperature target means both the UK and EU increasing their ambition. With the new Paris Agreement wording on temperature strengthening as well, UK and EU ambition should be higher still.

To deliver on the science and equity wording in the Paris Agreement, the UK should set a 2030 target and carbon budget of at least an 80% cut on 1990 levels<sup>10</sup>.

**Contact:** [simon.bullock@foe.co.uk](mailto:simon.bullock@foe.co.uk)

---

<sup>1</sup> CCC, 2015. Domestic implications of the “Paris Agreement” to combat climate change. <https://www.theccc.org.uk/2015/12/14/domestic-implications-of-the-paris-agreement-to-combat-climate-change/>

<sup>2</sup> UNFCCC, 2015. Adoption of the Paris Agreement. <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2015/cop21/eng/l09r01.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> CCC, 2015. The scientific and international context for the fifth carbon budget. <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/the-scientific-and-international-context-for-the-fifth-carbon-budget/> . Box 2.1

<sup>4</sup> Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society, 2015. Explaining Extreme Events of 2014 from a Climate Perspective. <https://www2.ametsoc.org/ams/index.cfm/publications/bulletin-of-the-american-meteorological-society-bams/explaining-extreme-events-from-a-climate-perspective/table-of-contents/low-resolution-version/> . Vol. 96, No. 12. December.

<sup>5</sup> Forster, P, 2015. 1.5°C is a brave new world. <http://www.carbonbrief.org/piers-forster-1-5c-is-a-brave-new-world>. Dec 15<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> CCC, 2015. The fifth carbon budget – the next step towards a low-carbon economy. <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/the-fifth-carbon-budget-the-next-step-towards-a-low-carbon-economy/> . Nov 26<sup>th</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Civil Society Equity Review, 2015. Fair Shares: A civil society equity review of INDCs. <http://civilsocietyreview.org/> . October

<sup>8</sup> Sandbag, 2015. Inflated CO<sub>2</sub> Forecasts hide the fact that EU is on track for 30% cuts by 2020. <https://sandbag.org.uk/blog/2015/nov/27/inflated-co2-forecasts-hide-fact-eu-track-30-cuts-/> Nov 27<sup>th</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Green Alliance, 2015. Cameron, Clegg and Miliband sign joint climate change agreement. [http://www.green-alliance.org.uk/leaders\\_joint\\_climate\\_change\\_agreement.php](http://www.green-alliance.org.uk/leaders_joint_climate_change_agreement.php) . Feb 13<sup>th</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Friends of the Earth, 2010. Reckless Gamblers. [www.foe.co.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/reckless\\_gamblers.pdf](http://www.foe.co.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/reckless_gamblers.pdf) . December