

Module 4 International negotiations

united nations climate change conference

Nusa Dua - Bali, Indonesia, 3-14 December 2007

THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL PANEL ON CLIMATE CHANGE

If you have ever tried organising a group of friends to do something on the weekend and encountered great difficulties trying to reconcile one person's preference for the movies with another's preference for the beach, spare a thought for the 2,500 scientists who form the **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)**. It is their task to consider scientific research from dozens of nations and thousands of scientists around the world and channel it into one report that is agreed to by all.

The **IPCC** was established in 1989 by the United Nations and the World Meteorological Organisation. In 1990, it released its First Assessment Report that highlighted concerns about global warming and its environmental impact. The report was extremely influential because, for the first time, thousands of scientists from around the world had reached a consensus on the existence of climate change and the likelihood that the problem was caused by humans. In other words, the conclusions of the report had been agreed to by all the scientists involved, conclusions that could not be agreed to were not included.

The United Nations was founded in 1945 at the end of World War II in the hope that it would intervene in conflicts between nations to prevent future wars. Based in New York, it now has 192 members and numerous agencies that address a range of global issues including the environment.

In 2007 the IPCC and former US Vice-President Al Gore shared the Nobel Peace Prize for "their efforts to build up and disseminate greater knowledge about man-made climate change, and to lay the foundations for the measures that are needed to counteract such change".

Module 4 International negotiations

UNITED NATIONS FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Since the release of its First Assessment Report, the IPCC's Assessment Reports have grown in significance and influence. Indeed two years after the first report, the United Nations sponsored the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro where countries from all around the world signed onto the **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)**.

This agreement set out the broad principles and objectives that kicked off the years of negotiations that created the Kyoto Protocol in 1997.

THE KYOTO PROTOCOL

In 1997 representatives from countries around the world came together in Kyoto, Japan, to develop a plan to deal with global warming. The result was the **Kyoto Protocol**, a historic agreement that reflected over a hundred years of scientific research.

The Kyoto Protocol is a legally binding agreement made under the UNFCCC. Its aim is to avoid dangerous climate change. The first step was to set emission targets for developed nations to achieve between 2008 and 2012. It was always expected that later agreements would build on this, so the Kyoto Protocol was the first, not the last step.

As **Figure 1** shows, each developed nation received individual emission targets, which were expressed as a percentage of their emissions in 1990. Although three countries (including Australia) received a target that allowed emissions to increase from their 1990 levels, the combined effect of the Protocol, if all countries meet their targets, will be that average annual emissions will decrease by five per cent below 1990 levels between 2008 and 2012.

Most of the countries that initially signed the Kyoto Protocol also ratified it. That is, they formally agreed to be bound by its obligations. Australia signed in 1998, but it did not ratify the Protocol until 2008.

By the start of 2008, 176 countries had **ratified** the Kyoto Protocol and the only developed country not to have ratified the Protocol is now the United States.

As far back as 1896, the Swedish chemist Svante Arrhenius claimed that increasing levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere could cause the planet to warm. He was the first person to warn that human activities could lead to changes in the Earth's climate.

Module 4 International negotiations

Figure 1 Emission targets under the Kyoto Protocol, selected countries

Country	Target (2008 - 2012)
European Union – 15	-8%
United States*	-7%
Canada, Hungary, Japan, Poland	-6%
Croatia	-5%
New Zealand, Russian Federation, Ukraine	0
Norway	+1%
Australia	+8%
Iceland	+10%

* The US has indicated it does not intend to ratify the Kyoto Protocol.
Source: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2007.

DEVELOPED & DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Although developed countries like the United Kingdom and Australia have been given emission targets, developing countries like China and India have not. This may seem strange given that China is the second largest emitter of greenhouse gases after the United States however, the decision is based on the principle of **'common but differentiated responsibility'**.

The first part of this principle recognises that while all countries share a common responsibility to reduce their emissions, historically it is developed countries that were the main contributors to the greenhouse gas emissions during the industrial revolution that is causing climate change today (see **Module 5**).

The second part of this principle recognises that rich industrialised countries are better able to introduce measures to reduce emissions than developing countries. As a result, developed countries like Australia and the United Kingdom are to act first to reduce emissions and developing countries will receive emission targets thereafter.

Module 4 International negotiations

AUSTRALIA & THE KYOTO PROTOCOL

In December 2007, the newly elected Labor Government ratified the Kyoto Protocol and as a result Australia is legally bound to meet its target – see **Figure 1**. For this to occur, Australia's average annual emissions between 2008 and 2012 must be no higher than 567 Mt CO₂-e, or 108 per cent of the 1990 level.

The Government has stated that it is committed to meeting this target, but the **most recent evidence** indicates that Australia's emissions will exceed the target level unless new policies are introduced quickly.

There has been controversy in Australia and internationally about Australia's position towards Kyoto. Until December 2007, the previous Coalition Government, which had been in power since 1997, had refused to ratify the Protocol. There are three main reasons that were given for the decision.

- 1 Kyoto is not in Australia's economic interests.
- 2 Developing countries like China and India are exempt from the Protocol.
- 3 Australia will meet its Kyoto target anyway, so it does not need to ratify the Protocol.

The response from people who support ratifying the Protocol is as follows.

- 1 The costs from the Kyoto Protocol will be higher for countries that stay outside the Protocol because they will miss out on the economic benefits from carbon trading (this is explained in **Module 8**). Environmentalists also point out that economic interests are not always the same as national interest especially when the likely impacts of climate change are taken into consideration.
- 2 Developing countries like China and India have ratified the Protocol and the reason they do not have emission targets is because of the principle of common but differentiated responsibility (see above).
- 3 If Australia will meet the target, why not ratify the Protocol and gain the economic benefits of participation? Also, if Australia ratifies the Protocol it will have a greater say in future negotiations that will have a big impact on Australia after 2012.

THE FUTURE OF INTERNATIONAL NEGOTIATIONS

The attention of the international community is now turning to the agreement that will follow the Kyoto Protocol once it expires in 2012. It is likely that the UNFCCC will continue to be the framework for reaching such an agreement, despite the past efforts of some countries (including Australia and the US) to set up different frameworks.

There is much more certainty about the science of climate change than there was in 1997 when the Protocol was signed, and greater urgency in finding solutions. Disturbingly, global greenhouse gas emissions are also much higher than they were in 1997.

Module 4 International negotiations

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

Comprehension Questions

- What is the Kyoto Protocol?
- Write in your own words the meaning of the principle of common but differentiated responsibility.
- Why does Australia have an emissions target under the Kyoto Protocol but China does not?

Analysis Questions

- Draw up a chart with the arguments for and against ratifying the Kyoto Protocol.

For	Against

- Do you think the Federal Government's decision to ratify the Kyoto Protocol is a good one? Explain why.



Exercise 1

At international climate negotiations, representatives from different countries meet to discuss ways to address climate change. These meetings are often intense, as was the case in Kyoto in 1997, as negotiators try to reach an agreement that satisfies all participants.

Consider the different interests of two countries that are involved in climate negotiations and see how they might be able to resolve their differences.

Notes for Teachers

Split the class into two groups; the first group are negotiators from China, the second are negotiators from Australia.

Ask the students to brainstorm reasons why they think the opposing country should have an emissions target.

After students in each group have had time to write down their arguments, both groups come together to persuade the other of the need to have an emissions target.