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Think Globally. Act Locally!

The COP26 meeting, 31Oct-12Nov 2021 – an overview by HOPE

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This article is a follow up piece to [one produced by HOPE on IPCC climate reporting, in August 2021](#). It will be followed by other occasional articles on Australia's national response to issues concerned with climate disruption, the renewable energy transition here and the need for greater support of various environmental and social justice outcomes.

The forthcoming COP 26 conference (a UN Conference of the Parties) to be held in Glasgow, Scotland at the end of this month is much in the news, and rightly so. These crucial international climate disruption negotiations, incorporating the views of 197 countries, build on the outcomes of earlier COP events, primarily the 2015 COP meeting in Paris. The present conference in 2021 is aimed at accelerating collective international response to climate risks over the next 10 years. A key desired outcome is to agree strategies which can keep global heating trends to under 1.5°C for the long term future, in part by greatly reducing global greenhouse gas emissions (GHG).

Another required outcome of the conference is to refine strategies which can help poorer countries better adapt to increasing climate disruption impacts. The current trend of these impacts pose existential threats to the stable functioning of all of global society. It follows that the collective decisions made at COP 26 will be of immense consequence to future human health and wellbeing, and that of the natural world. In the run up to this important conference, HOPE is producing this simple overview.

What is COP26 and what are the main objectives of the meeting?

In a nutshell, the COP 26 conference will further underline the dangerous threat posed by global heating and climate disruption trends and will try to further galvanise the global community of nations to do everything in its power to counter those trends. Countries such as Australia, which to date have done far too little to make a fair contribution to this global effort, will rightly come under increasing scrutiny as to its genuine motivation to make a difference at the global level. There may well be future diplomatic and economic repercussions for Australia if that motivation is found wanting.

What are some of the hoped for outcomes from COP 26?

Those major GHG emitting countries yet to commit firmly to a mid-century, net zero GHG target (such as Australia at time of writing of this article) must make that commitment urgently; and match it with a realistic, 2030 interim target of at least a 50% reduction of emissions on 2005 levels; increasing quickly to a 2030 target in the 60 - 75% reduction range. Due to past inaction, Australia needs to be in that latter range. Additionally, all countries which signed up to the earlier, Paris 2015 COP climate accords need to demonstrate their ongoing, honest and realistic commitment to helping control global heating.

A key way to demonstrate that serious, authentic commitment would be to start to wind back existing fossil fuel interests and to enforce the principle, voiced by the United Nations and International Energy Agency this year; that no new fossil fuel projects should be developed from now on. Many countries are currently ignoring that principle, including Australia; and hopefully COP26 will add to the pressure to halt this duplicity.

Greater clarity and certainty needs to be achieved over allocation of the \$USD 100 billion per annum climate mitigation and adaptation fund, agreed at earlier COP meetings, to help third world and less developed countries transition to a low carbon future, and better adapt to the impacts of global heating. At present there are major questions over whether funding commitments are being met, the right mix

of GHG reduction and climate adaptation funding, and whether financial support should be delivered primarily as grants or loans. Australia's current contribution to this fund needs to be improved significantly over the next few years.

What could or should Australia bring to COP26?

Australia is a country which has much to gain or lose depending on the decisions made at the COP26 meeting. It should not just be a complacent observer at the conference table, or a 'free rider' on the decisions made by more responsible and rational governments around the world. It is in our own interests to show the international community that we are an active player in helping to combat the existential threat posed by global heating, not a continuing laggard with its head in the sand over climate disruption.

In HOPE's view, along with that of majority public opinion and peak business and health sector organisations in Australia, the Prime Minister should declare an Australian national GHG net zero 2050 target, and at the same time give that long term objective credibility, by announcing a realistic, 2030 interim GHG reduction target, somewhere in the range of a 60 -75 % reduction on 2005 levels by 2030. Australia might then begin to be seen as a legitimate player in global climate negotiations. This new found commitment would also need to be backed by a ditching of the so-called, gas-led recovery here, and its replacement with a genuine and well-considered renewable energy transition plan, supported through associated strategy and policy development.

To assist such a change in approach to tackling climate disruption, the federal government could make great use of the well-publicised, visionary strategies produced by a range of independent Australian think tanks such as the Climate Council, the Australia Institute and Beyond Zero Emissions, to name a few. It is clear to many that we can refashion Australia as a clean energy super power in the remainder of the 21st century. This country has magnificent opportunities to further expand renewable energy to power its domestic economy via solar electric, wind, pumped hydro and battery storage, and is also well placed to produce a mainstay of the renewable energy revolution in the form of green hydrogen, which can be used as a combustion fuel in the production of steel and other consumables for export.

The federal government here should be embracing such initiatives and learning from the more ambitious and innovative climate disruption and renewable energy policies already undertaken by many Australian state and local governments. It should be moving to offer strong leadership and adequate financial support to speed the uptake of such approaches – not trying to resist them as is presently the case.

Doing our best within a collective international effort to help control global heating, whilst ensuring our economy remains competitive in the face of the renewable energy revolution. Creating tens of thousands of Australian jobs in the low carbon industries of the future. This is the type of vision the federal government should be promoting, but it remains to be seen whether a fresh, national Australian stance on climate will emerge following COP26, or simply a re-run of tired, old and irresponsible arguments for fossil fuelled business as usual.

Some information resources and initiatives related to the COP26 meeting

If you want to increase your understanding of the COP26 process, and global heating and climate disruption challenges, there are many great, free resources online. Here are just a couple of suggestions.

The Australian [Climate Council](#) has an excellent archive of informative material relevant to the COP26 negotiations, and has just produced a [comprehensive and detailed report](#) covering all aspects of Australia's national position on the climate disruption challenge and our needed responses at COP26 and beyond.

The [Countdown initiative](#) from the TED online informal education platform is covering the run up to the beginning of the COP 26 meeting and features a lot of resource material across a range of climate disruption concerns, up for debate at COP26 and beyond.

The [Climate Fringe events](#) web page covers COP26 related events taking place in Scotland – and some of these may be available for exploration online.

[ClimateActNow](#) is an Australian political initiative linked to the independent federal MP Zali Steggall. She is using the momentum around COP26 to leverage her attempt to introduce a Climate Change Bill to federal parliament. She is calling for citizen support to lobby federal MPs, to allow a debate of this bill in the near future. The ClimateActNow website describes how to join this campaign and also provides a range of information on climate change challenges and solutions.