

Delay in climate decisions will cost more, as we head to 3.5 degrees C of warming say scientists

Durban—6 December 2011--Delaying any decisions on future climate action until 2015 or 2020 will bring a rapidly increasing risk in costs and threatens the likelihood of the world being able to keep global warming to below 2 degrees C, the Climate Action Tracker warned today in its Durban update.

We are heading toward a global emissions pathway that will take warming to 3.5degC, and far from a cost-optimal pathway to keep warming below 2degC, according to the latest analysis from the Climate Action Tracker, a joint project of Climate Analytics, Ecofys and the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research.

With the current pledges taken under the Cancun Agreements, global emissions would be on a pathway where, in 2020, we would be emitting 55 gigatonnes of CO₂ equivalent a year (GtCO₂e/year), way above the levels consistent with a 2degC pathway of below 44GtCO₂e/year. This is in line with the UNEP "Bridging the Emissions Gap" report.

"The longer we wait to take ambitious action, the more costly it will get. If governments delay increasing pledges until 2015 - or later, the mitigation opportunities drop substantially. Halving the time to act between now and 2020 roughly halves the potential in 2020." said Niklas Höhne, Director Energy and Climate Policy of Ecofys.

Even the 2degC pathway itself is difficult, as the world will have to cut global emission levels 2% a year (on 2000 levels) from 2020 to 2050.

But leaving mitigation decisions until 2020, i.e. staying with the current pledges, would mean those emissions would need to be reduced by 3.8% a year after 2020, almost twice as fast.

The International Energy Agency's "World Energy Outlook 2011" (IEA WEO2011) carries a similar message. It indicates that for every US\$1 of investment not spent on reducing emissions in the power sector before 2020 an additional US\$4.3 would need to be spent after 2020 to compensate for the increased emissions.

"To put it bluntly, the longer we wait, the less options we will have, the more it will cost, the less likely we are to be able to stay below global warming of 2 degrees C and the bigger threat to the world's most vulnerable," said Bill Hare, Director of Climate Analytics.

The scientists also called for a common set of accounting rules so as to lead to better transparency.

Scientists are faced with an increasingly complex and fragmented information base, making it progressively more difficult to compare governments' proposals for action and assess their stringency.

With no common accounting system to compare countries, scientists are forced to make assumptions on what lies behind government pledges. While we are transparent on the assumptions made, having a wide variety of assumptions hardly leads to transparency overall. A set of common rules would ensure a higher level of transparency, ensure comparability and build confidence. This would help our work and - we think - would also benefit the overall process.

Examples include

- LULUCF rules, where countries have quite different ways of measuring and accounting, for example the US and Australia

- Shifting baselines, especially with big developing countries, such as Brazil
- Pledges that are based on a variety of measurements, such as China's emissions intensity/GDP.
- The wide variety of accounting in forest management submissions where:
 - 31 countries submitted reference levels based on projections;
 - three countries submitted historical reference levels based on a single year 1990;
 - one country chose the average removals during a historical time series (1990-2006);
 - and one country kept the Kyoto rules from the first commitment period: gross-net accounting using a narrow approach.
- Fast Start Finance accounting, for example Japan's accounting between public and private financing has a difference of USD \$3.4 billion.

For a colour version of the update, please visit our brand new website, launched today, at <http://www.climateactiontracker.org>

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Climate Analytics

Climate Analytics is a non-profit organization based in Potsdam, Germany. It has been established to synthesize climate science and policy research that is relevant for international climate policy negotiations. It aims to provide scientific, policy and analytical support for Small Island States (SIDS) and the least developed country group (LDCs) negotiators, as well as non-governmental organisations and other stakeholders in the 'post-2012' negotiations. Furthermore, it assists in building in-house capacity within SIDS and LDCs.

www.climateanalytics.org

About Ecofys – Experts in Energy

Established in 1984 with the vision of achieving “sustainable energy for everyone”, Ecofys has become the leading expert in renewable energy, energy & carbon efficiency, energy systems & markets as well as energy & climate policies. The unique synergy between those areas of expertise is the key to its success. Ecofys creates smart, effective, practical and sustainable solutions for and with public and corporate clients all over the world. With offices in the Netherlands, Germany, the United Kingdom, China and the US, Ecofys employs over 250 experts dedicated to solving energy and climate challenges.

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Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK)

The PIK conducts research into global climate change and issues of sustainable development. Set up in 1992, the Institute is regarded as a pioneer in interdisciplinary research and as one of the world's leading establishments in this field. Scientists, economists and social scientists work together, investigating how the earth is changing as a system, studying the ecological, economic and social consequences of climate change, and assessing which strategies are appropriate for sustainable development.

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