

Briefing Note:

December 2015

The UNFCCC's COP21

On Saturday 12th December, 195 countries agreed to a new global strategy to stop climate change. [“The agreement is a legal instrument that will guide the process for universally acting on climate change. It is a hybrid of legally binding and nonbinding provisions”](#). In short, the *process* agreed in Paris is legally-binding, as is the requirement to take action. But specific outcomes (e.g. targets for emissions cuts) are not legally binding. This means the agreement does not require ratification by the US Senate.

You can find the full, 32-page, agreement [here](#). The European Commission's response to the agreement is [here](#).

The EU was praised for its role in spearheading what became known as the “High-Ambition Coalition”, a partnership specifically geared to breaking the deadlock between developed and developing nations. You can read more on the politics of the negotiations on [Politico](#).

Most important points

- Agreement to hold **global average temperature rises to under 2 degrees** from pre-industrial levels and to work towards holding them to under 1.5 degrees. This effectively means a net-zero emissions after 2050, with countries pledging “to achieve a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases in the second half of this century”. This leaves open the possibility of man-made carbon sinks like Carbon Capture and Storage technology.
- 187 countries have submitted action plans to cut their emissions beyond 2020, and stretching as far away as 2030. But it is widely believed that these do not go far enough. So the agreement has a mechanism to **review those pledges every five years**, in order to make them fit the 2C. The first “stocktake” will happen in 2018,
- There are provisions for **loss and damage** caused by climate change (although no facility for compensation claims from developing countries) and for the ramping up of **financial support to developing countries** – although this was left out of the legally-binding text.

Select Global Reaction

Carbon Brief has put together a comprehensive wrap-up of the [global media reaction](#) to the agreement. In the UK, [the FT](#) praised the agreement, not for providing a solution but for “spreading the responsibility for finding one beyond a small coterie of developed countries” and [The Guardian](#) also praised the diplomacy involved in getting developed countries and developing countries to see eye-to-eye. On the other hand, one of the most well-known climate scientists, James Hansen, called the agreement [“worthless words...basically a fraud”](#), holding to the line that only a global tax on carbon can stop fossil fuels being burned. Bill McKibben, meanwhile, [writing in the Guardian](#), likened the agreement to a training plan, the proof will be in the running of the marathon. [BusinessGreen](#) editor James Murray has given his take on what the agreement means UK energy and climate policy. And [Lord \(Nicholas\) Stern](#), author of the UK's first study on the economics of climate change, has emphasised the importance of public-private partnerships in making good on the UNFCCC's agreed goals.

Next steps

The EU has already set-out its decarbonisation plans to 2030. The directives which will institute these in EU law will be amended during the course of next year. On Tuesday 15th December, the European Parliament [passed a resolution](#) on the EU Energy Union which again calls for tighter renewables and energy efficiency targets.