



Australia: Part of the Climate Problem—Part of the Solution

3 International Action

Climate change is a global problem requiring a global response.

Action by the top 20 major emitters must be part of an effective response. Australia is one of these countries.

The international negotiations have galvanised ambition by all countries but more is needed.

These negotiations are not static—they are live and are at a pivotal point.

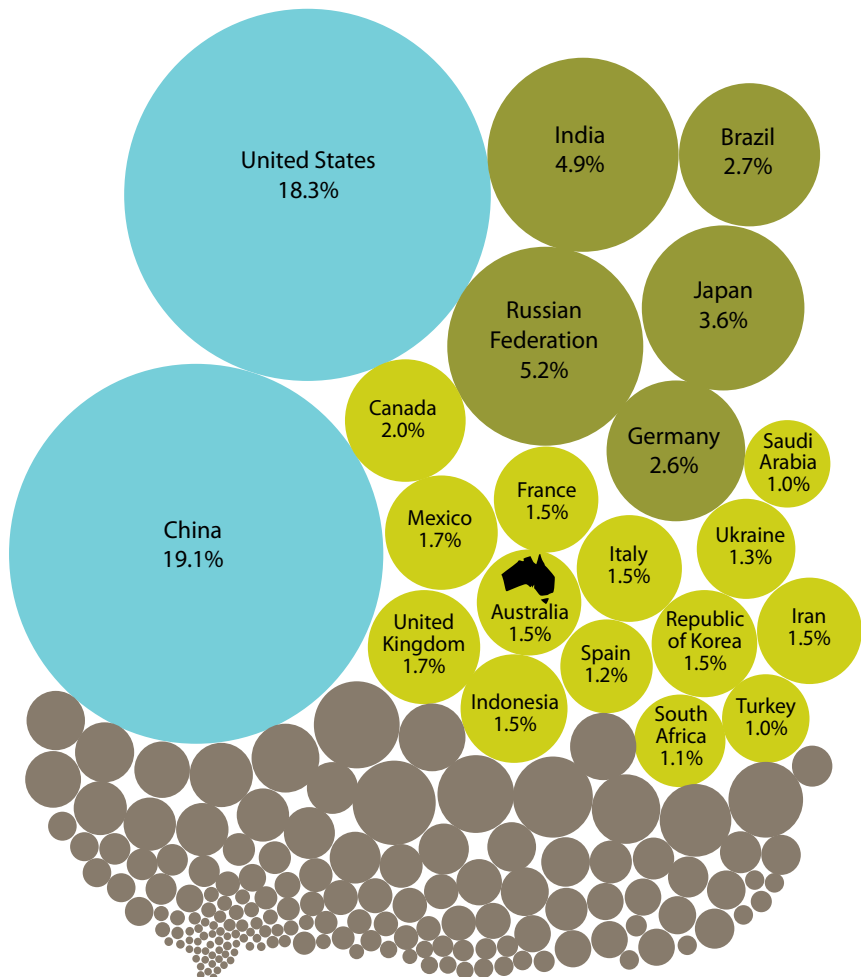
The decisions made this decade will determine whether the world can avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

Climate change is a global problem that can only be tackled by international action. Global action must involve all countries, but avoiding the worst impacts of climate change relies entirely on whether the top emitters take action. Australia is in this group.

The international negotiations under the United Nations have built ambition over a relatively short time but more will be needed to achieve the globally agreed goal of avoiding dangerous climate change.

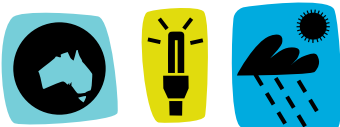
All major emitters need to play a role if the world is to reduce carbon emissions to a level capable of keeping temperature rise to less than 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels—the goal signed up to by the global community (figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 All major emitters need to act (percentage of global emissions, 2005¹)



- emissions >6% : 2 countries = 37% of total
- emissions >2 - 6% : 5 countries = 19% of total
- emissions 1 - 2% : 14 countries = 20% of total
- emissions < 1% : rest of world (164 countries) = 24% of total

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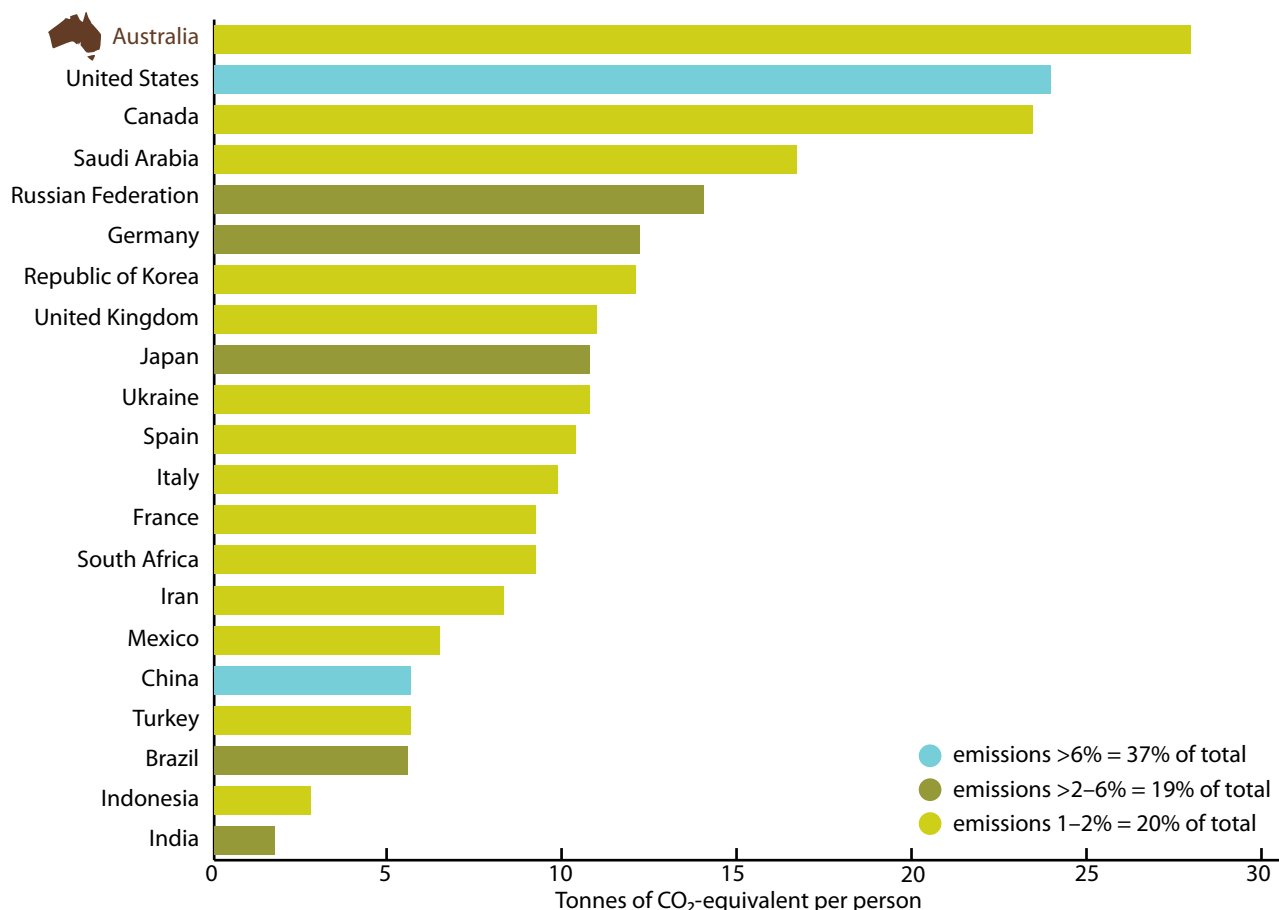


1 Excludes land use change. Data source: Climate Analysis Indicators Tool (CAIT) Version 8.0 (Washington DC World Resources Institute, 2010).

Two countries contribute over 35 per cent of global emissions—the United States and China. Nineteen countries are responsible for the next 40 per cent—individually emitting between 1 and around 5 per cent of global emissions. Australia is one of these countries. Holding any temperature increase to below 2 degrees is not possible if countries with national emissions similar to Australia do not act.

Of these top emitting countries, Australia is the highest emitter on a per capita basis, with around 27 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent per person.

Figure 3.2 Emissions per capita in 2005² (excludes land use change)



International cooperation has grown substantially in a relatively short time—reflected in the increased ambition of major emitters. The negotiations are live and continue to develop a stronger global response.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (the Convention) is comparatively young in global diplomacy terms. The Convention was agreed in 1992 and has 195 signatories.

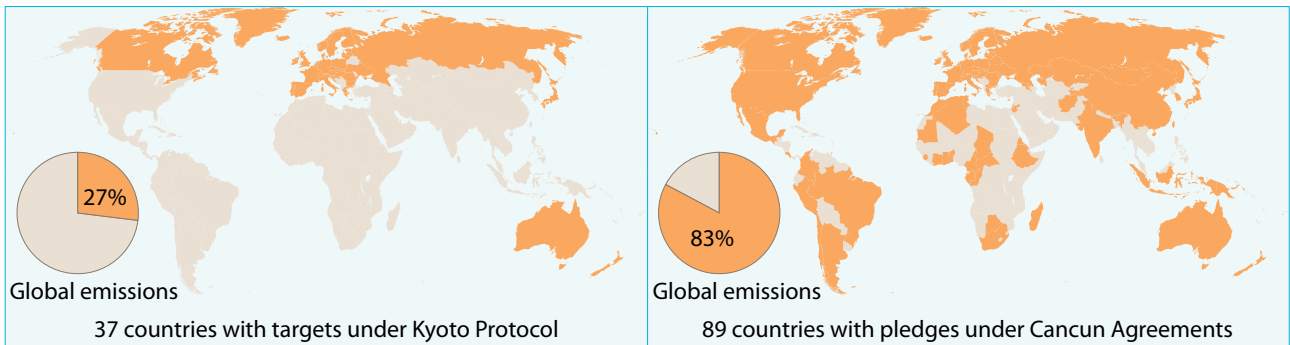
Since its establishment, steady gains have been made towards the overall objective of the Convention—to stabilise atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases at a level to prevent dangerous climate change.

Solid achievements on five key fronts have been made in this time:

- The world defined a global goal to guide emission reduction efforts. At Copenhagen (2009), it was agreed that holding any temperature increase to below 2 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels was needed to prevent dangerous climate change.
- Substantially more countries have put emission reduction pledges on the table—there are 89 countries with pledges after Cancun (2010) that account for over 80 per cent of global emissions—this is up from 37 countries with targets under the Kyoto Protocol that account for just 27 per cent of global emissions (figure 3.3).

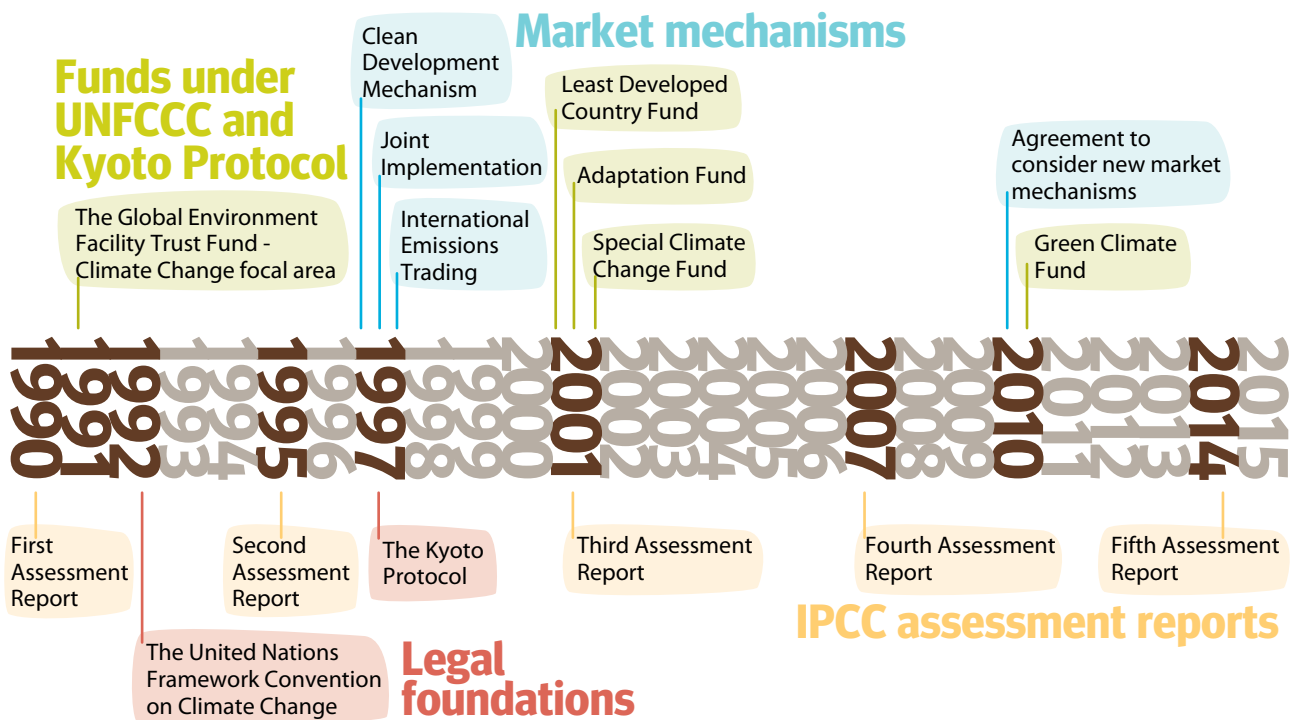
² Excludes land use change. Data source: Climate Analysis Indicators Tool (CAIT) Version 8.0 (Washington DC World Resources Institute, 2010).

Figure 3.3 Growth in the number of countries pledging action and the portion of global emissions covered under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change



- The infrastructure to deliver action has built continuously—billions of dollars have been mobilised to support clean technology and deliver a low carbon future including through the formation of specialised funds and market mechanisms to reduce emissions across borders, along with substantial investments and policy efforts at the individual country level (figure 3.4).
- The science of climate change has been settled alongside improvements in the way we gather, share and communicate the latest findings.
- Significant improvements have been made to how we measure and track emissions—the world agreed in Cancun to develop an even more robust system to measure and report on individual country emissions. This helps build confidence that countries are doing what they said they would do and that global efforts are on track to avoid dangerous climate change.

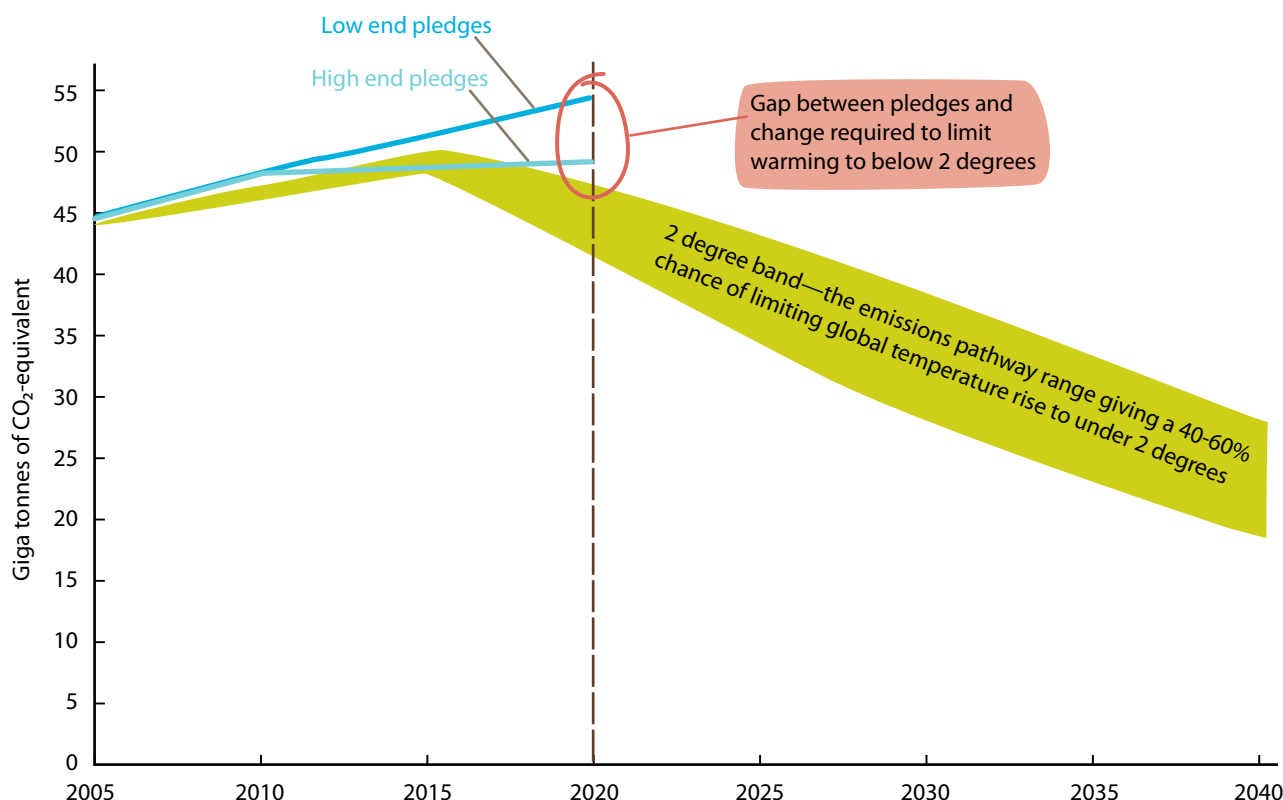
Figure 3.4 The infrastructure for climate change action, 1990 to 2015



As efforts to reduce emissions have grown substantially the live and continuous negotiations continue to press for a stronger, more holistic response. This is important for two key reasons:

- The time window is closing for global emissions to peak and decline. The science indicates that global emissions need to peak in this decade if the world is to limit global warming to below 2 degrees and avoid the most significant climate impacts.
- While the pledges put forward by countries are a good start, more is needed. A range of leading analysts³ have looked at what the pledges taken together deliver. They find that, even with the highest set of pledges, global emissions in 2020 would be too high to give a reasonable chance of meeting the below two degree goal.

Figure 3.5 Predicted global emissions in 2020 (low and high end pledges) against the below two degree goal



Source: Adapted from Exhibit 2 'Potential Emissions Paths' from Project Catalyst (2010) 'Taking stock—the emissions levels implied by the pledges to the Copenhagen Accord'.

The global decisions made in this decade will determine whether the world can avoid the worst impacts of climate change. The Cancun Agreements started the decade positively but many challenges lie ahead. A future point of significance set out in Cancun was the commitment by the world to conduct a detailed review of global progress in 2015. This review will assess how the world is tracking, taking into account the actions of all countries as well as the latest science, including the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) Fifth Assessment Report. This focus on assessing what the world has achieved and what is needed to keep the globe on a path to avoid the worst impacts of climate change will be an important milestone to target the next chapter of climate change cooperation.

For more information on what the Australian Government and other countries are doing on climate change go to www.climatechange.gov.au.

³ See for example Nicholas Stern and Christopher Taylor (2010), 'What Do the Appendices to the Copenhagen Accord Tell Us About Global Greenhouse Gas Emissions and the Prospects for Avoiding a Rise in Global Average Temperature of More Than 2 Degrees C?', Centre for Climate Change Economics and Policy and the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and Environment Policy Paper; Joeri Rogelj and Malte Meinshausen (2010), 'Copenhagen Accord pledges are Paltry', Nature (464) pp.1126-1128; Chief Scientists Office, United Nations Environment Program (2010), 'How Close Are We to the Two Degree Limit?', UNEP Information Note; Project Catalyst (2010), 'Taking Stock—the Emission Levels Implied by the Pledges to the Copenhagen Accord', Project Catalyst Briefing Paper; Trevor Houser (2010), 'Copenhagen, the Accord, and the Way Forward', Peterson Institute for International Economics Policy Brief.