

World News

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WORLD NEWS

by Scott Johnson*

EUROPE

EUROPEAN COMMISSION PROPOSES A NEW ENERGY PLAN LESS THAN ONE MONTH BEFORE RELEASE OF LANDMARK IPCC REPORT ON CLIMATE CHANGE

On January 10, 2007, as various meteorological organizations suggested a high probability that 2007 will be the world's warmest year ever,¹ the European Commission ("EC") announced a new plan to intensify its campaign to limit greenhouse gas emissions and bolster energy security with a new energy policy for Europe.² The policy, grounded in goals of: (1) an internal European energy market; (2) use of low-carbon energy; and (3) increased energy efficiency, proposes that, under a future "global agreement," developed nations should reduce greenhouse gas emissions to an average of 30 percent below 1990 levels by 2020, and by 50 percent of 1990 levels by 2050.³ In the interim, the EC noted that the EU should lead the way by reducing its emissions by twenty percent by 2020.⁴ The EC will seek endorsement of its proposals during the Spring European Council scheduled for March 2007, and will propose legislation following discussions there.⁵ The United Nations reacted positively to the proposal, and Yvo de Boer, head of the UN Climate Secretariat in Bonn, "urged EU governments to adopt the goals quickly."⁶ Other groups, including Greenpeace, criticized the proposal as a "political and scientific blunder" more the result of "political bargaining . . . than climate change science."⁷

On February 2, 2007, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change ("IPCC") issued a report entitled *Climate Change 2007: The Physical Science Basis* ("IPCC Report"), which concluded, with 90 percent certainty, that human activity is responsible for marked increases in atmospheric carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide concentrations since 1750.⁸ The IPCC Report attributed the carbon dioxide increase primarily to fossil fuel use and land-use change, and the methane and nitrous oxide increases primarily to agriculture.⁹

Organizations across the globe reacted differently when the IPCC report was released in Paris. For example, Exxon Mobil Corporation, a former supporter of groups that question climate change science, appears to have changed its position, stating that the debate is no longer about whether human-induced climate change is happening, but what should be done to remedy it.¹⁰ Exxon officials assert the company has stopped funding skeptics of climate change science.¹¹

AFRICA

RESEARCH SUGGESTS PROFOUND IMPACT OF GLOBAL WARMING ON AFRICAN CONTINENT

Global warming is likely to affect Africa profoundly, as long-term droughts intensify and uncertainty regarding the effect of climate change persists,¹² and recent studies suggest that continued warming in Africa poses serious risks to food security and peace.¹³ While climates across Africa always have been variable, recent research suggests that "new and dangerous extremes" are evident, as historically dry areas become drier, and wet areas wetter, threatening escalating drought in places already desperate for water, and flooding where too much rain already falls.¹⁴ Prior to his departure from the UN in December 2006, former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan highlighted the problem at a UN climate summit in Nairobi,¹⁵ equating the danger of climate change in Africa to "conflict, poverty, and the spread of weapons."¹⁶ At that summit, Mr. Annan announced a UN plan to advance clean development in Africa, including renewable energy projects and forestry programs designed to minimize greenhouse gas emissions.¹⁷ Such efforts, however, could be futile, considering that some commentators maintain that Africa itself has played "virtually no role" in climate change.¹⁸ The UN also recently highlighted the lack of means in Africa to detect and adapt to changing patterns of drought, flooding, and disease, and announced a new initiative, "ClimDev Africa," to intensify climate observation and risk management in eight African countries, later to expand to half of the continent.¹⁹

ASIA

CHINA'S FIRST NATIONAL CLIMATE CHANGE ASSESSMENT WARNS OF CONTINUED WARMING

China, which is among the most significant global greenhouse gas emitters, recently released its first national assessment of global climate change.²⁰ The assessment, as reported by Chinese state media, suggested that temperatures in China might increase significantly in coming decades.²¹ The Chinese government, in contrast to the position often taken by the United States prior to the IPCC Report, is not shy with respect to recognition of the effect of human activity on climate change and the potential impact that such change could have on the China's ability to

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develop.²² Among the potential effects of warming in China are worsening drought, extreme weather, glacial and river decline, and permafrost loss.²³ In addition, as recently reported by the Chinese State Forestry Administration, the risk of forest fires, wood-destroying pests, and tree disease also are expected to increase, as 2007 is expected to be the warmest year ever in parts of China.²⁴

On February 6, 2007, China inaugurated a three-year, \$1.7 million domestic carbon dioxide credit exchange program, assisted by the UN and prominent steel producer Arcelor Mittal, which, if successful, could be the first such program established in a developing nation.²⁵ Centers in twelve western Chinese provinces will assist investors in locating local industries in which to fund clean development projects.²⁶ Emphasizing the importance of clean development in China, UN China coordinator Khalid Malik noted that many “market-based instruments [have] emerged to support this effort, with carbon trading emerging as a major opportunity.”²⁷

AUSTRALIA/ NEW ZEALAND

AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTER CHANGES POSITION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

On January 25, 2007, Australian Prime Minister John Howard, a self-described “climate change skeptic,” indicated a shift in his position, claiming himself a “climate-change realist,” and saying, while delivering a national plan for Australian water security, that “he now accepts [that] global warming has contributed to Australia’s long-running drought.”²⁸ Howard noted that Australia’s “current trajectory of water use and management was not sustainable,” and that while Australian “rainfall has

always been highly variable . . . [t]he deviation around average rainfall is enormous . . . [and] seems to be getting bigger.”²⁹ Following this change of position, Australia’s developing carbon trading may receive increased support. On February 7, 2007, New Zealand’s Climate Change Minister, David Parker, said New Zealand would study the carbon trading system Australia is designing “to see if it is possible to set up a trans-tasman market.”³⁰

NORTH AMERICA

NOAA ALSO RECOGNIZES ANTHROPOGENIC INFLUENCE ON CLIMATE

On January 9, 2007, reported as the first time under the Bush administration, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (“NOAA”) stated, in a press release, that anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions contribute to climate change.³¹ NOAA’s statement, which indicated that 2006 was the warmest year on record for the contiguous United States since recordkeeping began in 1895,³² surprised some critics, who had complained in the past that the administration and NOAA had not been “open” with such information.³³ Despite such recognition, however, even with the recent shift in control of the U.S. Congress, certain political commentators do not expect that the United States’ position on the Kyoto Protocol will change, particularly without concurrent change in China’s position.³⁴ Another new potential factor in the United States climate debate is recent research from the University of California at Davis, which, contrary to the view that climate change impacts are likely to be gradual and easily anticipated, provides support for concerns that climate shifts could be unexpectedly severe and erratic as atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations continue to increase.³⁵

Endnotes: World News

¹ ABC News, *2007 Predicted to be World’s Warmest Year* (Jan. 4, 2007), available at <http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory?id=2769880> (last visited Feb. 11, 2007).

² Environment News Service, *EU Plans Steep Emissions Cuts to Avert Climate Disaster* (Jan. 10, 2007), available at <http://www.ens-newswire.com/ens/jan2007/2007-01-10-03.asp> (last visited Feb. 11, 2007) [hereinafter ENS].

³ ENS, *id.*

⁴ ENS, *id.*

⁵ ENS, *id.*

⁶ ABC News, *EU Climate Plan Seen Spurring UN Action* (Jan. 10, 2007), available at <http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory?id=2784808> (last visited Feb. 11, 2007).

⁷ Reuters, *EU About to Make Climate Change Blunder: Greenpeace* (Jan. 9, 2007), available at http://today.reuters.com/news/articleNews.aspx?type=scienceNews&storyID=2007-01-09T144227Z_01_L0935055_RTRUKOC_0_US-EU-CLIMATE-GREENPEACE.xml (last visited Feb. 11, 2007).

⁸ INTERGOVERNMENTAL PANEL ON CLIMATE CHANGE, *CLIMATE CHANGE 2007: THE PHYSICAL SCIENCE BASIS, SUMMARY FOR POLICY MAKERS* (Feb. 2007),

available at <http://www.ipcc.ch/SPM2feb07.pdf> (last visited Feb. 9, 2007) [hereinafter IPCC REPORT].

⁹ IPCC REPORT, *id.* at 2.

¹⁰ Greenwire, *Exxon Mobil Changes Position on Global Warming* (Feb. 9, 2007), available at <http://www.eenews.net/Greenwire/2007/02/09/#8> (last visited Feb. 9, 2007) [hereinafter *Exxon*].

¹¹ *Exxon, id.*

¹² SABC News, *UN to intensify Africa Climate Change Monitoring* (Dec. 19, 2006), available at <http://www.sabnews.com/world/other/0,2172,140511,00.html> (last visited Jan. 11, 2007) [hereinafter MONITORING].

¹³ BBC News, *Climate Change ‘Hitting Africa’* (Oct. 26, 2006), available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6092564.stm> (last visited Feb. 11, 2007) [hereinafter *Climate Change*].

¹⁴ *Climate Change, id.*

¹⁵ BBC News, *UN Chief Issues Climate Warning* (Nov. 15, 2006), available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/6149340.stm> (last visited Jan. 11, 2007) [hereinafter *UN*].

¹⁶ *UN, id.*

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continued from page 72

¹⁷ UN, *id.*

¹⁸ *Climate Change*, *supra* note 13.

¹⁹ MONITORING, *supra* note 12.

²⁰ Yahoo! News Canada, *Dire Warnings From China's First Climate Change Report* (Dec. 27, 2006), available at http://ca.news.yahoo.com/s/afp/061227/world/china_environment_climate_warming_sched_lead_1 (last visited Feb. 9, 2007) [hereinafter *Dire Warnings*].

²¹ *Dire Warnings*, *id.*

²² *Dire Warnings*, *id.*

²³ *Dire Warnings*, *id.*

²⁴ Planet Ark, *Climate Change Could Fuel China's Forest Fires* (Jan. 10, 2007), available at <http://www.planetark.com/dailynewsstory.cfm/newsid/39783/story.htm> (last visited Feb. 11, 2007).

²⁵ Shanghai Daily, *China to Set Up UN Emissions-Trading Hub* (Feb. 7, 2007), available at http://www.shanghaidaily.com/sp/article/2007/200702/20070207/article_305561.htm (last visited Feb. 9, 2007) [hereinafter *Trading Hub*].

²⁶ *Trading Hub*, *id.*

²⁷ *Trading Hub*, *id.*

²⁸ The Australian, *Howard a climate convert* (Jan. 26, 2007), available at http://theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,20867,21119912-601,00.html?from=public_rss (last visited Feb. 9, 2007) [hereinafter *Howard*].

²⁹ *Howard*, *id.*

³⁰ The New Zealand Herald, *Government Watching Australia's Carbon Trading*