

recent developments

INTERNATIONAL

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Climate Change –international developments

Bangkok meetings

The first round of 2008 United Nations climate change talks were held in Bangkok from 31 March to 4 April with the goal of launching a comprehensive process to sustain the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change beyond 2012 – Kyoto Protocol's first commitment period end date. The talks resulted in a framework and timetable for progressing the Bali Action Plan (2007) elements including 'a shared vision for long-term cooperative action', mitigation, adaptation, technology and finance. Meetings were also held to analyse the means for Annex I parties to reach their emissions targets, concluding that mechanisms for achieving targets should remain flexible. Discussions also progressed in relation to means of addressing key issues in the second commitment period (post - 2012) including land use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF) and sectoral approaches. It was agreed that measures related to LULUCF activities should remain available to Annex I parties to achieve their targets.

Sectoral approaches were discussed for the first time by the relevant Ad hoc working group on further commitments for Annex I parties. Approaches raised included mitigation potentials on a sectoral level, sectoral international cooperative action and sector-specific action in developing countries. There seemed to be general agreement that sectoral approaches could not replace national targets but may be a complimentary tool for meeting them. Ultimately however, the only agreement was to continue to discuss sectoral issues. Sectoral approaches seem to be favoured by

the US and Japan, amongst others. Japan called for sectoral approaches which would

differ for developed and developing countries. India has since led objections against the use of sectoral approaches by developed nations, stating that sectoral approaches in high emitting industries such as cement and steel could cripple those industries in developing nations and be used to dilute reduction requirements in developed countries.

The next phase of meetings is in June 2008. For further information on the Bangkok talks

President Bush commits to a curbing of emissions by 2025

The third of a series of US-led climate change talks was held in Paris on 17 and 18 April 2008. On 16 April President Bush announced that he would commit to a halt in emissions growth by 2025, stopping well short of Kyoto targets. He reiterated his view that technology would be the cornerstone of reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. He stated "Like many other countries, America's national plan will be a comprehensive blend of market incentives and regulations to reduce emissions by encouraging clean and efficient energy technologies. We're willing to include this plan in a binding international agreement, so long as our fellow major economies are prepared to include their plans in such an agreement." At least some delegates at the Paris meetings were disappointed with the unambitious nature of President Bush's commitment.

Other developments in the US suggest that President Bush's successor is most likely to take a more robust approach and may introduce federal legislation including mandatory emissions caps and establish a national emissions trading scheme. Senators Obama and McCain have all co-sponsored climate change legislation currently in Congress.

Greece and Canada face sanctions for breaching emissions reporting rules

The UN Climate Secretariat's enforcement branch has declared Greece to be in violation of its greenhouse gas reporting requirements. In the first such ruling since the Kyoto treaty came into force in 2005, it has suspended Greece from UN carbon trading. This means that Greece is restricted in using offsets gained by paying for emissions cuts in developing or former Eastern bloc nations to meet its targets for emissions reductions. However as Greece's emissions were 26% above 1990 levels and their target was 25% there is little need to utilise offsets.

The enforcement branch is also proceeding against Canada for alleged violations of reporting requirements. Canada says its Kyoto target of 6% above 1990 levels by 2008-2012 is unachievable – in 2005 its emissions were still 25% above 1990 levels. Canada's development of oil sands involves high carbon emissions. Final rulings on Canada have yet to be made by the enforcement branch.

International environment crime

An action plan to fight environment crime was agreed in early 2008 at a high level meeting of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), the World Customs Organization (WCO), customs administrations and others. Participants called for an urgent and coordinated global response to fight increasing environment crime.

Illegal international trade in environmentally sensitive products such as ozone depleting substances, other toxic chemicals and waste and endangered species is on the rise. Customs administrations reported over 9800 seizures under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and 220 hazardous waste seizures, over the last few years, but claim this is the tip of the iceberg. It is also believed that organised crime groups are involved in the trade. Under the Basel Convention on trade and disposal of hazardous waste, unlawful waste trade is now a criminal offence. UNEP estimates that between 20 and 50 million tonnes of 'e-waste' is produced annually with 70% of this being dumped in developing Asian and African countries.

Under the recent action plan, environment crime will become a priority for customs administrations with increased training and enhancement of international cooperation and information exchange. For more information see: www.greencustoms.org.