

Oxford Climate Policy Blog

Initiating debates on international climate policy

A Glasgow Ambition Cycle



Johnson Banks, with COP 26 logo.

On 1 April, the UNFCCC Bureau decided to postpone 2020 sessions in light of the corona pandemic. While this may have been inevitable, it must not be used as an excuse to also postpone enhancing the ambition of the global response to climate change under the Paris Agreement. We cannot afford to postpone ratcheting up the ambition of targets ('Nationally Determined Contributions' or 'NDCs') originally announced five years ago!*

Indeed we need to complete the 'Paris Ambition Mechanism' by adding the final component to the current 5-yearly communication and stocktake cycles: an ambition (replenishment) cycle! **

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Introducing the missing Ambition Cycle

This aim of this post is to summarise a proposal for this missing cycle, based on work which has been going on since 2014 (see 'Publications' below for more info on the origins and evolution of the idea). Following the language used in paragraphs 23 and 24 of the implementing Decision (1/CP.21) of the [Paris Agreement](#) (see 'COP 21 Text' below) to operationalise the communication cycle, the proposed Ambition Cycle can be introduced with a very simple procedural decision to:

1. *request* Parties to communicate by 2025 a nationally determined contribution with a time frame up to 2035, and to do so every five years thereafter, in line with Art. 4.9 [five-yearly communications];
2. *also request* Parties to consider in 2025 updating any nationally determined contributions communicated before, in line with Art. 2.2 [Equity], Art. 4.3 [Progression], and Art. 4.9 [informed by the outcomes of the 2023 global stocktake] of the Paris Agreement, and to do so every five years thereafter.

Exegesis

A. Choice of Language

From an exegetical point of view, the first and most important point to be made is that the proposed decision language was chosen not just because of the Paris precedent (paras 23 and 24, see COP 21 Text below) but because it allows avoiding having to go into metaphysical arguments as to the nature of 'time frames' which have unfortunately and unnecessarily taken up a lot of time in the past negotiations on the topic.

A lot of time has been spent in the past couple of years to discuss the merits of different durations of a common time frame and whether it should be interpreted as, say, a 'target period', or a 'period of implementation.' Indeed, it sometimes feels as if there are now different sects (a '5-year' sect, a '10-year' sect, and a '5+5-year' ecumenical lot), who seem to be getting more and more entrenched in their creeds. Fortunately, there is no need to enter into such metaphysical debates in order to adopt a common time frame. All that is necessary is the realisation that the target period and period of implementation of an NDC have a common end-point X, referred in the Paris language as the NDC "containing a time frame up to X". Given this it is possible to define a common time frame without any reference to durations, in the manner proposed above.

B. The Paragraphs

Para. 1 launches the 5+5 cycle. Note that the request is to communicate **by** 2025 (not **in** 2025), which leaves open the possibility for Parties to communicate the 2035 15 years before the end of the time frame, as some seem to favour.

Para. 2 introduces the ambition replenishment cycle, that is the simultaneous regular (5-yearly) assessment by Parties of the ambition of NDCs that were originally announced ('contributed') 5 years earlier. A lot can happen in 5-years, which is why Parties will not lose face if they decide that, in light of such changed national circumstances, they can do better than what 5 years prior was their highest possible ambition (Art. 4.3). However, this will not happen without a common timetable as to when such assessment are to happen: no-one will increase their ambition 'spontaneously' on their own, not least for fear of being accused of imposing an unfair burden on domestic stakeholders.

In practice the two paragraphs mean that Parties:

- **in 2020:** (§23) communicate a (new) 2030 NDC (i.e. with a time frame up to 2030), or (§24) consider updating the existing 2030 NDC;
- **by 2025:** communicate a 2035 NDC, **in 2025:** consider updating 2030 NDC;
- **by 2030:** communicate a 2040 NDC, **in 2030:** consider updating 2035 NDC;
- **by 2035:** communicate a 2045 NDC, **in 2035:** consider updating 2040 NDC;
- etc. etc.

COP26 was to be held five years after the Paris Agreement was agreed. 2020 is effectively when the Paris Agreement comes into effect and is also the year when Parties to the Paris Agreement are expected to put forward enhanced or updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) as part of the so-called "ratchet" mechanism.

Source: [COP26](#), UK House of Commons Library Briefing Paper, April 2020.

* See also Francesco Bassetti, "[Coronavirus Postpones Climate Summits, But Climate Action Cannot be Delayed](#)".

** The only way to avoid the situation castigated in a recent Climate Home News blog post ([Is the Paris Agreement failing its first test?](#)) becoming the default is by adopting such an ambition updating cycle.

COP 21 Text

Relevant Articles and Paragraphs from the [Paris Agreement](#) and [Decision 1/CP.21](#), respectively.

- **Para. 23.** *Requests* those Parties whose intended nationally determined contribution pursuant to decision 1/CP.20 contains a time frame up to 2025 to communicate by 2020 a new nationally determined contribution and to do so every five years thereafter pursuant to Article 4, paragraph 9, of the Agreement;
- **Para. 24.** *Also requests* those Parties whose intended nationally determined contribution pursuant to decision 1/CP.20 contains a time frame up to 2030 to communicate or update by 2020 these contributions and to do so every five years thereafter pursuant to Article 4, paragraph 9, of the Agreement;
- **Art. 2.2.** This Agreement will be implemented to reflect equity and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances.
- **Art. 4.3.** Each Party's successive nationally determined contribution will represent a progression beyond the Party's then current nationally determined contribution and reflect its highest possible ambition, reflecting its common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances.
- **Art. 4.9.** Each Party shall communicate a nationally determined contribution every five years in accordance with decision 1/CP.21 and any relevant decisions of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to this Agreement and be informed by the outcomes of the global stocktake referred to in Article 14.

Selected Publications

Reverse chronological order.

- Müller, B. (2020), [A "Glasgow Ambition Cycle"?](#) OCP Blog Post, April 2020
- Müller, B. (2020), [Here's looking at EU again! The European Climate Law](#), OCP Blog Post, March 2020

- Müller, B. (2020), [Leipzig in September: Birth of a new G2?](#), OCP Blog Post, February 2020
- Müller, B. (2020), [Enhance Climate Ambition in 2020: Here's looking at EU, kid!](#), OCP Blog Post, January 2020
- Dagnet, Y., and N. Cogswell, ["Setting a Common Time Frame for NDCs."](#) Working Paper. Washington, DC: World Resources Institute, November 2019.
- Müller, B., A. Sharma, Y. Dagnet, N. Cogswell (2019), [The Dynamic Contribution Cycle: Enhancing Ambition on the Basis of Equity](#), OCP/WRI In Brief, August 2019
- Müller, B. (2018b), [Common Time Frames: Creating Space for Ambition in the Paris Agreement Rulebook](#). ecbi. October 2018
- Müller, B. (2018a), ['Common Time Frames': What & Why?: A Contribution to the Debate on Article 4.10 of the Paris Agreement](#). OCP/ecbi Discussion Note, 2nd Ed., June 2018.
- LDC Group, [Submission by Ethiopia on behalf of the Least Developed Countries Group on common timeframes for nationally determined contributions](#); April 2018.
- [Submission on Common Timeframes for NDCs_TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO_BELIZE](#); April 2018.
- OECD/IEA, [Common time frames: Summary of discussions at the March 2018 Climate Change Expert Group Global Forum](#), March 2018
- Sharma, A. (2016), [Justice is still critical in the post-Paris world of "nationally determined" climate action](#), OCP blog post, October 2016
- Müller, B., and C. Shakya (2016), [Why an effective Ambition Mechanism is vital to deliver the Paris Agreement](#), OCP blog post, October 2016
- Müller, B., and X. Ngwadla (2016), [The Paris Ambition Mechanism: Review and Communication Cycles](#), OCP/ecbi Options Note, October 2016
- Müller, B. (2016c), [From Contribution Framework to Ambition Mechanism: How to enhance mitigation ambition under the Paris Agreement](#), April 2016
- Müller, B. (2016b), ['Maillot Jaune' for the Dynamic Contribution Cycle](#), OCP Blog post, February 2016
- Müller, B., (2016a), [A Dynamic Ambition Mechanism for the Paris Agreement](#), OCP/ecbi Discussion Note, March 2016
- Brazil (2014), [Views of Brazil on the elements of the new Agreement under the Convention applicable to all Parties](#), November 2014
- Müller, B., X. Ngwadla, and J. Miguez (2014), [A Dynamic Contribution Cycle: Sequencing Contributions in the 2015 Paris Agreement](#), October 2014

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