

## SNAPSHOT

# UK climate negotiators

International negotiations about climate change can either succeed by establishing legally binding commitments that ensure a 2 °C trajectory, or fall short of this target and thus utterly fail. At least this is how most people perceive them, suggests Pete Betts, director of the International Climate Change (ICC) directorate in the UK government Department for Energy and Climate Change. Of course, given the scientific consensus on the anthropogenic drivers of climate change (recently confirmed by the 5th Assessment Report of the IPCC), we should all hope that the next rounds of climate change negotiations — particularly the UN climate change Conference of the Parties to be held in Paris next year to establish the new climate deal — will end successfully.

The truth, however, is that things are much more complicated than that. Betts explains how progress has been achieved over the years in climate negotiations, with commitments from all major economies, albeit not enough to put us on track for climate security. He says that building global climate consensus involves several different challenges, beyond the actual negotiation at international meetings. Government experts are involved in a variety of activities that help to align countries' positions on climate change mitigation. ICC officials in the UK, for example, operate a four-pillar strategy. The first is the negotiation of international agreements with the goal of keeping the global mean temperature increase below 2 °C relative to the pre-industrial level; another focuses on climate finance to help developing countries to adapt to climate change; a third pillar focuses on seeking to shift political conditions in various countries by working with a number of stakeholders (including NGOs and businesses) to encourage low-carbon development; the fourth pillar is encouraging European Union leadership, notably through seeking consensus on a credible 2030 greenhouse gas target.

Overall, ICC has around 70 people dedicated to building climate consensus globally. Many others support the work to address climate change in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and its overseas posts and in the Development Ministry.



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The UK's negotiations team is small compared with other major economies, but it has contributed much to move the climate change agenda forward. "If existing commitments by leading economies were honoured in full, the world would have taken a big step towards a cost-effective trajectory to meet the 2 °C target by 2020," says Betts. And yet, what has been achieved so far is not enough: what is needed is the political will to radically change things. Countries continue to perceive a trade-off between economic growth and climate change mitigation. That is why showing them that the transition to a low-carbon economy is possible without damaging economic growth and, particularly in developing countries, without undermining poverty alleviation goals, is fundamental to create the political space for change.

ICC officials have worked with China on market-based instruments for climate policy, with India on energy efficiency, and with the US to understand the national security implications of climate change. Encouraging countries to take further steps to transition to a low-carbon economy domestically can help give more confidence when it comes to making commitments internationally, according to ICC deputy director of strategy, engagement and analysis, James Hughes. Although it is difficult to assess the impact

of such engagement, Hughes reflects that at the launch of the Guangdong pilot emissions trading scheme in China, the Consul General was invited to attend in recognition of the collaboration provided by the UK. "What is key to our credibility when we advocate action internationally is our ability to deliver action domestically," says Hughes. The UK has put in place a fairly comprehensive legislative framework to tackle climate change, and it has been quite innovative on issues like energy efficiency. In fact, Mexico has closely followed the UK example and set its targets in legislation.

Going forward and looking towards the UN climate change meeting in Paris in 2015, Hughes makes clear that the UK will encourage countries to be as ambitious as possible and emphasize that they will each need to play their part. Countries will need to come under some pressure to deliver the new climate agreement. However, in the aftermath of the Copenhagen meeting in 2009 and the consequent loss of confidence of businesses and investors, negotiators are now mindful, as Pete Betts stresses, that "Paris can be a very significant step forward but it won't be the end of the road."

MONICA CONTESTABILE