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## Joint APPG COP26 Briefing Series

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December 2020

# Making it count: the UK's NDC

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## Foreword

### Introduction to the briefing series

Caroline Lucas MP / Anthony Browne MP / Bim Afolami MP  
Alex Sobel MP / Sir Ed Davey MP

The United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26), due to be held in Glasgow in 2021, will be the most pivotal international climate change talks since the 2015 Paris Agreement was signed. The UK's COP26 presidency is not only a diplomatic responsibility but a huge opportunity for the UK.

As parliamentarians, we have a responsibility and a role to play. Good UK climate leadership means setting the right example, so much of what happens between now and the summit will rest on policy at home. It also means using UK diplomatic capacity to stretch the ambition of other countries.

We are writing as the chairs of the APPGs for Climate Change, Environment, Renewable & Sustainable Energy, Net Zero and Sustainable Finance. Our groups have their own specialisms and programmes, but we share the desire to maximise the success of COP26, and we want to help colleagues from both houses and all parties engage.

To kick things off, we've asked our APPGs' secretariats, working alongside the Energy & Climate Intelligence Unit and Green Alliance, to prepare regular briefings to bring you the inside track as the countdown to COP26 begins. These monthly briefings will highlight the significance of the conference, providing a timeline of key dates and comment pieces exploring the policy issues that will be central to negotiations at COP26.

We hope these briefings will be useful and informative to you, and can help to build a solid parliamentary foundation for a successful presidency.

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## What is a Nationally Determined Contribution?

Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) are a central component of the Paris Agreement. Every five years, countries who have signed up to the Paris Agreement must submit an NDC detailing the measures they are taking towards the goals of the agreement. Countries are expected to put forward an NDC that is more ambitious than their previous one and reflects their 'highest possible ambition'. Countries must submit updated NDCs by the end of 2020, five years after the 2015 Paris Agreement, though some countries may end up submitting in 2021 given the postponement of COP26. The new NDCs should focus on action over the coming decade, although they can include longer targets as well.

### **The challenge ahead of COP26**

Global temperatures have already increased by around 1°C since pre-industrial times resulting in extreme weather, rising sea levels and diminishing Arctic sea ice. The Paris Agreement aims to keep a global temperature rise this century well below 2°C, aiming for 1.5°C to prevent the worst effects of climate change. Countries current NDCs would result in approximately 3°C of warming on preindustrial levels which would result in catastrophic climate change.<sup>1</sup>

This makes the increasing ambition a vital objective of COP26. We cannot wait until the next NDC submission round in five years' time.

### **What should NDCs contain?**

As a minimum, NDCs for developed countries must include an economy-wide emission reduction target. NDCs can also contain commitments on adaptation and climate finance. The 'Katowice Rulebook' was agreed at COP24 and contains details of the information and level of details expected in an NDC. Although these rules don't officially enter into force until the next round of NDC submissions, their voluntary adoption for 2020 submissions can be taken as a sign of a high quality NDC. The UK NDC can, therefore, be expected to contain:

- An economy wide emission reduction target
- Targets or objectives on climate adaptation
- Implementation plans for all targets, with reference points, quantifiable indicators and timeframes
- Details of the methodology used to develop targets and implementation plans
- A commitment towards ensuring the Paris Agreement collective finance goal is met
- A view on whether the NDC is fair and ambitious in light of national circumstances

### **What level of ambition should we expect from the UK?**

The Committee on Climate Change (CCC) gave its advice on the UK's 2030 NDC target on 3 December.<sup>2</sup> Based on this advice, the government, led by BEIS, will submit the UK's updated NDC to the UN.

2030 falls within the period of the UK's fifth carbon budget (2028-2032) which dictates an emissions reduction of at least 57 per cent on 1990 levels. However, this budget was set before the UK's 2050 target was changed from an 80 per cent reduction to net zero. The 2030 target in the UK NDC will, therefore, need to be significantly above 57 per cent to be compatible with reaching net zero by 2050. On the basis of current policy commitments, the government is off track to meet its fifth carbon budget.<sup>3</sup>

The EU will submit an NDC for a 55-60 per cent reduction in emissions by 2030, depending on the ongoing negotiations.

Environmental groups, led by WWF, have estimated an NDC of 71 per cent reduction by 2030 is feasible (including international aviation and shipping).<sup>4</sup>

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## Comment

### Can a strong UK NDC inspire international ambition?

Dr Alison Doig, international lead at the Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit



The presidency of COP26 is an opportunity and a test. Good leadership requires the UK to be at the top of its international game on climate change. That starts now. It is critical that the government publishes an updated NDC before the climate ambition summit the prime minister is co-hosting with UN Climate Change on 12 December, the five year anniversary of the Paris Agreement.

The Paris Agreement calls on countries to present improved NDCs by the end of 2020. It is worth recalling exactly what is at stake. The Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), a group of 48 countries most at risk from climate impacts (representing 1.2 billion people), has called the December 2020 deadline for enhanced NDCs a 'survival deadline'. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) Special report on 1.5°C told the world that the next decade is vital if governments are to keep global temperatures below the 1.5°C, warning of dire consequences for the world and, in particular, for these vulnerable countries, if governments fail to deliver.

Their position is a diplomatic clarion call. These vulnerable nations are natural allies of developed countries with a more progressive stance in the negotiations, including the UK. But that only holds if the UK and its fellows step up.

Some of the world's big emitters are starting to ramp up their efforts. It looks likely that the EU will present its enhanced offering in December, with its emissions reduction target raised substantially from a current 40 per cent emission reduction by 2030 to a new target of at least 55 per cent. This increased target is being driven

by the EU Green Deal, which looks to deliver real world change across EU countries in buildings, renewable energy, chemicals and methane emissions.

Brexit politics also come into the equation with it being the UK's first international climate commitment made outside the EU. It is an opportunity to demonstrate the government's promise of high standards for Britain after Brexit.



Climate change is an obvious area of common ground between Number 10 and the new Biden administration."

Having declared last month its ambition of reaching net zero emissions by 2060, China is also indicating its willingness to strengthen its NDC. It has already said emissions will peak and decline before 2030, and there are calls from inside China to enhance this commitment in its NDC, with emissions peaking at or before 2025.

Joe Biden's victory in the presidential election will bring the US back into the Paris Agreement, challenge the other big powers to up the ante on climate commitments and intensify the clean energy transition. Climate change is an obvious area of common ground between Number 10 and his new administration.

All told, the Climate Ambition Summit in December is an opportunity to send strong signals to the multilateral process, and potentially a rallying call to those countries who are dragging their feet on presenting a strengthened target, including Australia, Indonesia, Russia and Japan. It is an opportunity to champion the Paris Agreement as a truly joint international effort. But, to do that, the UK will have to look like a true international champion.

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## Endnotes

- 1 UNDP, 2019, Emissions gap report, [www.unenvironment.org/resources/emissions-gap-report-2019](http://www.unenvironment.org/resources/emissions-gap-report-2019)
- 2 Committee on Climate Change, 3 December, letter from Lord Deben to Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP, 'Advice on the UK's 2030 NDC'
- 3 CCC, 2020, Reducing UK emissions: 2020 progress report to Parliament, [www.theccc.org.uk/publication/reducing-uk-emissions-2020-progress-report-to-parliament/](http://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/reducing-uk-emissions-2020-progress-report-to-parliament/)
- 4 WWF, 2020, Setting an ambitious and feasible NDC for the UK, [www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-11/WWF\\_NDC\\_report.pdf](http://www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-11/WWF_NDC_report.pdf)

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