

COP-out 26

This is an extended version of the article which appeared in the WCA newsletter in December 2021, with additional contributions from Nick Murry and Andrew Nicholson and extra photos from Nick Murry



The COP 26 venue in Glasgow

Despite some modest gains and modest hopes which were kindled by announcements during its first week, most climate campaigners will look at the [Glasgow Climate Pact](#) with deep disappointment and regard COP26 as a gigantic missed opportunity. Perhaps the biggest cop-out of them all occurred in the final draft of the agreement, in which it was pledged only to phase out *inefficient* fossil fuel subsidies (not efficient ones then), and a proposed wording to phase out coal was watered down to “phase-down” (whatever that may mean).

However, at least equally blameworthy was the failure of the developed nations yet again to come up with the hundred billion dollars a year which was promised to developing countries in 2009, despite the UK having found over £400 billion to spend on the Covid pandemic and President Biden planning to spend trillions of dollars on the US Covid recovery. Any rejoicing at the news that President Bolsonaro of Brazil had signed up to end rainforest destruction by 2030 has to be tempered by the consideration of how much of the Amazon will actually be left by then, and other pledges are equally open to interpretation and dependent on uncertain delivery.

Another such high-profile promise was the **Global Methane Pledge**, which would have to affect Wiltshire, where most methane emissions are from beef and dairy cattle and sheep. An urgent 30-50% reduction in UK methane emission raises hard questions about Wiltshire’s farming economy and community. Ways to reduce CH₄ per head may be too little too late. Basing decisions on the 100 or 20-year CO₂ equivalent of a tonne of methane (factors of about 25 or 85), as Arla Foods and other firms do, is irrelevant to the next eight years. UK Climate Change Committee Chair Lord Deben says we should eat 30% less meat. WCA member Andrew Nicholson is reviewing the science in depth to come up with a policy proposal, because it is difficult to see how this promise can be delivered.

The UNFCCC process also failed in one of its key objectives, which was to raise the ambition of the national targets (nationally determined contributions) that were agreed in Paris in 2015. Less than half of countries had submitted 5-year updates in time for the COP, and only three quarters of countries had submitted them by its end, although signatories did agree to ‘revisit and strengthen’ their 2030 targets in 2022.

It’s worth reminding ourselves that back in 2018, the IPCC’s [Special Report](#) on 1.5 degrees of warming made it clear that 2°C was no longer considered a safe limit, and that we need to cut emissions by 45% (on a 2010 baseline) to hit net zero by 2050, to keep within 1.5°C of heating. Yet

according to the recent [UNEP Emissions Gap Report](#), we were facing a rise of 2.7°C, even if the [national pledges](#) made at COP21 in Paris were implemented. Post COP26 estimates suggest this may have been marginally reduced to 2.4-2.5°C.

Unlike many previous COPs, however, there was a lot going on outside of the UN process. For example, global investment institutions are moving away from fossil fuels regardless - the [Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero](#), a coalition of 450 financial institutions, committed to accelerating decarbonization of the economy with \$100 trillion of finance over the next three decades, and they have the potential to deliver real change. Market signals such as Shell's [decision to pull out](#) of the Cambo oil field development, may also be a sign of things to come.

As far as the Glasgow Pact is concerned however, we are left with little more than a bunch of vaguely-worded promises and targets from the same politicians and national leaders who failed to meet any previous targets or deliver on any promise made in the past. It is hard not to agree with Greta Thunberg that it was just a load more “Blah, blah, blah”. And whilst ‘one-point-five’ may still be alive - just - as an aspiration, there are no plans sufficient to enable us to get there.



“It’s Blash, blah, blah” said Greta Thunberg

As climate activists, we know we cannot give up. We just have to take the positives and carry on. Those who made the trek up to Glasgow found the solidarity of the thousands of campaigners from all over the world inspiring and energising. At least the issues were front and centre of the news for two weeks, so consciousness had been further raised. And pledges (however inadequate) have been made, so they are something we need to hold our rulers to keeping and improving upon. It was clear in Glasgow that it is only world-wide climate activism that has got us this far, and it is only more of it that can get us the rest of the way.



A question for delegates outside the COP



The Earth's future hangs in the balance



Did the young generation get its voice heard?



An indigenous peoples' perspective at the Peoples' Plenary



Facemasked protest inside the Conference



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