

# Crikey Copenhagen Crib Notes

# INTRODUCTION

Everyone keeps saying how important it is. No-one can clearly explain why.

Yes, Copenhagen. It's the destination on everyone's itinerary: not because it's the capital of Denmark, and not because it's one of the world's most environmentally friendly cities (did you know the water in the inner harbour is so clean you can swim in it and 36% of all citizens commute to work by bicycle?). It's not even because it's the home of our own Princess Mary.

Nope, Copenhagen is about to become the centre of the universe because it's where the world will meet to decide the collective path forward on climate change.

This perfect storm has been brewing for decades now, and it's crunch time. But how serious are the world's governments about tackling climate change? What's the latest science, anyway? Just how desperate is the situation, and how much is hot air from politicians going to help it?

Crikey's been writing on the issue for months now – for our full collection of Copenhagen stories, [click here](#). Here, we wrap up some of the best writing on the issue, with some further reading material, to create Crikey's Copenhagen Crib Notes, essential reading if you want to be up-to-date before the negotiation for the planet's future starts on December 7.

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## **F**irst things first: The who, what, when and where of Copenhagen.

From 7-18 December, the 192 nations that have ratified the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (the UNFCCC) will meet at the Bella Center in Copenhagen to try and thrash out an international climate change deal that will supercede - and improve upon - the last major global agreement to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions, the Kyoto Protocol, which is due to expire in 2012.

These countries will be joined by thousands of observers from dozens of accredited organisations, ranging from environment groups, business organisations, research institutions and many other NGOs, not to mention protestors. As for the media contingent, it's set to be big – and Crikey will be there too.

### **FURTHER READING:**

- Want to know more about the practicalities of Copenhagen? Check out Crikey's Clarifier on the ultimate meet and greet.
- The road to Copenhagen - *Nature* has the best interactive wrap of international climate change policy from 1972 to now that we've seen. Highly recommended reading.
- *The Guardian* has a good Copenhagen glossary for those who want to tell their UNFCC from the IPCC.

## **C**rikey goes to Copenhagen:

Crikey will have three correspondents covering the action at Copenhagen.

Clive Hamilton, Australia's leading climate change public intellectual, will be filing for Crikey every day of the Copenhagen conference, in the conference rooms and behind the scenes with the deal makers.

Freelancer Matthew Knott will be Crikey's man on the ground, gauging the public mood and bringing Copenhagen to life and to your door. There'll be videos, blogging and an engaging look at all aspects of the climate change negotiations.

Anna Rose, Co-Director of the Australian Climate Youth Coalition and a regular writer on Crikey's environmental blog, Rooted, will also be reporting from Copenhagen with diary updates, footage, pictures, stories and more.

### **FURTHER READING:**

An archive of Crikey stories by Clive Hamilton.

## **W**ho will be the key negotiators at Copenhagen?

They're likely to be the US, EU, China and the G77, along with Russia, Japan, India, Brazil and the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS). NGOs, including Greenpeace International and WWF International, are also at the core of the process, says Clive Hamilton, who expects them to have "a big influence over the EU".

## **B**ut enough of politics, Copenhagen is about climate science. What's the latest?

International politicians aren't meeting up in December because they enjoy catching up over a Danish. They're putting their heads together to find a global solution to what the UNFCCC website calls the "overwhelming scientific evidence" that if we allow emissions to "continue to rise at their current pace" and "double from their pre-industrial level, the world will face an average temperature rise of about 3°C this century."

And that's more of a temperature rise than the world can sustain, according to the all-important 2007 report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

It said that the world had a leeway of a 2°C rise in temperature before catastrophic climate change effects will kick in; think rising sea levels, widespread extinctions and an increase in extreme weather from droughts to cyclones (for starters).

Since then, the scientific view of climate change has become more dire in some camps. Ahead of Copenhagen, the Joint Science Academies of the G8+5 released a statement that "climate change is happening even faster than previously estimated; global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions since 2000 have been higher than even the highest predictions, Arctic sea ice has been melting at rates much faster than predicted, and the rise in the sea level has become more rapid."

In other words, even the science upon which decisions about safe levels of emissions are made is being revised.

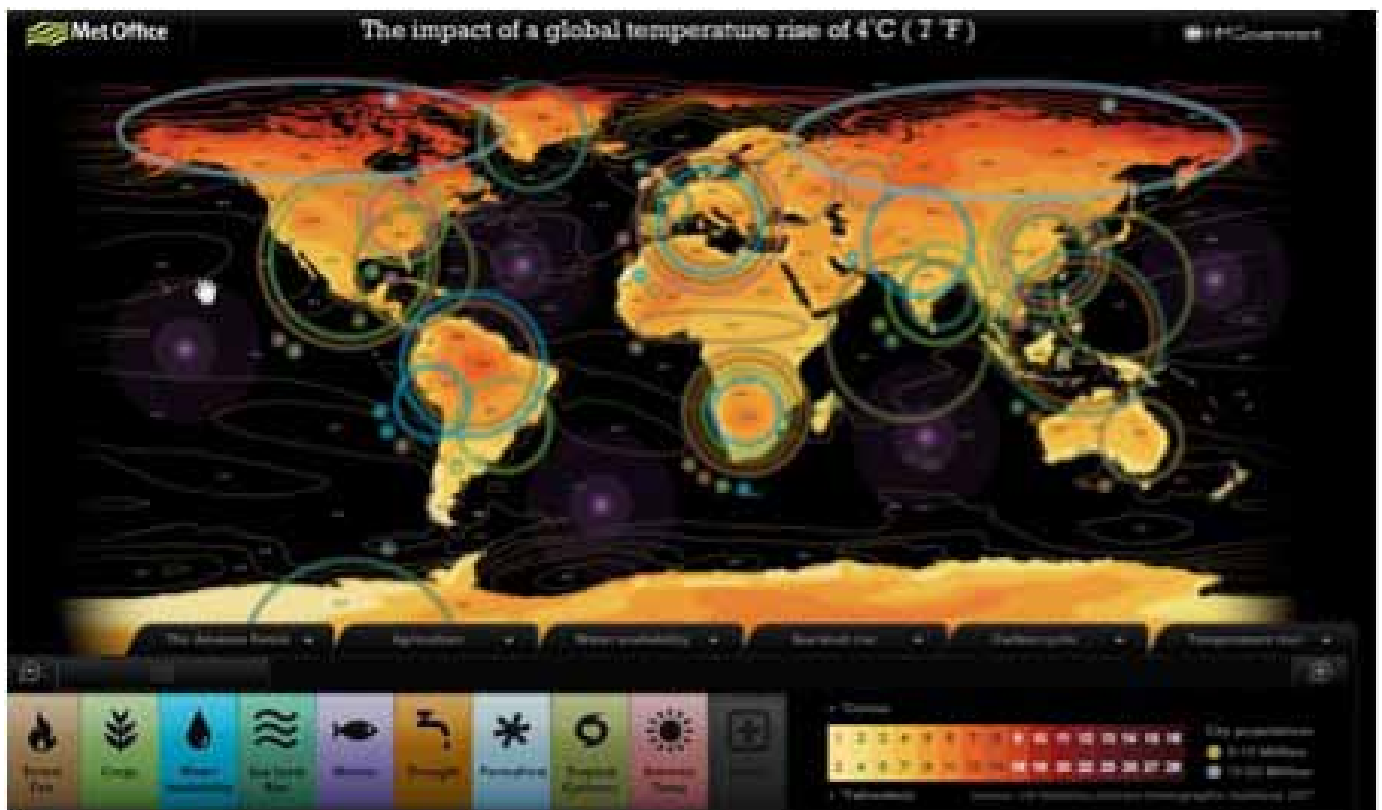
### ***FURTHER READING:***

CNN has a timeline of climate science beginning in 1824.

## **A**nd what could happen if the earth's temperature rises further than 2°C?

Using peer-reviewed science, the UK's Met Office Hadley Centre has just recently produced a handy interactive map outlining some of the impacts that may occur if the global average temperature rises by 4°C above the pre-industrial climate average.

Good bedtime reading.



## **S**o what's to be done? Will Copenhagen try to produce an international emissions trading scheme?

No. Even though the political debate in Australia over the last few months has raged around whether the Federal government will get its emissions trading scheme – or Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme -- across the line, it just isn't the main game at Copenhagen; it's simply a means to an end. As Dr Richard Denniss, Executive Director of The Australia Institute, explains:

*There's a misunderstanding that Copenhagen is about creating an international emissions trading scheme. It's not. It's about setting targets for countries to meet. How they meet them is up to them. Individual countries can implement domestic emissions trading schemes if they want to but they are also free to have a carbon tax or introduce Stalinist command and control policies. Countries who want to pollute more than their entitlement can trade with countries who want to pollute less. But Copenhagen is about developing targets for countries, not telling them how they should get there.*

Read more in his Crikey article, "The CPRS is pointless. It's Copenhagen that counts."

## **W**ith all that in mind, what kind of emissions cuts must Copenhagen aim for? The Stern cold facts.

In 2006, economist Lord Nicholas Stern produced The Stern Review, a 700-page report commissioned by the Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer to assess the potential global financial ramifications of climate change. It was highly significant, wrote climate researcher Ian McHugh in Crikey at the time, because it translated the issue "into the fundamental language understood by governments".

Ahead of Copenhagen, Lord Stern has written again about the kinds of emissions number-crunching that countries will need to do if they want to avoid climate change:

*Global emissions of greenhouse gases in 2010 are likely to be about 47bn tonnes of carbon-dioxide-equivalent (they may have exceeded 50bn tonnes without the global economic slowdown). Countries around the world have been designing programmes that could reduce annual emissions to about 49bn tonnes of carbon-dioxide-equivalent in 2020, compared with 55 to 60bn tonnes under 'business as usual'.*

*However, to have a reasonable chance of cost-effectively limiting a rise in global average temperature to no more than 2°C, beyond which scientists regard as "dangerous" to go, annual emissions must be reduced to below 44bn tonnes by 2020, well below 35bn tonnes in 2030 and well below 20bn tonnes by 2050.*

His conclusion: rich countries will need to cut emissions by an ambitious 80% by 2050.

## **R**ight, so drastic emissions cut then?

Well, in fact, Stern's recommendation is nothing compared with that of Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, chair of an advisory council known by its German acronym, WBGU, and a physicist whose specialty is chaos theory. He's argued that the whole world should be carbon-free by 2050 – and the US should cut its carbon emissions by 100% within the decade -- and even that might not be enough.

His findings caused him to have an “Oh shit” moment. This in turn has inspired Crikey readers to write in about the moment they first started freaking out about climate change – that is, if they're concerned about it.

Crikey's environmental blog Rooted was flooded with an unprecedented number of comments as Crikey readers shared their insightful and highly personal reactions to climate change and what they believe is in store for the world, and themselves. Read them all here.

## **T**he Australian view of the climate science.

While the UK had the Stern Review, Australia had Professor Ross Garnaut's Climate Change Review, commissioned by former Opposition Leader Kevin Rudd ahead of his 2007 election win.

Garnaut's interim findings (February 2008) and his final draft report (September 2008) were an acknowledgement of the science behind climate change – and were vital documents for establishing why Australia should address the planet problem.

In essence, Garnaut argued that “there is only a small chance that the anthropogenic climate change thesis is incorrect, and it would be a gross dereliction of public responsibility to fail to act”, said Bernard Keane.

But, as Keane noted, Garnaut's cautious and conservative recommendations to government about just how they should act would frustrate environmentalists. He wasn't wrong.

Clive Hamilton was critical of Garnaut's recommendation to the Government, however reluctantly made, that Australia take a target of stabilising global emissions at 550 parts per million (ppm) of carbon dioxide to Copenhagen when the “science demands” a stabilisation of global emissions at 450 ppm CO<sub>2</sub>-e or below.

“The Garnaut Review's reasoning that the best strategy towards a 450ppm outcome is via a 550ppm trajectory is extremely risky and an unnecessarily pre-emptive global political judgement,” wrote Climate Institute CEO John Connor in Crikey.

### ***FURTHER READING:***

- Crikey Q & A with Tim Flannery: Garnaut makes a good first step
- Garnaut's dismal logic – Bernard Keane
- Ross Garnaut reflects a year on from his report: Why the ETS must not be distorted



## **W**ho emits what right now?

Well, we know that, according to the most recent information, China produces the most emissions of any nation, more even than the US – The Guardian crunches the country by country numbers. But when you break it down into an emissions per capita reading, Americans fare far worse than the Chinese. And on a per capita basis, Australians beat almost every other nationality with 20.6 tonnes per person; that's higher than all but the oil states like Kuwait.

## **S**o how should Australia reduce the level of its greenhouse gas emissions?

Although it's pressing on with an Emissions Trading Scheme, the government's CPRS has been hampered by political fighting and what many believe to be too many concessions to polluting industries.

Crikey's Canberra correspondent Bernard Keane has provided some of the most detailed and up to the moment commentary from the Press Gallery on the government's CPRS scheme and the other parties' alternatives.

Keane suggests that there are other public policy options for addressing climate change. They won't be as efficient or effective as an ETS, but they will work, albeit more slowly and with greater economic costs. He argues that:

*The next-best option is a significant ramping-up of investment in renewable energy and energy efficiency technology — preferably by the private sector, but by the public sector if necessary. And this is, partly, what the government has done with its Renewable Energy Target — as flawed and inefficient as it is in its final, politically debauched form.*

Read more about some other options here.

### **FURTHER READING:**

- Read more on the politics of climate change in Canberra here.
- And read Keane's detailed review of the government's proposed CPRS 'An ETS so bad, it makes tax and Liberals look good' here.

## **T**he biggest potential roadblock at Copenhagen: developing nations

How much responsibility should developing nations shoulder for global emissions?

The vexed question has already derailed many climate change talks. The Climate Institute's Will McGoldrick canvassed the issue – what it means for Copenhagen and how countries are trying to overcome it – recently for Crikey:

*The international negotiations in Bangkok, in the lead-up to Copenhagen, again highlighted that the issue of financial support for developing countries is one of, if not the, main hurdle for Australian and other diplomatic efforts to produce a new and more ambitious global deal on climate change.*

*... the issue is how the post-2012 climate agreement will unlock the hundreds of billions of dollars of public and private money needed to support developing countries to reduce emissions and adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change. Unless the finance question can be resolved, there will be no agreement in Copenhagen.*

*Australia is well aware that the finance issue is crucial, and ... during the negotiations the government provided a taste of what it has in mind. In essence, Australia has proposed establishing a "facilitative platform" to link developing countries' needs with financial support. This is not a bad idea, but is only one step on a long track and will not help build the political momentum needed to achieve a deal that is in Australia's national interest.*

Many experts believe that the issue of compensation for developing nations has the potential to be one of the major roadblocks to consensus at Copenhagen.

Read more about other nations' approaches here.

### **FURTHER READING:**

- Crikey Clarifier: Penny Wong's climate change "compromise" for developing nations explained.
- Rudd Government still not putting dollar figure on aid for developing nations – *The Age*.
- Greenbeat on the US and EU's difficulties in securing financial compensation for developing nations.

## **T**he people with the most to lose if Copenhagen fails

A report tabled recently in Australian Parliament suggested that the government might need to ban the construction of new properties in some coastal areas due to the threat of rising sea levels. But that's nothing like losing your whole country to the sea, says Crikey correspondent Bernard Keane, putting things in perspective:

*80% of Australians may live within 6m of sea level but that's nothing compared to our Pacific neighbours. They face not the inconvenience of finding new homes for millionaires, but the end of their existence as separate states. It is starting slowly, with rising salinity, and more damaging storms, and changing vegetation patterns and growing seasons. Soon it will escalate. More villages will become uninhabitable. More people will be displaced internally. More civil conflict, more fights over resources, will occur.*

*The "arc of instability" will demand more Australian resources and there'll be ever-increasing pressure to increase immigration from the Pacific. That's what climate change means when your entire country is beachfront property, and it's not the rich but the poor who live by the sea.*

And in her recent Special Report in Crikey, "In the Pacific, they're not waving, they're drowning", Katherine McGrow wrote:

*Kiribati is one of a number of low-lying islands with few resources and minimal carbon emissions, such as Tuvalu, the Carteret and Mortlock Islands, and our own Torres Strait Islands, to be already suffering from the effects of climate change and rising sea levels...*

*.... In the Carteret Islands in Papua New Guinea resettlement has already begun, with families starting to set up new homes in Bougainville, 86 kilometres away. Spring tides have been inundating the islands on an increasing basis destroying food gardens and contaminating water supplies. Life there has become impossible.*

Meanwhile, Possum Comitatus writes on Crikey's Pollytics blog about how the Australian agricultural sector is set to be affected:

*Of all industries, the ABS says: Agricultural industries with a high percentage of businesses reporting that they considered the climate affecting their holding had changed were citrus fruit growing (81.0%), apple and pear growing (77.3%), rice growing (74.7%), and dairy cattle farming (73.5%). In contrast, 41.5% of sugar cane growers considered the climate affecting their holding had changed.*

### **FURTHER READING:**

- In Crikey, Lionel Elmore questions what is actually causing coastal erosion in Australia.
- Larvartus Prodeo maps what rising sea levels would look like around the world.
- In climate denial: this is not scepticism, by Bernard Keane

## **W**hat can we expect from Australia at Copenhagen?

Well... when it comes to climate change negotiations at an international level, Australia has a distinctly chequered history.

Australia first made a name for itself back in 1997 in Kyoto – for all the wrong reasons. Before ultimately refusing to ratify the Kyoto Protocol in 2002, Australia had negotiated a target that allowed an increase in Australia’s greenhouse emissions by 8% above 1990 levels.

Led by then Environment Minister Robert Hill, the Australian delegation also refused to sign at the last minute unless a special loophole on land clearing was created for Australia alone. Australia’s Kyoto delegation secured the unpopular inclusion of what has often been referred to as the “Australia clause” in Article 3.7 of the Protocol. As Australia’s land clearing emissions were unusually high at the time, it bought them all-important room to move on emissions (read more of the history here).

A change in government in 2007 meant a chance for a new start. At the Bali conference -- the 13th meeting of the signatories of the UFCCC -- Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s decision to ratify the Kyoto Protocol was met with a standing ovation. But by the time he reached the 14th in Poznan, the Rudd government’s tactics of delay, distract and find a loophole were frustrating other international leaders.

More recently it was revealed exclusively in Crikey that Australia had stopped Pacific Islands from pushing for the tough emissions stance they really wanted to take, a reduction in emissions of 85% by 2050. Instead, the Small Island States Forum in August publicly agreed to the softer G8-approved target of at least 50% below 1990 levels by 2050 – the Australian government’s current emissions position.

As for Copenhagen, stayed tuned to Crikey for what Australia (and the world) does next.

## **H**ungry for more? Further reading on Copenhagen

### *CRIKEY ARTICLES ON CLIMATE CHANGE :*

- Crikey Clarifier: How do carbon pollution reduction schemes work?
- Young people weigh in on climate change – Anna Rose, Director of Australian Youth Climate Coalition
- Penny Wong's Green Paper explained – Bernard Keane
- VIDEO: Wong's Green Paper speech
- Penny Wong's White Paper – how she and Rudd ate their own ETS by Bernard Keane
- Clive Hamilton: how to deal with climate change grief. (129 comments and counting)

### *COPENHAGEN BACKGROUNDEERS:*

- Copenhagen for Dummies – New Matilda
- Factbox: what is holding up progress in climate talks? -- Reuters
- The Copenhagen Conundrum: why America wants China to leap first and other issues – Council on Foreign Relations
- Prep yourself for a Copenhagen compromise – The Guardian
- Don't get your hopes up for Copenhagen – New York Times
- Clive James: In praise of climate change scepticism – BBC Magazine



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