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Rudd pledges to forge 2009 climate deal

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PRIME Minister Kevin Rudd has pledged to work closely with Chinese leaders, India and the US to get a climate-change agreement by the end of 2009.

But as the Bali "road map" was broadly welcomed, despite its limitations, the US attacked it for not doing enough to commit developing economies to hefty emissions cuts.

Underscoring the lack of consensus, India's Science and Technology Minister, Kapil Sibal, said his country had successfully defended itself against a push to impose binding targets to reduce greenhouse pollution. "It was a hard-fought win, but we have secured India's position in the two-year negotiations," he said.

Australian green groups, critical of the Government's caution during the negotiations, welcomed the result as better than they had expected.

They were especially heartened by a reference in the separate declaration by Kyoto countries, which do not include the US, to the science that has concluded that aggregate cuts by the developed world of 25% to 40% by 2020 are needed.

The Australian Government signed up to this but emphasises that it is not a negotiating range nor does it represent a national target for Australia — which will be set after the Garnaut report.

Climate Change Minister Penny Wong told *The Age* this text was "consistent with Australia's position all along — that the science should be recognised. The reference to numbers is simply a reference to the scientific work already done. It in no way commits any country to those specific targets in the absence of further agreement."

Don Henry, executive director of the Australian Conservation Foundation, said there was now "guidance as to the destination".

Professor Neville Nicholls, a Melbourne environmental scientist who has worked with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, said the talks had been an important first step. "The decisions in Bali are very heartening to the IPCC scientists, and make us feel our efforts have been worthwhile," he said.

But Oxfam said the language of the road map reduced emissions reduction targets to "guidelines". Oxfam policy director James Ensor said the US delegation did everything it could to undermine binding targets and acted "like a bunch of first-class passengers on a jumbo jet who firmly believed a crash would only affect those sitting in economy class".

Mr Rudd said Australia would make the negotiations over the next two years "a core priority".

Australia would be going into them "with sleeves rolled up and prepared to put in the hard yards". In the year ahead, he hoped to spend as much time as possible with China's leaders to get greater consensus on future action. He also wanted to have talks with India. The climate issues would certainly "be forming a part of my discussions with the US Administration".

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The challenge for Australia now was "to frame our own national targets, which are cognisant of the science".

The Bali agreement came amid high emotion at the conference and after a backdown by the US, which finally caved in to overwhelming international opinion and agreed to sign up to the road map. While the US is concerned about ensuring developing countries bear enough of the burden, Mr Rudd said there was now a commitment by such countries "to engage in measurable, reportable and verifiable, nationally appropriate mitigation actions".

He said it was a step forward, although not as much as the international community would have liked.

Opposition environment spokesman Greg Hunt welcomed the road map for including China, India, and Indonesia.

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