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Targets to be taken out of pact

Matthew Warren, Environment writer | December 13, 2007

A REFERENCE to non-binding targets is likely to be stripped from the road map for global climate change negotiations to be launched by the UN conference at Bali.

The US, Japan and Russia are reported to be pushing hard for the removal of any reference to developed countries needing to make cuts of between 25 and 40per cent by 2020.

The US is also opposing any quantified national emission commitments by developing countries, saying this could turn the new global deal after 2012 into another Kyoto Protocol, which it refuses to ratify.

Opening the high-level talks yesterday, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said any agreement on targets would need further negotiation beyond Bali, indicating he did not want the current impasse to impede work on a new post-2012 climate deal.

"Some time down the road we have to agree on that (targets)," he told reporters. "At this time, we need to launch these negotiations to discuss in a detailed manner how the international community should address this issue on an urgent basis. We need to work hard during the remaining three days to agree on a road map to launch these negotiations and, by the weekend, I'm reasonably convinced that we will be able to agree on all these issues."

The EU has been pushing hard for the Bali mandate, which will guide the terms of any new climate deal, to make specific reference to the most aggressive emission reduction targets mentioned by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

The Pew Environmental Centre yesterday said the US was pushing for removal of all text referring to the underlying science, including a reference to halving global emissions by 2050, which has been opposed by some developing countries.

Australia's evolving position reiterated yesterday by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd is that the draft text should refer to, and be guided by, the full science and not just the specific reference to one target.

US negotiators yesterday said they recognised the science and the need for a long-term goal to cut emissions.

The inclusion of targets risked predetermining the formal negotiations which will conclude at Copenhagen in 2009, they said.

"The reality in this business is that once numbers appear in text, it predetermines outcomes and it tends to drive negotiations in one direction," said lead US negotiator Harlan Watson. "We want to be sure that the text we have before us is going to be neutral."

A fresh draft of the crucial Bali road map retains the controversial reference to targets for the time being, and will be finalised by the world's environment ministers in high-level meetings today.

The relatively soft language of the text requires calling for emissions reduction commitments for developed countries and measurable and reportable actions by developing countries.

Negotiations to establish mechanisms to transfer abatement technologies between developed and developing countries have broken down at Bali. The talks have been unable to find a practical way of preserving the intellectual property rights of developers and fast-track deployment.

Australian Conservation Foundation director Don Henry said Mr Rudd had positioned Australia well at these negotiations starting with the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol. "He's keeping his options on the details," Mr Henry said. "The negotiations are washing around here and he's obviously ruling out a commitment to binding targets here."

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