

THE KYOTO PROTOCOL AND CLIMATE CHANGE - BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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There is broad consensus in the scientific community that climate change is happening faster and to a greater extent than previously expected, confirmed by the Third Assessment Report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which was the outcome of a process involving 2000 international scientific experts. Due to the projected growth of emissions of greenhouse gases, the world's climate could warm up by up to 5.8°C by the end of this century.

Under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, to which 186 countries are Parties including the EC and the US, industrialised countries are to stabilise their greenhouse gas emissions at 1990 levels by the year 2000. The European Union has met this commitment. The Kyoto Protocol to that Convention goes a step further, by requiring industrialised countries to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions from 1990 levels by an average of 5% over the period 2008-2012.

The EU is committed under the Kyoto Protocol to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 8% from 1990 levels by 2008-2012. According to European Commission figures, the total compliance costs of meeting the Kyoto Protocol targets can be as low as 0.06% of EU projected GDP in 2010, if the EU adopts the most efficient policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The European Commission has already proposed measures including an EC-wide emissions trading system, a strategy to increase the use of alternative road fuels and improvements in the energy efficiency of buildings and will come forward with a range of additional measures in the next two years. These include measures on energy efficiency, promotion of combined heat and power, fluorinated gases and shifting the balance towards less polluting modes of transport. A Directive to promote electricity generation from renewables and agreements with car manufacturers on vehicle fuel efficiency are examples of measures that have already been adopted by the EU.

The EU's and Member States' greenhouse gas reduction targets are specified in the EC ratification decision, having originally been agreed in June 1998 under the so-called "Burden Sharing Agreement". These greenhouse gas reduction targets are:

Austria	-13%	Italy	-6½%
Belgium	-7½%	Luxembourg	-28%
Denmark	-21%	Netherlands	-6%
Finland	0%	Portugal	+27%
France	0%	Spain	+15%
Germany	-21%	Sweden	+4%
Greece	+25%	United Kingdom	-12½%
Ireland	+13%		
European Community	-8%		

Today's simultaneous deposit of ratification instruments by the European Union and Member States follows the agreement of the EC ratification decision and the completion of the internal ratification procedures in the fifteen Member States.

For the Kyoto Protocol to enter into force, it must be ratified by 55 nations and by the nations responsible for 55% of industrialised countries' emissions in 1990. The first threshold for the Kyoto Protocol's entry into force has now been attained. As of today, 70 countries have done so. The second threshold for its entry into force is now much closer, because the countries responsible for more than a quarter (26.6%) of industrialised countries' emissions in 1990 have now taken this step.

41 more nations have signed the Kyoto Protocol, including Russia, Japan, Canada, New Zealand and Australia. Every indication is that the Accession Countries, the EEA and EFTA countries, Russia, Japan and New Zealand will ratify, enabling the 55% of emissions threshold to be reached soon.

The United States is the biggest emitter of greenhouse gases with one of the highest levels of emissions per capita, and agreed to reduce its emissions from 1990 levels by 7% under the Kyoto Protocol. The EU has called upon the U.S. to live up to its responsibilities under the UNFCCC which requires industrialised countries to return their greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels. Furthermore, the EU and many other nations have repeatedly called for the US to return to the multilateral process for addressing climate change, and continue to do so.