Info sheet:
Timetables for Zero Emissions and 2050 Emissions
Reductions: State of the Science for the ADP Agreement
February 2015 – Authors: Joeri Rogelj, Michiel Schaeffer, Bill Hare

Holding warming below 2°C and returning warming below 1.5°C by 2100 are two warming limits being called for in the new climate agreement that is currently being prepared for adoption in Paris at the end of 2015. Many countries and stakeholders have proposed that global emission reduction goals for 2050 and a timetable for the achievement of zero emissions, consistent with achieving these temperature limits, be included in the agreement. This new analysis reviews the state-of-the-art science, including the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC AR5) and the 2014 UNEP Emissions Gap Report, to provide recommended numbers for reflecting these long-term global emission goals within the text of the agreement.

Recommended Quantitative Elements for the ADP Agreement

1.5°C
- Returning warming to below 1.5°C by 2100 with a more than 50% chance
- 70 to 95% reduction from 2010 levels by 2050 or 65 to 90% from 1990 levels
- Reach zero global GHG emissions by 2060-2080

2°C
- Limiting warming to below 2°C by 2100 with a more than 66% chance
- 40 to 70% reduction from 2010 levels by 2050 or 35 to 55% from 1990 levels
- Reach zero global GHG emissions by 2080-2100

Global energy & industry CO₂ emissions
- 95 to 120% reduction from 2010 levels by 2050 or 95 to 125% from 1990 levels
- Reach zero energy & industry CO₂ emissions around 2050 (range 2045-2055)

- 35 to 80% reduction from 2010 levels by 2050 or 10 to 70% from 1990 levels
- Reach zero energy & industry CO₂ emissions by 2060-2075

These Recommended Quantitative Elements are based on a detailed analysis of low-emission scenarios from the IPCC AR5, the 2014 UNEP Emissions Gap Report and the recent scenario literature. The underlying analysis quantifies global emission benchmarks for near-term policy variations (higher or lower 2020 emissions), various GHG baskets (CO₂ only or all GHGs), additional indicators (year of emissions reaching zero), and other temperature targets.

The 1.5°C scenarios underlying the emission numbers here can also be seen as high probability below 2°C pathways (around 85% chance to hold warming below 2°C), compared to the likely (>66%) 2°C pathways. For the return below 1.5°C/ high probability below 2°C pathways full decarbonisation of the energy sector is needed by 2050 (2045-2055).

A detailed briefing note is available at:
Temperature stabilisation implies zero CO₂ emissions

Holding warming below 2°C, or more stringently, returning global warming to below 1.5 °C by 2100 implies a limit on the total amount of carbon-dioxide (CO₂) emissions that can ever be emitted into the atmosphere. Because of this limited carbon budget and historical emissions, global CO₂ emissions have to become zero at some point.

Zero carbon emissions are defined as zero global anthropogenic CO₂ emissions. Global zero carbon emissions does not mean that carbon emissions have to be zero everywhere, but means that any remaining anthropogenic CO₂ emissions in one region, or sector, are compensated by the same amount of ‘negative’ anthropogenic CO₂ emissions elsewhere. Negative CO₂ emissions are a result of a process such as the use of Carbon Dioxide Removal (CDR) technologies that permanently removes CO₂ from the Earth’s atmosphere, storing it in a geological reservoir on a timescale of thousands of years. In addition, scenarios also assume anthropogenically enhanced uptake of CO₂ by the terrestrial biosphere, for example, through afforestation, resulting in increased storage of carbon. The net input of CO₂ to the atmosphere due to human activities globally thus remains zero. If the global amount of CO₂ storage is larger than the global CO₂ emissions then global negative emissions are achieved.

From a geophysical point of view, there are no restrictions on how the CO₂ budget can be spread out over time, but higher emissions in the near term have to be compensated by lower emissions in the longer term. However, factors like costs and availability of mitigation technologies and political barriers restrict how fast and how deep emissions can be reduced in the real world. These limitations are taken into account in the assessments of detailed future scenarios of the IPCC ARS and the 2014 UNEP Emissions Gap Report. Other greenhouse gases (GHGs), like methane, also contribute to global warming and also typically decline in low-emission scenarios. Because it is much more difficult to entirely eliminate non-CO₂ emissions, for example from the agricultural sector, the overall path of emissions of all GHGs is higher than the path of CO₂ only. Consequently, the timing of all GHGs reaching global zero levels is later than the timing of the corresponding zero CO₂ emissions.

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1 The anticipated outcome of the Ad-hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform (ADP) under the UNFCCC.
2 Available at: www.ipcc.ch
3 Available at: http://www.unep.org/publications/ebooks/emissionsgapreport2014/