

# Proposals for the Feasta Climate Group's strategy in the wake of Copenhagen

Now that the UN climate process is widely recognised as having failed, there is an excellent opportunity to put another process in place. Here are six defects in the UN process which the new process should avoid.

The UN process is flawed because it:

## **1. Requires a response from some countries but not others on the basis of a simplistic distinction**

The countries which had signed the Framework Convention on Climate Change were divided into two groups in the crudest way conceivable - developed countries (Annex 1) and the rest. The developed countries were blamed for causing the problem and thus required to reduce their emissions and while the rest had no specific responsibilities at all. This simplistic, black-white, static division has caused enormous problems because many of the non-Annex 1 countries are “developing” and increasing their emissions and there is no mechanism in the UN structure for them to take on emissions-reduction responsibilities as they move towards “developed” status.

In any case, the division was false. South Africa, India, China and Brazil, key countries in agreeing the Copenhagen Accord, all have extremely advanced fossil-fuel hungry economies side-by-side with low carbon “developing” ones. Indeed, every country contains people whose living standards have been raised a great deal by the use of fossil fuels and others who have gained less or whose ability to earn a living has been damaged by the availability of cheap energy. The appropriate division is therefore between rich and poor, in whatever country they live. Any new system has to ensure that the benefits from the use of whatever amount of fossil fuel use is permitted in future is fairly shared between people rather than countries. Cap and Share does this, of course, but, by itself, Cap and Share is not enough.

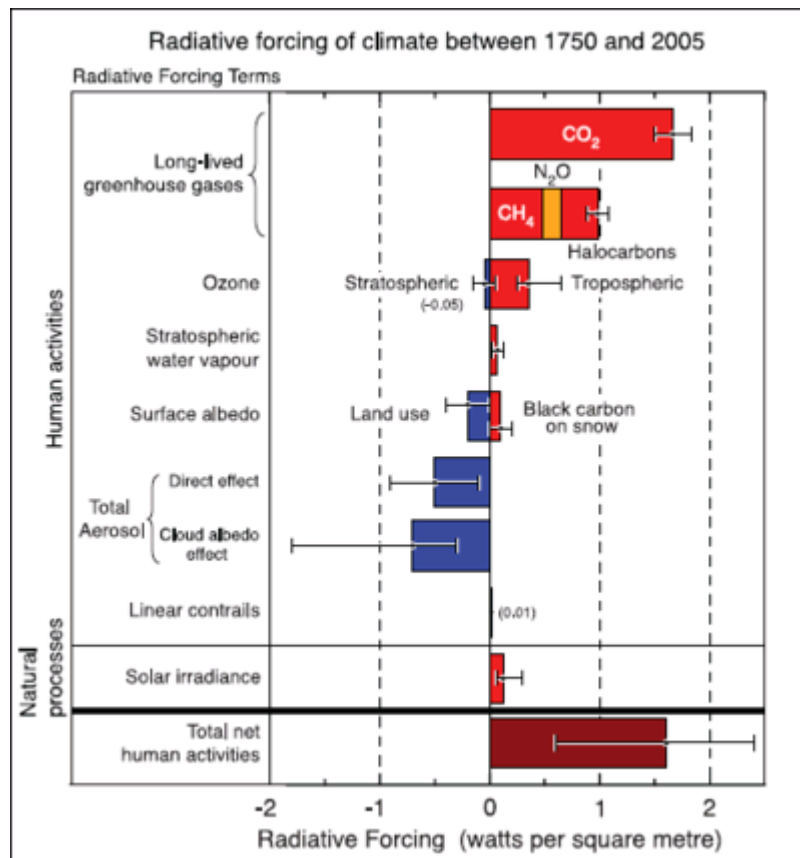
## **2. Over-simplifies the response required to a matter of cutting CO<sub>2</sub>**

The UNFCCC's failed process is monolithic. It presents what is needed to be done almost entirely in terms of reducing carbon dioxide emissions – the other greenhouse gases are to be dealt with simply as “carbon dioxide equivalents” according to their “global warming potential” in comparison with that of CO<sub>2</sub>. Again, this is simplistic as it ignores the other environmental effects of the other greenhouse gases and thus sets a false priority for their reduction. If the ozone-destroying CFCs and HCFCs, halocarbons that were successfully handled under the Montreal Protocol had been lumped in with other greenhouse gases and dealt with under the Kyoto Protocol, the chemicals would still be in widespread use. Indeed hydrofluorocarbons, halocarbons that are both ozone destroyers and greenhouse gases which not controlled by the Montreal Protocol but which are covered by the Kyoto Protocol are still in common use and a Swiss study has found that their atmospheric concentration is increasing.

Nitrous oxide, a powerful greenhouse gas which comes from both natural and anthropogenic sources, is now destroying more ozone than any other gas. As a result, it is not only slowing the recovery of the ozone layer and thus causing people and plants to be exposed to damaging radiation, but it is also slowing the rate at which another powerful greenhouse gas, methane, is broken down because the rate of the latter's destruction is

determined by the ozone concentration. Nitrous oxide is therefore much more damaging than its global warming potential suggests and should be the subject of its own reduction programme.

I therefore suggest that the Feasta group's policy should be that each significant greenhouse gas, or group of gases, should have its own reduction programme and that, in some cases, it might be a good idea to have a special programme for a gas from a particular source. For example, in addition to reduction programmes for carbon dioxide from fossil fuels, for halocarbons and for nitrous oxide, I think it would be good to have two programmes for methane. One would be for methane from fossil fuel sources, such as natural gas leaks and escapes from coal mines, plus that from refuse tips and the way animal dung is handled. The second programme would be for the methane produced by ruminants. This source needs to be treated separately because of the importance of livestock as a food source, as an income source for people with few alternatives and the potential that grazing animals have to reverse desertification and increase soil carbon if properly managed. Potentially, all the warming and cooling effects shown in the chart below should have at least one reduction or augmentation programme.



Having several programmes would give much greater flexibility to the new process than that available to the failed one. It would allow, for example, for the different reduction programmes to be worked out and agreed independently of each other, so that every action on climate no longer depended on 195 countries reaching agreement at one massive conference in the space of two weeks. For example, an independent carbon dioxide reduction programme for releases from land use and deforestation would allow

progress to be made without waiting for a deal on the crucial topic – who is to get the benefit from using fossil fuel. Moreover, the absorption of carbon by forests would not automatically count as an offset for fossil carbon emissions as they would be in different programmes and, as a result, the interaction between the two could be controlled. This would mean that it should be possible to avoid those earning good incomes from using fossil fuel being able to take over resources from those on lower incomes in order to continue to burn carbon. Of course, some link between the two programmes would be essential so that fossil fuel users paid the cost of preserving and increasing forest carbon.

### **3. Needs a complete consensus before action can be taken**

A major design flaw in the UNFCCC process is that all decisions have to be reached by consensus. This was inevitable because it has to deal with sovereign nations, who naturally object to their being compelled to do anything that they perceive to be against their national interests. The consensus requirement is unlikely to change as even in the EU, the 27 member states have found it hard to accept qualified majority voting and the veto remains in key areas. But preserving the need for a global consensus will mean that climate action organised by the UN will proceed at the pace permitted by the slowest. This is unlikely to be fast enough. As a result, any new arrangement has to allow countries to proceed as rapidly as they wish and to protect themselves from countries subsidising their economies by permitting greater levels of fossil fuel use, or by their non-participation in other programmes. They would probably gain this protection by imposing import taxes and giving export rebates based on the extra cost imposed by the climate activity over and above the costs of production in the country with laxer climate standards.

### **4. Lacks a mechanism to gain widespread acceptance of a temperature target**

The UNFCCC failed to develop a mechanism for setting a temperature-rise target during its 17 years' work. As a result, two temperature targets are being promoted, 2 degrees and 1.5 degrees, both above the pre-industrial figure. In general terms, the higher target is supported by the governments of richer countries not because they think such a rise is desirable but because they think it might just be feasible within the confines of their present economic structures. The lower target is predominantly backed by countries in which agriculture is important or which are threatened by sea-level rise. The new system should involve presenting the likely consequences of various increases to the public around the world so that it leads to a target being chosen which has widespread popular support. Once the target has been selected, the concentration target needs to be selected based on the degree of risk people have indicated they are prepared to accept.

Incidentally, the current issue (January 3, 2010) of *Nature Geoscience* carries an article by Birgit and Ralph Schneider which suggests that the Earth's temperature is more sensitive to CO<sub>2</sub> increases than previously thought judging by temperature and concentration estimates going back millions of years. As a result, even the 350 parts per million concentration advocated by the countries in green on the attached list may be too high and it might be necessary to reduce the concentration to pre-industrial levels.

### **5. Does not stress the positive benefits that may come from facing the crisis**

Because it was conceived largely as a matter of reducing fossil fuel use, the UNFCCC process has been presented as almost wholly negative in its effects. In the public's mind, responding to the threat of climate change is seen to be about driving and flying less,

consuming less and turning off appliances. However, if a concentration target below the present concentration is adopted, a very much more positive approach can be taken because the idea that dealing with climate change is simply a matter of managing on less no longer cuts the mustard. The efforts by hundreds of millions of people would be required to take carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and sequester it safely. They would achieve this result by planting millions of hectares of forest, short-rotation coppice and giant grasses such as sugar cane and elephant grass, and by raising livestock using the system developed by Allan Savory. Not only would these activities lock up carbon in the soil and biomass, they would also increase incomes and provide not just biofuels but also the food and, thanks to rural biorefineries, the raw materials that are presently provided through fossil fuel use. Essentially, millions of underused people and hectares of underused land would become much more productive. Everyone would benefit. Economies and societies would be totally transformed. A new type of civilisation would emerge.

## **6. Ignores fossil fuel depletion**

The idea of building a new, fairer civilisation is the carrot. Here's the stick. The UNFCCC process has been presented to the public and the politicians as if there was enough oil, coal and gas to enable the world economy to continue to expand indefinitely. This ignores the near-certainty that the rate at which world oil output will fall because of resource depletion in the next few years is comparable with the rate at which it has to be reduced to achieve a 350ppmv CO<sub>2</sub> concentration target. Unfortunately, that rate of fall will come perhaps five years later than it would if the world decided to act in time to have a good chance to solve the climate crisis. In addition, it would only affect the oil supply. Supplies of gas and coal would fall too but a few years later still. Moreover, these falls risk collapsing the world economy because they will be unplanned. They may also cause war, terrorism, disease and mass starvation. Nor will they solve the climate crisis because, besides coming too late, they will not create the circumstances in which it will be possible to get the carbon content of the atmosphere down to a safer level by starting vast programmes so that the carbon content of the soil and biomass is increased. Doing nothing is consequently not an option. The threat that fossil fuel depletion presents to almost every national economy provides the motive for countries to move to a low carbon economy as quickly as possible without having to wait for an international climate agreement to tell them to do so. Indeed, the only thing that an international climate agreement might have done for them is to make sure that their major trade rivals were working to the same rules.

However, while fossil fuel depletion provides a powerful motive for reducing carbon emissions, it will not be enough for countries to invest in energy efficiency and renewables. Such investments themselves demand energy and the world supply will quickly prove inadequate. Prices will rise and undermine national economies, just as they did in the run-up to the world financial crisis in 2008. A non-market way of sharing out the limited supply of fossil energy needs to be put in place if a succession of financial crises is to be avoided. This sharing system – which Cap and Share would of course provide - is needed whether the limited energy supply is the result of resource depletion, under-investment, or measure to combat climate change.

## **So what should the group do?**

As far as I'm aware, we are the only group taking such a broad, holistic view of the climate crisis. We have the opportunity to present our ideas at a national and international level. At

our meeting in Dublin last year, we decided that we would ask Feargal Duff to try to get the United Nations Environment Programme to assess Cap and Share as a possible mechanism for a global climate treaty. Feargal has had considerable success and it is likely that the assessment process would be under way by now if we had had support from the Irish government. Its support was withheld because the Minister for the Environment was advised to do nothing that might be considered to indicate a lack of support for UN process. Now, however, the international context has changed and we believe there is a good chance that the government will request the assessment.

### **The changed international context**

The UN has lost a great deal of credibility as a result of its failure to come up with a worthwhile climate treaty at Copenhagen despite the years of work. Even the Accord was not the result of its efforts but those of a few heads of state who flew in and cobbled together a deal independently amongst themselves. As a result, people are beginning to ask whether the UN will play any significant part in future climate talks or whether matters will be settled by a handful of powerful leaders.

It is significant that the UNFCCC chief Yvo de Boer is asking that question himself. After the Copenhagen conference had broken up, he told reporters after that his agency's process was "large, cumbersome and diverse" He went on to say "You could argue that it would be much more effective just to address climate change in the G20, where you've got 85 percent of the emissions around the table. That may be correct from an emissions point of view but it's not correct from an equity or from an environmental point of view, because what you don't have around the table is the 100-odd countries that have contributed nothing to climate change, who are on the front line of dealing with the impacts of climate change."

The "Accord" itself demonstrates perfectly what is likely to happen if giant countries get together to settle things among themselves. They act purely in what they consider to be their own interests. As a result, at Copenhagen, one of their number ensured that the group failed to limit its future fossil energy consumption.

A way must therefore be found to keep the UN at the heart of the climate negotiations.. Last September, Ban Ki-moon, announced he was setting up a High-level Panel on climate change and development. This will be launched formally early this year, 2010, and will include heads of government among its members. It could be the ideal vehicle for the UN to show its relevance and to turn the climate situation round. If the UN is to take this opportunity, the panel's first task must be to recommend an alternative process to replace the one which has just failed. Feargal could use his UNEP and UNDP contacts to suggest that the Panel is used in this way and that the following are some of the essential characteristics it should seek in any new process.

- It should avoid the need for a complete global consensus by allowing those nations that wish to reduce emissions rapidly to do so. For that to be possible, nations which group together to impose tight limits on their fossil fuel use should be able to protect themselves economically from countries which continue to permit high levels of fossil fuel use. This may involve the use of border tax adjustments, export rebates and even capital controls.
- It should have the potential to achieve whatever full-term global temperature or atmospheric ghg concentration target is chosen by the international community

provided all major emitters eventually agree to participate

- It should have a mechanism for setting the temperature/concentration target which maximises international support for the target.
- It must deal with both emissions sources and sinks. Just restricting emissions is not enough. It must also protect existing terrestrial carbon stocks and encourage their enhancement.
- It should be capable of adjustment in the light of the latest information about whether or not the world is on track to reach its target.
- Its provisions must be enforceable in those countries which have signed up to it. It should therefore set out credible governance and enforcement systems.
- One of the major problems with the UNFCCC process has been the artificial division it has created between Annex 1 countries and the rest. The real division is between people who live well because they are able to enjoy the benefits of fossil fuel use and those that experience hardship because their incomes are limited by their low level of energy use. The new process should therefore contain provisions for sharing out a major part of the benefits from whatever continuing release of emissions it permits in a way that is equitable at a human rather than a national level. This sharing system should be resistant to crime and fraud.
- The new process should contain provisions for compensating people who carry an unfair share of the hardships that result from whatever restrictions it imposes, or from the effects of a changing climate, in a way that is equitable at a human rather than a national level.
- It should make provision for technology transfer and capacity building.
- It must include a mechanism (or mechanisms) for providing those carrying out whatever actions it proposes with the financial and other resources they need to do so. These resources will almost certainly have to come from the incomes generated by continued fossil fuel use.

It is desirable, but not essential, that the process selected should be capable of allowing the tasks that need to be done to stabilise the climate to be divided into bite-sized chunks so that everything does not have to be settled at one big conference but allows elements to be prioritised and tackled accordingly. For example, an agreement to end deforestation has no need to be discussed at the same time as one to limit the release of CO<sub>2</sub>. It would also be good if the process selected :

1. Did not impose unnecessary costs and administrative burdens.
2. Was based on an inherently simple principle or set of principles in order to ensure clarity, prevent barriers to participation and understanding, and minimise opportunities for fraud, error and misrepresentation and
3. Was capable of handling multiple greenhouse gases more flexibly than simply in terms of their Global Warming Potential.

Once the Panel has proposed and won acceptance for the new process, it should be

mandated to:

- Examine how international collective action can increase resilience to a changing climate at global, regional, national, and local levels.
- Analyse the implications of climate change and climate change policy for other parts of the international system, including security, economic governance, international development, and human rights.

## Action at EU level

Besides attempting to get Cap and Share adopted as the basis of a new UN process, we can also work at the EU level through the British and Irish governments. Our aim could be to get the EU to try out systems that could be adopted globally later on.

The EU had very little influence over the Copenhagen outcome and, speaking afterwards, Commission President José Manuel Barroso said the deal was "clearly below" the EU's goal. "I will not hide my disappointment," he said. The German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, said: the deal was not ambitious enough for the EU to increase its commitment to cut carbon emissions by 30% by 2020 rather than by 20%.

Reflecting this, the price of EU ETS emissions permits fell. "Carbon prices dropped sharply on Monday [Dec 21] in response to disappointment at the outcome of the United Nations climate conference in Copenhagen" *The Financial Times* wrote. This led two big British energy suppliers, E.ON and Centrica, to warn that they would not invest in low carbon energy sources if the carbon price stayed at around €12 a tonne, close to its six-month low. They apparently need prices closer to €40 a tonne to make their projects viable.

An E.ON spokeswoman said that without action to tighten carbon markets, companies would wait until ageing nuclear and coal plants were closed over the next decade before investing. This might cause power cuts, she said, but power prices had to get to a level where the power firms thought there was money to be made before they would invest. Centrica is one of a number of power companies which has asked the UK government to put a floor price on carbon to guarantee them a profit on building expensive low carbon power plants.

In short, the Accord is already hindering the EU phasing out fossil fuels. This is serious not only from a climate perspective but also because, as we noted earlier, a rapid reduction in fossil fuel use is required now that the peak in conventional oil production has almost certainly been passed and Europe will have to pay far more for its imported energy when the world economy recovers and global energy demand goes up. Moreover, some EU countries like Ireland and the UK will not get the expansion of the renewable energy sector which they were hoping would not only lift them out of recession but also provide them with new manufacturing and export opportunities. Other EU countries which are already world leaders in renewable energy technologies will see their lead slip away.

It would therefore be in the EU's interests to find a way in which it could adopt the 30% target – or, at very least, the 20% target without offsets – and protect itself from competition in home and overseas markets by using a combination of border tax adjustments and export rebates, both based on the energy required for the production of

the goods involved, so that any effect on its international competitiveness is nullified.

Despite the economic and energy security advantages, some EU states are going to be reluctant to agree to the 30% target if they do not know the mechanism by which they can achieve it. So, just as the UN needs to agree a global mechanism for achieving and financing global emissions reductions, the EU needs to develop one or more mechanisms in addition to the ETS to do the same. As these need to have all the characteristics of the mechanisms needed by the UN, the EU may be able to act as multi-national testbed. In particular, it needs to share out the benefits from the use of fossil fuels between member states and between people and we should make every attempt to get C&S used for this. A demonstration in Britain or Ireland could lead to it being used by the EU as a whole.

Ideally, the EU should come to see itself as the core of a grouping of countries which has adopted a very rapid fossil fuel phase-out target. If it did this using C&S, it should not give each individual recipient a greater emissions tonnage allocation than he or she would have been given if a world C&S system had been in place. To do so would require the recipients to deal in stolen goods. Accordingly, the EU should invite countries with much lower per capita levels of fossil fuel use to join its grouping and adopt C&S. Their citizens would then be allocated emissions permits which they would sell through banks and the fossil energy suppliers to the grouping would be required to buy. This would share the benefits of fossil fuel use fairly amongst all the 2 billion or so people in the countries in the grouping, just as it would if C&S were adopted throughout the world. Because firms in countries outside the grouping would find themselves at a disadvantage when attempting to sell their goods within it, they would be likely to press their governments to join and the EU's initiative could snowball into a global system.

Other areas we could urge our governments to accept for themselves and seek to have adopted at an EU level are:

1. The adoption of the 350ppmv-or-less atmospheric concentration target.
2. Separate reduction programmes for non-enteric methane, halocarbons and nitrous oxide. The EU's total enteric methane output should be divided between member states on an equal per capita basis, rather than being attributed to the countries in which the cattle are kept, as the milk and meat produced is sold throughout the EU.
3. The development of systems by which EU landowners can be encouraged to preserve and sequester carbon in their soils and in the biomass growing on them.

## **Meeting in Scotland**

I'd like to see these suggestions discussed at our meeting in Scotland in February. If you can think of ways to develop or improve them, please let me know.

Richard Douthwaite.  
29.12.2009

## Country List:

Countries Listed in GREEN  
Support 350

Countries Listed in RED do  
NOT support 350

Albania

Algeria

Andorra

Angola

Argentina

Armenia

Australia

Austria

Afghanistan

Bahamas

Bahrain

Bangladesh

Barbados

Belarus

Belgium

Belize

Benin

Bhutan

Bolivia

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Botswana

Brazil

Brunei

Bulgaria

Burkina Faso

Burundi

Cambodia

Cameroon

Canada

Cape Verde

Central African Republic

Chad

Chile

China

Colombia

Comoros

Costa Rica

Cote d'Ivoire

Croatia

Cuba

Cyprus

Czech Republic

Democratic Republic of the  
Congo

Denmark

Djibouti

Dominica

Dominican Republic

East Timor

Ecuador

Egypt

El Salvador

Equatorial Guinea

Eritrea

Estonia

Ethiopia

Fiji

Finland

France

Gabon

Gambia

Georgia

Germany

Ghana

Greece

Grenada

Guatemala

Guinea

Guinea-Bissau

Guyana

Haiti

Honduras

Hungary

Iceland

India

Indonesia

Iran

Iraq

Ireland

Israel

Italy

Jamaica

Japan

Jordan

Kazakhstan

Kenya

Kiribati

Korea

Korea

Kuwait

Kyrgyzstan

Laos

Latvia

Lebanon

Lesotho	Palau	Syria
Liberia	Panama	Tajikistan
Libya	Papua New Guinea	Tanzania
Liechtenstein	Paraguay	Thailand
Lithuania	Peru	Togo
Luxembourg	Philippines	Tonga
Macedonia	Poland	Trinidad and Tobago
Madagascar	Portugal	Tunisia
Malawi	Qatar	Turkey
Malaysia	Republic of the Congo	Turkmenistan
Maldives	Romania	Tuvalu
Mali	Russia	Uganda
Malta	Rwanda	Ukraine
Marshall Islands	Saint Kitts and Nevis	United Arab Emirates
Mauritania	Saint Lucia	United Kingdom
Mauritius	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	United States of America
Mexico	Samoa	Uruguay
Micronesia	San Marino	Uzbekistan
Moldova	Sao Tome and Principe	Vanuatu
Monaco	Saudi Arabia	Venezuela
Mongolia	Senegal	Vietnam
Montenegro	Serbia	Yemen
Morocco	Seychelles	Zambia
Mozambique	Sierra Leone	Zimbabwe
Myanmar (Burma)	Singapore	
Namibia	Slovakia	
Nauru	Slovenia	
Nepal	Solomon Islands	
Netherlands	Somalia	
New Zealand	South Africa	
Nicaragua	Spain	
Nieue	Sri Lanka	
Niger	Sudan	
Nigeria	Suriname	
Norway	Swaziland	
Oman	Sweden	
Pakistan	Switzerland	