



Opinion

# Talking Point: Big role to play as world fights climate change

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THIS week, representatives of nearly 200 countries gathered in Bonn, Germany, for COP23, the major climate change conference of the year.

While the corridors were filled with talk of the Trump Administration's decision to withdraw from the 2015 Paris Agreement, support for the agreement remains firm.

About 170 countries ratified Paris and collectively they represent more than 70 per cent of the world's emissions and GDP, and more than 80 per cent of the world's trade and population. Big emitters like China and India are at the table.

While Australia's share of the global carbon footprint is small at just 1.3 per cent, we are highly active in these international meetings.

Some of the initiatives that Australia is driving include:

#### The Asia-Pacific Rainforest Partnership

FORMED in Sydney in 2014, the partnership brings together leaders from government, the private sector and civil society to implement policies that prevent deforestation and forest degradation.

To put it in perspective, about one billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> is released each year in our region as a result of deforestation and land degradation. This is nearly double the amount of emissions Australia produces annually from every sector of the economy combined. Indonesia has agreed to host the 2018 partnership meeting and our two countries are working closely together in this important area.

#### **The International Partnership for Blue Carbon**

ANOTHER Australian initiative, this partnership strengthens co-operation between 20 formal members, including research bodies, intergovernmental organisations and governments themselves, to protect mangroves, tidal marshes and seagrasses.

It's a little-known fact that these water-based ecosystems can sequester up to four times as much carbon as a traditional land-based forest ecosystem. If degraded or destroyed, significant amounts of greenhouse gases are released, making their conservation critical.

With Australia home to about 10 per cent of the world's blue carbon, our role leading this region-wide effort to build awareness of blue carbon and encourage inventory standards to report and manage it has been well received.

#### **Climate finance**

AUSTRALIA is co-chair with Saudi Arabia of the Green Climate Fund and has spearheaded the Climate Finance Roadmap with the United Kingdom. Both initiatives, the fund and the road map, seek to leverage support from government and the private sector for investment in emissions reduction technologies and measures to build climate change adaptation and resilience. Australia has committed at least \$1 billion in climate finance over five years, including \$300 million to projects working with our neighbours in the Pacific.

#### **Mission innovation**

AUSTRALIA is a member of a 21-nation group committed to doubling its investment in clean energy technology by 2020. Already a leader in the field, Australia has much to gain from sharing experiences and knowhow with other countries.

This has particular resonance for Tasmania where the Turnbull Government is investing in projects such as a feasibility study into 2500MW of pumped hydro storage at 13 different sites, a University of Tasmania stocktake of the country's tidal energy resources and a smart grid project on Bruny Island.

The work Australia's Clean Energy Finance Corporation and Renewable Energy Agency is doing around pumped hydro, including Snowy 2.0, battery storage and large-scale wind and solar has been acknowledged globally. There is also particular interest in CSIRO's research into new hydrogen technology which involves using the power of the sun to store energy in hydrogen molecules.

The COP will also be a good opportunity to outline the recently announced National Energy Guarantee. As I have found in discussions with my UK counterpart earlier this week, Australia is not alone in facing reliability and affordability issues in the energy sector. The NEG offers an innovative approach to integrating climate and energy policy and in doing so is attracting significant interest.

After a decade of partisanship and domestic disputes over climate change, Australians could be forgiven for being a little jaundiced over this issue. But against this backdrop Australians should know the Government is making a real difference at the international level.

Josh Frydenberg is Australia's Minister for the Environment and Energy and led the Australian delegation in Bonn.