WAITING FOR A MIRACLE

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For most of the last two decades, frustrated climate campaigners have been saying that "the climate is changing faster than the pace of the climate negotiations", or words to that effect. While we all hoped that that was not really true and that it would spur governments into action, it is now really the case.

The much-reported record loss of Arctic sea ice is only the tip of the proverbial iceberg. A new study from independent researchers estimates that climate change is already contributing to the deaths of 400,000 people per year, and costing the global economy about US$1.2 *trillion* per year, or roughly 1.6 per cent of global GDP, which of course is expected to continue to rise dramatically. Put that next to the furore surrounding the IMF's recent announcement downgrading its expectations for global GDP growth in 2012 from 3.6 to 3.5 per cent, and for 2013 down to 3.8 per cent from a previous projection of 4.1 per cent, and you have to wonder…

Extreme drought conditions across the United States have wreaked havoc with this year's corn crop, and the litany of extreme weather events, increasing evidence of ecosystem change from the Arctic to the tropics, floods, heat waves famine and accelerating sea level rise has built up to a pitch that even government climate negotiators cannot ignore. Or can they?

Back before the disastrous debacle of COP15 in Copenhagen in late 2009, the IPCC's fourth assessment report and vigorous public pressure from right across society had made the goal of keeping global mean temperature rise at or below 2°C above pre-industrial levels into an irresistible imperative. In order to achieve this goal, global emissions have to peak and begin to decline before 2020, at the latest.

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In fact, governments agreed to the 2°C target (sort of) in Copenhagen, and it was later confirmed at COP 16 in Mexico in 2010, albeit there was and continue to be strong calls from the most vulnerable countries that even this is too high.

However, at last year's negotiations in South Africa, in what was widely yet incomprehensibly hailed as a "breakthrough", governments agreed to all but put this goal out of reach, by agreeing to start negotiations on a new treaty to be agreed by 2015, but would only come into effect in 2020, nearly ruling out any possibility for global emissions to peak before that date, barring a miracle. So where does that leave us?

Well, it leaves us hoping for miracles…but in the meantime there is a lot of work to do to try to put the pieces of the climate regime back together so that if and when our prayers for some political leadership on this subject are answered, negotiators will have something to work with. The point to remember is that there are no technological or economic barriers to getting the climate problem under control, although that will not be the case for many more years. But for now, the only missing ingredient is political will.

Given current conditions, expectations for COP 18 in Doha are pretty low, with no signs of any new mandate from the negotiators' political masters, although rising expectations from the public could yield some useful steps in the right direction.

First and foremost, the Doha talks must resolve the issue of the 2nd Commitment Period of the Kyoto Protocol, the unloved treaty which remains the only concrete and even vaguely effective expression of governments' willingness to get to grips with climate change on a global basis. What seems to be on the table at the moment is an 8-year (2013-2020) commitment period with a reduced number of countries with legally binding emissions reduction obligations. This will breathe some new life into the

Pictured below: Scroby Sands offshore wind farm, UK

Photo by ©Ben Alcraft

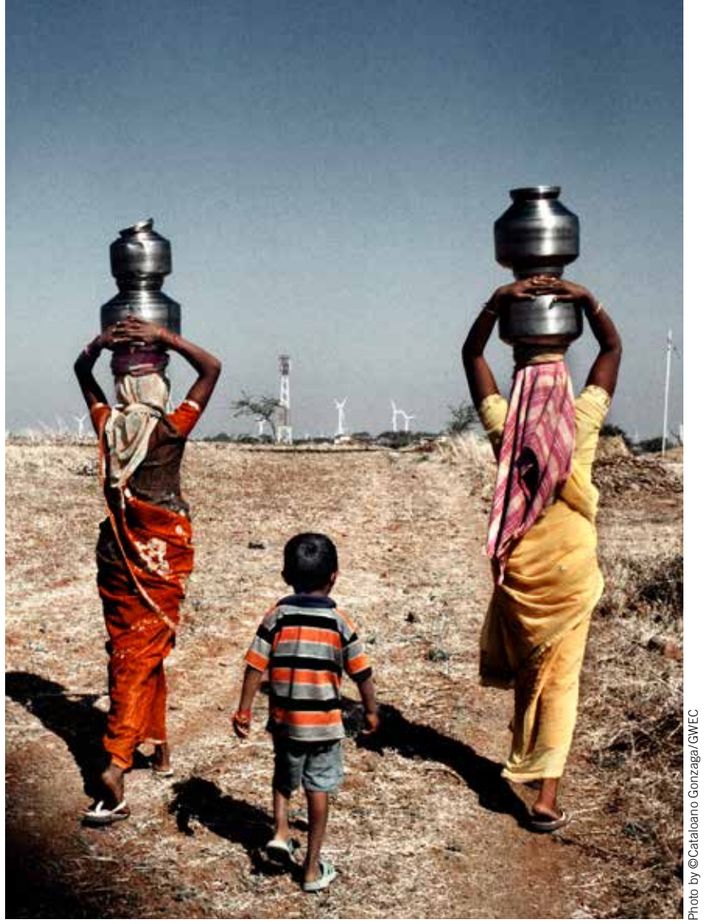
ailing carbon market past the end of this year, and provide an international anchor for the new and emerging national emission trading schemes in Australia, Korea and down the road in China and hopefully elsewhere. The adoption of this package should have a clause for provisional application of the new amendments to the Protocol to avoid a gap until they are in fact ratified by acceding governments at home. This outcome, while not very satisfying will allow for the negotiators to put away a large part of the 'old business' inherited from the Bali Action Plan agreed in 2007, the "two-track" negotiation process which was an attempt to deal with the fact that the United States can't seem to decide whether it is a developed or developing country.

Movement on Kyoto will allow negotiators to wrap up the other Bali track, the working group on Long-Term cooperative action under the 1992 Climate Convention, which provides the framework and principles for the negotiations. This track was never going to yield much of any use to the climate, and the sooner it is dispensed with, the better.

Assuming these hurdles can be overcome, then it is on to the next step, which is to begin to flesh out the parameters of the Durban Plan for Enhanced Action, which is the framework for the new treaty agreed last year in South Africa. The best case outcome would be to agree two streams of work: one, to shape the new agreement which is supposed to be complete and agreed by 2015; and two, to figure out how to increase the ambition of mitigation efforts in the period between now and 2020. While the former is fundamentally important for the long term, it may be of relatively little use unless we get the latter right.

The IPCC's 5th Assessment Report, under preparation now and which is scheduled for publication in stages throughout 2013 and 2014 will provide the scientific basis for the negotiations; and will hopefully bolster the currently faint but discernible and emerging political impetus to come to grips with the climate problem.

So what does that mean for the renewables industry? It means that we are still relegated to fiddling around the edges of the talks, dealing with the second tier issues until the larger political direction is clear. While it seems clear that the Clean Development Mechanism (which now has 117 GW of wind projects in the pipeline, for instance) will continue in some form or other, there is not much scope for growth until governments figure out some way to bolster demand for these credits; and that will not become clear until and unless governments agree what role legally binding emission reduction obligations are going to play in the new regime. So until then, we have to wait.



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Also on the table in Doha is the "Technology Mechanism", attempting to fulfill the obligation under the Convention for technology transfer. Personally, I am very skeptical that this elaborate mechanism put together by these negotiators can ever yield anything substantial beyond employment for the civil servants who operate it; but it may give us a useful opportunity to educate them as to the opportunities provided by renewable energy options across the spectrum, as they seek to reinvent the wheel. Let us hope that they conclude that it should be round.

As always, there is the question of money. Great fanfare attended Hilary Clinton's call in Copenhagen in 2009 for US$100 billion per year for the climate; and in Mexico we saw the establishment of the Green Climate Fund, and great effort has been put into deciding who shall govern the fund and what it shall spend its (imaginary) money on. There are two fundamental problems here: one, the widespread expectation that OECD governments will "fill" the Green Climate Fund with contributions from their national budgets - anyone who has read a newspaper in the last 18 months knows that this is just not going to happen; second, US$100 billion per year (minus the large sums it will no doubt take to administer the Fund) is just the tip of the iceberg; for instance, the IEA suggests that 5-10 times that amount per annum will be required for the power sector alone over the next 20 years or so. Finally, OECD governments have been backpedalling from the US$100 billion/year commitment ever since it was first put on the table in Copenhagen.

Pictured Above: **Extreme drought conditions and heatwaves caused by climate change affect people in India**
Pictured right: **Steve Sawyer, Secretary-General of GWEC**
Pictured below right: **The affects of climate change has wreaked havoc with corn crop in Canada**

The one hopeful sign to emerge in the last few months is that there are now the beginnings of a renewed understanding that the vast majority of the finance and all of the technology needed to address the problem is going to have to come from the private sector – and that one of the key features of the new treaty needs to be a mechanism(s) to incentivise investment. More than ever before, private sector actors – industry, entrepreneurs, investors, etc. – are ready to act, with the renewables industry front and centre on that score. What is lacking is the expression of political will and the framework. Until governments can come up with the goods, we remain frustrated observers on the sidelines struggling through difficult economic times and waiting for a miracle. ■

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steve Sawyer, Secretary-General of GWEC, has worked in the energy and environment field since 1978, with a particular focus on climate change and renewable energy. Mr Sawyer spent 30 years working for Greenpeace as CEO of both Greenpeace USA and Greenpeace International and served as Head of Delegation to Kyoto Protocol negotiations on climate change. Mr Sawyer is a founding member of REN21 and was also an expert reviewer for the IPCC's Working Group 3.

ABOUT THE GLOBAL WIND ENERGY COUNCIL

The Global Wind Energy Council (GWEC) is the international trade association for the wind power industry. Our mission is to ensure that wind power establishes itself as the answer to today's energy challenges, providing substantial environmental and economic benefits.

GWEC is a member-based organisation that represents the entire wind energy sector. The members of GWEC represent over 1,500 companies, organisations and institutions in more than 70 countries, including manufacturers, developers, component suppliers, research institutes, national wind and renewables associations, electricity providers, finance and insurance companies.

GWEC works at the highest international political level to create a better policy environment for wind power. GWEC and its members are active all over the world, educating local and national governments and international agencies about the benefits of wind power. Working with the UNFCCC, the IEA, international financial institutions, the IPCC and now the new International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), GWEC represents the global wind industry to show how far we've come, but also to advocate new policies to help wind power reach its full potential in as wide a variety of markets as possible.

More information is available at www.gwec.net

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