

A Submission from Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Norway and the United States on the 2013-15 Review

2015 May

Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Norway and the United States are pleased to make this submission in response to the invitation by the Subsidiary Bodies in paragraph 54 of the SBSTA-41 conclusion, and paragraph 117 of the SBI-41 conclusion.

We wish to thank the co-facilitators of the Structured Expert Dialogue (SED), the expert presenters of the SED, the co-chairs of the Joint Contact Group, the Secretariat and the Parties that contributed to the success of the 2013-15 Review.

We welcome the summary report of the SED, comprised of the final, factual Technical Summary (TS) with a compilation of the summary reports from each SED, which completes the phases of the Review mandated by the COP and listed in Decision 2/CP.17, paragraph 164. We are mindful that the TS notes that “the views expressed by experts during the dialogue and captured here should not be seen as taking precedence over the findings of the AR5 or the reports from other organizations considered in the SED sessions.” That said, we would like to express our appreciation to the co-facilitators of the SED who made every effort to ensure that the TS is factual and represents the scientific understanding of the issues addressed.

As Parties work together under the ADP to conclude an ambitious global agreement that sets the framework for long-term collaborative action on climate change, the 2013-2015 Review has helped Parties better understand and reflect upon the adequacy of the long-term global goal (LTGG) and the progress being made towards achieving it.

Theme 1 of the 2013-15 Review: The Adequacy of the LTGG

The TS provides a number of important findings that address Theme 1 of the Review. For example:

- Message 1 notes that “...science has provided a wealth of information to support the use of that goal [i.e., an upper limit of global warming of 2°C].”
- Message 2 affirms the “need to act soon and decisively” and that “[l]imiting global warming to below 2°C necessitates a radical transition, not merely a fine tuning of current trends.”
- Message 3 states, “Assessing the adequacy of the LTGG implies risk assessments and value judgments, not only at the global level, but also at the regional and local levels.” Paragraph 40 of the TS goes on to note, “[o]n the qualification of ‘safe’ or ‘dangerous’ levels of impacts... this depends on the scale, frequency and severity of the impact, and implies a value judgment.”
- Message 4 notes that, “Significant climate impacts are already occurring at the current level of global warming and additional magnitudes of warming will only increase the risk of severe, pervasive and irreversible impacts,” which reinforces the need for ambitious,

immediate, global action to mitigate and adapt to climate change and, therefore, reduce the risk of severe, pervasive and irreversible impacts.

- Message 5 suggests that the ‘guardrail’ concept, implicit in the current formulation of the 2°C LTGG, might “... be better seen as an upper limit, a defense line [or buffer zone] that needs to be stringently defended, while less warming would be preferable.”
- Message 10 concludes, “[t]he science on the 1.5 °C warming limit is less robust than for the 2 °C warming limit or warming beyond this limit. Consequently, assessing the differences between the future impacts of climate risks for 1.5 °C and 2 °C of warming remains challenging. More scientific findings are likely to become available in the future, and considerations on strengthening the long-term global goal to 1.5 °C may therefore have to continue.”

The TS provides robust science on climate change addressing the adequacy of the LTGG and at the same time it shows that we rarely have complete certainty in understanding the risks and impacts of climate change. We learned that, in almost all instances, impacts occur on a continuum, not after crossing some threshold, that significant climate impacts are already occurring and that the associated risks increase considerably with increasing temperature. These findings suggest that a risk-based approach to decision-making may allow for various interpretations on acceptable levels of risk depending on value judgments. Therefore, in trying to achieve the LTGG, such an approach may serve as a useful tool in making decisions, while allowing for periodic adjustments as new information becomes available (i.e., iterative risk management).

Theme 2 of the 2013-15 Review: Progress towards Achieving the LTGG

The TS of the 2013-15 Review also provides a number of important findings that address Theme 2 of the Review. For example:

- Message 8 relays an important finding that successful mitigation policies are known and must be scaled up urgently, but unfortunately, incomplete and imbalanced national information was available to assess the progress needed to bend the emissions curve to put the world on a pathway that is consistent with the LTGG. (More comprehensive implementation of the reporting obligations under Decision 1/CP.16 would result in greater understanding of national information.)
- Message 9 summarizes many of the ambitious and significant mitigation-related efforts related to means of implementation being undertaken by institutions both under and outside the Convention to achieve the LTGG (e.g., Standing Committee on Finance; Green Climate Fund; Technology Executive Committee; Climate Technology Center and Network; Durban Forum on capacity building and the Dialogue on Article 6 of the Convention). As a result, institutions and processes launched under the Convention on finance, technology and capacity-building have built a foundation for much greater and sustained global mitigation effort in the future.

In particular, the TS (paragraph 84) underlines the importance of enabling environments, including institutional arrangements, for the appropriate transfer of technology, the provision of finance and the capacity to absorb technologies, with paragraph 81 noting, for example, that, “The required technology deployment [i.e., to achieve the LTGG] is often impeded by social, political and economic barriers rather than technology transfer issues, meaning that the role of social, political and organizational aspects need to be addressed.”

We believe that the findings on the progress being made and the foundations being established for enhancing global ambition and efforts are encouraging in light of Message 6, which states that “[l]imiting global warming to below 2°C is still feasible and will bring about many co-benefits, but poses substantial technological, economic and institutional challenges.”

Information Gaps Revealed during the 2013-15 Review

The SED was valuable in another aspect in that it helped Parties – and the technical experts – identify where knowledge gaps exist. Decision 1/CP.18, paragraph 91 stated that “... the information gathering and compilation phase... should end not later than six months before the conclusion of the review in 2015, unless critical information emerges...” and we do not feel such critical information has emerged. We identify some topics as information gaps revealed during the 2013-15 Review:

- The differences in the magnitude and “regionality” of impacts at various degrees of warming – “units of risk” are a qualitative barometer that are normative in nature, which complicates the understanding of the spatial differences in impacts at various levels of warming.
- How physical systems such as ice sheets, glaciers and permafrost and human systems such as agricultural systems will respond to varying degrees of warming [paragraph 109].
- The interplay of multiple stressors and climate change. As paragraph 38 notes, “[c]limate-related hazards exacerbate other stressors...[attribution of impacts to climate change] is sometimes difficult owing to non-climate stressors and the influence of other convoluting factors further down the chain of impacts.”

Final Thoughts

The SED process provided a unique and valuable opportunity to advance the science-policy interface as it relates to climate change. It took into account the robust science on climate change, as well as areas of uncertainty and complexity. It also demonstrated the importance of climate risk management and how policy decisions will differ across sectors, regions and countries in part because policy makers make decisions about what risks are acceptable – and unacceptable – based on specific local contexts.

We note the importance and success of the 2013-15 Review in informing the broader UNFCCC process, including the work of its bodies (e.g., COP and ADP), consistent with Decision 1/CP.17, paragraph 6, and paragraph 79 of the report on SBSTA-40. We note Decision 12/CP.20 that recognized the Fifth Assessment Report of the IPCC (AR5) as the most comprehensive and

robust assessment of climate change to date and Decision 1/CP.18 paragraph 82, which noted that AR5 was a key input to the review. We also note the boundaries of the scope of the periodic review(s), as mandated by Decision 1/CP.16, paragraph 138; Decision 2/CP.17, paragraph 157; and Decision 1/CP.18, paragraph 79.

We recall paragraph 52 of the SBSTA-41 conclusion, which “noted that the resumed fourth session of the SED [i.e., Geneva, Feb 2015] will be its final meeting,” and we welcome the Informal Note by the SBSTA Chair in advance of SBSTA-42 which “...encourage[s] Parties to work towards an expeditious conclusion of the 2013–2015 review at SBSTA and SBI 42.” The SED has allowed Parties to fulfill the mandate of the Review as first described in 1/CP.16, paragraph 138.