

# The five-year commitment period is key to consistent climate action

**To be effective, the first commitment period of the 2015 agreement (Paris Protocol) should end in 2025. Each subsequent commitment period should also last for 5 years.**

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The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process is in the process of negotiating a new global agreement, due to come to fruition in Paris in December 2015. A five-year frequency of commitments embedded in this anticipated agreement will be critical if the world is to move away from a coal, oil and nukes addicted energy system and toward 100% renewable energy by 2050. This shift is essential to increase the chance of stabilizing the global average temperature rise far below 2 or even 1.5 degrees Celsius, thereby averting the worst impacts of climate change.

The negotiations preceding the Paris Protocol are complex, but something that should be able to be agreed at the Lima Conference of Parties in 2014 is the length of mitigation action commitments, which needs to be common to all Parties and short enough to allow a dynamic political response to the challenge of climate change. It is imperative that their commitments, for the first and subsequent commitment period of the Paris Protocol, should be five years for the following reasons:

- ✓ **Avoiding locking in low levels of ambition**  
The number one reason in favour of short commitment periods is to avoid locking in low levels of ambition. Some governments still resist taking action on climate protection, and while there is such a dearth of political leadership, there is a real risk they will table unambitious targets for Paris. Those countries cannot be allowed to lock-in paltry targets for any significant length of time, and certainly not for a ten-year period that will end in 16 years from now!
- ✓ **Incentivizing early action**  
Having the first commitment period run to 2025 (beginning an on-going cycle of 5-year commitment periods) would compel governments to begin cutting emissions immediately. By contrast, longer commitment periods allow governments to delay taking action and risk not meeting set targets.
- ✓ **Linking the five years (2021-2025) to the scientific review by IPCC**  
Linking the commitment period to the scientific review by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) allows countries to correct domestic climate policies and legislations accordingly, and avoids locking in too little effort to mitigate global warming due to strong resistance from domestic fossil fuel and nuclear industries. After all, five years starting in 2021 means 11 years from now! In Lima, countries should mandate the IPCC to produce reports on a 5-year cycles, as in its original mandate.
- ✓ **Maintaining political accountability**  
Short commitment periods secure political accountability – also in the longer run. Election periods are typically four to six years, thus for most governments, fulfilling commitments made for periods well into the future will become someone else's political achievement. Avoiding climate chaos is everyone's problem and must be addressed immediately, consistently and in a manner that gives all the confidence that appropriate action is being taken by all.
- ✓ **Failure of mid-term reviews in longer commitment periods**  
Review processes in the climate regime, outside of the Kyoto Protocol Article 3.9 mandate for its second commitment period, have very rarely delivered; one only needs to look at the review of Article 9 in the Kyoto Protocol or the more recent Kyoto Protocol Ministerial. For this reason, the mandate to begin negotiations for 2015 agreement's second and subsequent 5-year commitment periods needs to be included in the text of the Paris Protocol and closely based on the Kyoto Protocol's Article 3.9.

✓ **Disparity of domestic targets and the five-year multilateral standard**

Nothing stops countries from implementing longer term policies and measures to reduce emissions as long as they are ambitious. However, at the international level, five-year commitment periods are highly preferable. Shorter international commitments can be calculated based on longer-term domestic commitments.

Finally, countries cannot be allowed to pick and choose an end year or length for their commitments. The political pressure created by successive negotiating rounds within the UNFCCC process will be lost. Thus, both the length and end-date of the commitment period must be the same for all countries.

*The ideal scenario for the Paris Protocol is to have a first five-year commitment period that is combined with a long-term goal of ensuring 100% renewable energy for all by mid-century.*

A typical argument in favour of longer commitment periods is investor confidence. Investors demand long-term certainty to make investments with long pay-back periods. The “certainty” argument is propagated by big coal and oil companies that make 30- to 40-year investments in the building of new coal-fired power plants and lock the world into one of the most polluting sources of energy. On the other hand, the renewable energy industry is calling for policy certainty in terms of tax credits or feed-in laws – not for any particular length of commitment. Agreeing to phase out fossil fuels and phase in 100% renewables by mid-century combined with a five-year commitment period can provide more investor certainty than a longer (initial) commitment period.

### The current positions of countries on commitment lengths

The **United States of America** supports the first commitment period ending in 2025, recognizing the need for increasing ambition and avoiding lock-in. They also support that the commitment periods should operate in common 5-year cycles. The US should make this positive position a key, and non-negotiable, component of their diplomatic outreach in the climate negotiations. The proposed Energy Protection Agency’s rules announced by President Obama are mostly aiming at 2025. However, the USA needs to do more domestically. The Greenpeace Energy Revolution scenario confirms that emissions reductions from US power plants could be four times greater than the EPA proposal; thus, a shorter commitment period would promote an earlier and more ambitious adjustment. Given the fact that the energy system is becoming more and more diverse and renewable energies are booming, there is a high chance for improvement soon.

Many **Small Island States** are calling for a five-year commitment period linked to the scientific review by IPCC. These countries already feel the existential threat of the sea level rise caused by human-induced climate change and know if the major emitting countries lock-in low climate targets it could mean the end of life on their islands.

The **Least Developed Countries (LDC)** support commitment period lengths of 5 years, until 2040 when a review should be undertaken. As highly vulnerable countries to climate impacts, they are understandingly keen to ensure that ambition is ratcheted up on a suitably frequent timescale.

The **Association of Independent Latin American and Caribbean states (AILAC)** is also a welcome supporter of 5-year periodicity in the new agreement.

The **European Union** has agreed the headline targets of its 2030 climate and energy package in the October Council this year. It aims at three targets for CO2 reduction, renewable energy (RE) and energy efficiency (EE) by 2030. With an “at least” minus 40% reduction of greenhouse gases by 2030 based on the 1990 values, it is highly probable that the EU Emissions Trading System will not drive the necessary divestment from coal and oil and the sufficient investment in RE and EE, particularly since the energy targets are weak, and only binding at the European, not national, level. Under high lobby pressure from fossil- and energy-intensive industries, Europe also risks locking-in low ambition from other major emitters by promoting a 2030 timeline. The EU has argued that a 10-year commitment period, 16 years from now, could include a strong review in the middle, assessing which targets could be improved if needed. But the history of the EU and UNFCCC demonstrated that reviews do not work like that. Once targets have been agreed on, countries are unwilling to change them. More recently, the EU has shown greater flexibility on the

issue, calling for a common and regular process for strengthening mitigation ambition, restating that review of the mitigation commitments should take place every 5 years. They assert that commitment period discussions for the first period should be limited to 2025 or 2030 only.

The economy in **China** is organized in 5-year planning cycles. Its 14th Five-Year-Plan from 2021 to 2025 goes well with an international 5-year commitment period. The shorter commitment period also averts the difficulties of projecting too far into the future, thus barring low ambition due to low certainty. This is particularly important for an economy as dynamic as the Chinese one. There is a risk that China will table numbers for 2030 that are linked to a peak year around 2030. Given modelling results this would put global warming on a dangerous path and cannot be accepted. A peak of Chinese emissions for a time much earlier than 2025 is imperative to protect citizens from dangerous coal pollution and prevent global warming to get out of control. A 5-year commitment period would prevent the international process from locking in Chinese emission peaking around 2030.

The phase out of fossil fuel emissions and the transition to a 100% renewable energy economy that ensures sustainable energy access for all by no later than 2050 requires bold and fast common action.

**For all the aforementioned reasons, Greenpeace calls to ALL parties to stick to the 2025 time frame in the mitigation commitments they will present for the Paris Protocol first commitment period.**

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