

Climate target is foolhardy

[Economics & Deregulation](#) and [Climate Change](#) | [Alan Moran](#)



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As a face-saver to December's collapse of the world climate negotiations, governments agreed to the Copenhagen Accord. This had vague provisions to pursue measures to limit global temperature increases to 2C.

The accord offered no guidance as to how this might be achieved but did say it would involve deep cuts in emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. Accordingly, developed country governments agreed to lodge quantified measures they would adopt to reduce their emissions by 2020.

Australia has made an unconditional commitment to reduce emissions by 5 per cent on 2000 levels, agreeing to increase this to 15-25 per cent, conditional on an international agreement. By comparison, Canada has agreed to a conditional reduction of 17 per cent on 2005 levels; the EU a conditional 20-30 per cent on 1990 levels; Japan a conditional 25 per cent on 1990 levels; New Zealand a conditional 10-20 per cent on 1990 levels; Norway a conditional 40 per cent on 1990 levels; Russia a conditional 15-25 per cent on 1990 levels; and the US a conditional 17 per cent on 1995 levels.

Australia is the only jurisdiction to have offered an unconditional reduction in emissions by 2020. This commitment has problems.

The first is that it is based on proposals that have been voted down by parliament and which, though being re-submitted, seem certain once again to be rejected. Hence, not only has the Rudd government uniquely offered to deliver something unconditionally but parliament has denied it the offer it has made.

It may be argued this doesn't matter as there is bipartisan agreement for a 5 per cent cut in emissions by 2020. At the end of January, the Coalition announced similar goals to those of the government in its climate policy.

However, this is invalid for two reasons. First, the government lodged its commitment before it knew of the Coalition's plans. Second, the government has maintained the Coalition's policy will not achieve the goal it has set.

It may be argued the global warming negotiation system is a meaningless farce and everybody is merely posturing. But no other country has offered an international commitment it cannot keep. Instead, they have ensured they would not be held to account for missing any 2020 targets they might set themselves. Their submissions were accompanied by conditions. Japan's offer is "premised on the establishment of a fair and effective international framework in which all major economies participate". Canada's commitment was, "to be aligned with the final economy-wide emissions target of the US in enacted legislation". Even the EU stipulates "that other developed countries commit themselves to comparable emission reductions and that developing countries contribute adequately".

In contrast, the Australian government has chosen to offer a firm commitment that is quixotic.

Gesture diplomacy of this nature must have repercussions on our credibility.

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