

REFLECTIONS ON COP26: 26th meeting of the Conference of the Parties, organized by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC) by Peter Love

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I did not attend the COP26 meeting in Glasgow but will say at the outset how very proud I am that my oldest daughter was there and speaking on behalf of the B Corp movement in the UK. I will assume that most of the people who read this have been following the discussions and have read many summaries so I will not repeat those here. Instead, the following are a few of my reflections on issues that I consider of most interest. As I think it is important to see what was actually agreed to, not what was reported to have been said, I have included direct quotes from the final pact.

- **The Final Pact** – The [final report](#) is relatively short (8 pages) and written using clear language. Officially called the *Glasgow Climate Pact*, it starts with nine acknowledgements of previous decisions and scientific facts re: climate change. It then has 71 paragraphs, organized into 8 sections. Interestingly, the wording of each of the 97 articles starts with a verb which is *italicized* for emphasis: *urges*, *calls upon*, *decides*, *emphasizes*, etc. The order of these sections is revealing; it starts with “Science and Urgency” which is logical followed by sections on “Adaptation” and “Adaptation Finance”, a clear signal of how important adaptation (reducing the negative impacts of climate change) has become compared to mitigation (avoiding/reducing emissions causing climate change). The fourth section is on “Mitigation”, the fifth is on “Financing, Technology Transfer and Capacity Building for Mitigation and Adaptation” and the sixth “Loss and Damage” returns to the issue of adaptation. The last two sections deal with “Implementation” and “Collaboration”. The final version is surprisingly different from the proposal recommended by the President of the FCCC on Saturday, November 13th with 29 of the original 97 paragraphs removed, a few major edits (discussed below) and a few added.
- **Adaptation** – Article 11 “*urges* developed country Parties to urgently and significantly scale up their provision of climate finance, technology transfer and capacity-building for adaptation so as to respond to the needs of developing countries...” While strong, it is not as specific as a previous version of this paragraph which called for “at least double their collective provision of climate finance for adaptation to developing countries.” This paragraph was a response to compelling pleas made by developing countries who noted that it was developed countries who created the problem and demanded that more be spent on adaptation.
- **Impacts of Even Small Changes** – Article 16 “*recognizes* that the impacts of climate change will be much lower at the temperature increase of 1.5^oC compared with 2^oC and *resolves* to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5^oC.” While 0.5^oC may seem small, the most recent [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#) (IPCC) report noted that “every additional 0.5^oC of global warming causes clearly discernible increases in the intensity and frequency” of severe weather events such as heat waves, heavy rains and droughts (Hello, BC!).

- **Revisit/Strengthen 2030 Targets Annually** – While articles 17 and 18 “recognize” that further action is required to keep temperatures below 1.5°C, the working is much weaker than the previous version which “requests Parties to revisit and strengthen the 2030 targets in their nationally determined contributions as necessary to align with the Paris Agreement temperature goal by the end of 2022.” This would have been a major change as countries were previously supposed to submit new or updated plans every 5 years. The final wording keeps the 5-year update in place.
- **Phase-Down of Unabated Coal and Inefficient Fossil Fuel Subsidies** – Article 20 is probably the most well-known of all the articles and is the one that India, with the support of a few other countries including China, sprung on delegates at the last minute. It starts with a call to the transition to low-emission energy systems and ends with “...accelerating efforts towards the phasedown of unabated coal power and phase-out of inefficient fossil fuel subsidies, while providing targeted support to the poorest and most vulnerable in line with national circumstances and recognizing the need for support towards a just transition.” The five key weasel words here are “phase-down” (changed from phase out), “unabated” (thus allowing burning of coal as long as it also includes carbon capture, utilization and storage, CCUS), “inefficient” (very vague term), “national circumstances” (could be used to permit continued use of coal) and “just transition” (acknowledging that coal and fossil fuel subsidies will be required during the unspecified transition period). As many have remarked, it is at least the first specific mention of coal and fossil fuels by a COP meeting.
- **Meaningful Youth, Indigenous and Female Participation** – Article 64 “urges Parties and stakeholders to ensure meaningful youth participation and representation in multilateral, national and local decision-making processes....” Article 66 “emphasizes the important role of indigenous peoples’ and local communities’ culture and knowledge in effective action on climate change and urges Parties to actively involve indigenous peoples and local communities on designing and implementing climate action...” Article 68, added at the end, “encourages Parties to increase full, meaningful and equal participation of women in climate action and to ensure gender-responsive implementation and means of implementation...”
- **Side Agreements** – There were a number of announcements during the conference that involved various countries, including Canada. These included the [Powering Past Coal Alliance](#) (more than 40 countries agreeing to phase out use of coal to generate electricity), US/China joint climate change pledge to slow global warming, the agreement to end deforestation by 2030 (more than 100 countries including Brazil), [Industrial Deep Decarbonization Initiative](#) (countries would require green factors to be considered for the purchase of materials including steel), selling only electric vehicles by 2040 (agreed to by 24 countries and 6 major auto manufacturers) and the [Glasgow Financial](#)

[*Alliance for Net Zero*](#) (consortium of 450 banks, asset managers and insurers who committed \$130 trillion to transition global economies by 2050).

The burning (!?) question I am left with is this: Do we have enough time for the type of incremental improvements that were made in Glasgow, what Barak Obama referred to as “moving the ball down the field”, and others have referred to as “not letting the perfect be the enemy of the good”? Or did we need stronger targets and REAL action now to avert the worst that might be in store for us? I sincerely hope it is the former but there is a fear that it might be the latter.

About the author:

Peter Love is a Professor at Yorkville University and an Adjunct Professor at York University where he teaches courses on energy efficiency and sustainability and has written a free on-line text book on energy efficiency policy and programs. He provides strategic and policy advice and serves on several corporate and non-profit boards including Efficiency Capital, International Solar Solutions, Lightspark, Toronto 2030 District (Chair Advisory Committee) and the Royal Canadian Institute for Science (past Chair). Previous roles have included Chief Energy Conservation Officer of Ontario and member of the team at Pollution Probe in the 70's that developed the 3 R's: reduce, reuse, recycle.