



net zero
CARBON

GUIDES AND INSIGHTS

*1.2. - An introduction to UK and
global climate policy*



An introduction to UK and global climate policy

An introduction to decarbonisation should include a brief look at the institutions and policies that determine the global response to climate change. This guide will present some of the more important features to consider at the global, EU, and UK levels.



The UNFCCC

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is the intergovernmental body of UN member states that convenes to decide global climate policy. It meets once a year for the Conference of the Parties (COP). The first COP (COP 1) took place in 1995 in Berlin.

The Kyoto Protocol (COP 3)

COP 3 in 1997 produced the Kyoto Protocol – a formalised agreement for countries to reduce their GHG emissions. A fundamental feature of its design is the principle of ‘common but differentiated responsibilities’, which acknowledges that developed countries with greater historic carbon emissions have both a greater capacity and duty to reduce GHG emissions. This principle was implemented through as Annex I countries under the Kyoto

Protocol: those categorised as ‘developed’ which adopted emissions reduction targets.

The Kyoto Protocol is also noteworthy for agreeing a defined basket of GHGs that all climate policy should target. The six gases and families of gases agreed are now known as the Kyoto Protocol basket of GHGs.

It also developed three Flexible Mechanisms intended to lower the cost of reaching emissions reductions targets: the Clean Development Mechanism, international emissions trading, and Joint Implementation.

The Paris Agreement (COP 21)

The Paris Agreement is the work of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – the intergovernmental body of UN member states that convenes to decide global climate policy. In 2015, at the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP 21), member states agreed that global warming should be kept to no more than 2°C above pre-industrial temperatures, and ideally below 1.5°C.



An important change marked by the Agreement is a departure from the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities enshrined in the Kyoto Protocol. Under the Agreement, UN member states submit Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs): their own efforts to help meet the 1.5°C or 2°C targets of the Agreement. NDCs mean that all countries are expected to act. For example, the EU's NDC is to reduce GHG emissions 40% from 1990 levels by 2030.

Glasgow's climate summit (COP 26)

The UK will host COP 26 in Glasgow in December 2020. COP 26 is expected to be the most important COP since COP 21 because it will be the

first of the Paris Agreement's planned global five-year stock-takes on progress to date against the Paris Agreement's objectives.

The EU Green Deal

The EU Green Deal is the European Commission's 2019 climate policy proposal. Its headline item is the EU's own 2050 net zero target. An important item it also proposes is a 'border adjustment mechanism' – a tax – that will price imports in a way that more accurately reflects their embodied GHG emissions. This would make imports to the EU from countries with lower environmental standards more expensive. It is part of the fight against 'carbon leakage' – the resulting increase in emissions by a country when a trading partner adopts stricter climate policy.

The 2008 Climate Change Act (and its 2019 Amendment)

The Climate Change Act is the top-level policy for climate change in the UK. It was introduced in 2008. It first mandated an 80% reduction in GHG emissions from 1990 levels by 2050. This was the first time a government had set legally binding emissions targets. In 2019, the 2050 target was amended to a net zero one.

The path to the target is supported by a system of five-year carbon budgets. The UK is currently in its third carbon budget. The 6th carbon budget (which will cover 2033-2037) is currently being designed and will be the first new carbon budget since the 80% reduction target changed to a net zero one.

About Us

The UK has a net zero target for 2050. Businesses who are unprepared for it are exposed to long-term regulatory and reputational risk. If your business is looking to respond to the UK's 2050 net zero target, you're going to need a clear resource to help you through the complex process of developing and implementing a commercial decarbonisation strategy.

This is why Alfa Energy founded netzerocarbon.com, the home of everything net zero you'll need. Along with our partners and industry collaborators, we will be bringing you a step-by-step guide to strategy development and implementation, regulatory and compliance developments, best practice advice and examples from industry experts and your peers, and roundups of ongoing stories in business decarbonisation.

We aim to provide you with a clear, straightforward approach to achieving net zero emissions and all you'll need to develop your knowledge and understanding of the opportunities to deliver this critical objective.

