

From The Times

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China announces first greenhouse gas target



In September President Hu Jintao pledged to reduce the intensity of carbon emissions as a percentage of economic growth by 2020 by a 'notable margin'

Jane Macartney in Beijing

China has unveiled its first firm target to curb greenhouse gas emissions, and said that the Premier, Wen Jiabao, will attend climate change talks in Copenhagen next month.

The State Council, or Cabinet, pledged yesterday to cut carbon dioxide emissions per unit of gross domestic product by 40 to 45 per cent by 2020 compared with 2005 levels.

It said: "This is a voluntary action taken by the Chinese Government based on its own national conditions and is a major contribution to the global effort in tackling climate change."

The Foreign Ministry did not say which days of the December meeting Premier Wen would attend, although it claimed his presence underlined China's commitment to making Copenhagen a success despite the low expectations of any binding outcome from the talks.

A spokesman said: "We hope to reach a fair and reasonable arrangement." The Premier's attendance "fully demonstrates the importance attached to this".

China's emphasis on tackling its climate change and pollution problems has become a priority for the Government. This announcement marks the first time Beijing has put specific numbers on a September pledge by President Hu Jintao at the United Nations to reduce the intensity of carbon emissions as a percentage of economic growth by 2020 by a "notable margin".

Experts described the goal as ambitious but not unattainable and said that it was extremely significant that China had made such a move a day after President Obama said that he would go to Copenhagen to announce personally US proposals to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

Alex Wang, of the Natural Resources Defence Council environmental group, said: "This is setting the stage for a successful meeting."

He described the two targets from Beijing and Washington as opening numbers. "We hope to see a higher range if not beyond."

The goal does not mean that China will actually cut its carbon emissions by 2020. In fact, given the expected huge increases in its economy over the next decade, its global warming emissions should increase but at a much slower pace than if China had made no changes.

China already has a goal to cut energy intensity by 2010 by 20 per cent, a target that it should meet by a whisker and probably only because the global financial crisis slowed its red-hot growth last year.

The carbon intensity goal is particularly important because coal accounts for a massive 70 per cent of China's total electricity generation.

Allan Zhang, head of carbon markets in Beijing with PriceWaterhouseCoopers, said: "I would say it is a very aggressive target. This 40-45 per cent reduction is quite big.

"I am sure they will have to come up with subsequent action plans to implement it."

He cited the link with actions from the US, the world's No2 carbon emitter after China. China and the US together account for about 40 per cent of the world's carbon emissions.

"This will be the official position of China and it will be quite something. I am sure it will put more pressure on the US side. It is definitely a significant move but to achieve it will be quite a challenge."

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