

NEWS

Climate deal agreed in Bali showdown

Insults, threats, tears and booing: the latest round of international climate talks made for an entertaining, if gruelling, two weeks in Nusa Dua, Indonesia. These talks may well be remembered for the bold stand that developing countries took against the United States in the push for consensus on how to move forward in negotiating a new international framework on climate change.

Some 10,000 delegates from nearly 190 nations finally agreed on Saturday to a 'Bali roadmap' that will guide negotiations up until the end of 2009, when they will have to decide on a regime to replace the Kyoto Protocol in 2012. But the path to agreement was rocky from the outset, as discussions over individual words in the draft document led to heated arguments, threats of trade sanctions or boycotts, and even tears.

By the middle of the second week, a deal had more or less been reached on some of the key issues that would enable developing nations — including those with budding economies — to

reduce their emissions. The deal entailed providing compensation for reducing tropical deforestation, which accounts for some 20% of greenhouse gases.

That left two thorny issues on the table, both of which the United States objected to. As one of the world's largest greenhouse-gas emitters and the only rich nation not to have ratified Kyoto, the United States became noticeably isolated as developing and developed nations,

led by the European Union (EU), stood strong on the need for richer countries to lead on climate change and to tackle it with emissions targets. In a year that has been punctuated with reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on the urgency of global warming, most delegations agreed that the roadmap should refer to the need for industrialized nations to slash emissions by 25–40% of 1990 levels by 2020.

The EU delegation, headed by commissioner Stavros Dimas, argued that a roadmap without a destination would be pointless. And Portuguese secretary of state for the environment, Humberto Rosa said: "It is crucial for us that we must have an idea where we are heading to — it's not only to science to show us the destination, but the destination must be consistent with the science."

But the United States countered that to include specific numbers would be to "prejudge the outcome" of the process. Following days of intensive negotiations, a compromise was reached by including a



People from around the world campaigned outside the Bali conference centre.

Exchange rate hits US researchers

The weak dollar is affecting US researchers working abroad and threatens American involvement in flagship projects say physicists at the CERN laboratory. Grants paid in dollars to researchers in Europe are now worth substantially less than they were a year ago.

"It's hurting, and people are scrimping and making up for it in other ways," says Mike Tuts, a programme manager for the US collaborators on Atlas, a component of the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) at CERN, which will look for the Higgs boson, dubbed the God particle.

In January 2006, a US dollar bought about €0.83, in January 2007 that was €0.77. Today it is worth only €0.69. Although US researchers at CERN receive adjusted pay to reflect the cost of living, these corrections are not keeping up with the change in exchange rates. "It's already starting to hurt and it's making people nervous," says Joel Butler of the US section of the Compact Muon Solenoid experiment, another part of the LHC.

And it is not just the researchers who are

suffering. Local costs incurred by US teams at CERN have risen significantly. Butler says that additional funding to deal with these expenses will be requested, but it is not guaranteed to be forthcoming. "In the end, if we don't get some relief, we will probably have to reduce the size of the community and do more work remotely," he says.

Similar problems may befall CERN itself, which straddles the border between France and Switzerland. Changes in exchange rates between the euro and the Swiss franc — between 2002 and 2006 — cost the LHC project 40 million Swiss francs (US\$35 million), says Florian Sonnemann, head of resource planning and controlling at the facility. "This Sfr40 million had to come from the contingency we have for this project," he says.

However, at the moment, it is the Americans who are really suffering. "We used a rather poor exchange rate in the budget planning," says Tuts. "Ultimately it will impact on the science." ■

Daniel Crescey

SNAPSHOT Bumper cone crop

The tall conifers of America's Pacific Northwest are experiencing a peculiarly heavy cone-harvest. Ken Bible of the University of Washington in Seattle, who investigates the phenomenon, says: "In normal mast years [when most Douglas-fir cones are produced], we would see four or five cones per branch. Now we are seeing 30."

The cone-production cycle is thought to be driven in part by weather events during the development of tree buds and cones. Bible says that his team is looking closely at temperature, rain, humidity and wind data at several development stages to see if they can work out what caused the super mast.

It seems to be confined to that region. For example, white spruce in Canada are masting normally in Edmonton, Calgary and Banff, reports Jalene LaMontagne, at the University of Calgary in Alberta. ■

Emma Marris

