

Check against delivery

Scoping Meeting for the Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways

Opening statement by Hoesung Lee, Chair of the IPCC Monday 15 August 2016

Elena Manaenkova, deputy Secretary-General of the WMO, dear Thelma, Florin and Abdalah, members of the IPCC Bureau, distinguished experts

I'd like to welcome the many experts from different fields who are here to draw up the outlines of the Special Report on 1.5 degrees, and thank Elena for hosting us so generously. There is huge interest in this report. We had nearly 600 nominations of experts to take part in this meeting, and you can be sure that the report when it appears – the first in the IPCC's Sixth Assessment cycle – will attract enormous attention. So you have a great responsibility!

You will be hearing more details later from Abdalah Mokssit, the Secretary of the IPCC, about how the IPCC works. In these few remarks, I'd like to focus on one particular aspect of the IPCC: our policy relevance. IPCC reports are read by many people – the scientific community, civil society organizations, the general public. But our prime audience is policymakers – national, regional and local governments, and international policymakers too. An IPCC report is intended to deliver robust science to help them take sound evidence-based policy decisions. We don't tell governments what to do. We are policy-relevant without being policy-prescriptive.

So, IPCC reports are used by a wide range of policymakers with differing resources at their disposal. They are intended to support governments in every country and region of the world, facing a variety of different local conditions. In your work over the next few days, please keep the importance of this policy-relevance in mind.

One of the most important aspects of policy relevance is the use of IPCC reports in the international climate negotiations. The Paris Agreement reached last December at COP 21 – the 21st Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change – states that the reports of the IPCC will be an input into the global stocktake, in which countries review progress towards the goal of holding global warming to well below 2 degrees while pursuing efforts to limit it to 1.5

degrees. Specifically, when the COP invited the IPCC to produce a report on 1.5 degrees, it asked for it to be delivered in 2018, in time for the “facilitative dialogue” which will be a first informal review under the global stocktake process. So please remember this Special Report must provide a scientific basis for the global stocktake.

You may find some guidance in the questionnaire that we circulated before this scoping meeting, where we invited governments, observer organizations, research institutions and other stakeholders to tell us what they would like to see the report cover. Let me summarize the results.

Of the 226 replies received, just over half were from governments, international organizations and IPCC National Focal Points. 39% were from developing countries.

Respondents were invited to state the topics that should be addressed in the report. Those attracting most interest are: differential impacts, emission pathways, mitigation pathways, improved understanding, adaptation, avoided impacts, sectorial impacts, regionalization, human impacts, climate extremes, knowledge review, sustainable development, cost-benefit analysis, agriculture and food security, feasibility of 1.5 degrees global warming above pre-industrial levels, short lived emissions, disasters and risks, and policy actions.

Looking at the responses received, the following questions could be addressed:

1. What local-to-regional, sectorial and socio-economic impacts are avoided when global warming is limited to 1.5 degrees?
2. How adequate is research attempting to quantify the differential impacts of global temperature targets of 1.5 degrees or 2 degrees and beyond, taking into account the contribution of short-lived climate pollutants such as black carbon, methane, hydrofluorocarbons, & ozone?
3. What development and emissions pathways (including pathways with or without negative emissions and/or overshoots) are consistent with limiting the rise in global mean surface temperature to no more than 1.5 degrees.
4. How feasible is the 1.5-degree temperature rise limit and its implications for adaptation strategies, emission pathways, mitigation pathways and sustainable development goals?

In addition some governments and academic respondents asked us to examine affordable options for geo-engineering, especially bio-energy with carbon capture and storage, or BECCS, estimate how feasible they are, and their availability horizon.

In the end we will rely on value judgments based on science, economics and technology. The job of the scientific community is to show policymakers what are the parameters and conditions that will produce warming of 1.5 degrees.

One notion that runs through all this is feasibility. How feasible is it to limit warming to 1.5 degrees? How feasible is it to develop the technologies that will get us there? This is highly policy-relevant, because we must analyse policy measures in terms of this feasibility, even if that involves value judgments. We must look at economic feasibility, technological feasibility, and institutional feasibility.

Finally, with a report whose prime audience is non-specialists, it's important to give some thought to structure. The Special Report on 1.5 degrees is not intended to replicate a comprehensive IPCC assessment. It should be focused on the matter at hand. In preparing the outline of the Special Report, consider what questions should be included now, and which should be left to the full Sixth Assessment Report. The availability of scientific literature is also a factor here. The majority of respondents to the questionnaire favoured a report of five chapters over 200-300 pages.

The report should also be user-friendly, so please consider how elements such as frequently asked questions, graphics, and a technical summary could enhance clarity and accessibility. The summary for policymakers is intended to capture the most policy-relevant elements. How can that best be structured?

With its special position at the interface of science and policy, the IPCC offers an almost unique opportunity for the scientific community to engage with policymakers and contribute to their decision-making. I hope your work over the next few days will enable us to do that effectively and rigorously, so that the Special Report on 1.5 degrees will be a powerful contribution to the world's efforts to tackle climate change.

Thank you for sharing your time and expertise with us.