

## **Japan submits a 'highly insufficient' 2030 climate target to the UN, sending negative signals to the world on its intent to combat climate change**

The Japanese government announced on March 30 a [new but unchanged goal](#) for reducing emissions by 2030. As the first of the G7 economies to send a new plan to the UN, it sets a disappointing bar in a year when countries must significantly ramp up efforts to meet the 2015 Paris Agreement's goals for limiting global warming.

The Paris Agreement requires all countries to submit revised climate plans, known as nationally determined contributions (NDCs) this year. Japan's new submission keeps its target at the same level announced after Paris, to reduce emission by 26 percent by 2030 compared to 2013. Climate Action Tracker assesses the commitment as "[highly insufficient](#)." If all government targets were in this range, global warming would reach between 3°C and 4°C by 2100. The Paris deal aims to keep warming well below 2°C, with every effort stay at 1.5°C.

The Japanese announcement signals that it will make further mid-term and long-term efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, including "efforts" to increase its targets. In fact, the government has stated it will review the plan again ahead of the UN's COP26 climate summit, scheduled for November 2020 in Glasgow, as part of Japan's "Climate Action Plan."

**Although this is reassuring, the government also says its climate targets would be "consistent with" Japan's latest energy mix. This means that if the energy mix stays the same, the Paris plan also stays largely the same. Fossil fuels are still expected to provide 56 percent of Japan's energy mix by 2030, including a 26 percent share from coal, while renewables provide only 22-24 percent. The government is now reviewing the country's energy mix, but it is not expected to be finished until late 2021. Significant changes to the climate plan are therefore unlikely before then.**

Japanese businesses, however, are moving faster than the government to tackle climate change. The same week the government announced its unchanged emissions reduction target, one of Japan's three mega banks, SMBC, was [expected](#) to announce a plan to stop financing new coal-fired power plants. Additionally, Japan's major electronics company [Ricoh](#) revised its emission reduction target in line with limiting warming to 1.5°C, and [a coalition of more than 100 Japanese firms](#), including Fujitsu, Aeon, Takeda Pharmaceutical, Daiwa House Industry, called on the Japanese government to align its emissions target with the Paris temperature goals.

Japan is the world's third largest economy and fifth largest emitter.

### **Background**

#### **Japan's already weak NDC not revised**

- 2020 is the year in which all the signatory countries of the Paris Agreement are expected to submit updated and more ambitious climate plans. This is critical to driving the near-term action needed to close the gap between the current emissions trajectory — 3-4°C — and the Paris Agreement's goals — well below 2°C, with every effort for 1.5°C. More ambitious climate plans are critical for building resilience, and could function as a recovery package for the current COVI-19 crisis.

- Japan's announcement does signal that it will make further mid-term and long-term efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, including "efforts" to increase its targets. However, it does not provide a timeline for doing so, even though the government states change will happen before the Paris deal's next revision, in 2025.
- It says Japan's Paris plan would be "consistent with" its latest energy mix, meaning that if the energy mix stays the same, the climate plan does too. A review of the country's energy mix is tentatively expected to be completed in late 2021.
- It is possible the government will review its Paris plan again along with the review of Japan's "Climate Action Plan" in 2020, ahead of the COP26 summit scheduled for November. This is unlikely, however, given that the target is bound to the latest energy mix.

### **Coal funding undermines climate action**

- Japan is the only G7 country building new coal-fired power at home. As the US and EU move away from coal, Japan is developing [11.9 gigawatts of coal power](#) in the country, which would increase lifetime carbon dioxide emissions from its existing coal fleet by 50 percent (from 3.9 billion to 5.8 billions tonnes).
- Japanese public finance is also behind [24.7 GW of coal power](#) in other countries — larger than Australia's entire coal fleet of 24.4 GW.
- Global coal power development has dropped for the [fourth year running](#) and there is a further acceleration due to [COVID-19 related disruptions](#). As well as the [decline of coal in Europe and the US](#), South Korea is [beginning to shift away from coal](#), while in India coal power is [collapsing](#) as solar power in particular grows.
- A recent Reuters survey found that [62 percent of Japanese firms want the government](#) to restrict its coal-fired power projects. Only 18 percent said Japan should continue to promote coal-fired power.

### **Impacts of climate change in Japan**

Climate change is driving longer and hotter heatwaves and more destructive typhoons in Japan. More than a thousand people died during the record-setting heatwave in the summer of 2018 which, according to a study, "[could not have happened without human-induced global warming](#)." The 2019 typhoons Hagibis and Faxai were the [costliest single events for insured losses](#) that year. Combined, they cost over 100 lives and an estimated \$15 billion worth of losses. This year's snowmelt is [already having a negative impact](#) on the Japanese tourism industry.

### **Responses to Japan's new Paris climate pledge:**

**Laurance Tubiana, CEO of the European Climate Foundation, French climate change ambassador during the 2015 Paris summit:**

*"I welcome the fact that Japan has submitted its climate plan, but it is disappointing to see the government has not increased its ambition in response to the climate crisis. The EU, UK, China and South Korea are moving towards a new — low carbon — economy. If Japan doesn't move, it will lose out in the high-tech race of this century. At one of the most challenging times of recent*

*memory, we need bolder, mutually reinforcing plans that protect our societies from the global risks we all face. But there is still time: Japan should reconsider its position and come to COP26 with a more ambitious plan. This will also allow a resilient recovery from the negative economic impact of COVID-19."*

**Christiana Figueres, former head of the UN climate change secretariat, convenor of the Mission 2020 campaign and co-author of the new book, *The Future We Choose*:**

*"Japan is home to the largest pension fund in the world as well as the biggest global bank outside China. Both of these have made clear their intention to take immediate, bold action on climate. In addition, Marubeni, the biggest power player in Japan is moving firmly away from coal, and close to 90 Japanese companies have set science-based targets to limit their emissions in line with the Paris Agreement. Japan has also just completed the world's largest green hydrogen plant at Fukushima. It's therefore unclear why Japan's newly updated commitment under the Paris Agreement does not reflect the extraordinary leadership underway at home with the highest possible ambition. Instead, the new NDC limits the scope for Japan to meet the goals required by science, desired by humanity and committed to by its government in Paris. I hope this announcement does not hinder further leadership from the private sector in Japan, which clearly has unparalleled capacity to lead us all into the clean energy future."*

**Mohamed Adow, director of the Nairobi-based think tank Power Shift Africa:**

*"The lack of strong climate commitments by Japan is deeply shameful. One of the richest countries in the world is not only disregarding the plight of the world's poor but actively making their suffering worse with their aggressive use of coal. For a country whose culture was built on the idea of honour, this is an embarrassment."*

*When the world is learning through the Covid-19 pandemic that we need to work together to tackle global threats like climate change, it's disappointing to see Japan not learning this lesson. As countries begin to plan economic stimulus packages it's vital they ensure this investment doesn't exacerbate the climate crisis and instead can be used to both boost economic activity and tackle the climate crisis."*

**Tim Buckley, director of energy finance, Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis:**

*"As a technology leader, Japan should be at the forefront of the world energy transition. But unambitious policies, demonstrated once again in the latest NDC, are holding the country back."*

*If the COVID-19 crisis shows us anything, it is that delayed action comes at great cost."*

*Japan would benefit greatly from accelerating its transition to renewable energy. And with the number of proposed coal-fired power stations around the world drying up, Japan's continued insistence on using public money to seek out a final wave of increasing unviable coal power projects internationally to subsidise is both financially risky and counter-productive in the extreme."*

*Fossil fuels have been the mainstay of the last century, but zero emissions technologies are the basis of industries of the future. Now is the time for Japan to show global leadership, to invest in developing renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies across Asia. Japan's JBIC, JICA*

*and NEXI should be at the forefront of mobilising financial capital to solve this problem, rather than propping up stranded asset proposals that are both unviable commercially but that also lock in massive carbon emissions for decades to come.”*

**Kimiko Hirata, international director of the Japanese NGO Kiko Net:**

*“As with COVID-19, in the face of the climate crisis, we have no time to delay actions. Governments have the choice between showing the ambition to lead and succeed, or settling for the false comfort of empty words and collective failure. Sadly, Japan’s latest climate action offering is very much the latter. And let’s be clear, that failure will cost us all dearly.*

*Japan is the world’s third largest economy with the potential to catalyse, and benefit from, a rapid transition to clean energy. Prime Minister Abe still has the chance to invest in a green economic boom, playing a role as a leader who tackles the climate crisis. He, however, appears to be content to settle for a low target for next 10 years and policies to continue to fund coal, which are firmly taking us down the path to economic and environmental ruin. Japan swiftly has to revisit and strengthen the plan in order to be in line with the Paris Agreement.”*

**Dr. Kentaro Tamura, director of climate and energy area at the Japanese policy research institute, Institute for Global Environmental Strategies:**

*“If COVID-19 teaches us anything, it is that we have to work hard together to solve the crises which face us all. Climate change, like COVID-19 does not respect borders. But when it comes to the climate crisis, it is disappointing that the Japanese government communicated their updated NDC without any enhancement of the target. While Japan’s NDC is based upon the government’s bullish outlook of future GDP growth, our study shows that a more realistic level of GDP growth would increase the possibility of attaining the target, and even the possibility of achieving a deeper emissions cut if all the measures are taken as planned. Apparently, the Japanese government missed the opportunity to duly contribute to the global endeavour toward raising the ambition level of NDCs and limiting global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.”*

**Hironori Hamanaka, the Chair of ICLEI Japan**

*“While the world is rightly focused on tackling Covid-19, this should not happen at the expense of other looming threats to our lives and livelihoods like climate change. If anything, it should sharpen our ambition to create a safer, more resilient country. Local and regional governments in Japan are joining the global efforts to limit the temperature rise to 1.5°C. As of March 24, 86 local and regional governments have raised their admission and announced to aim at net zero carbon emissions by 2050.*

*Tokyo, Kyoto and Yokohama, are among others in the list and it represents more than 48.5% of Japanese population. It is encouraging to see that Japanese local and regional governments are taking the lead and showing their commitment to take ambitious measures, but we also need to see this as a sign that climate change is now felt on the ground and affecting the livelihood of people at every corner of Japan.*

*We therefore call upon Japanese government to join hands with local and regional governments who have committed to strengthen its ambitious measures and contribute to the world's efforts to strengthen actions with the same aspirations.”*

**Rebecca Mikula-Wright, Director of the Asia Investor Group on Climate Change (AIGCC)**

*“It is discouraging to see that Japan’s revised pledge under the Paris Agreement contains no immediate commitment to greater emissions reductions. In February, [global investor organisations wrote to Prime Minister Abe](#) encouraging Japan to create a positive signal for new investment by setting a more ambitious short-term emissions reduction target by 2030 and setting a clear pathway towards zero emissions.*

*The transition towards a zero-carbon economy is a tremendous investment opportunity and one that can help with economic recovery following the global COVID-19 pandemic. There are hundreds of trillions of yen in private international capital that investors could deploy into clean technologies and other climate solutions if governments like Japan create the right policy and price signals.*

*We note the Japanese government has flagged it will consider increasing the ambition of its emissions reduction goals after a review and before the next formal submission date under the Paris Agreement. It should now immediately consider how it can unlock investment to accelerate transition plans by 2030 and fully decarbonise by 2050 in line with the Paris Agreement goals. If market signals for the zero-carbon transition remain weak in Japan then international investment will likely flow to other countries with more robust low-carbon policies that spur investor confidence.*

*The financial costs of unabated climate change will only increase without action. through physical risks to infrastructure, health and supply chains, as well as transitional risks that could strand assets for those companies that are not well positioned to thrive with increasing carbon prices and clean technological development.*

*To accelerate the low-carbon transition and improve the resilience of economies to climate risks, last year 631 investors, representing \$US37 trillion in assets under management, [joined a global statement](#) calling on all leaders to activate private sector investment by incorporating Paris-aligned scenarios into relevant policies, setting a meaningful price on carbon, phasing out fossil fuel subsidies and bringing to a close thermal coal power.”*

*This briefing was compiled by researchers in Europe and the US. For more information or questions, please contact [info@mission2020.global](mailto:info@mission2020.global), or visit [mission2020.global](https://mission2020.global).*

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