

Greens slam Australia's Kyoto 2 commitment

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Australia will pledge to cut its greenhouse gas emissions as part of its commitment to sign up to a second round of the Kyoto Protocol - but only just.

The government has revealed the emissions target that it will lodge with the United Nations at the latest major round of climate change talks starting in Doha, Qatar, on Monday.

Agriculture Minister Joe Ludwig told the Senate that Australia would submit a target under what is known as "Kyoto 2", or KP2, equivalent to a 0.5 per cent cut below 1990 levels.

The target is an average of the national emissions level across all years that Australia wants covered by the treaty - 2013-2020.

Answering a question from the Greens, Senator Ludwig said: "Australia is ready to commit to limit its emissions in the KP2 from 2013 to 2020 to an average of 99.5 per cent of 1990 emissions.

He said the target was "entirely consistent" with Australia's pledge with Australia's existing unconditional pledge to cut emissions by five per cent below 2000 levels by 2020.

"The government will retain the ability to move up its existing 2020 target range of five to 15 per cent or 25 per cent below the 2000 level if conditions on the extent of global action are met," Senator Ludwig said.

He said the newly-created Climate Change Authority would make recommendations about the national target by early 2014.

Greens Leader Christine Milne said setting a target so close to keeping emissions at 1990 levels was an "obvious insult" to the international community.

"The government has just done the least it thought it could possibly get away with," Senator Milne said.

"Sneaking in a hair below 100% is nevertheless an insult to countries like China and India, which have far lower emissions than ours both per capita and per unit of GDP.

"And it's an absolute slap in the face to our neighbours like Tuvalu and Kiribati, whose very survival depends on rich countries like Australia doing as much as we can to tackle global warming."

A spokesman for Climate Change Minister Greg Combet later said the government continued to support its long term target of reducing emissions by 80 per cent by 2050.

"Joining the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol is in Australia's national interests as it will enable liable entities have access to the global carbon market. This ensures emissions are reduced at least cost," he said.

Australia was heavily criticised by developing countries and green groups for adopting a target under the first stage of the Kyoto that allowed it to increase its emissions by 8 per cent between 1990 and 2012.

Signed in 1997, The Kyoto Protocol is the world's only pact covering greenhouse gas emissions. The first stage - which expires at the end of this year - covered most wealthy nations, but not the US.

Only the European Union, Australia and handful of small developed countries have signed up to the second stage. Other major rich countries including the US, Japan, and Canada have refused.

Nearly 200 nations attending the Doha meeting will try to set a timeline to negotiate a new climate deal by 2015. If successful, it would include emissions targets for both rich and poor countries and take effect in 2020.

Ahead of the talks old tensions are once again emerging. In a pre-meeting statement, the powerful BASIC bloc of major developing countries - Brazil, South Africa, India and China - said any new 2015 deal must be based on the long-held principles that rich and developing nations have different degrees of responsibility to cut emissions.

But some wealthy nations, the US in particular, say the 2015 agreement must end that divide and recognise the extraordinary growth in emissions from the developing world.



Greens leader Christine Milne. Photo: Alex Ellinghausen