



Metallurgical tradition:
SMS DEMAG HAS BECOME SMS SIEMAG!
Further information: www.sms-siemagsa.com

Cremer Media's
ENGINEERING NEWS Online

Peak, plateau and decline of our GHG emissions

By: Harald Winkler

Published: 17 Apr 09

President Kgalema Motlanthe restated the strategic direction for climate policy at the second Climate Change Summit. "Government has agreed to a strategic policy framework for our emissions to peak between 2020 and 2025 and then stabilise for a decade before declining in absolute terms towards midcentury," he said.

The real test will be if this direction is turned into formal policy.

The statement confirms what Cabinet decided in July last year, based on the long-term mitigation scenarios (LTMS). Reiterated at the second climate summit, last month – the first having been held in 2005 – the statement by our President-for-now was important in signalling continuity ahead of this month's elections. The continuity is a significant outcome of the summit, as is the launching of a serious policy development process.

Motlanthe urged the gathering to formulate a sound policy framework for a transition to a low-carbon economy. A series of Ministers and other high-level speakers outlined what their various sectors can do to implement this broad strategic direction. The conference statement defines this action, organised by responsible government departments – and it is hard to spot which ones are missing. There is a strong sense that climate change is no longer an environmental issue only – it affects all sectors as well. Also of note is that almost all domestic sectors are expected to deal with both mitigation and adaptation.

The impacts of climate change are already being observed, which lends greater urgency to action. At the Science Day organised by the Department of Science and Technology, speaker after speaker outlined what is already observable. At the summit opening, the President of the country reminded everyone of what African National Congress (ANC) president Jacob Zuma had said a day earlier, at a Socialist International event: "We believe it is correct and proper for the world to take climate change seriously. Science tells us that an increase in global average temperature above 2 °C poses a danger to all of us, but, in particular, the poor. To avoid the worst impacts of climate change, we need to limit the temperature increase to 2 °C above preindustrial levels. We are already approximately 0,7 °C above preindustrial levels."

Zuma has openly aligned himself and the ANC with the need to limit temperature increase to below 2 °C. Given that starting point, the numbers on emissions are clear – it will require developing countries to take their fair share of responsibility, even as developed countries effect much deeper absolute cuts in emissions.

To realise the broad strategic direction, the 2009 summit went higher, broader and, perhaps, deeper – higher in that the President spoke (in 2005, it was the then Deputy President, Phumzile Mlambo-Nguka); full Ministers, rather than mainly deputies, attended, and there was a broader range of representatives. Business associations that attended included both Business Unity South Africa and the National Business Initiative, and there were also many individual companies. Eskom, Sasol and a range of large corporate emitters took part. Cities were better represented than in 2005, and were more vocal about the importance of their role in implementation. Some nongovernmental organisations took part in the conference proceedings, while others made their presence felt through the direct action of protesting outside the gates of Gallagher Estate.

The summit launched a process to develop a formal policy – a "legislative, regulatory and fiscal package to give effect to the strategic direction" in formal policy by 2012, with Green and White Papers along the way. Written submissions (to be in by May 15) are invited from stakeholder representatives.

The initial exchanges identified areas of agreement, but were also refreshingly frank about areas of disagreement. Agreement across government, business and civil society is strong on energy efficiency, renewable energy and putting a price on carbon – but not on how to do the latter. But, equally clearly, there are different views on the country's energy mix and on transparency in decision-making. Immediate priorities are outlined that should not wait while the policy development process is under way.

To formulate a serious climate policy will take time, since this will demand thorough consultation and careful thought. It was common cause that immediate priorities cannot wait during a lengthy process. Summit participants outlined a number of immediate priorities, namely:

- * mandatory standards for energy efficiency, including standards for commercial and residential buildings and fuel efficiency standards;
- * scaling up of renewable energy, including the roll-out and scaling up of solar water heaters and the building of a local industry, as well as finalising and implementing a renewable-energy feed-in tariff at a level that is adequate to incentivise large-scale investment;
- * Working for Energy and other initiatives to create green jobs in energy efficiency and renewable energy;
- * Working for Adaptation – developing a green jobs programme to build climate resilience;
- * ensuring that the Industrial Policy Action Plan review includes promotion of green technologies to deal with both adaptation and mitigation;
- * accelerating the development of the Risk and Vulnerability Atlas to inform adaptation responses and planning;
- * developing an atlas of sites for carbon capture and storage (CCS) and establishing a CCS centre;
- * finalising a greenhouse-gas inventory and the Second National Communications for submission to the UNFCCC;
- * completing the Treasury report on options to implement a price on carbon this year;
- * developing regulations for mandatory emissions monitoring and reporting; and
- * convening by government of a group to ramp up efforts on education, public awareness, media and public awareness.

The summit did not make major breakthroughs in terms of decisions on substance. Its importance lies rather in process. The peak, plateau and decline trajectory had been previously outlined – the importance lies in signalling continuity and seriousness to convert this into policy, regulation, law and fiscal instruments. The launch of a formal policy development process is an important step. The more ambitious strategic options in the LTMS will need to be implemented if South Africa is to contribute to keeping temperatures below 2 °C above preindustrial levels. The written submissions in mid-May will make fascinating reading, as stakeholders state their initial positions.

The final conference statement, various speeches and other documents are downloadable from the summit website, at www.ccs summit2009.co.za. The site is to be maintained for the policy development process.

Harald Winkler is Associate Professor at the Energy Research Centre, University of Cape Town and can be contacted at Harald.Winkler@uct.ac.za. He writes in his personal capacity.

Copyright Creamer Media (Pty) Ltd. All rights reserved.

Tel: +27(0)11 622 3744 | Fax +27(0)11 622 9350 |
newsdesk@engineeringnews.co.za
<http://www.engineeringnews.co.za>