

## CLEAN THE PLANET

FROM THE WORLD IN 2008 PRINT EDITION

Emma Duncan: deputy editor, The Economist

### Time to move beyond rhetoric and get down to the details, argues Emma Duncan

Over the past couple of years, climate change has arrived on the political map. A lot of different people helped to put it there: Al Gore, who came to life inspiring Americans on the topic; Sir Nicholas Stern, who counted the cost in a report to the British government; American businessmen, who started lobbying the administration to take action; American legislators, who have been pushing for measures to combat global warming since 2006; voters, who according to the polls began to take a serious interest in the subject; and journalists, who always jump on a bandwagon when they see one rolling by.

Now that the world has recognised the problem, it wants a solution. That is good, but dangerous, because expectations are mounting and the rhetoric is running high. There is a risk that 2008 may be a let-down, for the two big things needed to combat climate change are unlikely to be put in place next year.

### What won't happen

The first thing is serious federal climate-change controls in America. The Democrats, by and large, want federal controls, and they are in charge of the legislature. But some Democrats—especially those associated with organised labour—are hostile to the idea. Some don't want legislation yet because they want to keep the issue alive during the presidential election. The more radical greens want to wait until a Democratic president is ensconced, on the ground that they'll get a tougher scheme if they do. Opposition from such groups, as well as from Republicans, and the sheer complexity of carbon-emissions controls, mean that anything more than minor tinkering will have to wait.

Second, a framework for a new international agreement is needed. The Kyoto protocol can claim some achievements (such as Europe's Emissions-Trading Scheme) but it has failed in its main aim—of getting the world's big polluters to agree on how to cut carbon-dioxide emissions. If America and China are to be included, a new agreement must be reached. That's not going to happen in the coming year, either.

### The world needs to work at enticing China and America into an agreement

Still, 2008 is crucial for climate change, in two ways. First, America needs a president committed to the issue; as the year unfolds, it will become clearer which candidates would take serious action. Hillary Clinton, Bill Richardson, John Edwards and Mitt Romney probably would; Barack Obama is less committed, and nobody knows where Rudy Giuliani stands.

Second, the world needs to work at enticing China (and other big developing countries) and America into an agreement of some sort. George Bush gestured towards a "new international framework" before the 2007 G8 meeting, calling for big polluters to accept emissions targets. China, whose leaders used never to mention global warming, in 2007 unveiled its first plan to combat climate change. It included a commitment to increase energy efficiency by 20% by 2010 and to double the use of renewables by 2020. But China is still a long way from accepting emissions caps.

The rich world has to help China move in that direction. It has to work out how it is going to compensate developing countries for the higher costs of cleaner energy—for instance through a fund that subsidises the adoption of clean technologies and eases the transfer of such technology. And poor countries have to find some way of accepting cuts in their emissions. One way of doing this is through no-loss targets, whereby poor countries would be rewarded if they hit their targets, but not punished if they missed them. An alternative option could be sectoral targets, under which poor countries would accept limits on emissions from, say, their iron and steel industries but not from their economies as a whole.

It will be dull stuff. It will not make the headlines. But if the many officials and politicians involved can beat out some such agreement, 2008 will be a good year for climate change.