

South Africa's National Climate Change Response Strategy

Government's position on climate change

South Africa is both a contributor to, and a potential victim of, global climate change, given that it has an energy-intensive, fossil-fuel powered economy and that is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate variability.

Government regards climate change as one of the greatest threats to sustainable development. Climate change, if un-mitigated, has the potential to undo or undermine many of the positive advances made in meeting South Africa's own development goals and the Millennium Development Goals.

South Africa, as a responsible global citizen, is committed to reducing its own greenhouse gas emissions in order successfully to facilitate the agreement and implementation of an effective and binding global agreement on emission reductions. South Africa will have to adapt to the unavoidable impacts of climate change through the management of risk and the reduction of vulnerability. Although there will be costs associated with the emission reduction efforts, there will also be significant short and long-term social and economic benefits, including improved international competitiveness that will result from a transition to a low carbon economy. Importantly, these costs will be far less than the costs of delay and inaction.

Green Paper

An effective response to climate change requires national policy in order to ensure a coordinated, coherent, efficient and effective response to the global challenge of climate change.

This policy is outlined in a Green Paper that was issued for public comment in December 2010. It presents Government's vision for an effective climate change response and the long-term transition to a climate resilient and low-carbon economy and society.

Comments from the Green Paper will where appropriate be incorporated in a White Paper which will go to Cabinet in June 2011. Government seems keen to showcase South Africa's progress in planning to reduce its emissions at the COP 17 meeting in Durban in November 2011.

Major points in the national policy

Sectors likely to be negatively impacted by climate change that will need to develop appropriate adaptive responses include agriculture, water and human health.

The economic sectors responsible for over 80% of South Africa's GHG emissions include energy, industry and transport. According to the green paper, these sectors will be required to make a "significant contribution" towards mitigating climate change. Affected industries include mining, manufacturing and tourism.

Against this background, the green paper outlines a wide range of proposals. As far as the energy sector is concerned, these include:

- Integrating an emissions constraint into energy planning tools;
- Diversifying South Africa's energy mix;
- Investing in the development of new, cleaner technologies and industries;
- Initiating the transition to a low carbon economy;

- Using market-based measures (such as an escalating carbon tax) to “internalise” the external costs of climate change;
- Identifying and addressing regulatory, financial and institutional barriers to implementing the renewable energy feed-in tariff as an investment incentive;
- Investing in new, clean, efficient coal technologies;
- Setting “ambitious and mandatory targets for energy efficiency”;
- Introducing minimum energy performance standards for appliances and equipment.

Proposals for other sectors include:

- Putting in place policies that result in a modal shift in passenger transport to public and low carbon forms of transport, including plans to move freight from road to rail over time;
- Promoting carbon capture and storage applications for CO₂-rich industrial process emissions.

Coal

Some comments relevant to coal are made:

- The burning of coal as a fuel accounts for more than 60% of South Africa's GHG emissions
- Certain mining operations, especially large-scale open-cast mines, reduce natural carbon-sequestration capacity and may also result in increased water stress
- There is considerable risk relating to regulation that targets energy intensive mining companies, and hence lead to potential disparity in relation to key competitor countries
- A local and global transition to a low carbon economy will negatively impact on local coal sales and exports, although the export impacts are only likely to become significant in the medium- to long-term.

[Click here to view printable version of the National Climate Change Response Green Paper.](#)

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