

What was really achieved at the COP21 climate summit, and what next?

December 16 2015, by Michael Hopkin



Time to terminate greenhouse emissions? Hollywood star and former Californian Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger says it's time to act. Credit: Michael Hopkin/The Conversation, CC BY-SA

As French foreign minister Laurent Fabius brought his gavel down on the most ambitious climate deal ever struck, at 7:27pm on Saturday December 12, 2015, applause broke out throughout the sprawling conference centre in Le Bourget.

It spread even into the cavernous media centre that played host to an estimated 3,700 journalists. It was celebration mixed with relief – a punishing two weeks of negotiations were finally over, albeit 24 hours later than planned.

The result is the first agreement requiring all nations, rich and poor, to pledge action on [climate change](#), with the stated aim of restricting [global warming](#) to "well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels", and to strive to limit it to 1.5°C.

Alongside the politicians, negotiators, business leaders and celebrities at the Paris talks were dozens of The Conversation's authors from around the world, as well as two Conversation editors. Before, during and after the conference, we have published more than 200 analysis articles, many commissioned from inside the summit.

We featured contributions from at least 140 academics at 74 universities. Those articles garnered nearly 1 million reads and were republished in media outlets worldwide, including [Quartz](#), [Newsweek](#), [IFLScience](#), [Scroll.in](#), [RawStory](#), [Mamamia](#), [Economy Watch](#), [SBS](#), [The Brisbane Times](#), [Phys.org](#), [SciBlogs NZ](#) and [Business Spectator](#).

But as many of our authors have pointed out, the real test of whether Paris was a success will be seen in what happens next. So we've pulled together two dozen of the best articles on the big scientific, political and economic challenges beyond Paris.

As you'll see, these highlights show the value of The Conversation's global newsroom in bringing you insights from experts worldwide, working with all of our teams in France, the UK, US, Africa and Australia.

In case you want to catch up on your reading offline, we've also created a special report for you to [download](#).

The big picture

For a fast overview, start with our infographic to see what was agreed at a glance.

Then read why Boston University's Henrik Selin and Adil Najam argue the agreement was good, bad and ugly.

Clive Hamilton from Charles Sturt University describes the emotional turmoil as the deal was being struck.

And Jackson Ewing from Singapore's Nanyang Technological University explains why China and the United States have finally found common purpose on climate change.



COP21: one of the few places where your work is scrutinised by a giant animatronic polar bear. Credit: Michael Hopkin/The Conversation, CC BY-SA

The scientific challenge ahead

CSIRO's Pep Canadell and Stanford University's Rob Jackson explain why the Paris Agreement was an extraordinary achievement, but that our real work to cut emissions starts now.

That's because, as Katja Frieler from Germany's Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research shows, global warming is already affecting us (2015 is about to set a new global temperature record) and we're still

heading towards a 2.7°C world.

New research from the Global Carbon Project shows where in the world emissions are rising or falling, and how much we need to do to achieve a healthy [global carbon budget](#).

Need a quick explainer on what greenhouse gases are? Université de Lille's Céline Toubin can help. (And if you speak French, you can also read it in French, along with the rest of The Conversation France's summit coverage.)

But emissions cuts are no longer enough; Oxford University's Myles Allen argues we'll also have to find ways to put carbon back in the ground. How? One answer is lying beneath our feet: carbon stored in soil is a bigger solution than you might realise, as a team from the University of Sydney explain.

Show me the money: economic trends to watch

The most surprising revelation of the Paris climate talks was, according to Clive Hamilton, "the astonishing shift" he saw among big business and investors over the past 12 months.

The University of Adelaide's Peter Burdon was also struck by that shift, especially the way that a growing number of business leaders are now clamouring for a [global carbon](#) tax.

But our experts had different views on the best way to price carbon. Katherine Lake from the University of Melbourne argues carbon markets – that is, trading permits to pollute – could play an essential role. However, Steffen Böhm from the University of Essex disagrees, warning that carbon markets have created more problems than they've solved so far.

Luke Kemp from the Australian National University looks at how the Paris Agreement left a big question unanswered: what about coal? And no matter what we do now, most people agree adaptation is crucial – yet as the University of Minnesota's Jessica Hellmann explains, we're still too hazy on what that will cost.

What could we do if we were really serious about climate change? University College London's Chris Grainger makes the case to invest as if we were in a global 'space race'.

Voices of the many, not just the few

Speaking with Matt McDonald from the University of Queensland, Saleemul Huq – who has attended all 21 UN climate summits – reflected on the "very significant change" in negotiating blocs at Paris, which saw vulnerable countries making themselves heard more loudly than before.

Ambuj D Sagar from the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi explains why developing countries need more than betting billions on clean energy breakthroughs. Maria Ivanova from the University of Massachusetts Boston highlights the work of 15 female climate champions around the world – but we still need far more.

Stellenbosch University's Anthony Mills shows what Africa can learn from China about climate change.

Many climate activists won't be satisfied by the Paris deal, and will keep pushing for action on fossil fuel use, energy market reform and more, as the University of Sydney's Rebecca Pearse explains.

And there's a good reason why, according to the University of Lapland's Ilona Mettiäinen: polar bears aren't the only ones facing [climate](#) impacts in places like the Arctic – those impacts also affect people, locally and

globally.

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