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Since at least 1983, when the Air Pollution Control Ordinance (Cap 311) was enacted, the government has had a fairly consistent policy of improving the quality of the air we breathe. This edition considers broadly the effectiveness of the government's efforts to achieve this laudable aim. In particular, we present the views of the Clean Air Network, a leading authority on the issue of Hong Kong's air pollution.

The Editors

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HOW EFFECTIVE ARE HONG KONG'S AIR POLLUTION CONTROLS?

Introduction

In 1959, Hong Kong enacted its first legislation for controlling air pollution, the *Clean Air Ordinance*, which was limited to controlling emissions from stationary fossil burning sources.

This statute was replaced by the *Air Pollution Control Ordinance* (Cap 311) (**APCO**) in 1983, which extended controls to cover non-combustion sources. Subsequent amendments further extended the ambit of the legislation to cover, *inter alia*, road and marine transport and to apply emissions caps to power stations.

Pursuant to section 4(1), APCO, the Environmental Protection Development (**EPD**) (under the Secretary for the Environment) is the designated agency responsible for administering and enforcing the anti-air pollution framework established by APCO. The EPD summarises the purpose of APCO as follows:

"*The Ordinance provides a statutory framework for establishing the AQOs and stipulating the anti-pollution requirements for air pollution sources. It enables the making of subsidiary regulations to deal with specific air pollution problems such as vehicular exhaust, construction dust, etc. It also empowers the EPD to impose a licensing control on major stationary emission sources, namely the Specified Processes, and issue legal notices to air pollution sources to demand remedial actions.*"

Thus, to judge the historical (and present) effectiveness of the government's efforts to give Hong Kong long awaited, better air quality, requires assessment of the EPD's performance in administering the legislation.

Government's approach to air pollution

For the purposes of this discussion, we limit "air pollution" to pollution generated within Hong Kong. Cross-border pollution originating in Guangdong and other parts of mainland China is not controllable by the EPD under APCO, although the government continues to work with Guangdong authorities to reduce such pollution.

In section 2, APCO:

- "Air pollutant" is defined as "*any solid, particulate, liquid, vapour, objectionable odour or gaseous substance emitted into the atmosphere*";
- "Air pollution" is defined as "*an emission of air pollutant which either alone or with another emission of air pollutant*

a. *Is prejudicial to health;*
b. *is a nuisance;*
c. *imperils or is likely to imperil the safety of or otherwise interferes with the normal operation of aircraft; or*
d. *is determined to be air pollution under a technical memorandum*".

Accordingly, by virtue of its power to legislate (by regulation) technical memoranda, the EPD may declare any emission to be an air pollutant.

The EPD administers the APCO

In the UPELQ September2025 edition, we provided an overview of the APCO framework in the context of its purpose of preventing air pollution from Hong Kong based sources.

In short, the EPD is pivotal to ensuring this framework effective in reducing our long-standing high levels of air pollution. Aside from its power to prosecute polluters for APCO offences, such as operating contrary to an emission licence granted by EPD (power stations), the EPD may take non-punitive steps to enforce compliance with APCO, by, for example:

- issuing an abatement notice requiring the recipient to take immediate steps to cease the polluting emissions: section 10;
- issuing a notice requiring the operator of defective equipment which is causing air pollution to take specified steps to repair the defects: section 30;
- issuing an asbestos abatement notice requiring an immediate suspension of a faulty asbestos activity or the taking of steps to prevent the release of asbestos: section 79.

Additionally, the EPD issues informal warnings to polluters to encourage the cessation of air polluting processes. These "technical advices", which do not include sanctions or penalties, are the enforcement mechanism most relied on by the EPD.

The EPD also has statutory power to take direct and immediate action to remove a source of air pollution, such as by serving on the operator of a source of pollution a closure notice requiring the immediate shut-down of the polluting operations (sections 30D and 30G) or prohibiting "specified processes" (section 30H and First Schedule) or varying or cancelling an emissions licence (section 17).

Underpinning the EPD's monitoring and enforcement role is section 28, which confers on EPD officers a wide power to enter and inspect premises suspected of emitting air pollutants. Under section 29 it is an offence to hinder or obstruct an EPD officer from carrying out an inspection; the penalty is a fine of HK$50,000.

In the current edition of *An overview on air quality and air pollution control in HK* the EPD states:

"The government gives high priority to controlling both local air pollution and regional smog problems. The main strategies include:

- *Implementing a wide range of measures to control emissions of air pollutants from motor vehicles, marine vessels, power plants, and industrial and commercial processes local;*
- *Working with Guangdong Provincial Authorities to implement a joint plan to tackle the regional smog problem.*

To continuously improve air quality, the Government announced the Clean Air Plan for Hong Kong 2035 in June 2021, setting out the vision of "Healthy Living • Low-carbon Transformation • World Class", leading Hong Kong to be a more liveable city with air quality on par with major international cities by 2035, and advancing towards the long-term target of having Hong Kong's air quality fully meeting the ultimate targets under the World Health Organization Global Air Quality Guidelines."

However, Hong Kong does not rate highly in the world's anti-air pollution field. *IQ Air* ranks Hong Kong 41st most polluted, with a "moderate air quality" assessment of 63 in the 51-100 "moderate" band. The 6 most polluted cities are:

(1) Manama, Bahrain – 173 (a reading of 151-200 = "unhealthy" air quality)
(2) Kolkata, India – 163
(3) Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo – 157
(4) Karachi, Pakistan – 156
(5) Kuwait City, Kuwait--153
(6) Dhaka, Bangladesh – 148.

According to the *World Air Quality Index*, the 6 cities with the highest level of air pollution are:

(1) Dhaka---236 (201-300 = "very unhealthy" air quality)
(2) Lahore---197 (151-200 = "unhealthy")
(3) Kolkata---194
(4) Cairo---193
(5) Wuhan---186

(6) Delhi---172.

Hong Kong is listed as number 40 on this scale, with an assessed level of 79.

AQI's 6 cities with lowest levels of air pollution are:

(1) Oslo---7 (0-50 = "good" air quality)
(2) San Francisco---9
(3) Algiers---11
(4) Prague---11
(5) Aukland ---14
(6) Seattle---14.

As a snapshot indication of our continuing, serious air pollution problem, on 15 September 2025, for example, Hong Kong's PM2.5 concentration was 3.3 times the WHO guideline.

Air pollution control programme must be strengthened

Leaving aside the more complex problem of dealing with air pollution generated in mainland China, after years of grappling with this major environmental issue, the government needs to adopt more innovative and robust methods of compelling or enticing potential polluters to reduce substantially their harmful emissions.

Hong Kong's *Clean Air Network* (**CAN**) is heavily involved, and has considerable expertise, in air quality issues.

In its *Response to the Public Consultation of the Policy Address 2025*, CAN noted that Hong Kong is lagging behind other comparable cities in reducing air pollution. For example: "*in 2023, Hong Kong achieved only 75% of its short-term Air Quality Objectives (**AQOs**), with significant gaps in Nitrogen Dioxide and Ozone levels remained high. Notably, in 2024, the roadside Nitrogen Dioxide exceeded WHO's most stringent standards by 550%.*"

Some of CAN's suggestions for tightening air pollution controls, as set out in the *Response*, are as follows (abridged and without appendices):

"Strengthening Measures to Address Ambient and Roadside Air Quality

- *Tightening the Air Quality Objectives (AQOs): Ensure continuous tightening of AQOs, aligning with WHO's most stringent standards.*
- *Formulating a Green Transformation Roadmap for All Land Transport to ensure achievement of the long-term goal of zero vehicular emission by 2050.*
- *Formulating an Action Plan to address Regional Ozone: Based on the study of ozone formation in the Greater Bay Area, develop and implement effective strategies.*
- *Formulating a roadmap to advance Marine Electrification: Shipping remains the largest local emission source of several key pollutants. Marine electrification, comprising Onshore Power Supply (OPS) for berthed vessels and the electrification of harbour craft, is a vital and viable strategy to further reduce air pollutants and health risks for the near-port population.*

Addressing Indoor Air Quality (IAQ)

- *Historically, policy discussions in Hong Kong have focused on ambient and roadside air quality. However, Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) is equally significant, especially post-Covid-19, as more people spend the majority of their time indoors. Recent findings indicate a shift in public health risk profiles from ambient to indoor pollution, primarily due to volatile organic compounds (VOCs).*
- *To combat communicable diseases, especially those transmitted via air, strengthening indoor air quality control is paramount. This is particularly crucial for vulnerable groups housed in aging buildings with poor IAQ, such as nurseries, child care centres, and elderly homes.*
- *Tackling IAQ with an Inter-Bureau and Departmental Approach: Formulate objectives and work plans involving various bureaux and departments.*
- *Legislating for IAQ: Amend the Air Pollution Control Ordinance to include IAQ objectives, prioritize stringent standards, and conduct regular reviews.*
- *Developing Support for Pre-Schools and Hospitals: Develop guidelines for spaces that are frequently visited by the vulnerable groups, including the children and patients.*
- *Setting Role Models for Data Transparency: Implement continuous monitoring and publishing of IAQ data in all Government buildings.*
- *Expanding the IAQ Certification Scheme: Include premises without mechanical ventilation and air conditioning systems.*

Strengthen measures to address ambient and roadside air quality

- *Overall, we urge the Government to continue tightening the Hong Kong's Air Quality Objectives ("AQO") until they level with the World Health Organization's most stringent standard, provide provision of new energy infrastructure to support the adoption of new energy vehicles, provide action plans to control ozone at ambient level, and to further lower ship emissions.*

Tighten the Air Quality Objectives

- *The Air Pollution Control Ordinance requires the Government to review the AQOs, the standards for various air pollutants in Hong Kong at least once every five years. However, the current review mechanism does not guarantee the tightening of the standards. Without stricter AQOs, there is a lack of robust policy drivers to significantly improve air quality over time.*
- *In order to ensure the long-term goal of levelling Hong Kong's air quality with the World Health Organization's most stringent standard can be achieved as soon as possible, during the current and future reviews of the Air Quality Objectives, we recommend the Government take a pro-active approach to ensure tightening of the target for each pollutant by at least one level under the guidelines of the World Health Organization each time.*

Promote adoption of new energy vehicles

- *Despite general improvements in ambient and roadside air quality over the last decade, roadside nitrogen dioxide and ambient ozone levels remain high. To further improve roadside air quality and reduce carbon emission from transport sector, the Government planned to introduce 700 electric buses (around 12% of all buses) and 3,000 electric taxis (around 17% of all taxis) by 2027.*
- *The Government expressed its confidence in reaching the target of zero vehicular emission for franchised bus and taxis before 2050, and committed to install 3,000 fast chargers by 2030 and conduct second and third review of supply and demand of the overall charging infrastructure at 2032 and 2037.*
- *While we agree the Government's approach to assess the charging needs of not only e-buses and e-taxis but also all land transport vehicles at a macro level, in order to ensure that Hong Kong is on the track to achieve zero vehicular emission, we recommend the Government to:*
  - *Provide annual reports of the progress of conversion to zero emission vehicles of all land transport, including franchised buses, taxis, non-franchised buses, minibuses, light, medium and heavy duty commercial vehicles, motorcycles, etc.*
  - *Introduce comprehensive Green Transformation Roadmap to enhance the adoption of zero emission vehicles of all land transport, including trucks, lorries, non-franchised buses, and public light buses.*
- *In the 2022 Policy Address, the Chief Executive announced trials of new generation electric taxis, as well as hydrogen fuel cell electric double-deckers and heavy vehicles, to be completed by 2025. The Government has also started a trial of electric public light buses in March 2024.*
- *We recommend the Government provide updates about and release data from the trials, and include school buses, coaches and medium and heavy goods vehicles in the trials.*
- *For hydrogen vehicles, we welcome the release of the Strategy of Hydrogen Development in Hong Kong in June 2024. We understand that hydrogen buses are now allowed in tunnels; we recommend the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department provide updates on its work on the potential new Gas Safety (Hydrogen) Regulations, Cap. 51H to govern the use of hydrogen as a fuel.*

Marine Electrification

- *Despite overall improvements in air quality, shipping remains the largest local emission source of NO2, PM10, and PM2.5. Elevated NO2 concentrations have been persistently recorded in districts with key port facilities, such as Kwai Chung, directly linked to emissions from marine vessels and posing serious health risks to nearby residents and workers.*
- *Currently, Hong Kong has no specific legislation regulating NOx emissions from ships. Marine electrification is a critical strategy to address this gap, reduce public health risks, and further the government's goal of developing Hong Kong as a green shipping hub.*

Marine electrification encompasses two key components:

(a) Onshore Power Supply (OPS) for Ocean-Going Vessels (OGVs)
  - *OGVs often run auxiliary engines while docked to power onboard systems, resulting in significant near-port emissions of SO2, NOx, and PM.*
  - *Global competitors are moving decisively to mitigate this; Mainland China aims for 90% shore power coverage for key container terminals by the end of 2025, and the majority of European ports plan to offer OPS by 2030[16].*
  - *Without a clear OPS development strategy, Hong Kong risks losing its competitive edge to newer, OPS-enabled ports. A 2015 feasibility study confirmed the technical viability of OPS at the Kai Tak Cruise Terminal, and its implementation there and at the Kwai Chung Container Terminal could eliminate thousands of tons of harmful pollutants annually.*

(b) Electrification of Harbour Craft and Domestic Vessels
  - *Local vessels and river vessels account for approximately 60% of NOx and 50% of PM10 of total maritime emissions in Hong Kong.*
  - *Many of these harbour craft use outdated engines that pollute disproportionately compared to their modern land-based counterparts. Zero-emission propulsion technology is increasingly viable for these vessels. While barriers like high upfront costs and limited charging infrastructure exist, they can be overcome with clear government policy and intervention.*
  - *The government's Pilot Scheme for Electric Ferries, initiated in 2025, is a positive step, and its findings should inform a broader strategy for vessel electrification, including for the government's own fleet.*

To capitalize on these opportunities, we recommend the Government:

- *Formulate a comprehensive OPS development policy and implementation timetable – The Environment and Ecology Bureau should lead the development of a clear policy direction to enhance infrastructure readiness, coordinate with power grids, and provide the regulatory leadership necessary for investment.*
- *Formulate a strategy and roadmap for the electrification of harbour craft and domestic vessels – This should include plans for shore charging infrastructure and incentives to accelerate adoption, moving beyond the current electric ferry pilot scheme. The Government should also lead by example by setting a clear timeframe to electrify its own marine fleet.*
- *Establish regional coordination on marine emissions with Greater Bay Area (GBA) authorities – Given the high volume of cross-boundary vessel traffic, a regional strategy to advance vessel electrification, coordinate incentives, and align protocols for green shipping corridors is essential for tackling shared air quality challenges.*
- *Advance research to quantify marine emissions and the benefits of policy measures – The Environmental Protection Department should commission research to obtain precise, up-to-date emission factors for ships operating in Hong Kong waters to produce robust estimates of how marine electrification will improve air quality.*

Addressing Indoor Air Quality (IAQ)

- *Policy discussions in Hong Kong over the past decade have so far focused on ambient and roadside air quality, however, IAQ is as important. After Covid-19, most people spend the majority of their time indoors. Recent scientific findings indicate that ambient volatile organic compounds (VOCs) have surpassed diesel particulate matter (PM) as the primary inhalation cancer risk in Hong Kong. It is generally believed that most ambient VOCs come from indoor environments. The Government should take note that the public health risk profile has shifted from ambient to indoor pollution source.*
- *With more aging buildings in Hong Kong, the worsening indoor environment, including the under-managed indoor air quality, would continue to threaten the health and well-being of the occupants. It is particularly important to ensure good IAQ among places where the vulnerable communities spend a lot of time in, including the nurseries, childcare centres, elderly homes, etc.*
- *Specifically, we recommend the Government to establish a comprehensive roadmap to manage IAQ. The roadmap should take consideration of the below.*

Tackling IAQ with an Inter-Bureau and Departmental Approach

- *Since IAQ policy would involve the contribution of experts at various bureaux and departments, particularly those responsible for and specialise in the environment (Environment and Ecology Bureau (EEB) and EPD), health (Department of Health), buildings (Architectural Services Department and Development Bureau), engineering (Electrical and Mechanical Services Department).*
- *We recommend the Government formulate the objectives and work plan for the Inter-Departmental IAQ Management Group.*

Legislating for IAQ

- *The Air Pollution Control Ordinance, Cap. 311 should be amended to include IAQ objectives in the long run, with more stringent standards prioritized for places where vulnerable groups stay.*
- *Since a one-off revision of the IAQ objectives in the voluntary IAQ Certification Scheme in 2019, the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) has not updated the objectives.*
- *We recommend a regular review of the indoor air quality objectives, similar to the Air Quality Objectives review for ambient air quality, provided by the Air Pollution Control Ordinance.*
- *Specifically, the IAQ objectives in the IAQ Certification Scheme do not currently include one for PM2.5, although the WHO has pointed out that there is no convincing evidence of a difference in its hazardous nature from indoor sources as compared with those from outdoors sources. We recommend the inclusion of PM2.5 in the IAQ objectives.*
- *Several jurisdictions around the world have adopted mandatory regulations and policies for indoor air quality management. For example, South Korea has legislated on IAQ since 1998. South Korean legislation mandates IAQ monitoring in public spaces and more stringent IAQ standards for vulnerable groups such as children and the elderly, as well as the use of air purifiers in schools.*

Also, we recommend all Government buildings should implement continuous monitoring and reporting of IAQ data to demonstrate good practices.

Expanding the IAQ Certification Scheme

- *Currently, the IAQ Certification Scheme only applies to premises with a mechanical ventilation and air conditioning (MVAC) system and excludes places with only window-type or split-type air conditioners, which means that many places, including schools and elderly homes, are not eligible.*
- *With growing interest among various sectors to enhance IAQ management, the EPD should expand the IAQ Certification Scheme to allow schools and elderly homes to participate.*"

With respect, CAN's criticisms and proposals miss what is perhaps the most important area which the government must address: robust enforcement of our air pollution laws! For the life of the APCO, penalties imposed by courts for breaches of the ordinance have been in the lowest range of prescribed penalties, even for second (or more) offenders. EPD's table below (for 2023) exemplifies this. Bear in mind that

prescribed maximum penalties (which vary between offences) are quite substantial: e g failure to comply with abatement notice: $500,000 + 12months gaol for first offence, + $100,000 per day for continuing offence (section 10(7)); failure to use best practicable means to prevent emissions of noxious emissions: $200,000 + 6 months gaol + $20,000 per day (section 12(2)); contravening terms of an emissions licence: $200,000 + 6 months gaol (section 13(2). Penalties are higher for second (etc) offences. We also may safely assume, judging by prosecution statistics of years gone by when the EPD published names of offenders (a practice unfortunately discontinued some years ago), that a significant number of convicted defendants are repeat offenders, even serial repeat offenders.

Fines Imposed for Air Pollution Convictions in 2023 (HK$)				
	Total	Highest	Lowest	Average
Breach of Asbestos Requirement	73,500	5,000	2,000	3,675
Breach of Construction Dust Regulation	61,000	15,000	3,000	6,100
Defective Design	673,000	30,000	2,000	11,603
Illegal Installation/Alteration	25,500	8,900	5,000	6,375
Fails to comply with air pollution abatement notice	377,000	32,000	8,000	19,842
Breach of Fuel for Vessels Regulation	0	0	0	0
Breach of Volatile Organic Compounds Regulation	0	0	0	0
Dark Smoke Emission	0	0	0	0
Breach of Specified Process Licence Requirements	196,000	25,000	2,000	5,297
Breach of Non- Road Mobile Machinery (Emission) Regulation	81,000	18,000	10,000	13,500
Breach of Ocean-Going Vessels (Fuel at Berth) Regulation	0	0	0	0
Breach of Open Burning Regulation	9,000	6,000	3,000	4,500
Breach of Ozone Layer Protector Ordinance	0	0	0	0

Whilst we acknowledge that the long history of manifestly inadequate penalties imposed for APCO (and other environmental statutory) offences is primarily due to the courts' unfathomable, entrenched low penalties attitude towards environmental offences, the EPD could do more to agitate for imposition of higher, more realistic penalties.

It is worth noting, also, that in 2023 the EPD:

- Issued 13 new Specified Process Licences
- Served 93 Notices (e.g. abatement notices)
- Brought 158 APCO prosecutions
- But…issued 2,141 "technical advices" (i.e. informal warnings)

We understand that the extent of EPD's financial resources limits the number of enforcement prosecutions it can bring, nevertheless the established pattern of simply warning polluters, as against holding them to account in accordance with the provisions of the APCO, weakens the enforcement element of the government's clean air strategy by indirectly encouraging emitters to ignore the APCO and EPD's Technical Memoranda.

Conclusion

The government is to be commended for at least recognising that air pollution is a serious environmental problem, and for taking various steps to address the problem. However, as CAN points out, much more can and should be done. A worthwhile beginning would be to increase significantly the resources available for EPD's APCO enforcement role, and to appeal manifestly inadequate sentences imposed by magistrates.

TOWN PLANNING

Sha Tin Zoning Plan amendments

The Town Planning Board announced amendments to the Sha Tin Outline Zoning Plan (OZP) on 16 January. The primary change involves rezoning a site at Sheung Wo Che from "Village Type Development" to "Government, Institution or Community (1)" to formalise the property's current use as a religious institution and columbarium. Alongside this change, the plan's Notes and Explanatory Statement have been updated, and general information on land-use zones has been refreshed where appropriate.

The amended draft plan, identified as Sha Tin OZP No. S/ST/39, is now available for public inspection during office hours at several government offices, including the Secretariat of the Town Planning Board, various Planning Enquiry Counters, and relevant district offices in Sha Tin, Tai Po, and North District.

The public may submit written representations concerning these amendments to the Secretary of the Town Planning Board. The deadline for submissions is 16 March 2026. Those intending to submit are strongly advised to consult the Town Planning Board Guidelines No. 29C, which outlines the submission process.

[*Town Planning Board Press Release*, 16/01/2026]

Approval of Tai Po Zoning Plan

The Chief Executive in Council has approved an amended draft Tai Po Outline Zoning Plan (OZP), establishing a statutory framework to guide future development within the area. The plan encompasses approximately 2,438 hectares, bounded by the Pat Sin Leng, Cloudy Hill, Tai Mo Shan, and Grassy Hill mountain ranges; Tolo Harbour forms its eastern boundary.

Key amendments in the approved OZP (No. S/TP/32) primarily involve site rezonings to facilitate housing projects and adjust community infrastructure. Major changes include:

- Rezoning two sites along Ting Kok Road to "Residential (Group A)" zones to enable public and private housing developments under the Land Sharing Pilot Scheme.
- Rezoning a site north of Shek Kwu Lung to "Government, Institution or Community" use.
- Adjustments to surrounding land designations, including changes between "Green Belt," "Road," and "Residential (Group C)" zones to support the new developments and planning logic.

The Notes and Explanatory Statement concerning the plan have been revised to reflect these amendments, and general land use information has been updated. The approved OZP is now available for public inspection at the offices of the Town Planning Board, relevant Planning Enquiry Counters, and district offices in Sha Tin, Tai Po, and North District.

[*Town Planning Board Press Release*, 23/01/2026]

Tsuen Wan Zoning Plan amendments

On 13 February, the Town Planning Board announced amendments to the approved Tsuen Wan Outline Zoning Plan (OZP). The key changes involve rezoning sites at two locations to facilitate residential development. Specifically, a site at Fu Yung Shan is rezoned from "Green Belt" and "Village Type Development" to "Residential (Group B)9", while a site in Yau Kom Tau is rezoned from "Green Belt" and "Government, Institution or Community" to "Residential (Group B)10". Additionally, a strip of land north of this new residential zone is rezoned from "Green Belt" to "Government, Institution or Community" to support infrastructure.

The Notes and Explanatory Statement of the OZP have been updated to reflect these amendments, and general information on land use zones has been revised where appropriate. The amended draft plan, Tsuen Wan OZP No. S/TW/40, is available for public inspection during office hours at the Secretariat of the Town Planning Board, various Planning Enquiry Counters, and the Tsuen Wan and West Kowloon District Planning Office, among other listed locations.

The public may submit written representations concerning these amendments to the Secretary of the Town Planning Board. The deadline for submissions is 13 April 2026. Those intending to submit a representation are strongly advised to consult the Town Planning Board Guidelines No. 29C, which details the submission process. It is critical to include one's full name and the first four alphanumeric characters of a Hong Kong identity card or passport number; failure to do so will result in the representation being invalidated. The Board's Secretariat also reserves the right to request identity proof for verification.

[*Town Planning Board Press Release*, 13/02/2026]

DIGEST OF LEGISLATION

EV tax break for private cars to end

The government announced on 25 February 2026 that the first registration tax concessions for electric private cars (e-PCs) will expire on 31 March 2026, and will not be extended. However, the full tax waiver for electric commercial vehicles, motor cycles and tricycles will continue for another two years.

Unveiled as part of the 2026-27 Budget, the changes mean that from 1 April 2026, new e-PCs registered in Hong Kong will no longer benefit from the reduced tax rates introduced to encourage their adoption. This includes the popular "One-for-One Replacement" Scheme, which allowed owners to scrap an old private car and replace it with a new e-PC at a significantly lower tax rate.

The government has, however, put in place a one-off transitional arrangement to protect purchases already in the pipeline. E-PCs that were ordered on or before 25 February 2026 (Budget Day), or were already arranged to be shipped to Hong Kong for personal use by this date, will still be eligible for the existing tax concessions. To qualify, local registered distributors, importers, or individual owners must submit the required supporting documents and tax applications to the Transport Department (TD) for verification and approval by 24 February 2027. This applies even if the vehicle is not first registered before the 1 April deadline.

In a move welcomed by the logistics and public transport sectors, the full first registration tax waiver for electric commercial vehicles, motor cycles and motor tricycles will be extended for two years until 31 March 2028. This measure aims to continue supporting the greening of these vehicle categories.

The government confirmed that all standard first registration procedures remain unchanged. For any private electric car with a first registration application submitted to the TD on or after 1 April 2026, the previous tax concessions will no longer apply.

[*Press Release, Government of Hong Kong,* 25/02/2026]

Global cultural leaders to convene for landmark summit

The West Kowloon Cultural District is set to become a pivotal hub for international arts dialogue when it hosts the second Hong Kong International Cultural Summit (HKICS) on 22 and 23 March 2026. Building substantially on the momentum of its successful inaugural event in 2024, the summit will gather close to 30 eminent cultural leaders, visionaries, and thought leaders from 15 countries and regions to explore the pressing issues shaping the future of arts and culture on a global scale.

Serving as the flagship event launching Hong Kong Art Week 2026, the two-day summit is expected to attract thousands of participants, both in person and virtually, from Hong Kong and around the world. Its central theme, "A New Era: Reimagining Community through the Arts," will frame a series of high-level discussions on how cultural institutions can evolve to meet contemporary challenges and, more importantly, foster stronger, more resilient social connections through their work.

Global dialogue on the future of culture

The core mission of HKICS 2026 extends far beyond a conventional conference format. It is conceived as an integrated forum for genuine constructive dialogue and exchange on the critical issues affecting the future development of arts and culture globally. Rather than a series of isolated presentations, the programme is designed to facilitate deep conversations among peers who are shaping cultural policy and institutional strategy worldwide.

Key area discussion will be the unique challenges and opportunities facing the increasing number of multidisciplinary arts districts around the world. Leaders from such districts will share insights on governance, sustainability, and how to maintain cultural vibrancy while serving diverse urban populations. This conversation is particularly pertinent as cities increasingly look to culture as a driver of economic and social regeneration.

A significant and recurring focus will be placed on the integration of sustainable development within the cultural sector. Discussions will investigate how museums, theatres, and festivals can enhance public engagement and embrace innovative, even entrepreneurial, models to remain relevant and financially resilient in a rapidly changing world. This includes examining the shifting role of learning within 21st-century museums, moving beyond traditional education departments to become dynamic, participatory community hubs that invite dialogue and co-creation.

With the anticipated completion of the West Kowloon Cultural District's new Performing Arts Centre, this year's summit features an expanded programme dedicated specifically to the performing arts. Leaders in this field will explore how institutions, like dance theatres and concert halls, can fundamentally redefine their relationships with audiences. The discussion will centre on the transition from conventional, sometimes passive, performance venues into vibrant, community-centric cultural hubs that respond dynamically to the needs and creative input of a new, more diverse generation of attendees.

International partnerships

The true significance of the summit, however, lies in its function as a catalyst for forging lasting and productive international partnerships. The inaugural HKICS in 2024 marked the beginning of the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority's comprehensive global partnership efforts, resulting in the signing of 21 memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with leading arts and cultural institutions worldwide. This foundational step has since led to an expanded network, increasing the total number of MOUs to 34 to date.

These are not merely ceremonial agreements; they have already yielded tangible, high-profile cultural projects that enrich Hong Kong's cultural scene and project its influence abroad. Notable examples include the "I. M. Pei: Life Is Architecture" special exhibition, co-presented by M+ and Qatar Museums, which toured to ALRIWAQ in Doha from late 2025. Similarly, the Hong Kong Palace Museum has engaged in significant exchanges, co-organising "Wonders of Imperial Carpets" with the Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, and "Treasures of the Mughal Court" with the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. M+ has also forged strong connections with other cultural institutions, presenting "Picasso for Asia—A Conversation" with the Musée national Picasso-Paris, and is set to debut "Janet Cardiff: The Forty Part Motet" in August 2026, its first project realised in collaboration with the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

The 2026 edition of the summit aims to build substantially on this momentum, facilitating new partnerships across diverse areas, including the co-production and touring of both exhibitions and performances. It will also foster long-term educational and exchange programmes for artists and arts administrators, creating a sustained network of collaboration involving the Hong Kong Palace Museum, M+, and the future West Kowloon Performing Arts Centre.

By convening directors and chief executives from world-renowned institutions—from the Southbank Centre in London and the Uffizi Galleries in Florence to the Pinacoteca de São Paulo and the Sharjah Museums Authority—the summit provides a unique and invaluable platform for cross-cultural pollination and strategic collaboration. As Hong Kong solidifies its strategic role as an East-meets-West centre for international cultural exchange, HKICS 2026 underscores the city's ambition to be not just a vibrant consumer of culture, but an active and essential participant in shaping its global future.

The event will fully immerse delegates in the rich cultural tapestry of Hong Kong, offering complimentary access and exclusive tours of M+ and the Hong Kong Palace Museum, as well as the opportunity to participate in the annual WestK FunFest. This concerted effort, supported by partners, including the Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau and the Hong Kong Tourism Board, aims to elevate Hong Kong's international profile as a premier cultural destination and a dynamic hub for global artistic dialogue.

[*West Kowloon Cultural District Authority Press Release,* 26/02/2026]

Collaboration Task Force meets in Shenzhen

The Deputy Financial Secretary, Mr Michael Wong, and Vice Mayor of the Shenzhen Municipal People's Government Mr Tao Yongxin, leading delegations of the governments of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) and Shenzhen respectively, held the seventh meeting of the Task Force for Collaboration on the Northern Metropolis Development Strategy in Shenzhen today (November 12).

In the morning, the delegation of the Shenzhen Government accompanied the delegation of the HKSAR Government to visit the exhibition hall of Guangdong Yuehai Water Co Ltd, reviewing the 60-year history and development of Dongjiang water supply to Hong Kong. They subsequently visited the Yulong Landfill Remediation Project in Luohu District to learn more about Shenzhen's efforts and achievements in safeguarding people's livelihood and ecological governance.

At the afternoon meeting, the HKSAR Government presented the progress on taking forward the three pilot areas for large-scale land disposal at Hung Shui Kiu, Fanling North and San Tin Technopole, and the ecotourism nodes at Tsim Bei Tsui and Pak Nai. The HKSAR Government also introduced details of measures related to accelerating the development of the Northern Metropolis in the Chief Executive's 2025 Policy Address. Both sides also exchanged views on the development of the Hetao Shenzhen-Hong Kong Science and Technology Innovation Co-operation Zone, the progress for the planning and development of the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Western Rail Link (Hung Shui Kiu-Qianhai) and the Northern Link Spur Line, as well as the redevelopment of the Sha Tau Kok Boundary Control Point.

Mr Wong said, "The Northern Metropolis is the core engine of Hong Kong's economic development, possessing immense potential and economic value. Accelerating the development of the Northern Metropolis will further promote economic and social integration between Hong Kong and Shenzhen, as well as with other cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. In this year's Policy Address, the Chief Executive announced plans to enhance the development of the Northern Metropolis through innovative approaches, optimising top-level design, and strengthening supervision and co-ordination. This will enable industries and enterprises to settle in earlier, allowing investors and the general public to truly benefit from the development of the Northern Metropolis."

Officials of the HKSAR Government attending the meeting today were the Secretary for Development, Ms Bernadette Linn; the Under Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Liu Chun-san; the Under Secretary for Security, Mr Michael Cheuk; the Under Secretary for Innovation, Technology and Industry, Ms Lillian Cheong, as well as the heads of relevant departments.

[*Government Press Release*, 12/11/2025]

Investment in Hetao and San Tin tech hubs

Financial Secretary Paul Chan has proposed a HK$20 billion capital injection to accelerate two cornerstone innovation and technology projects under the Northern Metropolis blueprint: the Hetao Hong Kong Park and the San Tin Technopole.

Delivering his annual Budget on Wednesday, Mr Chan outlined a strategy to deepen Hong Kong’s tech ecosystem by fostering full integration between technological innovation and industrial development. The funding is designed to fast-track infrastructure and leverage market participation.

The government will seek Legislative Council approval to inject HK$10 billion into the park company overseeing the Hetao Hong Kong Park. This capital will expedite the first phase of development by assisting the private sector to speed up the disposal of remaining land parcels, provide key infrastructure, bolster support for start-ups, and establish a dedicated venture fund.

Concurrently, a new dedicated company will be established this year to drive forward the San Tin Technopole project. The government will also seek LegCo’s approval for an initial HK$10 billion capital injection for this site, with plans to similarly harness market resources to accelerate its progress.

Mr Chan described the San Tin Technopole as a natural extension of the Loop area. Together, the two projects are intended to create a comprehensive industrial ecosystem. The Loop will focus on upstream research and development, commercialisation and pilot production, while the San Tin Technopole will provide extensive land for downstream activities, accelerating the commercialisation of R&D outcomes and offering space for prototyping, pilot production, and large-scale manufacturing.

In a move to further stimulate development, the government is exploring measures to encourage private developers who own land in the Northern Metropolis to collaborate with technology and advanced manufacturing enterprises on joint proposals. This tripartite cooperation between the government, developers, and enterprises is expected to channel land and corporate resources toward priority industries. Mr Chan expressed confidence that greater business sector participation will expedite the economy’s innovation and technology transformation and accelerate the Northern Metropolis’ development through coordinated efforts.

[*The Standard,* 25/02/2026]

Flexible legal framework for Northern Metropolis

A "relatively flexible" legal framework designed to fast-track the development of the mammoth Northern Metropolis project will be introduced to the Legislative Council later this month, the government has announced. This comes as the latest budget seeks an initial capital injection of HK$30 billion (US$3.8 billion) for three key technology parks within the development.

Secretary for Development Bernadette Linn Hon-ho confirmed on Sunday that the proposed legislation will be discussed at the LegCo development panel meeting on 24 March. The framework is intended to accelerate the Northern Metropolis project, spanning 30,000 hectares in the New Territories, which aims to bolster business and technological ties with Shenzhen while creating new residential and economic hubs.

Linn emphasised that the provisions would be drafted to accommodate works extending over a decade, prioritising efficiency over exhaustive detail. "The provisions will not be drafted in exhaustive detail… it is primarily to remove barriers and streamline procedures for development and planning," she explained during a radio programme.

Secretary Linn stressed that the new law would focus on empowering the government to introduce subsidiary legislation and exercise powers for faster approvals. This flexibility, she argued, is crucial to meeting the specific needs of enterprises. "If an enterprise coming to the Northern Metropolis does not want to build at such a high plot ratio, or wants some changes in the specific land uses, we must have legislation that allows faster approvals," Linn said. She was keen to clarify, however, that while the approach would be adaptable, it would operate within a clear structure and system, insisting, "it's not ruled by man."

The government's commitment is backed by significant funding. The budget proposes allocating HK$10 billion each as initial capital for three core sites: the Hetao Hong Kong Park, the San Tin Technopole, and the Hung Shui Kiu Industry Park. According to Linn, providing this capital, alongside land assets, will ensure operators at these sites have the credibility to engage with global consortiums, presenting themselves as "well-backed entities rather than shell companies." She added that the government would maintain involvement in the firms' strategic development through board meetings.

Offering a clearer timeline, Linn revealed that approximately 40 per cent of the 800 hectares planned for the Hung Shui Kiu Industry Park and a proposed University Town are expected to be completed within the next five years. The broader Northern Metropolis initiative, which will be governed by its own set of streamlined laws, represents one of Hong Kong's most ambitious urban planning projects, designed to deepen integration with the Greater Bay Area.

[*SCMP,* 01/03/2026]

HONG KONG BRIEFING

Operation clears Tuen Mun illegal dumping blackspot

A persistent illegal waste disposal site on Yick Yuen Road has been successfully cleared in an operation that combined smart surveillance technology with cross-departmental government collaboration, the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) announced on 14 January 2026.

Located in a remote rural area of Tuen Mun, the site had become an environmental concern since mid-2025. Following nearby resident relocations related to the Hung Shui Kiu/Ha Tsuen New Development Area project, the secluded roadside spot was increasingly exploited for illegal dumping, creating a significant hygiene problem and pathway obstruction.

In response, the EPD coordinated with the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, Highways Department, Civil Engineering and Development Department, and Lands Department to formulate a comprehensive action plan. The strategy involved a multi-pronged approach: deploying a smart surveillance system to catch offenders in the act, swiftly clearing accumulated waste to prevent further deterioration, and installing concrete barriers and warning signs to physically block access to the site.

The smart enforcement yielded rapid results. Between June and August 2025, the surveillance system helped authorities quickly identify vehicles involved in the illegal activity. This led to over 50 prosecutions, targeting the registered vehicle owners. Several small-scale works and transport companies were found to be repeat offenders, illegally dumping large quantities of waste, including commercial and industrial refuse and demolition materials. The swift legal action proved a significant deterrent, drastically reducing violations in the following months.

An EPD spokesman emphasised the department's ongoing commitment to protecting rural areas in the New Territories. "These remote roadsides and laybys are unfortunately vulnerable to becoming illegal dumping sites," he said. "By combining technology-driven enforcement with interdepartmental teamwork, we are dedicated to improving the living environment."

The EPD reminded all sectors, particularly the logistics and construction industries, of their legal responsibility to dispose of waste properly. The spokesman encouraged businesses to engage recyclers for reusable materials and to deliver non-recyclable waste to designated refuse transfer stations or landfills.

Under *Public Cleansing and Prevention of Nuisances Regulation (Cap. 132BK)*, illegally dumping waste from a vehicle is an offence. Offenders face a maximum fine of $25,000 and six months' imprisonment.

[*Press Release, Government of Hong Kong,* 14/01/2026]

Peach blossom tree recycling programmme

The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) has announced its 2026 Peach Blossom Trees (PBTs) Recycling Programme, inviting the Hong Kong community to contribute to a greener Lunar New Year. Continuing an initiative successfully run since 2017, the programme aims to recover and recycle yard waste, transforming discarded PBTs into valuable resources such as composting bulking agents and garden mulch.

The programme features a two-phase collection schedule designed for convenience. From 27 February to 8 March, the public may drop off their PBTs at 56 designated collection points across the city. This extensive network includes a central collection point at Y·PARK in Tuen Mun, complemented by 55 district collection points. These district points are strategically located and comprise 12 GREEN@COMMUNITY Recycling Stations, 6 Outlying Islands Transfer Facilities, and 37 public refuse collection points, ensuring widespread accessibility. Following

this initial phase, from 9 March to 14 March, Y·PARK will serve as the sole collection point, catering to both the general public and commercial and industrial organisations.

An EPD spokesperson reminded participants that only PBTs are accepted for recycling. It is crucial to remove all decorations, including traditional *fai chun* and tape, beforehand to facilitate the recycling process. Beyond PBTs, the EPD also advocates for broader waste reduction efforts, encouraging the replanting of small potted plants like tangerine trees and the reuse of festive decorations. The department also welcomes other organisations to offer their own PBT recycling services, fostering a collective approach to sustainability.

To acknowledge participants' efforts, those who deliver PBTs to Y·PARK or any GREEN@COMMUNITY Recycling Station will receive an e-certificate upon successful submission and verification of their enrolment form. Additionally, participants at GREEN@COMMUNITY Recycling Stations will receive a gift (available while stocks last). This programme underscores Hong Kong's commitment to environmental protection and offers a tangible way for everyone to contribute to a sustainable future.

[*Press Release, Government of Hong Kong,* 16/02/2026]

NGOs slam lack of climate aid

Environmental and social welfare groups have voiced strong criticism of the 2026-27 Budget, arguing it fails to provide adequate support for citizens most vulnerable to the climate crisis while allocating funds for a civil service pay rise.

In statements issued following Financial Secretary Paul Chan's budget announcement on Wednesday, groups, including Greenpeace and the Society for Community Organisation (SoCO), highlighted what they see as critical oversights.

Greenpeace expressed deep disappointment that the Budget lacked comprehensive, people-centred climate adaptation strategies. The organisation noted that despite Hong Kong experiencing its hottest Lunar New Year's Eve on record in 2025, and a year that saw the third-highest number of very hot days and hot nights, the financial plan offered "zero support" for at-risk groups.

"Greenpeace is very disappointed that comprehensive, people-centred climate adaptation strategies and measures were not included in the government's public fiscal planning," the group said in a statement. They pointed out that while infrastructure projects like flood warning systems received funding, no measures were introduced to directly help residents of subdivided flats, outdoor workers, or the homeless cope with extreme heat.

Adding to the calls, Friends of the Earth urged the government to allocate more resources for climate resilience. Their suggestions included establishing climate shelters in high-risk areas and developing mandatory heat-adaptation plans for public housing estates and schools.

SoCO criticised the government's spending priorities, particularly as the city returns to a projected HK$2.9 billion surplus after three years of deficits. The NGO called for the reinstatement of a HK$2,500 student subsidy, which was cut in last year's budget, arguing it is essential for students from low-income families.

The group also contrasted the lack of new grassroots support with plans to resume the civil service pay trend survey, a move that paves the way for salary increases after a freeze. SoCO advocated for a five per cent reduction in civil service roles over three years and an extension of the pay freeze, suggesting funds would be better directed toward poverty relief and AI development.

The criticisms highlight increasing pressure for the government to integrate social support with environmental policy, ensuring that Hong Kong's most vulnerable residents are not left behind as the city grapples with a heating climate.

[*Hong Kong Free Press,* 26/02/2026]

Hong Kong's Packaging Reduction Charter

In 2025 the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) officially launched the Packaging Reduction Charter to encourage businesses to reassess and reduce their packaging usage, foster a waste reduction culture in commercial activities, and support Hong Kong's long-term goals of 'zero landfill' and carbon neutrality. So far, 102 local and multinational companies have already undertaken the initiative.

The Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Mr Tse Chin-wan, officiated at the launching ceremony on 31 March 2025. In his speech he highlighted that while packaging plays a crucial role in protecting products during transportation, most packaging materials are discarded after a single or limited use, placing a significant burden on the environment.

He stated, "The launch of the Packaging Reduction Charter aims to encourage businesses to adopt sustainable packaging reduction practices, including reviewing their packaging designs to minimise unnecessary material usage, enhancing the recyclability and reusability of their packaging, as well as exploring innovative solutions. These efforts not only alleviate the pressure on landfills, but also help businesses fulfil their social responsibilities, contributing to Hong Kong's long-term goals of 'zero landfill' and 'carbon neutrality.'

Signatory companies to the Charter undertake to submit to the EPD their annual total packaging material usage, implement measures to reduce packaging or adopt sustainable packaging solutions, as well as encourage their upstream and downstream suppliers, business partners and customers to reduce packaging materials and enhance packaging management.

To assist businesses in packaging reduction and management, the EPD has published the *Practical Guides on Packaging Reduction and Management (Practical Guides*) for eight specific sectors (Note) on its website. The EPD has also conducted briefing sessions for relevant trades and will closely monitor their progress in packaging reduction.

The Packaging Reduction Charter also serves as a platform for knowledge exchanges and collaboration, enabling businesses to connect and share experiences through various activities, promote industry partnerships, and drive innovation in developing efficient and eco-friendly packaging solutions. Furthermore, the initiative will assist local businesses in preparing relevant data to meet environmental, social and governance reporting requirements for products packaging.

[*Government Press Release,* 31/03/2025]

ADVISORY COUNCIL ON THE ENVIRONMENT (ACE)

Lung Kwu Tan Reclamation EIA report

A paper has been submitted for consideration at the 163rd meeting of Hong Kong's Advisory Council on the Environment (ACE) and its Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Subcommittee. The paper presents the key findings and recommendations of the EIA report for the "Reclamation at Lung Kwu Tan (LKT)" project and to seek members' views. The Civil Engineering and Development Department (CEDD) is the applicant. The Director of Environmental Protection (DEP) will consider the Subcommittee's comments and public feedback when deciding whether to approve the EIA report under the Environmental Impact Assessment Ordinance (EIAO).

The project involves a near-shore reclamation of approximately 145 hectares at northern Lung Kwu Tan in the western New Territories. Associated works include the rearrangement of a submarine sewage outfall at Urmston Road and dredging for potential future berthing facilities, and site formation. It is a strategic land supply initiative under the "Hong Kong 2030+" strategy, tentatively scheduled to start construction in 2028, with land delivery from 2029-2030 and completion by 2035. The reclaimed land is intended to support green/new energy and advanced construction enterprises.

The EIA concludes that with the implementation of recommended mitigation measures, the construction and operation of the project will comply with EIAO requirements with no adverse residual environmental impacts. Claimed key environmental benefits include the adoption of eco-shorelines to conserve natural resources, fostering carbon neutrality through planned green energy uses and improving existing environmental conditions in the area by introducing modern sewage infrastructure.

The project design has undergone significant refinement to avoid and minimise environmental impacts. The reclamation extent was reduced from an initial 250 ha to 145 ha to avoid key habitats. It strategically avoids the Chinese White Dolphin's (CWD) primary habitats, marine parks, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), commercial fisheries spawning grounds, and oyster farming areas. The construction will employ non-dredged methods like Deep Cement Mixing (DCM) and be conducted in phases behind leading seawalls to minimise water quality impacts.

Specific environmental aspects are addressed in detail. For marine ecology, the area is not a major CWD habitat, but comprehensive protective measures, such as marine mammal exclusion zones and AI-powered monitoring, will be implemented. Eco-shorelines will be incorporated to enhance biodiversity. For water quality, measures such as silt curtains, phased construction, and controlled filling rates are planned to ensure no adverse impacts. The project avoids important fisheries areas and plans ecological enhancement features. No significant impacts on terrestrial ecology, landscape, visual amenity, or cultural heritage are anticipated with the proposed mitigation.

An Environmental Monitoring and Audit (EM&A) Manual is included, recommending a monitoring programme for dust, water quality, ecology, and marine mammals during construction. The EIA report was made available for public inspection from 2 to 31 January 2026, and a summary of public comments will be provided separately.

[*Advisory Council on the Environment*, 13/02/2026]

CLIMATE CHANGE

Global scientists confront climate crisis

In mid-February, Berkshire, U K, hosted a critical international summit on climate science, organised by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the UK Met Office at the University of Reading. The gathering included many of the world's foremost climate scientists, who worked to synthesise the latest research to provide policymakers with "critical guidance" for climate action in the coming decade, as noted by IPCC Chair Professor Sir Jim Skea.

The urgency of the deliberations at the workshops was underscored by recent local weather patterns. The University of Reading reported its longest continuous period of rainy days since records began in 1908—a trend experts directly link to human-caused climate change. Professor Rowan Sutton of the Met Office Hadley Centre emphasised that recent severe flooding in the U K is not an isolated event but part of a long-term pattern of increasingly wet autumns and winters in the UK, which aligns with scientific predictions of how greenhouse gas accumulation alters the climate.

Scientists at the event unanimously agreed that "climate change is here," warning that extreme weather is becoming the new normal. This sentiment was echoed for the public during a related lecture, where University of Reading Professor Ed Hawkins—creator of the famous "climate stripes" visualisation—used a jacket coloured from cool blues (1850s) to hot reds (2025) to dramatically illustrate the planet's warming trajectory over 175 years.

The summit highlighted a shift in public perception: climate change is increasingly felt as a personal, lived experience rather than a distant threat. IPCC Vice-Chair Sherilee Harper observed that this direct experience is driving people to seek actionable solutions and recognise that climate impacts are universal, not limited to others. UK Minister for Climate, Katie White, framed the summit as evidence of the nation's scientific leadership in confronting the climate crisis directly.

[*BBC News*, 11/02/2026]

Scientists warn of point of no return

A coalition of leading climate scientists has issued a grave warning that the planet is rapidly approaching an irreversible threshold—a "point of no return"—beyond which self-perpetuating feedback loops could lock Earth into a catastrophic and permanent "hothouse" state. This alarming assessment synthesises recent research on climate tipping points, emphasising that continued global heating, even at current levels of about 1.3°C, risks triggering cascading and irreversible changes. These changes would fundamentally alter the planet's climate, making it vastly more hostile than the stable conditions that supported the development of human civilisation over the past 11,000 years.

The scientists highlight 16 critical "tipping elements" in the Earth's system—including the collapse of the Greenland and West Antarctic ice sheets, the destabilisation of permafrost, the dieback of the Amazon rainforest, and the weakening of the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC). Once activated, these tipping points could reinforce one another, releasing stored carbon, accelerating ice melt, and disrupting global weather patterns. For instance, the AMOC's ongoing weakening could exacerbate Amazon drought, leading to forest dieback and additional carbon emissions, whilst permafrost thaw could release vast quantities of methane, further intensifying warming.

Average temperatures in a hothouse world would far exceed the currently projected 2–3°C of warming, with temperatures stabilising at levels significantly higher than 4°C for millennia. The consequences would be existential: sea-level rise capable of submerging coastal cities, ecosystem collapses, and societal disruption on an unprecedented scale. As emphasised by Prof. Tim Lenton, even a 3°C trajectory poses "profound risks to humanity and our societies," but a hothouse scenario would render the planet largely uninhabitable.

Despite the stakes, the scientists note that both the public and policymakers remain largely unaware of these risks. Current climate commitments are deemed "insufficient" to prevent tipping points from being activated. The researchers stress that once triggered, these processes may be impossible to halt—even with eventual emissions reductions. Their call for "precautionary" action is underscored by evidence that several systems, including Greenland's ice sheet and the Amazon, may already be nearing destabilisation. The study concludes that the world must rapidly phase out fossil fuels and protect critical ecosystems to avoid crossing the point of no return, emphasising that the window to prevent a hellish "hothouse Earth" is closing fast.

[*The Guardian*, 11/02/2026]

Green energy transition inching forward

In January, a total of seven gas(petrol)-powered cars were sold in all of Norway. This year, Pakistan expects that parts of the country will get more electricity from decentralized rooftop solar than from its entire electricity grid during parts of the day. In the United States, where we often tell ourselves we are in the grips of climate backlash and fossil fuel retrenchment, Texas has been setting new solar records through frigid February, around 90 percent of all new power capacity installed anywhere in the nation last year was green, and the share of renewables is expected to be even higher next year. The new "breakout star" of the battery world is the notorious petrostate Saudi Arabia, the countries with the biggest growth in solar power are concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa, and Australia's breakneck pursuit of clean energy too cheap to meter is so far along that electricity prices in some regions have fallen by a third in a single year. Parts of the country have announced that they will be giving away electricity for free for three hours a day. That isn't an accident. It's a state promise, which Australians can expect to take to the bank going forward.

These days, it sometimes seems as if the whole world is retreating on climate and green energy, with the fever of alarm giving way to what's been called a new energy realism. Part of this is simply the return of President Trump, who still calls global warming a hoax, who took a wrench to President Joe Biden's landmark climate bill, who promised oil and gas executives he would do their bidding in exchange for sufficient campaign contributions, who justified the kidnapping of the Venezuelan president, Nicolás Maduro, partly by citing the country's oil reserves, and who just announced that the federal government has entirely revoked its longstanding commitment to treating carbon emissions as a harmful pollutant and global warming as a serious problem.

The repeal of the endangerment finding is an outrage: a see-no-evil, hear-no-evil declaration of indifference to an ever-intensifying crisis. But it isn't just Trump: Liberal politicians who used to routinely invoke the existential stakes of climate change have moved on, too, now preferring to talk about energy affordability. And it isn't just America, either. In Europe, imports of natural gas are expected to reach record highs this year, and China, which has become the global face of green energy over the last half decade, has been building more coal plants than at any point since before the Paris agreement. World leaders mostly skipped the last big climate conference, as they did the one before it. Few countries anywhere in the world are passing new climate policies into law anymore. After a period of growing concern and accelerating momentum, the project of greening the world's energy systems certainly feels as if it has been thrown into reverse.

But by the most straightforward measures, that's simply wrong. There is more green stuff being installed than ever, and judged simply as a global infrastructure project the volume is pretty staggering. In 2024, 92.5 percent of all new power capacity installed around the world was renewable. In 2025, it's believed that global green installations were even greater. And even in Trump's United States, which has been behaving in many ways like a petrostate, more than 92 percent of utility-scale electricity capacity planned for 2026 is green.

The transition is more complicated than the headline figures suggest, and even the near future looks uncertain, especially ahead of China's big Five-Year Plan announcement next month. In fact, the International Energy Agency recently revised its short-term renewable forecasts a bit downward, partly in response to changes in U.S. and Chinese policy. But in the big picture, I.E.A.'s global outlook is nevertheless still clear: Between 2025 and 2030, more than 90 percent of new electricity capacity anywhere in the world is expected to be renewable.

Fossil power has the advantage of incumbency, and the challenge of decarbonization is bigger and thornier than just solving electricity, which itself takes more than simply paving the world in solar panels. But if the energy transition is a race to build the future, green is not just winning but running away with it. The advantage, globally, is 10 to one.

That's not to say victory over warming is at hand. New power only changes the existing system on the margins, and the old system is pretty dirty. To this point, new green energy has mostly supplemented rather than displaced fossil fuels. Globally, emissions are still climbing, if slowly, and temperatures are not only rising but rising at an accelerating rate, raising the uncomfortable possibility that the world's climate system may be more sensitive to emissions than almost anyone had bargained for. And meaning that however quickly the green transition is unfolding the climate future still looks treacherous — about which I promise I will write more soon.

But when I wrote in dismay last fall that we seemed to be giving up on climate politics a decade after the Paris agreement, I heard from leaders and advocates around the world that I was being too downbeat, focused too much on empty rhetoric and hit-or-miss policy momentum, not focused enough on taking the concrete measure of change on the ground.

In the fall, Christiana Figueres, the former head of the U.N.'s climate change body, told me that climate politics didn't matter nearly as much as "climate economy"— the combination of cheap solar and battery power, the price volatility of fossil fuels, domestic energy crises and geopolitics pushing countries toward energy autonomy and the relative ease of installing new renewables are all powering the global transition even under conditions of policy uncertainty. Canada's former environment minister Catherine McKenna and Britain's current energy secretary Ed Miliband made similar points. From nearly everyone I spoke with, what I heard was this: While the policy landscape might be a bit bumpy and public arguments less reliably green than they were a few years ago, neither offers a comprehensive measure of the state of play. And when you look past them, you don't see the end of climate action but something that looks much more like progress, if not a take-off. They may have a point.

A decade ago, the challenge of global decarbonization appeared intimidating enough that to many, it seemed the only way to surmount it was through politics. A decade later, we've lost a lot of political momentum, and the spirit of solidarity that seemed for a time to prompt it has evaporated. But in the most obvious sectors, at least, the transition is powering ahead anyway. When I spoke to Nicholas Stern — whose 2006 report warning about the underappreciated risks of unmitigated warming helped shape climate politics for the decades that followed — he lamented the loss of political attention but nevertheless expressed what he called "a heavily guarded optimism." "I don't think we'd get Paris if we started it now," he acknowledged. "But back then, none of us anticipated that we'd be discussing the end of the internal combustion engine anytime soon, either. And now it's coming."

So for a moment, allow me to play, if not climate optimist then transition optimist, at least. It's a pretty straightforward job, since the numbers somewhat speak for themselves. Globally, sales of gas-powered cars have declined by more than 20 percent since their peak, which we already passed a decade ago. Since then, sales of electric vehicles have grown almost 30-fold. In 2019, only 3 percent of car sales globally were electric; in 2025, a quarter were. In the European Union, full E.V.s and hybrids were more than half of all sales. In China, the world's largest car market, it's more than half. And the global pattern pops up in some unexpected places. In Nepal, for instance, 76 percent of new cars sold in 2024 were E.V.s. In Ethiopia — where the government was so desperate to stop importing so much foreign oil, it took a heavy-handed policy intervention in 2024, banning the importation of gas-powered cars — E.V. sales grew from close to zero to more than half of all new registrations that year.

By global standards, the United States is a relative laggard — enough so that the climate scientist Zeke Hausfather recently suggested the country could end up, 30 years from now, looking like Cuba does today, with roads crowded with gas-guzzling clunkers. But even here sales of gas-powered cars between 2016 and 2024 were down more than 2.5 million per year. Over the same period, American E.V. sales are up 10-fold.

You see a similar pattern when looking at solar power installations across the developing world, where decarbonization was long assumed to require significant subsidy and support from places like the United States and Europe. But in Algeria solar installations recently grew 33-fold in a 12-month period, with many other countries across the African continent tripling or more over the same period (even though oil imports still exceed solar panels in most of Africa's biggest markets). As the Global Energy Monitor put it earlier this month, "the center of gravity for new clean power has shifted decisively toward emerging and developing economies."

"We're moving fast, but we're nowhere near moving fast enough," says Stern, whose new book describes a world poised at the crossroads, not yet taking full advantage of what he calls the growth opportunity of the century. "Every time you look at the technology, it looks better," he says. But every time you look at the science, it gets worse."

In China, by far the world's largest emitter, emissions have been falling slowly now for about two years, marking what is likely to be an emissions peak. Simply put, this has never happened anywhere else before. Many rich countries of the world are well past their emissions peak — another fact about the green transition few outside of energy and climate circles appreciate. But those encouraging downward emissions slopes all depict periods of deindustrialization. Not China's.

As for India, long viewed as China's natural carbon successor? Its power sector emissions are falling for just the second time in 50 years. And more than that: India is moving away from fossil fuels faster than China did, according to a new analysis by Ember — transitioning at an earlier stage of economic development, that is, having produced less than a quarter as much carbon, cumulatively, as China has to this point.

This is especially remarkable given that for all that talk about its staggering emissions, China actually began moving away from fossil fuels much faster than the rich countries of the West ever did. India's economic mix is different, less dependent on manufacturing and heavy industry, but at comparable levels of G.D.P., Ember found, India is both generating far more solar and using far less coal than China, which did it much faster than Europe or the United States. At a comparable level of electrification, India is using just one-sixth as much coal as China did. And there are those who believe that the transition in sub-Saharan Africa will be even faster — which could be a great blessing, given that barely half of the region has access to electricity today, with some estimates of the number lacking it floating around 600 million for 15 years now.

Where does this all leave us? Still far from a global power system dominated by low carbon sources. In the United States, we are stumbling forward, driving emissions slightly up in the short term but still heading for slow declines in the years ahead. Overall, we are still so far north of recent climate targets, there is now a robust debate among climate advocates about what new goals or measures to use, since the old ones are so obviously irrelevant. And an awful lot of talk from the more climate complacent that the world has moved on to other concerns, tacitly accepting a future of much more climate disruption. But if the political mood has darkened, one last data point shines out to me like a beacon: In 2026, the world may well spend more on green energy in total than it devotes to military spending. And if not this year, it seems safe to say, it will probably happen soon.

[*The New York Times*, 25/02/2026]

REGIONAL & INTERNATIONAL

GREENLAND

Climate change threatens traditional livelihoods

Rapid climate change in the Arctic is disrupting the foundational traditions and economic stability of communities in Greenland. Hunter Malik Kleist's struggle to find seals—having to sail deep into fjords instead of hunting on stable sea ice—serves as a direct, personal example of the crisis. The absence of winter ice, a critical platform for seal breeding and protection, forces hunters to navigate rougher, stormier seas, fundamentally altering centuries-old practices.

The warming trend, highlighted by record-breaking temperatures at Greenland's Summit Station, triggers a cascade of socio-economic problems. The government's postponement of the vital winter musk ox hunt due to insufficient snow and ice has created immediate financial hardship for hunters who rely on the meat and skins for income and sustenance. This shortage intensifies the pressure on summer hunting seasons to stockpile food. Concurrently, the shrinking and unstable winter season cripples the tourism-dependent dogsled industry. Mushers face hazardous, icy conditions, dehydrated dogs due to lack of snow, and a drastically shortened operational window, leading many to give up their dogs as the practice becomes unprofitable.

Whilst the community demonstrates resilience through adaptation—such as planning to use wheeled sleds for summer tours—the overall trend is one of steep decline. The number of sled dogs in Greenland has plummeted by nearly half in two decades, symbolising the erosion of a cultural cornerstone. Despite individual hopes for a return to stable ice, the report underscores a harsh new reality: the Arctic's accelerated warming, at four times the global average, is not a future threat but a present emergency which is dismantling traditional ways of life and pushing Greenlanders into an uncertain and challenging future.

[*The Standard*, 11/02/2026]

THE NETHERLANDS

Trailblazing climate change ruling

In January, the District Court of The Hague found the Dutch government had violated the human rights of residents of Bonaire (Caribbean) by treating them differently from residents of European Netherlands when it comes to protecting them from climate change. The Court found this discrimination violates the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

This is a monumental win for climate justice. By holding the Dutch State accountable for its obligations to citizens in its Caribbean territories, this ruling transforms "human rights" from a broad concept into a specific, enforceable mandate for climate action.

The residents of Bonaire already experience extreme heat, drought, flooding, and coral reef loss, while one-fifth of the island could disappear by the end of this century due to rising sea levels.

"ELAW's Science Team provided useful references to support key points in the case," says Maria Alejandra Serra, Legal Counsel Climate Justice and Liability - Climate Specialist at Greenpeace International.

This ruling signals to governments everywhere that climate policy is not a political choice—it is a legal obligation tied to the fundamental right to life and equality. Greenpeace Netherlands reports:

"The Dutch court is the first court in the world to rule that the State is discriminating against its own people by failing to develop and adopt a climate adaptation plan."

The court found that the Dutch government is violating the ECHR in part by pursuing "a climate policy that does not make an equitable contribution to the measures that must be taken worldwide to limit global warming to a maximum of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels by the end of this century" and by failing "to take timely and appropriate measures to protect the inhabitants of Bonaire from the effects of climate change and failing to adequately inform them about the consequences and involve them in decision-making on measures"; and by "treating the inhabitants of Bonaire differently from the inhabitants of the European Netherlands when taking adaptation measures, without that different treatment being appropriate, necessary and proportional." *Greenpeace Netherlands v. Netherlands*, C/09/659832 / HA ZA 24-53 (28 January 2026) at 12.1 and 12.3 (unofficial English translation by the court).

To remedy this, the Court ordered the State to incorporate appropriate emission targets into legislation and to draft and implement an adaptation plan that covers Bonaire.

This decision adds to several recent similar judgments and opinions from international and regional courts, including the 2025 opinions from the International Court of Justice and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, and the 2024 European Court of Human Rights KlimaSeniorinnen case.

[*Elaw Press release*, 26/02/2026]

UNITED KINGDOM

Thinktank criticises UK's green energy policy

A significant political and ideological rift has emerged over the UK's climate strategy, pitting former Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair against the current Labour government's climate change response agencies, led by Energy Secretary Ed Miliband. The Tony Blair Institute (TBI) has published a report sharply criticising the government's core green energy policies, accusing them of being economically outdated and directly responsible for driving up energy bills for consumers.

The TBI's central argument is that the government's rigid commitment to decarbonise the electricity grid by 2030 ("Clean Power 2030") fails to account for a changed world. The institute contends that high geopolitical uncertainty and technological shifts mean the policy is no longer cost-effective. It specifically points to rising costs for new offshore wind power and argues that long-term natural gas prices will fall, making new gas generation cheaper. Consequently, the TBI urges the government to drop the 2030 target and instead encourage more North Sea oil and gas drilling by removing windfall taxes, framing domestic production as a strategic necessity.

The government defends its policies on the grounds of long-term energy security and economic stability. They argue that reliance on volatile international fossil fuel markets controlled by petrostates is the primary driver of high bills and the cost-of-living crisis. Transitioning to "clean homegrown power" is presented as the only route to permanently lower bills, energy sovereignty, and job creation. They dismiss the TBI's cost comparisons, suggesting that geopolitical risks will keep gas prices high indefinitely.

This report intensifies increasing conflict between Blair and Miliband, highlighting a deep divide within the Labour party as to how to achieve net-zero by 2050. The TBI's stance ironically aligns it with right-wing critics, like the Conservative Party and Reform UK, who also advocate for abandoning stringent climate targets. This places Miliband in a politically challenging spot, caught between criticism from a former party leader and his pre-election pledge to reduce average energy bills by £300.

The debate is further charged by allegations regarding the TBI's own interests. Critics note that the institute conducts paid work for petrostates like Saudi Arabia and receives substantial donations from Oracle co-founder Larry Ellison, whose company is heavily invested in AI. This leads to accusations that Blair's advocacy for more reliable, baseload power (including from gas) to fuel an "AI revolution" may be influenced by his institute's funding sources, rather than pure policy analysis. The TBI vigorously denies this, stating its work is data-driven and independent.

[*The Guardian*, 13/02/2026]

USA

EPA abandons health benefit calculations

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has adopted a major policy shift under the Trump administration in deciding to cease calculating the monetary value of health benefits—such as prevented premature deaths and avoided hospital visits—when crafting rules for dangerous air pollutants, like fine particulate matter (PM2.5) and ozone. This change means the agency's cost-benefit analyses will focus almost exclusively on the compliance costs to industry, moving away from a decades-long, bipartisan practice of quantifying how pollution rules save lives and money. The EPA defends the move as a technical correction, arguing past estimates were misleadingly precise, and insists it still values health protections. However, this shift is widely seen as part of a broader pro-business realignment that has involved rolling back numerous environmental and public health safeguards.

Environmental, legal, and public health advocates have condemned the decision as a dangerous abdication of the EPA's core mission. They argue that by ignoring the proven economic value of clean air—assessed as every dollar spent on reducing PM2.5 yielding up to $77 in health benefits—the agency is recklessly enabling increased pollution. Critics warn this new approach paves the way for weaker regulations, as demonstrated by a recently finalised rule on nitrogen oxide (NOx) emissions from power plants, which is less restrictive than previous proposals and, for the first time, omits any monetised estimate of the health benefits from cleaner air.

The long-term consequences of this policy change could be profound. Experts warn that systematically assigning a zero value to lives saved and illnesses prevented undermines the fundamental rationale for health and environmental regulations. By refusing to monetise these benefits while meticulously counting industry costs, the EPA's new calculus risks resulting in weaker air quality standards, potentially leading to more asthma attacks, heart disease, and premature deaths, with the burden falling disproportionately on American families and communities.

[*NBC News*, 15/01/2026]

Trump sets a course for global warming and environmental destruction

How the US reversed climate progress, at home and abroad

2025 was a pivotal year for US climate policy. Since assuming office for his second term, Donald Trump has taken sweeping actions to reverse America's environmental agenda and withdraw from international commitments. These moves have fundamentally altered the nation's role in the global fight against climate change, a crisis the President has dismissed as a "con job".

Unleashing fossil fuels

A long-time defender of planet-warming fossil fuels, Trump's focus has been on strengthening ties with the industry in spite of the countless climate commitments the US has made at home and on an international level. From a former fracking executive taking the reins of the Energy Department to an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) packed with political appointees who formerly lobbied for the chemical and fossil fuel sectors, Trump has surrounded himself with the right people to execute his anti-climate agenda.

On day one, Trump declared a "national energy emergency". It came despite the fact that the US had hit record production levels under the previous administration and was currently producing more oil than any other nation in history. The move allowed the administration to reverse many of the Biden-era environmental regulations and open up more areas to oil and gas exploration. And that is exactly what followed.

The Trump administration has moved to maximize oil and gas development in Alaska, reversing Biden-era restrictions on the 23-million-acre National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska and reopening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for drilling. He is now looking to take his "drill, baby drill" mantra abroad, having recently unveiled plans to extend his reach to Venezuela's vast oil reserves.

In April, Trump signed a series of executive orders aimed at reviving a dying coal industry by expediting leases and streamlining permitting for coal mining on federal land. This contradicts global trends, with nearly 60 countries having drastically scaled back their plans for building coal-fired power plants since the Paris Agreement was passed in 2015. The US itself retired or announced the retirement of hundreds of coal plants. Aside from being the dirtiest type of fossil fuel, coal is widely seen as an uncompetitive and unsuitable energy source, costing significantly more than renewables like wind and solar.

Trump has frequently targeted those renewable sources, missing no opportunity to spread falsities about clean energy. He has called wind turbines "pathetic and so bad" and falsely claimed they are killing people. He also frequently asserts that wind is "the most expensive form of energy," ignoring data showing it is significantly cheaper than fossil fuels in both manufacturing and electricity generation.

As part of the plan to prioritize fossil fuels, the administration has blocked billions of dollars in funding earmarked for clean energy projects across the US. Several lawsuits were filed in response; many are still ongoing, leaving affected organizations in limbo and unable to carry out their work.

The Trump administration is also going after state laws addressing polluting forms of energy, like California's cap-and-trade system and climate superfund laws in New York and Vermont.

Lowering accountability for polluters

Trump has also rolled back dozens of environmental rules, including national air quality standards for particulate matter, limits on wastewater discharges for oil and gas extraction facilities, and regulations on power plant emissions and vehicle pollution. He also took aim at electric vehicles, halting the distribution of unspent government funds intended for vehicle charging stations under the $5-billion National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Fund.

This month, the EPA announced it will no longer calculate the monetary benefits of air pollution rules in terms of healthcare savings or avoided deaths. Going forward, rules for fine particulate matter, or PM2.5, and ozone will exclusively prioritize the costs to industry. In a statement reported by media, the agency said it "absolutely remains committed to our core mission of protecting human health and the environment" but "will not be monetizing the impacts at this time." The decision has drawn sharp criticism from environmental and public health advocates.

"The idea that EPA would not consider the public health benefits of its regulations is anathema to the very mission of EPA," said Richard Revesz, the Faculty Director of the Institute for Policy Integrity at New York University School of Law.

Suppressing climate research

Trump's aggressive rollback of climate action took direct aim at science. In the past year, his administration has erased scientific data and slashed billions of dollars in funding for climate research.

In the early months of 2025, tens of thousands of federal workers were abruptly fired from agencies such as the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the EPA, the National Science Foundation, the Forest Service, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Many of these employees were engaged in vital climate-related research and conservation work, as well as providing essential services like weather forecasting and wildlife monitoring.

The administration has also signalled intentions to dismantle key research centers, including the Colorado-headquartered National Center for Atmospheric Research, which provides critical data on air quality, tools to improve aircraft safety, wildfire mitigation strategies, and forecasts for droughts, extreme precipitation events, and tropical cyclones. Another target is NOAA's Mauna Loa Observatory, which has been collecting essential data on climate change, atmospheric composition, and air quality since the 1950s.

The White House also terminated funding for the US Global Change Research Program, the federal body responsible for producing the nation's most comprehensive climate reports on the impacts of rising global temperatures. It also shut down climate.gov, NOAA's primary public-facing website for climate science, and axed NOAA's Billion Dollar Weather and Climate Disaster dataset, which has provided vital information for first responders, the insurance industry, and researchers to plan recovery efforts and assess weather-related risks.

The cuts extended to international climate efforts as well. In February, the administration pulled the US out of global discussions regarding an upcoming global climate change assessment carried out by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). President Trump also ordered federal scientists at NOAA and the US Global Change Research Program to cease all work related to IPCC climate assessments, effectively ending US involvement in one of the world's most critical climate evaluation efforts.

Retreating from the international stage

Earlier this month, the White House announced that the US will withdraw from 66 international bodies, conventions and treaties, including key climate treaties, deemed "contrary to the interests" of the country. The list comprises 35 non-United Nations organizations and 31 United Nations organizations – many of which conduct pivotal work on climate change. These include the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the

world's most authoritative scientific body on climate change, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the global authority providing technical and policy advice to drive conservation, and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UFCCC), the primary global treaty for coordinating international climate action.

The announcement drew strong criticism from experts, world leaders, and the scientific community, who warned that the US will be left behind as the rest of the world embraces the energy transition, shifting away from costly and polluting fossil fuels to cleaner and more affordable renewables like solar and wind. The decision was just the latest in a series of moves aimed at retreating the US from international climate commitments.

Over the past year, the US has exited the Paris Agreement, withdrawn from the board of the Loss and Damage fund for developing nations, and abandoned the Just Energy Transition Partnership, a flagship global climate financing program by rich nations to help developing countries quit coal. It also derailed international negotiations for a global shipping carbon levy and actively obstructed talks for a global plastic treaty, which ultimately collapsed in August after the US and several petrostate allies opposed mandatory caps on plastic production. For the first time, the US also did not send any representatives to the COP30 climate talks in Brazil.

Domestic climate financing efforts have also been gutted. Contributions to the Biden-era US International Climate Finance Plan, which leveraged multilateral and bilateral institutions to assist developing countries with climate mitigation and adaptation, were abruptly halted. Similarly, $4 billion in US pledges to the Green Climate Fund – the world's largest fund dedicated to global climate action –were rescinded under Trump's administration, further weakening the nation's role in addressing the global climate crisis.

Dismantling environmental justice programs

The Trump administration dismantled federal environmental justice initiatives, prioritizing economic deregulation over investments aimed at addressing pollution and inequality in underserved communities. One of its most significant actions was the termination of the Justice40 program. The program was designed to direct federal investments to disadvantaged communities disproportionately affected by pollution hazards, wastewater, climate change impacts, and high energy costs.

The EPA also shut down all 10 of its regional environmental justice offices, which had been instrumental in addressing pollution issues in low-income, historically marginalized, and disadvantaged communities. Experts warned that the move would leave "those living, working, studying, and playing near polluting industries, smog-forming traffic, and contaminated waterways and soil, with little support from the very agency they rely on to enforce protective laws."

The administration also engaged in a widespread campaign to remove, edit, and restrict access to critical data tools used for monitoring environmental, climate, public health, and demographic information. These tools were essential for identifying and addressing the needs of marginalized communities, leaving advocates and researchers with limited resources to track and address systemic environmental injustices.

Rolling back animal and nature protections

The Trump administration moved to roll back key protections under the Endangered Species Act, which has safeguarded plants and animals since the 1970s and is credited with preventing the extinction of hundreds of species. One significant change was the elimination of the US Fish and Wildlife Service's "blanket rule", which automatically provided protections for species listed as "threatened." The law has been credited with preventing the extinction of hundreds of species.

Trump also ordered the removal of key protections to allow commercial fishing in parts of the nearly 500,000-square-mile Pacific Island Heritage National Marine Monument, located about 750 miles west of Hawaii. Home to protected and endangered species, including turtles, whales and Hawaiian monk seals, the area has long been off-limits due to its ecological significance. The administration argued that marine protected areas put American commercial fishermen at a disadvantage, despite evidence from studies showing that these areas benefit both marine ecosystems and fishermen by allowing overfished species to recover.

It wasn't a good year for national parks either. Since Trump took office, the National Park Service has lost 24% percent of its permanent workforce. According to the New York Times, over 90 national parks reported problems between April and July, stemming from staff cuts and a hiring freeze that affected roles ranging from cleaners to rangers and visitor center staff. The cuts undermined essential park services and maintenance during a time of increased visitation.

In June, Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins announced plans to rescind a Clinton-era rule that prohibits road construction, reconstruction, and timber harvest on nearly 59 million acres of the National Forest System. It followed a March executive order and a memo issued by Rollins in April, which laid the groundwork for a major increase in industrial logging across federal forests. Green groups warned that timber and mining activities would pollute air and drinking water and strip away essential habitats for wildlife such as California condors, grizzly bears and wolves of the Yellowstone area, native salmon and trout in the Pacific Northwest, migratory songbirds of the Appalachian hardwoods.

[*Earth.Org Climate Newsletter* 01/2026]

WORLD

Battery passport plan aims to clean up the industry powering clean energy

For millions of consumers, the sustainability scheme stickers found on everything from bananas to chocolate bars and wooden furniture are a way to choose products that are greener and more ethical than some of the alternatives.

Inga Petersen, executive director of the Global Battery Alliance (GBA), is on a mission to create a similar scheme for one of the building blocks of the transition from fossil fuels to clean energy systems: batteries.

“Right now, it’s a race to the bottom for whoever makes the cheapest battery,” Petersen told Climate Home News in an interview.

The GBA is working with industry, international organisations, NGOs and governments to establish a sustainable and transparent battery value chain by 2030.

“One of the things we’re trying to do is to create a marketplace where products can compete on elements other than price,” Petersen said.

Under the GBA’s plan, digital product passports and traceability would be used to issue product-level sustainability certifications, similar to those commonplace in other sectors such as forestry, Petersen said.

Managing battery boom’s risks

Over the past decade, battery deployment has increased 20-fold, driven by record-breaking electric vehicle (EV) sales and a booming market for batteries to store intermittent renewable energy.

Falling prices have been instrumental to the rapid expansion of the battery market. But the breakneck pace of growth has exposed the potential environmental and social harms associated with unregulated battery production.

From South America to Zimbabwe and Indonesia, mineral extraction and refining has led to social conflict, environmental damage, human rights violations and deforestation. In Indonesia, the nickel industry is powered by coal while in Europe, production plants have been met with strong local opposition over pollution concerns.

“We cannot manage these risks if we don’t have transparency,” Petersen said.

The GBA was established in 2017 in response to concerns about the battery industry’s impact as demand was forecast to boom and reports of child labour in the cobalt mines of the Democratic Republic of the Congo made headlines.

The alliance’s initial 19 members recognised that the industry needed to scale rapidly but with “social, environmental and governance guardrails”, said Petersen, who previously worked with the UN Environment Programme to develop guiding principles to minimise the environmental impact of mining.

Digital battery passport

Today, the alliance is working to develop a global certification scheme that will recognise batteries that meet minimum thresholds across a set of environmental, social and governance benchmarks it has defined along the entire value chain.

Participating mines, manufacturing plants and recycling facilities will have to provide data for their greenhouse gas emissions as well as how they perform against benchmarks for assessing biodiversity loss, pollution, child and forced labour, community impacts and respect for the rights of Indigenous peoples, for example.

The data will be independently verified, scored, aggregated and recorded on a battery passport – a digital record of the battery’s composition, which will include the origin of its raw materials and its performance against the GBA’s sustainability benchmarks.

The scheme is due to launch in 2027.

A carrot and a stick

Since the start of the year, some of the world’s largest battery companies have been voluntarily participating in the biggest pilot of the scheme to date.

More than 30 companies across the EV battery and stationary storage supply chains are involved, among them Chinese battery giants CATL and BYD subsidiary FinDreams Battery, miner Rio Tinto, battery producers Samsung SDI and Siemens, automotive supplier Denso and Tesla.

Petersen said she was “thrilled” about support for the scheme. Amid a growing pushback against sustainability rules and standards, “these companies are stepping up to send a public signal that they are still committed to a sustainable and responsible battery value chain,” she said.

There are other motivations for battery producers to know where components in their batteries have come from and whether they have been produced responsibly.

In 2023, the EU adopted a law regulating the batteries sold on its market.

From 2027, it mandates all batteries to meet environmental and safety criteria and to have a digital passport accessed via a QR code that contains information about the battery’s composition, its carbon footprint and its recycling content.

The GBA certification will support companies achieve compliance with the EU regulation and it will “add a carrot” by recognising manufacturers that go beyond meeting the bloc’s rules on nature and human rights, Petersen said.

Raising standards in complex supply chain

But challenges remain, in part due to the complexity of battery supply chains.

In the case of timber, “you have a single input material but then you have a very complex range of end products. For batteries, it’s almost the reverse,” Petersen said.

The GBA wants its certification scheme to cover all critical minerals present in batteries, covering dozens of different mining, processing and manufacturing processes and hundreds of facilities.

“One of the biggest impacts will be rewarding the leading performers through preferential access to capital, for example, with investors choosing companies that are managing their risk responsibly and transparently,” Petersen said.

It could help influence public procurement and how companies, such as EV makers, choose their suppliers, she added. End consumers will also be able to access a summary of the GBA’s scores when deciding which product to buy.

US, Europe rush to build battery supply chain

Today, the GBA has more than 150 members across the battery value chain, including more than 50 companies, of which over a dozen are Chinese.

China produces more than three-quarters of batteries sold globally and it dominates the world’s battery recycling capacity, leaving the US and Europe scrambling to reduce their dependence on Beijing by building their own battery supply chains.

Petersen hopes the alliance’s work can help build trust in the sector amid heightened geopolitical tensions. “People want to know where the materials are coming from and which actors are involved,” she said.

At the same time, companies increasingly recognise that failing to manage sustainability risks can threaten their operations. Protests over environmental concerns have shut down mines and battery factories across the world. “Most companies know that and that’s why they’re making these efforts,” Petersen added.

[*Climate Home News*, 25/02/2026]

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Convictions under environmental legislation: December 2025 to February 2026 (March data not available)

[Note: the EPD no longer classifies second (and subsequent) offences.]

The EPD's summary of convictions recorded and fines imposed during the above period is as follows:

December 2025

Seventy convictions were recorded in December 2025 for breaches of legislation enforced by the Environmental Protection Department.

Six of the convictions were under the Air Pollution Control Ordinance, 11 were under the Noise Control Ordinance, 23 were under the Public Cleansing and Prevention of Nuisances Regulation, 2 were under the Product Eco-responsibility Ordinance, 27 were under the Waste Disposal Ordinance and 1 was under the Water Pollution Control Ordinance.

A company was fined $28,000, which was the heaviest fine in December for importing controlled waste without a permit.

January 2026

Thirty-four convictions were recorded in January 2026 for breaches of legislation enforced by the Environmental Protection Department.

Four of the convictions were under the Air Pollution Control Ordinance, 8 were under the Noise Control Ordinance, 14 were under the Public Cleansing and Prevention of Nuisances Regulation, 1 was under the Product Eco-responsibility Ordinance, 6 were under the Waste Disposal Ordinance and 1 was under the Water Pollution Control Ordinance.

A company was fined $80,000, which was the heaviest fine in January for carrying out prescribed construction work not in accordance with the conditions of a construction noise permit.

February 2026

Twenty-two convictions were recorded in February 2026 for breaches of legislation enforced by the Environmental Protection Department.

One of the convictions was under the Air Pollution Control Ordinance, 3 were under the Noise Control Ordinance, 9 were under the Public Cleansing and Prevention of Nuisances Regulation, 1 was under the Product Eco-responsibility Ordinance, 6 were under the Waste Disposal Ordinance and 2 were under the Water Pollution Control Ordinance.

A company was fined $40,000, which was the heaviest fine in February for importing controlled waste without a permit.

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