

PERSPECTIVE

The road to Glasgow



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Madrid was not a success. I mean no criticism of the Spanish capital's elegant step into the breach after Chile's domestic troubles pulled the plug on Santiago hosting last year's global climate talks. But the desired outcome was stymied, as it has been in the past, by the big emitters.

What it means is that all eyes are on the crucial COP26 summit to be hosted by the UK government in Glasgow in November. The talks will see the Paris Agreement come into effect, alongside immense pressure for greater emission-cutting ambition from all countries.

For the UK this will be a defining moment, as we wrestle with Brexit, to prove we still have what it takes on the international stage. It will require unparalleled diplomatic effort to take what was achieved in Paris five years ago and turn it into something with a chance of preventing the worst impact of climate change. Fortunately, the UK has an unrivalled diplomatic machine, and I know the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's network of energy and climate attachés is already kicking into action, so I have some confidence.

It also means leading domestically in the UK with what's required of economies around the world – to have the vision and political bravery to reinvent our economy around net zero. This poses gargantuan challenges for the UK – in transport, heat and (still) for our power system. But, based on the 40% cut in emissions since 1990 against a backdrop of more than 60% growth in GDP, I am again confident.

Climate emergency

To be clear, there *is* a climate emergency and we must remove greenhouse gas emissions from the global energy system as quickly as possible. And by “we” I mean governments, businesses and individuals, not just in the technologies we deploy but in the way we use them and how we behave.

But it's not only the amount of energy we use today that needs to be cleaned up. Global demand continues to grow and this must

be met in a sustainable way, in particular for the three billion people still cooking on some form of solid biomass, with serious impacts on health causing around four million premature deaths every year, mostly women and children. And for the near billion people who still have no access to electricity and the quality of life that accompanies that.

More generally, economic development and the growing middle classes in low and middle income countries, in Asia in particular, are rapidly pushing up energy demand. It's expected to grow globally by another 25% by 2040.

We cannot view these issues independently. Protecting our planet and reducing the imbalances across societies is the single greatest challenge of our age.

Simply, we need more, cleaner, better-managed energy – urgently. And this year at the Energy Institute we will significantly ramp up our contribution to this with:

- New technical programmes in hydrogen, carbon capture, usage and storage (CCUS), integrated networks and fugitive methane reduction.
- A guide for future consumers of hydrogen.
- A new health and safety conference bringing together our growing body of partner companies working in onshore and offshore wind power and other renewables.
- A special EI climate change award for young people at the Big Bang science and engineering fair.
- Setting science-based targets for our own operations to reach net zero well before 2050.

But before all of that, this month there will be a very different feel to IP Week, our annual gathering of global oil and gas industry leaders and influencers.

The 2020 programme will focus decisively on the low carbon future and the role of oil and gas industry in it. Alongside leaders from across the industry – including BP's incoming Chief Executive Bernard

Looney FREng FEI – we'll be bringing in external speakers from environmental NGOs, government, the investment community and elsewhere to provide vital context to the urgent global challenge we face.

The power of human ingenuity

Urgency will, I am sure, mean discontinuity in our energy system. But it must not give rise to panic. Such a fundamental change to our global economy calls for an approach that is honest, based on evidence and as low on regrets as possible.

Because the inescapable reality is, even as we pursue all and every low carbon alternative, oil and gas still account for 54% of the world's energy needs. Indeed we should never forget that our ability to harness these resources has delivered incredible human progress and improvements in our quality of life.

The question for those companies working in oil and gas is whether everything possible is being done to tackle fugitive emissions of methane – a potent greenhouse gas – and bring on vital CCUS to move us more quickly towards net zero? The engineering capabilities are certainly there, as are the financial weight and the proven ability to deliver globally and at scale.

As an engineer who spent half his career in oil and gas and the other in the power sector, I'm a big believer in human ingenuity and our ability to solve big challenges through technology. I've seen it first-hand time and again. Professionals in energy have changed the world before and I am confident 2020 will be a year in which we show we will do it again. ●

IP Week 2020 programme and registration details are available at www.ipweek.co.uk