

## PRESENTATION

Speech  
Climate  
Global Environment  
Transatlantic Program

# Considering Population and Emissions Together under a Novel Liability Framework

TimeLoc

8 October 2010

Tianjin

China

Phil Hannam

[Emily McGlynn](#) [1]



[2]

While the world waits for an international emissions reduction agreement under the UNFCCC, negotiating governments continue a stalemate on key issues. Historical emissions, population dynamics, and trade may be the missing pieces of the puzzle. Hannam (UNEP-Tongji Institute) and McGlynn (Ecologic Institute) connect these components under one framework for adjusting national emissions reduction responsibilities. To determine how much each nation should reduce emissions, they ask: Who benefits from past, present, and future emissions?

The most recent [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#) [3] (UNFCCC) meeting, held in [Tianjin, China](#) [4] from 4 until 9 October 2010, was meant to bring the world's governments closer to an international agreement on climate change. This goal seems to remain [out of reach](#) [5], at least [this year](#) [6], as delegates

continue to debate (or [avoid debate](#) [7]) over which countries should be responsible for reducing emissions and by how much emissions should be reduced.

Two young researchers presented a possible way to move forward. Phillip Hannam and Emily McGlynn, both of the US, held a side event during the Tianjin meeting to discuss a framework for accounting for past, present and future greenhouse gas emissions and holding a broader range of entities accountable for climate impacts. They believe incorporating several key variables in an emissions reduction agreement, such as historical emissions, population growth, and trade, may allow for more opportunities to ["give and take"](#) [8] among negotiators. They hope this can help move the negotiations closer to an equitable and science-based global emissions reduction agreement.

### **Understanding the framework**

Hannam and McGlynn's framework is based on the assumptions that a long term goal of equal per capita emissions for the entire global population is the most equitable outcome of reducing emissions. This concept is widely supported among [academics](#) [9], [civil society](#) [10] and some [governments](#) [11].

They also asserted that holding certain nations responsible for historical emissions, while not accounting for the climate impacts of population growth, is inconsistent. Population considerations, including demographic changes and growth, are highlighted as some of the key missing ingredients in past proposed UNFCCC frameworks.

In order to incorporate historical emissions, population, and other components that might affect individual nations' responsibilities for climate impacts (such as trade), Hannam and McGlynn propose a framework which utilizes two novel criteria: benefits received from an action resulting in an impact and the potential for future impact. Under this framework, Parties to the UNFCCC could be held accountable for actions which result in climate impacts, including past emissions and future population growth, if they are presently gaining benefit from such actions (see the White Paper for more details).

They propose that each Party's liability for climate impacts, as defined under the framework, would determine their emissions reduction responsibility. The broader definition of liability, claim Hannam and McGlynn, may appeal to a greater variety of Parties and facilitate more constructive discussion under the UNFCCC.

### **Audience response and participation**

Approximately 20 audience members participated in the side event discussion, including representatives from NGOs, the UNFCCC and

governments including Belgium, China and Bangladesh. The presentation was highly interactive, with the presenters and audience members discussing “simulations” of the framework model together.

Some questions from the audience included how to account for past emissions from which seemingly little present benefit was gained and how to account for population considerations which may have unclear effects on climate. For example, one audience member posited that perhaps a child born today will invent a machine which can save the world from climate change.

Hannam emphasized that the framework is defined to take into account only actionable impacts. It is up to the stakeholders of the framework to determine what they consider actionable, which a climate change machine may or may not be. Hannam and McGlynn maintained that in order for the framework to be useful, closer analysis will be required to determine the ultimate beneficiaries of actions implicated in climate change.

There was general agreement among audience members that using benefit as the basis of liability for climate impacts could be a useful tool, and is a novel idea among proposed UNFCCC frameworks.

**For more information:**

- White Paper: [“Benefit-based framework for climate change burden sharing: considering population, cumulative emissions and trade in the past, present, and future”](#) [12]
- presentation from the side event, [“Considering population and emissions together under a Novel Liability Framework”](#) [13]

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- [Emily McGlynn](#) [14] is a US citizen and worked as a Transatlantic Fellow at Ecologic Institute in Berlin, Germany where she analysed US, EU, and international climate and energy policy.

Any views, concepts, and possible errors in the research, publications and presentations are those of the authors only, and do not represent the UNEP-Tongji Institute of Environment for Sustainable Development, the Ecologic Institute, or Unis-Terre (the organization which sponsored the side event) in any way.

## Further Links:

- Ecologic Institute Presentation: [Earth Summit 2012: how it can help with a global climate deal](#) [15] - Emily McGlynn
- [Ecologic Institute supports negotiators at climate negotiations](#) [16]
- Ecologic Institute Publication: [Das zukünftige Klimaschutz-Regime der Vereinten Nationen - Ein Wegweiser durch die Verhandlungsarchitektur](#) [17] - Camilla Bausch and Michael Mehling

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## Links

[1] <https://www.ecologic.eu/3501>

[2] [https://www.ecologic.eu/sites/files/presentation/2018/tianjian\\_sideevent\\_mcglynn.jpg](https://www.ecologic.eu/sites/files/presentation/2018/tianjian_sideevent_mcglynn.jpg)

[3] <http://unfccc.int/2860.php>

[4] [http://unfccc.int/meetings/intersessional/tianjin\\_10/items/5695.php](http://unfccc.int/meetings/intersessional/tianjin_10/items/5695.php)

[5] <https://www.businessgreen.com/business-green/news/2270644/china-strikes-conciliatory-tone>

[6] <https://allafrica.com/stories/201010180075.html>

[7]

[https://www.sci-tech-today.com/news/Climate-Talks-Make-Little-Progress/story.xhtml?story\\_id=031001QL3KR1](https://www.sci-tech-today.com/news/Climate-Talks-Make-Little-Progress/story.xhtml?story_id=031001QL3KR1)

[8] <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/B6VP6-4PS5KDB-1/2/7386b3c938115b588068f50f4db99acd>

[9]

<http://www.pik-potsdam.de/news/press-releases/a-global-limit-on-emissions-equal-per-capita-emissions-rights-and-201cpeak-and-trade201d-emissions-trading-for-the-201c2b0max-climate-strategy201d>

[10] <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/4994296.stm>

[11] <https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,503155,00.html>

[12]

<https://docs.google.com/fileview?id=0B7XijvqHy-fGMjNhN2JhZTktMGZkZC00NmRjLWJhMGMtOTA3NGI4ZGY1O TZh&hl=en&authkey=CLHs3vcP>

[13]

[https://docs.google.com/fileview?id=0B7XijvqHy-fGNDkwMjQzMDItYmI3Ni00ZDI0LTlkNDctZDg5ZmI3ZTI0NjA3&hl=en&authkey=CNb0x\\_QN](https://docs.google.com/fileview?id=0B7XijvqHy-fGNDkwMjQzMDItYmI3Ni00ZDI0LTlkNDctZDg5ZmI3ZTI0NjA3&hl=en&authkey=CNb0x_QN)

[14] <https://ecologic.eu/3501>

[15] <https://www.ecologic.eu/node/3596>

[16] <https://www.ecologic.eu/node/3084>

[17] <https://www.ecologic.eu/node/2240>