

First Meeting of the Asia-Pacific Network of Energy Think-Tanks (APNETT), 2 June 2020

SUMMARY

The first meeting of the Asia-Pacific Network of Energy Think-Tanks (APNETT) was held virtually on 2 June 2020. Views and suggestions of APNETT members were sought on the plans for the network and on a number of emerging issues in the Asia-Pacific energy transition.

APNETT convenes academic institutions, think tanks, universities and not-for-profit entities to facilitate exchange on energy topics and develop collaborative research on energy issues identified by ESCAP's Secretariat and its member States through intergovernmental processes. The inaugural meeting was held in Bangkok on 8 October 2019 in Bangkok, Thailand.

The meeting was organized in lieu of a face-to-face meeting planned in early 2020 in Melbourne, Australia the objectives of the meeting were:

- a) Re-engage the network following the inaugural meeting in October 2019;
- b) Finalize and agree on the Terms of Reference for APNETT;
- c) Discuss emerging research issues in the Asia-Pacific energy transition, especially those relating to ESCAP's work program and issues arising as a result of COVID-19; and
- d) Plan future activities for the network.

The meeting was hosted by ESCAP, the University of Melbourne and Deakin University.

OVERVIEW

The deliberations covered the following topics:

- a. The Deakin University microgrid and the university's path to carbon neutrality
- b. APNETT Terms of Reference and forward planning for 2020 and beyond
- c. COVID-19 and the sustainable energy transition
- d. Coal phase out in the Asia Pacific

PROCEEDINGS

1. Opening Remarks

Professor Nino Ficca, Professor of Industry Engagement at Deakin University served as moderator for the meeting. Prof. Ficca welcomed all the participants and introduced the hosts for the meeting.

Professor Zou Ji, President of Energy Foundation China in his opening remarks the meeting reflected on the challenging circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, but also the opportunities arising from the resulting global public interest in overarching issues – which include health, climate change, and others. Professor Zou noted Energy Foundation China's eagerness to pursue efforts towards achievement of Sustainable Development Goals 7 and 13. He thanked ESCAP for its work to date in creating APNETT and congratulated the members on its establishment.

Professor Michael Brear, Director of Melbourne Energy Institute at Melbourne University, as co-host of the meeting, reiterated the original intention to host the meeting in Melbourne and wished members a successful meeting, while sharing his hopes a meeting of the network can be held in Melbourne at some point in future.

2. Keynote Presentation

Dr Adrian Panow, Director of Deakin Energy at Deakin University, as co-host of the meeting and keynote speaker, provided an outline of a major energy infrastructure project currently being undertaken at the University's Waurin Ponds Campus: The University is constructing a microgrid consisting of a 7 megawatt solar field, a 1 megawatt/2 megawatt-hour battery and 250 kilowatts of distributed rooftop solar PV with distributed small batteries. The project is intended to meet multiple objectives in research, sustainability and reduction in energy costs.

The project will offset 79 percent of the campus's grid electricity emissions – which, due to Victoria's reliance on lignite means its carbon intensity of electricity is among the highest in the world – and help Deakin University to meet its goals as a 'university signatory' to the Sustainable Development Goals. The facility will provide a test bed for innovation, with an explicit allowance for connection of other forms of generation and storage, as well as enabling investigation of sophisticated grid management approaches. It also provides a platform for studying and applying circular economy principles. The University intends to learn from the project and repeat the experience on other campuses, as well as use the experience to guide and inform developments and research internationally.

3. APNETT Terms of Reference and Forward Planning

Michael Williamson, Section Chief of the ESCAP Energy Division provided a summary of the background to APNETT's formation to serve three pillars in assisting ESCAP and its member States to address research and knowledge gaps in sustainable energy development and SDG7:

- Pillar 1: Knowledge creation: Collaboration, information exchange, partnerships and joint research projects between APNETT members and ESCAP.
- Pillar 2: Capacity building: Technical support for senior officials of member States and other stakeholders in understanding energy issues and identifying sustainable energy solutions.
- Pillar 3: Policy advice: Strengthening the energy science-policy interface by engaging with energy decision makers across the Asia Pacific region and translating cutting edge research into policy advice.

Members provided comments and feedback on the draft Terms of Reference (ToR). The key issues raised included a need to identify and include key procedural items within the ToR, and to acknowledge the specific (and differing) needs of stakeholders across different subregions and even countries within a subregion.

ESCAP will revise the ToR accordingly and distribute a final version of the document after the meeting.

4. COVID-19 and the sustainable energy transition

Michael Williamson introduced the topic and **Dr. Hina Aslam of the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) Pakistan** provided an overview of a proposed collaborative research project to be led by SDPI investigation the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the clean energy transition.

The work will:

- Decipher impacts of COVID on the energy sector.
- Recast COVID response to align with sustainable energy and low carbon transformation.
- Identify risks and opportunities for policymakers.

- Outline areas where regional cooperation can support recovery and transformation.
- Feed into policy advice via ESCAP Energy Committee and Commission theme study 2021.

SDPI sought (or will seek) input from APNETT members in the form of:

- Guidance on scope and content.
- Multidisciplinary and multi-country perspectives.
- Linkage to other institutional work streams, private sector and investment.
- Contribution of ideas and analysis to chapters.
- Peer review.

APNETT members provided feedback on the initial research steps.

5. Coal phase-out in Asia and the Pacific

Michael Williamson provided contextual background including the ‘lock-in risk’ of coal-fired power station construction and the investment community’s movements away from coal. **Dr Ursula Fuentes Hutfilter of Climate Analytics** described the current situation for coal, emphasizing that a rapid phase-out of coal is now recognized as the single most important step towards decarbonization across a wide range of scenarios.

Work by Climate Analytics has estimated that the achievement of Paris Agreement goals is contingent on a peak in coal-fired power generation by 2020, followed by a rapid decrease to 80% below 2010 levels by 2030, and phasing out by 2040 at the latest.

Coal expansion plans are an enormous risk to achievement of climate goals, and even the existing capacity is inconsistent with the Paris Agreement. Construction and commissioning data indicates that new development activity is reducing, but South-East and South Asia dominate development worldwide.

Climate Analytics is working with ESCAP to deliver a regional trends report 2020 which will cover the following elements:

- Overview of current situation, trends and expansion plans
- drivers of coal expansion in Asia Pacific
- How can trend be reversed to be in line with Paris Agreement and SDG
- Benefits of transition away from coal in line with PA (Sustainable development implications of pathways)
- Policy options including based on best practice examples
- Options for regional co-operation

APNETT members provided feedback and insight into the study and a range of related energy sector issues.

6. Closing Remarks

Participants agreed that the meeting was useful and efficient, and that this is a good indicator for the future of the network.

Moving forward, ESCAP and its research partners will incorporate feedback into the structure of the two research projects that were discussed and will invite offline comments by email to feed into its work going forward.