

# COP26 Summit Heads into Final Week

By Don Sutherland

Today, the COP26 conference moved into its second, and likely, final week. Barring its running past the scheduled timeframe, the week will end with a concluding statement on which the parties agreed. This afternoon, the outline of “possible elements” for that schedule was released.

The language contained in such outlines often differs from that which is ultimately adopted. Nevertheless, this document suggests that there may remain a large gap between what is agreed and what actually needs to be done to limit the warming.

Several items are draw attention:

- The bulleted items are described as “possible elements.” That means that not all have been agreed and that some might not be agreed.
- The document’ language contains no explicit statement that the burning of fossil fuels must be wound down or phased out. Even mention of the dirtiest fossil fuel, coal, is not made. Instead, it relies on the very indirect phrase, “responding to the science.”
- There is language for a “renewed call” for nations to submit “long-term strategies” aimed at achieving net zero emissions. This language hints that specific and concrete strategies toward that end won’t be part of the work product of COP26. There is a difference between setting a very long-term goal and also laying out the path, even a general one, aimed at achieving that goal. Only when the long-term strategies are provided does it become clear whether the goal is credible, much less attainable.

At the same time, there are some potentially promising elements. Two in particular are:

- “Specific measures for emissions intensive industries.” Whether the Scope 3 emissions from the oil, gas, and coal industries will be included in determining emissions intensity remains to be seen. If, however, the burden is shifted to consuming industries, that could wind up being a weaker strategy than one that would lead to the phase-out of fossil fuel burning.
- “Actions to transition to low-carbon economies.” An agreed framework that leads to material progress in such a transition would be constructive. However, the failure to cite the need to wind down the burning of fossil fuels hints that this section could be general. It could also include carbon capture and sequestration (CCS), which today is highly ineffective, to permit the continued production of fossil fuels. CCS, even if it were perfect, would not eliminate Scope 3 emissions, which constitute the majority of greenhouse gas emissions.

