**Last week saw the conclusion of one of the most important and consequential meetings of world leaders that you and I are likely to see in our lifetimes. In case you missed it it was called COP 26 and it involved two full weeks of climate negotiations between delegations from 197 countries ranging from the world's biggest greenhouse gas emissions like China, the USA and the European Union, right through to the small island nations who've contributed the least to our climate emergency but who are already suffering the worst of the consequences. The main goal of the conference was to reach agreement on what each country needs to do to prevent average global surface temperatures reaching more than 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. Some of it was good, some of it was bad, and a few bits were downright ugly. So what were the main outcomes and what does it mean for you and me?**

**Hello and welcome to Just Have Another Think, our monthly look at the ecological, environmental and social consequences of our 21st century climate emergency, and never have those consequences been in sharper focus than during the two weeks of COP 26 that we've just witnessed. If you listened to the big announcements from the conference podiums then you might be forgiven for thinking that some really positive step changes have been achieved during the conference. So let's scratch the surface a bit and have a look at the substance behind the words.**

**Glasgow was the first time that India has ever set any kind of net zero target at all so that's definitely progress. And committing to 50% renewables by 2030 is certainly better than no commitment at all. But prime minister Modi's proposed net zero carbon date of 2070 misses a key goal of the COP 26 summit by 20 years. It might be a clever piece of positioning by the Indian leader to give him some leverage to demand a greater level of funding from the rich developing nations, and frankly who can blame him, but posturing like this from a country with well over a billion inhabitants seems like a very dangerous game to play with people's lives.**

**The Glasgow declaration on forests and land use is a pledge to end or significantly reduce deforestation by 2030. More than $19 billion has been set aside to help drive the initiative and the fact that it was signed by Brazil Indonesia and Russia would suggest a positive breakthrough. But history shows us a poor track record of countries sticking to these sorts of pledges. Back in 2014 a similar landmark agreement called the New York declaration on forests promised to cut deforestation by 50% by 2020 and end it completely by 2030. Since then there's actually been an increase in global deforestation contributing an estimated 23 percent to total global carbon dioxide emissions under United Nations rules man-made plantations count as forests even though they contain none of the rich ecosystems and biodiversity of indigenous forests. Environmental groups worry that a big chunk of the 19.2 billion dollars allocated to the Glasgow declaration will be used to tear down existing forestry land to create more of these plantations for things like palm oil, paper and wood pellets, instead of preserving and protecting the trees and plants and wildlife that are now so critically endangered. And how about this doozy - the declaration's terminology of deforestation refers to permanent loss of forests when land is fully converted to some other use like agriculture or development. It's almost completely silent on the role of traditional logging in driving forest degradation from within. Under this agreement loggers can still disappear deep inside a rainforest like the Amazon and destroy forest biodiversity and carbon stocks resulting in almost exactly the same devastating impacts as true deforestation.**

**You probably don't need me to tell you that methane is a very powerful greenhouse gas. Over a 20-year period it's about 80 times more powerful than carbon dioxide. It comes from landfills and livestock and it leaks out of oil and gas wells and from the pipelines that stretch over vast distances across countries and continents. It also gets deliberately released by well operators through the processes of venting and flaring. Atmospheric methane has caused about 30 percent of global warming since pre-industrial times and concentrations have soared since 2007, mainly as a result of the fracking boom. So the global methane pledge signed at COP 26 is good news right? Well here again there are just a couple of minor wrinkles that you might want to be aware of. To start with there are some notable absentees from the pledge including China and India, as well as the vast landmass of Russia - a country with the most notoriously leaky fossil fuel infrastructure on the planet. And then there's the actual numbers. According to climate expert Myles Allen of Oxford University, even the most ambitious plans for cutting methane emissions in the short term will only avoid between 0.1 and 0.2 degrees of warming by 2050. Compare that with current CO2 levels which are driving about 0.2 degrees of warming every decade! In an interview with New Scientist, Allen said unless we get CO2 under control action on methane is kind of moot... "it worries me", he said "that it's being touted as the great success of COP26"**

**One of the most contentious issues in global climate discussions is always finance and this COP conference was no exception. Back in 2009 the rich nations agreed to put in place at least 100 billion dollars of support finance for developing nations every year by 2020. Sounds like a lot, but in reality it's barely more than a rounding error compared to the two trillion dollars the world spends on military hardware every year. And shamefully the rich nations haven't even managed to stump up that paltry amount of money anyway. At this COP the goal posts were moved again and everyone promised they would definitely get to the full hundred billion no later than 2023. Why not do it right now? Well apparently we poor lambs in the global north are a bit strapped for cash right now... "we are struggling each year to find money"... funny how money instantly appeared at the start of the covered crisis isn't it? And how the USA alone managed to find almost 800 billion dollars to spend on its defence budget in 2020, and how in the last five years 2.5 trillion dollars have been found to subsidise the fossil fuel industry... "2.5 trillion dollars in the last five years, six years went into subsidies for fossil fuel, that's a definition of insanity". Sovereign states have always had mechanisms to generate cash when they really need to. It's just a question of prioritization, and apparently the hundreds of millions of people in vulnerable countries in the global south just haven't shuffled their way up to the top of the priority list yet. Commercial investors got involved in week one of the conference when ex-governor of the Bank of England Mark Carney announced the Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero or GFANZ... "as you've heard today as part of GFANZ over 450 major financial institutions from 45 countries are committing to manage their balance sheets - balance sheets that total over 130 trillion dollars - in line with net zero. So make no mistake, the money is here if the world wants to use it." According to the unclimatesummit.org COP 26 fact check page though, Carney's numbers just don't add up. They include every kind of fund imaginable including people's mortgages and credit card balances which will obviously never be part of helping out developing nations. Genuine private climate finance was estimated to be about 340 billion dollars in 2020. That is more than three times better than the pathetic collective efforts of our western governments but it's still only 0.3 percent of the number that Mark Carney claimed to be "here if the world wants to use it". The Rainforest Action Network also points out that the 93 banks that signed the GFANZ pledge had also provided no less than 575 billion dollars of lending and underwriting to the fossil fuel industry just in 2020 alone. Rainforest Action Network finance director Tom Picken said "the disconnect between climate commitments and boardroom decisions is staggering".**

**So what about coal then? The dirtiest and most damaging of all fossil fuels. Well more than 40 countries including heavy users like Canada, Poland, South Korea, Ukraine, Indonesia and Vietnam pledged to phase out their use of coal for electricity generation with the larger economies getting there in the 2030s and the smaller economies in the 2040s. But expert assessments have found that for the world to stay within 1.5 degrees Celsius of warming all developed economies would have to phase out coal completely before 2030 and not at some vague time during the 30s and 40s. And guess who didn't sign up to the pledge. Well among many others it was of course good old Australia, China, India and the United States.**

**On vehicle emissions we did get a commitment from car makers including Ford, GM, Jaguar, Land Rover, Mercedes-Benz and Volvo to end sales of new cars producing greenhouse gas emissions by 2035 in major markets and by 2040 everywhere else in the world. But the two largest car manufacturers in the world, VW and Toyota didn't sign the pledge, nor did two other car giants Renault-Nissan and Hyundai-Kia. And the declaration didn't get the backing of the United States, China or Germany either. So yet again despite warm words about the EV revolution, progress is still being hindered by major players.**

**One of the rare positives over the two-week talking shop was this press conference led by Denmark and Costa Rica. They announced a partnership of 12 countries called the Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance or BOGA. It represents the first state-led initiative of its type and it recognizes that there is no future for oil and gas in a 1.5 degree world. As the largest oil producer in Europe, Denmark led the way by announcing it'd cancel all future licensing rounds for new oil exploration and drilling and end all its existing fossil fuel production completely by 2050. But as usual the world's biggest oil and gas producers were nowhere to be seen and even the COP 26 hosts the United Kingdom declined to join the alliance. All we got from our government was a wishy-washy statement saying there would likely be an ongoing but diminishing demand for oil and gas, so the UK could not commit to phasing out the energy sources entirely.**

**The announcement in week two from the US and China pledging to work more closely together on climate change issues came as something of a surprise and was certainly very welcome... "the United States and China have no shortage of differences, but on climate, on climate cooperation is the only way to get this job done" But quite what that'll look like in the coming months and years is anyone's guess. And despite the fact that it produces nearly 15 percent of total global greenhouse gas emissions, there was no discussion at all about animal agriculture and meat consumption anywhere on the official delegates agenda. So as we reached the end of the two-week conference and after an extra day of frantic negotiations a final draft of the COP 26 declaration was signed off by all 197 countries. Some of the wording was watered down as usual of course. This sentence on fossil fuels in the first draft for example became this sentence in the second and third drafts and then in a very last minute intervention from India the words "phase out" were changed to "phase down". Believe it or not though this is the first ever COP declaration in 26 years to even have any mention of fossil fuels in it at all. Big oil gas and coal producing countries, especially Saudi Arabia, Russia and Australia have always managed to have any language about fossil fuels completely removed from previous COP agreements. And they tried very hard to keep those references out this year too. There were more than 500 lobbyists from the fossil fuel industry at this COP. That's twice as many delegates as any country at the conference. But it looks like those lobbyists have finally found themselves on the wrong side of history. The fact that this sentence survived at all should be taken as a minor victory and it arguably opens the floodgates for much stronger language at COP 27 in Egypt next year. There were other little wins in the text too. There was a commitment from all developed nations to double their financial assistance for adaptation in developing nations. While that only moves those contributions from utterly unacceptable to just about the bare minimum, it does at least represent progress. There's also a reference to increased recognition of loss and damage in the text to account for damages to developing nations from the historical effects of climate change caused by developed nations, and it was eventually agreed that countries would come back with strengthened nationally determined contributions or NDCs at next year's COP meeting in Egypt, instead of waiting five more years as was previously agreed. Despite these baby steps though the sum total of all the herculean negotiating efforts of the hundreds of extremely dedicated country representatives at COP 26 was not enough to put the world on track to get anywhere near limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels. According to the team at Climate Action Tracker, who held a brutally frank press conference from inside COP26 during week two, current global policies and actions fall far short of the NDCs agreed at Paris in 2015 and they're currently taking us to at least 2.7 degrees Celsius of warming by the end of this century. In the unlikely event that every single country gets back on course to meet their 2030 NDC targets then we'd still be on track for about 2.4 degrees of warming, and if in the even more hopeful event that all submitted and binding long term targets were achieved that would limit warming to 2.1 degrees. And if every single country met every single new pledge and target that they all frantically published just prior to or during this conference then that would still only limit warming to 1.8 degrees. The Climate Action Tracker team very politely call that last option the optimistic scenario, but they certainly don't regard it as the likely one. In reality, as a recent IPCC report highlighted, if we're to stand any chance of keeping additional warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius then greenhouse gas emissions will have to be halved by 2030. During lockdown year we reduced emissions by 5.4 percent, so basically we need to do that every single year for the next nine years and then keep doing it every year after that. But nothing like that is happening. In fact as the world has started to bounce back from COVID in 2021 we've seen the second largest increase in greenhouse gas emissions in recorded history. So does all this mean we should collectively all get thoroughly despondent? No. It means we should all collectively get thoroughly determined. We all know what changes we need to make in our own lives so get on and make those changes now. And get involved in the global movement to put relentless pressure on our political and business leaders to take far more urgent action than what was pledged at this latest summit. The chief European Union climate negotiator Frans Timmerman, managed to sum up the magnitude of our global emergency quite neatly during his speech at one of the many COP 26 meetings when he held up a photograph of his one-year-old grandson case and said this.. "I was thinking, Kais will be 31 when we're in 2015. And it's quite a thought to understand that if we succeed he'll be living in a world that's livable, he'll be living in an economy that is clean with air that is clean, at peace with his environment. If we fail, and I mean fail now in the next couple of years, he will fight with other human beings for water and food". That fight is already happening in many parts of the global south but if our society doesn't change radically and rapidly then it'll be coming to all of us at some point in the next couple of decades. Thanks for listening and I'll see you soon.**