

Obama plans climate tag team at G20 on Abbott

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United States President Barack Obama plans to team up with other world leaders at the G20 in Brisbane next month to ensure Prime Minister Tony Abbott, the summit chairman, allows a thorough discussion on climate change. Mr Obama would likely have strong support from European leaders to push climate at the G20, while Mr Abbott's natural ally would be climate sceptic and Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

Mr Obama's international adviser at the White House, Caroline Atkinson, said the G20 economies generated 80 per cent of the world's carbon emissions and should give a political push to "specific steps" to reduce global warming. Asked how the US would approach the discussions given Mr Abbott's decision to abolish Australia's carbon tax, Ms Atkinson said "there would be many people around the table" to promote discussion.

Mr Obama has made climate change a key plank of his foreign policy agenda and is pushing for a major agreement at the United Nations climate summit in Paris next year.

Mr Abbott skipped the UN climate summit in New York last month, where Mr Obama and British Prime Minister David Cameron urged decisive action to contain global warming.

Energy efficiency talks planned

Government sources said Australia planned to have a discussion at the G20 meeting on energy efficiency, and climate change would likely be part of that agenda item. While Australia is willing to incorporate climate into the energy efficiency agenda, a government source said the G20 was primarily an economic forum and not necessarily the best vehicle for major climate discussion. The UN was a more appropriate forum, the government adviser said.

"As extreme weather events have become more frequent, as the next key date in the international negotiations on climate which is December 2015 comes closer, there is more of a focus among leaders," said Ms Atkinson, deputy national security adviser for international economics and Mr Obama's G20 sherpa. "We expect leaders will have a discussion about that."

World leaders will descend on Australia for the G20 meeting on November 15 to 16 to discuss lifting economic growth, closing tax loopholes, boosting infrastructure investment and reforming financial rules.

The Coalition abolished the carbon tax in July, a move that those close to Mr Obama say it disappointed the President, even though he privately conceded to Mr Abbott that the Prime Minister had an election mandate to do so. Ms Atkinson wants the climate change talks linked to infrastructure investment, to encourage investment in low-emissions technology and clean energy.

Pressure on Australia increasing

It is the second time this year Ms Atkinson has publicly ramped up pressure on Australia to make climate change a key discussion point at the G20. Ms Atkinson otherwise praised Australia's G20 presidency, hailing its focus on economic growth and infrastructure investment, in a speech to the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

Australia has tried to keep the G20 focused on a narrow set of economic priorities to ensure progress.

Australia and the US have a close relationship, particularly on international security and intelligence, as evidenced by Mr Abbott's eagerness to join the US in re-entering Iraq to fight against Islamic State militants.