

‘Dead rat’ deal saves Lima climate summit

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The UN Climate Change Conference COP 20 in Lima, Peru. Photo: Reuters

- China, India and African nations succeed in retaining developing/developed nation distinction, despite opposition from the US and Australia.
- The legal status of any global deal reached in Paris next year was also excluded.

Climate change talks in Lima have pulled back from the brink of disaster, but the prospect of a global climate deal in Paris next year is now under a cloud.

Negotiators agreed to a highly watered-down deal that stripped out a formal review process for the post-2020 commitments that countries will make before Paris.

Whether the Paris deal will be legally binding was also put off.

The deal – known as the “Lima call for climate action” – came after a day of deep divisions between developed nations and India, China and African countries. Under the deal, China and the world’s poorest countries succeeded in reintroducing words stressing the distinction between developing and developed countries that the United States, supported by Australia, had fought to exclude.

“The debate we witnessed here in Lima is not going to change that much in Paris,” said Union of Concerned Scientists strategy and policy director, Alden Meyer.

“What was a storm cloud in Lima could become a full-blown typhoon in Paris. A whole host of issues becomes a lot more difficult if you have this fundamental split in world view.”

Under the deal, the incorporation of a blueprint for the Paris agreement that was agreed earlier in the week was taken out, and a reference to developed countries paying poor nations for “loss and damage” caused by climate change was included, despite opposition from Australia and the US.

‘With this text we all win’. The president of the Lima conference, Manuel Pulgar-Vidal, said every country was a winner from the decision. “Like all texts, it is not perfect, [but] with this text we all win without exceptions,” Mr Pulgar-Vidal said.

“It is a more focused text. The text heeds everyone’s concerns and it does so in a balanced way.”

After the landmark climate deal between China and the US, there were high hopes that the Lima conference would create momentum for a global deal in Paris. But delegates will end up crawling out of the Lima conference in the early hours of Sunday morning.

But on Saturday morning, the talks were on the verge of collapse, with claims that countries were being asked to swallow a “dead rat” and that an already watered-down deal was in danger of being turned from a “circumcision” into an “amputation”.

At one stage, Venezuela’s chief negotiator, Claudia Salerno, said Lima was turning into a repeat of the troubled Copenhagen meeting in 2009 after complaints from some countries that they had not been consulted.

At the heart of the dispute was the removal of any reference in the draft decision to the concept of “differentiated responsibilities” of developing and developed nations that has been in the convention since 1992.

There were also complaints that the current draft was focused on mitigation to the exclusion of helping developing nations adjust to climate change and providing finance to assist them.

“Many of you colonised us, so we started from very different points .□.□. this you must appreciate,” said Malaysia representative Gurdial Singh Nijar. “There is a world out there that is different from your world.”

Brazilian representative Antonio Marcondes said the removal of the concept of differentiation was tantamount to “annihilation” of the UN convention. “We still live in a world of deep inequalities. Differentiation is not a reference belonging to the past,” he said.

Focus on Australia’s policies

But developed countries, some small island states and Latin American nations resisted a push to make further changes to the draft decision. “If you are submitting for circumcision be very careful that it doesn’t become an amputation because the surgeon used too big a knife and took too much flesh,” said Singapore Environment Minister Vivian Balakrishnan.

New Zealand’s representative, Helen Plume, said all countries were being asked to accept unpalatable compromises but supported them. “There are dead rats that need to be swallowed,” she said.

US negotiator Todd Stern warned China and African countries that a future deal in Paris was being put at risk by their brinkmanship. “What’s at stake are Paris 2015 [and the] future of UNFCCC altogether,” Mr Stern said. “All that we have achieved so far will be at risk.”

Marshall Islands Foreign Minister Tony de Brum said while his country was unhappy with parts of the decision, he was prepared to put aside those differences. “Without moving forward now, and without success in Paris, my country is on the line,” Mr de Brum said.

Climate Institute chief executive John Connor said all countries should have done more in Lima, but they had done enough to put a focus on the Abbott government’s resolve to consider climate risks seriously. “Australia will make new post-2020 international climate commitments early next year,” Mr Connor said.

Marcus Priest was flown to Lima by the Clean Energy Council as the winner of its 2013 media award.