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Australia and global warming: Stranded

Tony Abbott woos **China** and India as America rebuffs his climate policy

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A HEATWAVE hovered over Brisbane, the state capital of Queensland, as world leaders gathered on November 15th for a Group of 20 (G20) summit, the biggest such meeting Australia has hosted. Tony Abbott, the prime minister, had hoped to limit their talks to topics that chimed with his domestic political agenda: growth and jobs. Barack Obama, America's president, had other ideas. On his way to the talks, Mr Obama delivered a speech to cheering students at the University of Queensland, calling on Australia to do more to tackle climate change. To rub his message in, Mr Obama worried about the "incredible natural glory of the Great Barrier Reef", off the coast of Queensland, which is threatened by global warming.

The president's speech was carefully calculated. Three days earlier, Mr Obama had struck a deal with Xi Jinping, **China**'s president, at another summit in Beijing, in which the world's two biggest emitters of carbon set targets to lower their outputs of greenhouse gases. The deal apparently caught Mr Abbott by surprise. He had wanted to limit the G20's climate commitments to a line about **energy** efficiency. But climate change dominated the Brisbane summit in the wake of Mr Obama's proclamation that "here in the Asia Pacific, nobody has more at **stake**". Few can recall such a sharp public rebuke from Australia's main strategic ally.

Australia is responsible for about 1.5% of global carbon emissions; measured by its output per person, it is one of the highest polluters. Yet Mr Abbott has staked his political career on a combative approach to climate action. As opposition leader four years ago, he unseated his predecessor as leader of the conservative Liberal Party over a deal with the then Labor government for an emissions-trading scheme; that deal sank. Mr Abbott won power last year after waging a scare campaign against a carbon tax Labor had introduced instead; his government has since abolished it. Mr Abbott argued in Brisbane that climate talks should happen elsewhere, not at meetings of the G20.

But the summit's climate pledges left Australia isolated. Mr Obama pointedly used his speech in Brisbane to announce a \$3 **billion** contribution to the Green Climate Fund, a UN body to help poor countries deal with climate change. Japan, Germany and Canada also promised money.

Mr Abbott felt in warmer **company** after Mr Xi and Narendra Modi, India's prime minister, left Brisbane to address Australia's parliament separately in Canberra. As Mr Xi spoke, Australia concluded a free-trade agreement with **China**. It includes tariff cuts on Australian shipments of **coal**, demand for which in **China** has grown rapidly in recent years. India is also a big market. Defiantly, Mr Abbott told the G20 leaders he would be "standing up for **coal**". But the summitry has left him with difficult choices over Australia's position on global warming as countries prepare for another summit in Paris next year--devoted entirely to the climate.

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**NS**     gclimt : Climate Change | gglobe : Global/World Issues | gcat : Political/General News | genv : Environmental News | gwea : Weather

**RE** austr : Australia | china : China | brisbn : Brisbane | apacz : Asia Pacific | asiaz : Asia | ausnz : Australia/Oceania | bric : BRICS Countries | chinaz : Greater China | devgcoz : Emerging Market Countries | dvpcoz : Developing Economies | easiaz : Eastern Asia | queensl : Queensland

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