Policy makers gather in London for international climate summit

14 Jan 2013, Jessica Shankleman, BusinessGreen

International legislators will this week try to set aside political differences at a high-level summit aiming to accelerate the development of effective policies to tackle climate change.

The inaugural Globe Climate Legislation Summit (GLOBE) will take place over the next two days in London, giving policy makers from 33 countries a chance to share best practices for driving green growth and curbing greenhouse gas emissions at a national level.

In 2011, world leaders signed the Durban Platform, committing to work towards an international climate change treaty by 2015, that would come into force in 2020.

However, GLOBE members are concerned that the 2015 goal is unlikely to be achieved unless countries have delivered significant green policy progress at a national level.

Welcoming delegates to the summit today, Foreign Secretary William Hague will urge nations to deliver their own ambitious climate change policies ahead of 2015.

"As we look towards the imperative of getting agreement on a global legally binding deal on emissions reductions in the UNFCCC in 2015, it is clear that domestic legislation has a key role to play in building consensus and cementing ambition," he says.

"We are very pleased to have been able to support the launch of this initiative."

GLOBE will today unveil its third "audit" of climate legislation across the world's major developed...
and emerging economies, in a bid to understand how much progress needs to be made over the next two years.

The report reveals that 32 of the 33 countries analysed have progressed or are progressing significant climate and, or, clean energy-related legislation.

Canada was the only country deemed to be taking backwards steps on climate change, after it repealed the Kyoto Implementation Act last year.

The report will also show most of the new legislation on climate change last year took place in emerging economies. For example, China started to draft its national climate law alongside new local environmental legislation in 2012, while India published its 12th Five Year Plan, incorporating a range of recommendations from the government's Low Carbon Expert Group.

Speaking to BusinessGreen ahead of the summit, Barry Gardiner, MP for Brent North and vice president of GLOBE, said the report paints an encouraging picture of legislation at a national level.

"A substantial amount of progress is being made," he said. "We need more, but it's that progress which is going to be the critical defining factor as to whether 2015 is a threshold that we cross or an obstacle that we stumble on."

The summit will include workshops and keynote addresses from Christiana Figueres, head of the UN Climate Change Secretariat and UK Climate Change Secretary of State Ed Davey, who will address the meeting tomorrow. John Gummer, President of GLOBE, and chairman of the Committee on Climate Change will also open and close the conference.

A key focus is expected to be on how legislators can encourage governments to realise the links between green growth and economic growth, and develop a cross party consensus in support for green policies. The group aims to encourage peer-to-peer learning to help legislators find the best ways of tackling their national problems.

For example, it will aim to help ensure that new legislation is enacted to avoid a repeat of the Kyoto Protocol deal, which the United States failed to ratify in 2008.

"You can have Al Gore and Bill Clinton with the best will in the world, but unless you can get it through the House of Representatives, you're not going to achieve anything," said Gardiner.

He added that MPs and other legislators could do more to press governments on funding green policies, rather than the contents of the polices.

"If I'm tabling questions to government, I tend to focus on where I think their policies are wrong," he said.

"I'm less good as saying: 'Hey, I agree with your policy, but you guys just aren't funding it enough', because that doesn't score political points," he said. "Those are areas that we need to pay more attention to."