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Steering climate action in France towards carbon neutrality

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The French energy transition for green growth act (TECV) was published in the Official Journal in August 2015. Less than two years later, in July 2017, the Minister Nicolas Hulot presented the French Climate Plan, structured around a number of objectives, including that of “achieving carbon neutrality by 2050”. In just a few years, France thus established an ambitious policy framework to combat climate change. What are the results and how can it be strengthened? This blogpost presents four contributions from IDDRI to understand and improve the steering of climate action in France.

First, what is carbon neutrality? Set out in the Paris Agreement adopted during COP21, carbon neutrality is the goal of international climate action: we must collectively achieve a balance between the greenhouse gases emitted and those absorbed by sinks, whether natural (forests, soils, oceans) or technological (carbon capture and storage). This means that each country must define a long-term vision towards carbon neutrality, as well as a plan describing the tools for action that will place it on a credible short-term pathway to make this vision a reality. As discussed in an [IDDRI Policy Brief](#), this action will first entail a drastic reduction in emissions by 2050, by combining low-carbon technologies and a revision of our patterns of production and consumption, and will also require new approaches to ecosystem conservation and investments in “negative emission” technologies.

A [critical historical review of the establishment of French climate governance conducted by IDDRI](#) shows that France has a range of ambitious instruments at its disposal: legally binding long-term objectives, combined with implementation tools that are revised over the course of five-year cycles. These tools include “carbon budgets”, used to define a pathway towards long-term objectives, and framework documents describing implementation (the national low-carbon strategy – SNBC, and the multi-year energy plan – PPE). Setting itself the target of carbon neutrality by 2050 also demonstrates France’s commitment to comply with the Paris Agreement. However, **in practice, the implementation tools to achieve this ambition will only truly play their part in moving towards the long-term objective if they are accompanied by an effective safeguard: a robust monitoring and evaluation mechanism.**

France currently has nine consultative bodies responsible for providing advice on the implementation of the low-carbon transition¹; this profusion undermines the legibility and credibility of messages. Yet evaluation is a necessary condition to ensure the revision of the five-year plans reflects the real progress and challenges of implementation and thereby makes it possible to change course if necessary to achieve the long-term objectives. The publication in September of the first revised versions of the SNBC and PPE, which are neither based on nor make reference to any evaluation of past action, even though the Ministry for the Ecological and Inclusive Transition announced this summer that the first two carbon budgets would probably not be met², is a red flag on these points.

The governance of French climate action, defined in the TECV act, is still relatively new. But in order to ensure ambitious action that is consistent with long-term objectives, there is an urgent need to revise its monitoring and evaluation aspects. To this end, IDDRI proposes [ten recommendations to strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of the low-carbon transition in France. ten recommendations.](#)

One of the recommendations concerns the creation of a “dashboard for the low-carbon transition”, to enable a better understanding of public policy tools and their outcomes across all sectors; we suggest a prefiguration of these indicators in a [separate study, accompanied by a spreadsheet.](#)

Another recommendation has to do with streamlining the different consultative bodies mentioned above, and especially clarifying the role of the Expert Committee for the Energy Transition (CETE), created in 2015. With this in mind, [we looked to our neighbour the UK](#), which is celebrating 10 years of its Climate Change Act, in order to understand and to draw lessons for France from the functioning of the [Committee on Climate Change](#) (CCC). The CCC has undisputed legitimacy and independence to act as a safeguard for long-term climate ambition. It has not only considerable resources enabling it to establish its capacity for analysis and advice, but also a direct link with the French Parliament and referral autonomy, elements that could inspire French governance.

¹ All public consultative bodies responsible for evaluating the implementation of the PPE/SNBC strategic plans or providing advice on these plans, see annex 1 of the study “UK’s Committee on Climate Change. What lessons for France?”.

² DGEC Note/Presentation, PPE/SNBC monitoring committee, 19 July 2018

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