**Taking the Temperature**

**ACE environmental and climate policy update from Julie’s Bicycle**

**Speaker, Chiara Badiali from Julie’s Bicycle**

Hi,

Thank you so much for tuning into taking the temperature, an update on some climate and environmental issues and headlines from us at Julie's Bicycle.

My name is Chiara, my pronouns are she / her, I'm a 30 something year old blonde woman wearing a black t shirt and a gold necklace sitting in front of a spiky plant and a white wall. I tend to move my head and hands a lot when I talk.

**COP26 - UN international climate change conference**

So, one of the big ongoing stories this year is of course, the twenty-sixth UN international climate change conference - COP 26 for short - which is due to be hosted by the UK in Glasgow in November this year, after having been postponed last year because of the pandemic.

The priority themes and topics for this year's talks are going to be:

Number one, keeping promises made to the Global South and developing nations. That includes making sure that richer countries, including the UK, keep to their responsibility under the Paris Agreement, which is the international agreement on climate change, to make available $100 billion every year to help developing nations contribute to the fight against climate change, and also adapt to the changes already happening in their countries.

This also means having some difficult conversations around the idea of loss and damage. These are the consequences of climate change that are already baked in, that we can't mitigate against, or adapt to.

Things like the impact of lost crops, more extreme weather, rising seas. But the question becomes how can you put a cost on things that are lost forever, like human lives, or species loss, or the loss of your home? How do we respond to people displaced by the loss of their livelihoods and homes and forced to become climate migrants or refugees.

So richer nations who've benefited most from - and been most responsible for the decades of carbon emissions that have built up in our atmosphere - don't like talking about loss and damage because they don't want to open up the possibility of being held liable or being asked to pay compensation to those who are most feeling the impacts. But for the countries that are already on the frontline of our changing climate, how can you even begin talking about the future without having these conversations?

A second big theme for COP26 is raising ambition. So ahead of the talks, all countries have had to submit updated and hopefully tougher pledges for what climate action they will take to support the Paris Agreement goals of limiting global warming to well below two degrees, better yet 1.5 degrees -

so called Nationally Determined Contributions that every country makes.

If countries meet their currently submitted targets and pledges, we're going to be on track for a warming of around 2.4 degrees Celsius by 2100. So, there's still a big gap between what countries have said they will do and actually what we need to do. And that's also assuming that governments now get on with the work of putting in place policies to support their ambitious targets.

The climate action tracker estimates that current policies still put us on track for nearly three degrees of warming, which would have disastrous consequences for all of us.

So, the third big area for the COP 26 talks is accelerating that climate action. The UK government, which holds the presidency for the talks, has identified five priority areas for this.

The first one is adaptation and resilience. So, helping people, economies and the environment adapt and prepare for the impacts of climate change that are coming.

The second is nature: how forests, agriculture and ecosystems can be a climate solution, absorbing carbon from the atmosphere and protecting against the impacts of climate change.

The third topic is the energy transition moving away from fossil fuels like coal, gas and oil.

The fourth is accelerating the move to zero carbon road transport. And the fifth is around finance.

Lastly, there's going to be some very technical negotiations about the Paris Agreement rulebook.  
  
It's beyond the understanding of most of us. But it looks at important things like the rules for carbon trading. So, countries buying credits for reductions from other countries, how countries have to report on their progress and transparency, basically, making sure countries are kept accountable, and there are no loopholes that allow them to dock their responsibilities for reducing emissions.

All of that might seem quite distant and a little bit technical, but the decisions that get made or don't get made at this international level do have far reaching consequences for all of us. So do get involved in making a noise, showing governments that our eyes are on them, and supporting negotiators to make those ambitious commitments.

You can look at initiatives, campaigns and events that are happening where you are, or get involved in programmes like the Arts Council England supported Season for Change partnership programme, run by Julie's Bicycle and Artsadmin, which is a UK-wide cultural programme inspiring, urgent and inclusive action on climate change.

The International Energy Agency, one of the most important global energy policy advisors, recently stated in their new Net Zero roadmap, that if governments are serious about the climate crisis, there can be no new investments in oil, gas and coal from now, from this year.

That's a really strong message to investors and governments around the world. In the UK, it's going to increase the heated debate around planning permission for a new coal mine in Cumbria, which is now the subject of a public inquiry from government, which will take place in September.

And it's also probably going to open new debate about government's current decision not to outright ban new oil and gas exploration in the North Sea, which some environmental analysts have already criticized as being incompatible with our current climate goals. There are other signs of a shift in boardrooms and courtrooms around the world - what some have called bad days for big oil, but climate journalist Emily Atkin called a good day for life on Earth, reminding us that sometimes it's important to reframe these stories.

So, in the Netherlands, a court ruled that Shell, the seventh largest climate polluting fossil fuel company in the world, needs to go back to the drawing board on its climate plans and take action to reduce its carbon emissions much more drastically.

Exxon Mobil, the fourth most polluting fossil fuel company in the world, a small hedge fund won two seats on the board of directors in a win for shareholders who are trying to push the company to take more action on climate.

And at Chevron, the second most polluting fossil fuel company in the world, shareholders also went against the board of directors wishes and basically voted for a proposal saying that the company also has to address emissions from the company's customers – as in everyone that uses the oil and other fossil fuel products they produce.

And finally, in the US, the Keystone XL pipeline, which would have transported oil from Canada's tar sands, all the way to Nebraska, which has been at the heart of climate change and land rights protests for more than a decade, has finally been canceled, which is a really big victory for grassroots organizing, and also the fight against locking in more fossil fuel infrastructure.

Alongside this, we should never forget that the climate crisis is not happening in isolation.

The IPBES and IPCC – Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change - you can look at Julie's Bicycle Green Gibberish web pages to get explanations for those and other terms - but basically, they're the two groups that are tasked by the UN to summarise all the science on biodiversity and ecological systems, and all the science on climate change for policymakers.

And they took a strong stand this June to remind us that the two crises of climate change and biodiversity loss are inseparable, we have to solve both of them or we will solve neither, because we need strong ecosystems that help absorb carbon from the atmosphere and keep everything in balance. And that also means expanding nature reserves, restoring ecosystems, forests, grasslands, mangroves, kelp forests. And it also means making sure that our climate solutions don't make the loss of our ecosystems worse, there's only so much land to go around. It has to accommodate all of us. It has to accommodate our cities, roads, foods we grow, biofuels, we might want to grow, the trees, we grow to make stuff, as well as all the millions of species we share the planet with.

So there are big decisions to make there. And we can't keep the two separate. In the UK, the other big policy conversation you might have missed is that parliament is still debating the Environment Bill. It's a cornerstone piece of legislation that's been delayed over and over again since 2018. That sort of shapes the UK green regulation, which has to be redrawn after the UK’s exit from the EU.

There are some technical questions around creating a new environmental watchdog, the Office for Environmental Protection, which is going to be responsible for holding government and other authorities to account on compliance with environmental law.

And there's some questions about the powers that it's going to have to actually do so. The other things in the Environment Bill are things like finding government targets relating to the natural environment, improvements in air and water quality, making producers more responsible for the waste created and resources used when they make, use and dispose their products. It also includes stricter rules for businesses to make sure there's no deforestation in their supply chain; rules on biodiversity linked to development work.

So the Environment Bill covers a huge amount of ground. And many of the disagreements are about how strict, exactly, it's going to be. It has been delayed for a third time and now probably won't pass until the autumn – so it puts us in a slightly strange situation in a slightly legal no man's land, because there isn't really an environmental law enforcement structure in place now that the UK has left the EU, until that bill officially creates the office for environmental protection.

Finally, some small inspiring stories from our near neighbors in Paris, Paris has approved a  €250m project to add [major greenery to the Champs-Élysées](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2021-01-14/paris-dreams-of-a-calmer-greener-champs-elys-es), which is the main road running through Paris that's generally used by more than 60,000 cars a day, causing lots of air pollution.

And that plan is going to put lots of investment into that - to make it less friendly for cars and more friendly for pedestrians and cyclists, along with lots and lots of other similar measures happening in Paris that’s hoping to shift more people out of their cars, onto bicycles into walking and public transport.

And in the UK, a butterfly superhighway is being created by UK nonprofit Bug's Life. So they

announced that they've completed the first phase of what they're calling their Beeline project, which tries to create connected wildflower habitats. So called pollinator pathways around the country.

England's lost more than 97% of its grasslands in less than a century, they say. And so far

they've created or restored about 1500 hectares of butterfly habitat, which is a 10th of the goal that they set themselves. Over the past month, you may have also seen more grass growing longer in parks and on roadside verges or even your neighbor's gardens, which may well be people and councils participating in ‘no mow may’ to allow wildflowers to bloom, to feed our pollinators, and give space to insects. And if you have some green space, that's definitely one thing you can plan to do next year as well.

Thanks for tuning in and we will see you again soon.