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\$445m for cleaner energy, but it won't stop climate change

By Melissa Fyfe, Sydney

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A HIGH-POWERED deal struck in Sydney yesterday may push some of the world's biggest polluters to improve their performance, but an analysis revealed it would fall short of avoiding dangerous climate change.

Australia and the United States pledged almost \$445 million over five years to cleaner energy projects under the Asia-Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate.

And Japan yesterday called on Australia to sign the next stage of the Kyoto Protocol. The Japanese ambassador for the global environment, Mutsuyoshi Nishimura, told *The Age* that Australia should join the protocol in the next stage, after 2012.

The Australian Government has refused to sign the protocol, the international agreement to curb greenhouse gases.

The Asia-Pacific partnership, whose other four nations are Korea, Japan, India and China, will establish eight taskforces in which governments and businesses create action plans to cut global warming emissions in sectors such as aluminium, cement, steel and power.

But the action plans will be voluntary and not legally binding, drawing immediate criticism from conservation groups and the Federal Opposition. There was no overall target set for emissions cuts across the six nations, which together produce half the world's greenhouse gas emissions.

Prime Minister John Howard hailed the partnership as a practical way to address global warming. It would, he said, lead to a 20 per cent cut in the nation's emissions.

But analysis by the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics shows that even if the partnership was successful, global emissions would more than double by 2050.

Scientists believe that emissions must be cut by at least 50 per cent by 2050 or there will be a two-degree increase in the global average temperature. ABARE's analysis has the world on track for a four-degree increase, which would destroy the Great Barrier Reef and create havoc with Australia's water resources and farming economy.

Industry Minister Ian Macfarlane said the two-day inaugural meeting had made significant progress.

Australia's \$100 million pledge to the partnership will fund its activities and be available to businesses involved in clean energy projects in partner countries. A quarter of the funding is exclusively for renewable energy.

The six nations yesterday also announced:

- A significant ramping up of carbon storage underground.
- Renewable and nuclear energy would be an increasing part of the energy mix, but fossil fuels were an enduring reality.

Another meeting of the partnership will take place next year.

Conservation group WWF attacked claims that the partnership would help solve global warming. "I have never seen a more misleading public statement as that made by the Prime Minister, John Howard, today," said WWF boss Greg Bourne, a former business executive.

Australian Conservation Foundation head Don Henry said: "This meeting has not given business the incentives it needs to invest in clean energy on the scale required."

Shadow environment minister Anthony Albanese said only an additional \$20 million next year was allocated for clean technology, compared with \$55 million for the Government's industrial relations campaign.