

Gloomy start to 2019

Global co-operation to fight climate change is crucial, but as the world rang in 2019 there appeared to be little evidence that long-lasting goodwill and proactive intentions are universally present, writes [Legalbrief](#). The 2015 Paris Agreement delivered hope that nations could come together to fight catastrophic climate change, but the ensuing battle to draw up its rulebook has left the world on the edge of a precipice three years after the historic deal was negotiated. According to a [Mail & Guardian Online](#) report, two climate change conferences in 2019, in New York and Chile, will now have to try to salvage the failures of the 2018 effort by getting nations to commit themselves to cutting their emissions even further. **Although negotiators from 196 countries finalised a rulebook for the Paris Agreement at December's annual two-week climate change conference in Poland, talks progressed at a snail's pace, with many countries stalling.** The elephant in the room was the gloomy report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCCC) and the UN Environment Programme (Unep) warning that time is running out. This report also shows existing climate targets would need to be increased 'around fivefold' for a chance of limiting warming to 1.5°C. Climate activists say the newly agreed rulebook does not do enough to put the world on this trajectory. Getting countries to be more ambitious about cutting their emissions was the big disappointment of Katowice. It was expected that countries would give some indication of their willingness to do more than their current pledges. 'There is nothing here with ambition. Absolutely zero,' Maesela Kekana, SA's chief negotiator, said.

Last year was the fourth warmest on record, extending a scorching streak driven by a build-up of man-made greenhouse gases, the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service said yesterday. According to a [BusinessLIVE](#) report, **average world surface air temperatures were 14.7°C in 2018, just 0.2°C off the highest,** it said in the first global assessment based on full-year data. This year will also likely be hot, its scientists said. 'Dramatic climatic events like the warm and dry summer in large parts of Europe or the increasing temperature around the Arctic regions are alarming signs to all of us,' said Jean-Noël Thépaut, head of Copernicus. Among other extremes in 2018, California and Greece suffered severe wildfires, Kerala in India had the worst flooding since the 1920s and heatwaves struck from Australia to North Africa. Around Antarctica, the extent of sea ice is at a record low at the start of 2019, according to the US National Snow and Ice Data Centre. The Copernicus report confirms projections by the UN's World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) in November that 2018 would be fourth warmest. The WMO will issue its own estimate for 2018 temperatures in coming weeks, also comprising data compiled by US, British and Japanese agencies.

Meanwhile, it is increasingly clear that the effects of climate change are extremely costly. The 10 worst climate-linked disasters of 2018 caused at least £50bn worth of damage, a study has found. According to a report in [The Independent](#), extreme weather driven by climate change hit every populated continent this year, Christian Aid said. 'This report shows that for many people, climate change is having devastating impacts on their lives and livelihoods right now,' said Kat Kramer, who heads the British relief organisation's work on climate issues. The 20 warmest years on record have been within the last 22 years, the UN said last month, with 2018 on track to be the fourth hottest. The most expensive climate-linked weather events of 2018 were Hurricanes Florence and Michael, which caused at least £18.5bn worth of damage as they slammed into the US, the Caribbean and parts of central America, the report said. **The US also suffered at least £5.2bn of losses from wildfires that caused dozens of deaths and destroyed thousands of homes in California.** Japan was badly hit by severe floods over the summer, followed by the powerful Typhoon Jebi in autumn, which together caused more than \$4.3bn in damages. It also cited droughts in Europe, floods in southern India and Typhoon Mangkhut in the Philippines and China among the most expensive climate-linked disasters of 2018.

In other developments, Brazil's new President has shown scant respect for the Amazon, known as the 'lungs of the planet' and critical to preventing global warming. Hours after taking office, Jair Bolsonaro launched an assault on environmental and Amazon protections with an executive order transferring the regulation and creation of new indigenous reserves to the Agriculture Ministry – which is controlled by the powerful agribusiness lobby. According to a report in [The Guardian](#), **the move sparked outcry from indigenous leaders, who said it threatened their reserves,** which make up about 13% of Brazilian territory, and marked a symbolic concession to farming interests at a time when deforestation is rising again. 'There will be an increase in deforestation and violence against indigenous people,' said Dinaman Tuxá, the executive coordinator of the Articulation of Indigenous People of Brazil (Apib). 'Indigenous people are defenders and protectors of the environment.' Previously, demarcation of indigenous

reserves was controlled by the indigenous agency Funai, which has been moved from the Justice Ministry to a new ministry of women, family and human rights controlled by an evangelical pastor. During last year's election campaign, Bolsonaro promised to end demarcation of new indigenous lands, reduce the power of environmental agencies and free up mining and commercial farming on indigenous reserves. His measure also gave the Agriculture Ministry power over new quilombos – rural settlements inhabited by descendants of former slaves.