

News digest

The big environmental stories in the Chinese media (8-14 October)

Premier calls for more oil and gas extraction, but reaffirms carbon neutrality

Premier Li Keqiang has laid down the key tasks for the energy sector over the next year, at a [meeting](#) of the National Energy Commission on Sunday 9 October.

Li opened by stressing the need to address the country's ongoing power shortages crisis as well as the need to reduce emissions. Addressing doubts about the rationale behind China targeting peak emissions by 2030 and carbon neutrality by 2060, Li said "we must effectively manage development and emissions reduction, and the relationship between the present moment and long-term objectives."

To the consternation of some climate observers, on the topic of energy security Li focused on how China should exploit fossil fuels, calling for the "optimisation of coal production, the reasonable expansion of advanced coal power", alongside the phasing out of outdated coal power plants. He also called for an increase in domestic oil and gas extraction.

The emphasis triggered some commentators to [worry](#) that China is backtracking on its climate commitments. At a [press conference](#) held on Wednesday, the secretary general of the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), Zhao Chenxin, refuted such interpretations.

Li also mentioned the need to deepen market reforms in the power sector, an item long on the agenda and now boosted as the government tackles power shortages. On Tuesday 12 October, the NDRC announced that prices for coal-generated power would be allowed to fluctuate as much as 20%, with market

demand.

Li concluded his speech by stressing that “achieving carbon peak and carbon neutrality is a requirement for the transformation and upgrade of our national economy, as well as a globally shared requirement to address climate change.”

The comments are more conservative in tone than those made by Xi at international fora like the UN General Assembly. But it is notable that, in the face of the country’s most serious energy crisis in years and significant domestic pushback, China’s leadership are sticking firmly to their carbon peaking and neutrality pledges.

Read more on China’s complex energy transition on China Dialogue [here](#)

Kunming Declaration published

More than 100 countries have adopted [the Kunming Declaration](#), during the first half of the COP15 UN biodiversity conference (with the second and final part due to take place in the spring).

The document calls on countries to take urgent actions and to mainstream biodiversity in all government decisions in order to reverse its loss by 2030.

China’s environment minister Huang Runqiu said the document wouldn’t be a binding international agreement but would represent political will.

The declaration notes the efforts of many countries to protect 30% of the Earth’s land and sea by 2030. But Li Shuo, global policy advisor at Greenpeace, said it was not clear if China was on board with 30x30: “Beijing should make up its mind soon if it wants to lead from the front.” China announced that by the end of last year its protected areas covered [18%](#) of its land. However, its newly published [Five Year Plan for forest and grassland](#)

[protection](#) only sets the goal of “more than 18%” of land to be protected.

A decade ago, China introduced its [ecological redlines](#) policy to protect critical habitats. In [a white paper on biodiversity conservation](#) published three days before the conference, the government presented this policy as a contribution to the world’s environmental governance. However, there have been cases of local governments ignoring redlines for the sake of economic development.

Also at the conference, China launched a \$232 million biodiversity protection fund for developing countries. Xi said he would welcome contributions from other parties. He also formally established China's first five national parks, covering 230,000km², under the new [national park-centred system](#) of nature reserves.

Read more on China's [redlines policy](#) and [ecological civilisation](#).