

G7 Environment Ministers' Meetings, Commitments and Compliance, 1992-2018

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The G7 summit, first held in 1975, had started at the ministerial level among the “Library Group” of ministers of finance of the G5 of the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, France and Japan. While finance and foreign ministers then accompanied their leaders to the annual summit later in 1975 and annually until 1997, the G7 also created an array of stand-alone forums for other ministers, starting with the trade ministers Quadrilateral of the United States, Japan, Canada and the European Union in 1982 and G7 foreign ministers in 1984. With the advent of post–Cold War globalization in the 1990s, this ministerial array proliferated. The first body in this new phase was the G7 environment ministers’ meeting (EMM), in the policy area where globalization had advanced the most. Yet very little is known about the operation and value of this ministerial forum (Risbud 2006; Kirton and Warren 2018a).

It is thus worth examining in more detail what the G7 EMM has done, in particular in making commitments that are, or are not, complied with by its members, as a foundation for considering how such compliance could be improved (Kirton and Larionova 2018). This research report takes up this task.

The Cadence of G7 EMMs

The G7 has held 21 environment ministers’ meetings since 1992. Its first two meetings, both held in 1992, in Germany and Brazil, took place the same year the United Nations began its summit-level global governance of the environment and climate change. The UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), led by Canadian Maurice Strong, set the global legal framework for climate change cooperation with the creation of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The G7 summit, however, had been governing climate change through its soft law commitments since 1979, when it recognized the anthropogenic causes of climate change and made its first collective commitment on the subject a few years later (see Kirton and Kokotsis 2015). It thus had over a decade of experience through its informal summitry to act as a concerted club with common interests and values to support the formalization of global climate governance through the multilateral UN system.

It did so at both the leaders’ level and with ministerial reinforcement. Indeed, the G7 leaders made 332 climate change commitments from 1979 to 2018, with many centred on advancing the work of the UN climate regime. The environment ministers from 1995 to 2018 made even more commitments, totalling 518. Nonetheless, its performance here has been inconsistent, with a large gap when no environment ministerial was held between 2010 and 2015. Yet from 2016 to 2018, the G7 revived the EMM, during which time made a record number of commitments, in spite of a lack

of leadership from the largest and loudest G7 member, the United States under far-right Republican president Donald Trump.

However, these commitments only matter if, first, they are complied with, and, second, if such compliance is effective in reaching a given outcome. In the case of climate change, has compliance with the G7's climate change commitments, including those made by the ministers responsible for climate change, helped to reduce the G7's greenhouse gas emissions to mitigate climate change?

This review starts by answering the first question: are the G7 environment ministers' commitments complied with once the ministers go home after the summit ends?

Trends by Summit

The number of commitments made matters. According to the research from the G7 Research Group, the more commitments made on the same subject, the better the compliance with them (Nikolaeva forthcoming).

Commitments

At 21 meetings from 1992 to 2018 G7 environment ministers produced 23 documents and 518 collective, politically binding, future-oriented commitments (see Appendix A). Most of these commitments (277) came in collectively agreed communiqués. Another 175 commitments were made in other issue-specific documents, and 66 were made in a chair's summary or statement.

The majority of these commitments were made at meetings held prior to the leaders' level summit. There were 16 pre-summit ministerial meetings where 382 commitments were made. At the five post-summit meetings, 136 commitments were made.

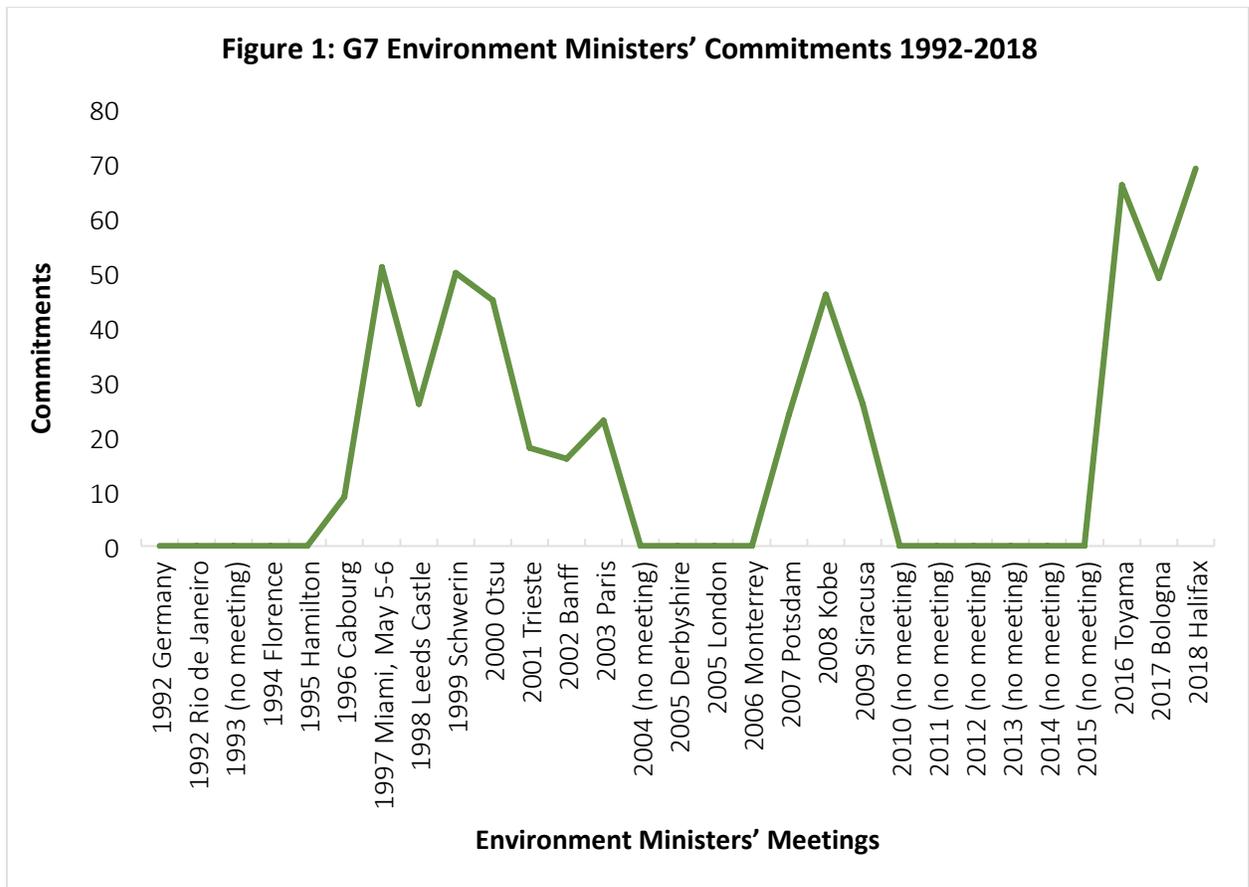
Although G7 environment ministers starting meeting in 1992, they did not make their first commitment until their 1996 meeting in Cabourg, France, in May (see Figure 1). Here, before the leaders met in Lyon later that year, an EMM chair's summary was issued and contained nine commitments. The next year, at the 1997 Miami ministerial meeting, there was a dramatic spike to 51 commitments. Most appeared in the Declaration on Children's Environmental Health, with just 13 appearing in the chair's summary. The number of commitments made at the following EMM, at Leeds in the United Kingdom in 1998, dropped by almost half to 26 before rising back to 50 at Schwerin, Germany, in 1999 and 45 at Otsu, Japan, in 2000. At the 2001 meeting in Trieste, Italy, and the 2002 meeting in Banff, Canada, the number of commitments again dropped, to 18 and 16, respectively. There was a slight rise to 23 at the 2003 meeting in Paris.

Then there was a three year gap. No commitments were made in 2004 as no meeting was held. And despite two meetings held in 2005, and a leaders' summit host, British prime minister Tony Blair, focused on climate action and sustainable development, no commitments were made in the one document produced. The trend continued in 2006 at Monterrey, Mexico, with a meeting held but no document issued, and thus no commitments made.

The next three years saw a comeback, with the number of commitments matching, at one meeting, the peak of the late 1990s. Twenty-four commitments were made at the 2007 meeting in Potsdam, Germany, 46 at the 2008 meeting in Kobe, Japan, and 26 at the 2009 meeting in Siracusa, Italy.

The comeback was short. No meeting was held for the next six years, until Japan took up the mantle again at the 2016 Toyama meeting. Japan as host had a history of producing many commitments on the environment (see Otsu with 45 and Kobe with 46). At Toyama, a new high was reached, with 66 commitments made, and the start of a new trend. Indeed, at the 2017 meeting in Bologna, Italy, 49 commitments were made. And then another new record was set with 69 commitments at the 2018 meeting in Halifax, Canada. However, several of the commitments made at Halifax were “soft” commitments, with relatively weaker language than at previous meetings. And the host failed to generate full consensus on a new plastics initiative launched at Halifax, without either the United States or Japan.

There have thus been peaks and valleys in the G7 EMM’s commitment making since 1992. The peaks occurred as surrounding summit support to the UN climate regime, with the valleys occurring in between the major UN climate summits. The start of the G7 EMM commitments came not long after the 1992 Earth Summit that created the UNFCCC and the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. The first peak came in 1997, the year of the Kyoto Protocol. Environment ministers’ meetings were sustained, but the number of commitments made declined until none were made between 2004 and 2006. The second peak came as the 2009 Copenhagen Accord was being negotiated. The environment ministers stopped meeting following this failed UN summit, only to revive again immediately after the 2015 Paris Agreement was signed. This pattern is the same at the leaders’ level.



Notes: United Nations climate treaties/agreements by year: 1992 Rio Earth Summit, 1997 Kyoto Protocol, 2009 Copenhagen Accord, 2015 Paris Agreement.

Compliance

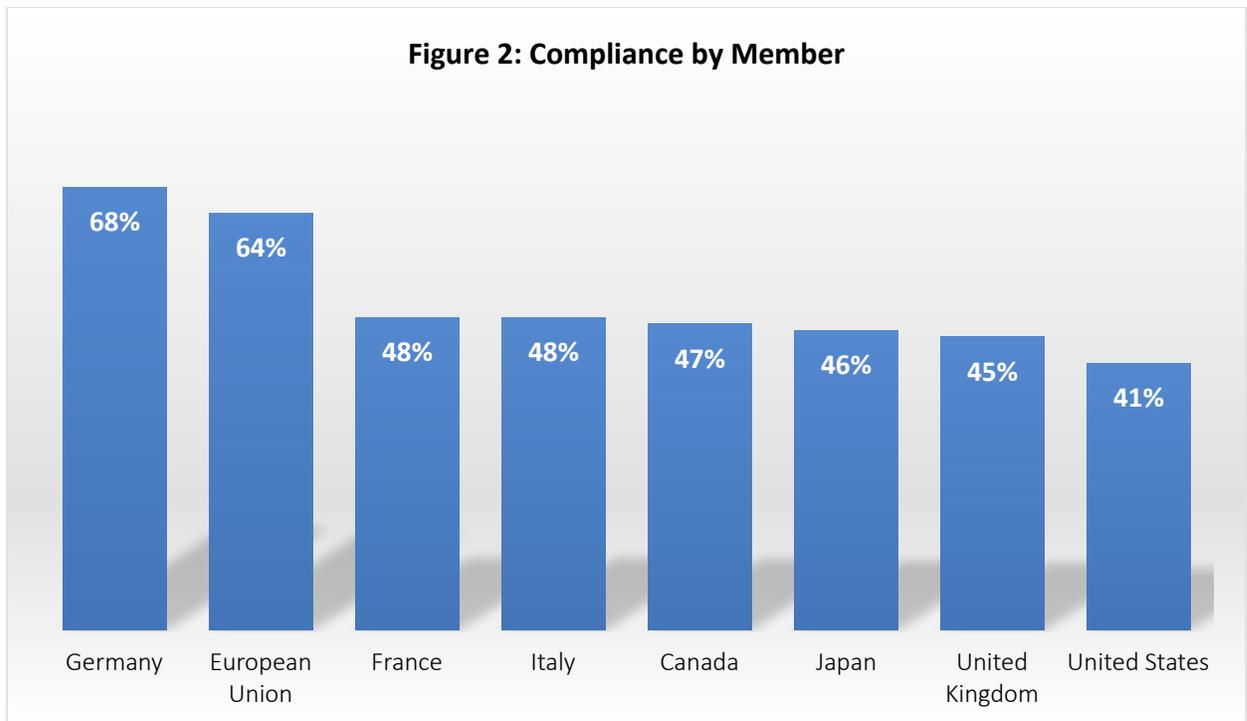
Of the 518 environment ministers' commitments, 35 (7%) have been assessed for compliance by members according to their implementing behaviour in the year after the commitment was made (see Appendix B). Overall compliance is strikingly low at only 51%.

Compliance by Year

Two of these assessed commitments were from the 1997 Miami meeting. The one on climate finance had compliance of 31% and the one on children's health had compliance of 50%. Average compliance with the two Miami 1997 commitments was thus 40%. Seventeen commitments were assessed from the 2016 Toyama meeting. Average compliance rose to 57%, across a range of subjects, including the Paris Agreement, biodiversity, marine litter, gender and children's health. Sixteen commitments were assessed from the 2017 Bologna meeting, also across a range of subjects, with compliance the same at 57%.

Compliance by Member

By member, Germany ranked first with compliance of 68% (see Figure 2). The European Union ranked a close second with 64%. France and Italy tied for third with 48% each. Then came Canada with 47% and Japan with 46%. The United Kingdom ranked second last with 45%, leaving the United States in last place with 41%.



There is thus a gap between commitments and compliance at the ministerial level. Further research should analyze the causes of such compliance to account for this gap and to provide a basis for recommendations to increase compliance. For example, across the three assessed EMMs, those that make more commitments have slightly higher compliance, although not in 2017. It should also consider the specific subjects where commitments and compliance are the highest, as well as the impact of compliance with climate change commitments on the environment and the global average temperature to inform such recommendations.

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Appendix A: Environment Ministers' Commitments 1992-2018

Environment ministerial	Commitments	Chair's statement	Communiqué	Other	Pre-summit (days before)	Post-summit (days after)
1992 Germany, Spring	(no document)	-	-	-	Yes	
1992 Rio de Janeiro, June	(no document)	-	-	-	Yes	
1993 (no meeting)						
1994 Florence, March 12-13	0	0	-	-	117	
1995 Hamilton, April 29-May 1	0	-	-	0	46	
1996 Cabourg, May 9-10	9	9	-	-	48	
1997 Miami, May 5-6	51	13	-	37	45	
1998 Leeds Castle, April 3-5	26	-	26	-	40	
1999 Schwerin, March 26-28	50	-	50	-	83	
2000 Otsu, April 7-9	45	-	45	-	104	
2001 Trieste, Oct. 27	18	-	18	-		97
2002 Banff, April 12-14	16	-	-	16	73	
2003 Paris, April 25-27	23	-	23	-	34	
2004 (no meeting)						
2005 Derbyshire, * March 17-18	(no document)	-	-	-	111	
2005 London, ** Nov. 1	0	0	-	-		114
2006 Monterrey, Oct. 3	(no document)	-	-	-		80
2007 Potsdam, March 15-17	24	-	-	24	89	
2008 Kobe, March 24-26	46	0	-	46	112	
2009 Siracusa, April 22-24	26	0	-	26	77	
2010 (no meeting)						
2011 (no meeting)						
2012 (no meeting)						
2013 (no meeting)						
2014 (no meeting)						
2015 (no meeting)						
2016 Toyama, May 15-16	66	-	66	-	10	
2017 Bologna, June 11-12	49	-	49	-		15
2018 Halifax, September 19-21	69	43		26		105
Total	518	66	277	175	16	5

Notes: 21 ministerial meetings, 23 documents produced at 17 meetings, 17 documents contain commitments.

– = no commitments found in document.

Blank = no meeting held, no document issued.

* = environment and development ministers' meeting.

** = environment and energy ministers' meeting.

Pre-summit and Post-summit = date of leaders' level summit and number of days between leaders' level summit and environment ministerial meeting.

Miami 1997: 14 of the 37 commitments in "other" were found in the annex to the document.

Toyama 2016: 29 of the 65 commitments were found in the annex to the Chair's Summary/Statement.

Bologna 2017: 21 of the 49 commitments were found in the annex to the Chair's Summary/Statement.

Halifax 2018: two Chair's summaries were produced. The environment ministers' chair's summary had 17 commitments and the joint ministerial session on healthy oceans, seas and resilient communities had 26.

Two "other" issue specific documents were produced at Halifax. The G7 Innovation to Address Marine Plastic Litter had seven commitments and the G7 Initiative on Earth Observation and Integrated Coastal Zone Management had 19.

Appendix B: Environment Ministers' Compliance

Commitment	Average	Canada	France	Germany	Italy	Japan	United Kingdom	United States	European Union
1997 Miami (2/50=4%)									
1997-12 Climate finance	+0.38	-1	-1	+1	0	-1	-1	0	0
1997-15 Children's health	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Average 1997	-0.19	-0.50	-0.50	+0.50	0	-0.50	-0.50	0	0
2016 Toyama (17/66 = 26%)									
2016-9 Biodiversity	-0.38	0	-1	0	-1	0	0	-1	0
2016-13 Paris Agreement	+0.75	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	-1	+1
2016-19 Methane mitigation	-0.63	0	0	0	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1
2016-20 Transportation emissions	+0.88	+1	+1	+1	-1	+1	+1	+1	+1
2016-22 Climate finance	+0.63	+1	+1	+1	0	+1	0	0	+1
2016-24 Gender	+0.25	+1	-1	+1	-1	0	-1	+1	+1
2016-26 Children's health	0	0	0	0	-1	-1	+1	0	+1
2016-31 Waste management	+0.13	-1	-1	0	-1	0	-1	0	+1
2016-32 Marine litter, removal	+0.25	0	0	+1	0	+1	0	0	0
2016-33 Marine litter, collaboration	+0.63	0	+1	+1	0	0	+1	+1	+1
2016-34 Marine litter, education	+0.88	+1	+1	+1	+1	0	+1	+1	+1
2016-35 Marine litter, standards	-0.50	-1	-1	0	-1	0	0	-1	0
2016-46 3Rs	-0.50	-1	0	-1	0	0	-1	-1	0
2016-48 Sustainable consumption	+0.75	0	+1	+1	+1	0	+1	+1	+1
2016-49 Organic waste	-0.13	+1	0	-1	0	0	-1	+1	-1
2016-56 Oil and Gas	-0.88	-1	-1	-1	-1	+1	-1	-1	-1
2016-60 E-waste	-0.50	0	-1	0	-1	-1	-1	-1	+1
Average 2016 (N=17)	+0.14	+0.12	+0.06	+0.29	-0.27	+0.19	+0.07	0	+0.50
2017 Bologna (16/49 = 33%) (Interim scores, date)									
2017-1 SDGs (Sept. 8)	+0.38	+1	0	0	+1	+1	0	-1	+1
2017-5 SDGs (Sept. 8)	-0.13	0	0	0	0	0	0	-1	0

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Commitment	Average	Canada	France	Germany	Italy	Japan	United Kingdom	United States	European Union
2017-6 Paris Agreement (June 30)	+0.43	0	+1	+1	+1	0	0	n/a	0
2017-7 Climate finance (Sept. 8)	+0.57	0	+1	+1	-1	+1	+1	n/a	+1
2017-14 NDC communication (June 30)	+1.00	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	n/a	+1
2017-18 Sustainable Finance (Sept. 8)	+0.88	+1	+1	+1	+1	0	+1	+1	+1
2017-21 10YFP (Sept. 8)	0	0	0	0	+1	0	0	-1	0
2017-22 Resource efficiency (June 30)	-1.00	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1
2017-23 Marine plastic litter (Sept. 8)	+0.50	+1	+1	0	+1	0	+1	-1	+1
2017-25 MDBs (June 30)	-1.00	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1
2017-29 G7 Alliance on Resource Efficiency (Sept. 8)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2017-38 Resource efficiency (June 30)	-0.63	0	+1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1
2017-39 Food waste (Sept. 8)	-0.50	-1	0	+1	-1	-1	-1	0	-1
2017-41 Plastics barriers (Jan. 31)	+0.75	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	-1	+1
2017-42 Green public procurement (Sept. 8)	0	0	0	+1	-1	0	0	-1	+1
2017-45 RRRDR definitions (Sept. 8)	-0.63	0	-1	-1	-1	0	-1	-1	0
2017-48 Eco-design (Jan. 31)	-0.38	-1	-1	0	0	-1	0	-1	+1
2017-49 NPR efficiency (Jan. 31)	+1.00	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1
Average 2017 (N=16)	+0.13	+0.18	+0.29	+0.29	+0.12	+0.06	+0.12	-0.54	+0.35
2017-33 International Resource Panel study (Italy only) (June 30)	-1.00				-1.00				

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Commitment	Average	Canada	France	Germany	Italy	Japan	United Kingdom	United States	European Union
Average 2017 (N=17) (with Italy)	+0.07				+0.06				
Average all by commitment (N=35) (w/o Italy)	+0.14	+0.11	+0.14	+0.31	-0.06	+0.09	+0.06	-0.23	+0.40
Average all by commitment (N=36) (with Italy)	+0.11				-0.09				
Average all by year (N=3) (w/o Italy)	+0.03	-0.07	-0.05	+0.36	-0.05	-0.08	-0.10	-0.18	+0.28
Average all by year (N=3) (with Italy)	-0.01				-0.10				

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