COP31 Day 9: Ocean, Seas, Nature and Land Use in the Spotlight as EU Rejects Draft Cover Decision

Antalya, 17 November 2026 – The ninth day of COP31 was defined by a stark contrast: while the thematic focus on **Ocean, Seas, Nature and Land Use** showcased innovative solutions and new coalitions, the negotiating rooms remained consumed by the fallout from the previous night's draft cover decision, which the European Union publicly rejected as a "shopping list". Ministers arrived to the strains of Bob Marley's "Get Up, Stand Up" as protesters urged them to fight for climate justice, a fitting soundtrack for a day where the gap between ambition and agreement remained wide.



Thematic Focus: Oceans, Seas, Nature and Land Use

The day's theme recognised the critical role of natural environments and ecosystems in the climate system, covering ocean and marine ecosystems, inland waters, coastal resilience, the blue economy, biodiversity, and forest restoration.

The Ocean Finance Gap

A new analysis presented at COP31–the World Resources Institute (WRI) working paper on The State of Ocean-Based Climate Action in 2025–26 Nationally Determined Contributions found that **more than 95 per cent of coastal and island nations now include ocean-related measures in their national climate plans,** up from 73 per cent in the previous round. However, around **60 per cent of these commitments depend on additional financing or technical support,** a figure that rises to **61 per cent** in a separate WRI analysis, which found that nine out of ten projects in middle-income countries across Ibero-America, sub-Saharan Africa, and Oceania are stalled due to funding gaps.

Brianna Fruean, a Pacific youth climate envoy, put a human face on the statistics, describing how residents of **Naidiri village in Fiji** have financed their own marine protected area to restore coral reefs and fish stocks. "*They shouldn't be taking money out of their own pockets to pay for these adaptation measures,*" she said.

Marine Lecerf, Head of International Policy at the Ocean and Climate Platform, framed the task not as creating new mandates but as delivering on existing ones: "*We're not asking for a new mandate; we're asking for acceleration*".

Brazil and France Launch Ocean Taskforce

Brazil and France launched an ocean action task force, linking national governments with **23 delivery partners to** accelerate marine-focused climate action and support coastal economies through financing and technical assistance.

Wildfire Prevention and Indigenous Knowledge

Twenty-three countries endorsed the **Antalya Action Plan on Integrated Fire Management,** an initiative spearheaded by the COP31 Presidency (Türkiye) and co-led by **Brazil and the Republic of Korea**, with support from the F**ood and Agriculture Organization (FAO).** The plan aims to turn growing political commitments on wildfire resilience into practical action on the ground, drawing on Indigenous knowledge and science.

The day also highlighted the role of the **cryosphere** (the frozen components of the Earth system–land ice, sea ice, snow cover, and permafrost–which play an irreplaceable role in regulating the planet's energy, water, carbon, and methane cycles). The **Royal Meteorological Society (RMetS**) noted that ice loss from mountain glaciers and ice sheets is a major driver of sea level rise and ocean current shifts.

Marina Silva, the former Brazilian Environment Minister, used the day to demand "just" remuneration for the **ecosystem services** provided by the Amazon, despite the fires, pollution, and deforestation the region continues to face.

The Cover Decision: EU Rejection and a "Shopping List"

The political centre of gravity on Tuesday was the 18-page, 144-paragraph draft cover decision released by the COP31 Presidency on Monday night.

The EU's Rejection

Wopke Hoekstra, the European Commissioner for Climate Action, delivered a blunt assessment: the draft was a "**shopping list**" that needed "**significant change"** and risked making the process "**untenable**". "It is hugely important that here at this COP that is about implementation, we do not get distracted by other things," Hoekstra said. "And to be frank, that is unfortunately what the draft cover decision is doing".

Ireland's Climate Minister, Darragh O'Brien, justified the European rejection by arguing the text contained "many things that have been added" to please all parties, which he saw as impossible because it "goes against our fundamental belief of what this COP should be about, which is implementation".

Presidency Consultations: A Fractured Landscape

During the Presidency consultations on the cover decision, the deep divisions among parties were laid bare:

- **The Environmental Integrity Group (EIG)** called for the decision to address the overshoot of 1.5°C, invite voluntary contributions, and urge Parties to accelerate mitigation, including transitioning away from fossil fuels.
- **Bhutan and Tajikistan** emphasized the vulnerability of mountain communities and called for a dedicated work programme and high-level dialogue on mountains.
- **The Republic of Korea, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Tuvalu** welcomed the inclusion of the Ocean-climate nexus.
- The **African Group** stressed the importance of climate finance that does not increase debt burdens and called for balanced treatment of overshoot, means of implementation, and loss and damage.
- **The Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Malaysia** highlighted the adaptation finance gap and welcomed the reference to the **International Court of Justice (ICJ) Advisory Opinion on Climate Change.**
- **The Arab Group** raised concerns about the legitimacy of the process and rejected references to roadmaps, top-down sectoral targets, and the ICJ Advisory Opinion.
- **The European Union** highlighted opportunities from the energy transition, including the **35% by 2035 electrification target.**
- **Indonesia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo** proposed including peatland protection.
- **The Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)** supported transitioning away from fossil fuels, fulfilling finance commitments, and recognizing the special circumstances of LDCs and SIDS.



The Fossil Fuel Fight

The draft's most contentious provision calls for "**accelerated action to phase out fossil fuels, including through the immediate transition away from fossil fuels in energy systems**"–language that goes further than the COP28 Dubai agreement and would be a significant step after COP30 in Belém ended without any explicit mention of fossil fuels. **Michael Joseph,** the environment minister of Antigua and Barbuda, said: "We would love to see a commitment that calls on the phasing out of fossil fuels," but acknowledged that getting consensus at COP31 "might be very, very difficult".







Technical Negotiations: Red Lines and Deadlocks

While ministers debated the political declaration, technical negotiators spent hours locked in parallel consultations, with little progress to show. The Earth Negotiations Bulletin reported that with most of the "low-hanging fruit" picked, Parties doubled down on their red lines.

Adaptation (Global Goal on Adaptation - GGA)

- **Belize rejected references to adaptation "beyond the temperature goals"**—a position likely rooted in the concern that such language could imply adaptation is only necessary in a world that overshoots 1.5°C, whereas adaptation is already an urgent necessity today.
- **The Solomon Islands, supported by Fiji,** proposed temporarily parking discussions on tripling adaptation finance because the issue was being addressed under the cover decision.
- **Climate Action Network (CAN)** called for adaptation finance to reach **at least USD 120 billion in public, grant-based finance "well ahead of 2035"** and be embedded in the GGA framework.
- **Youth Non-Governmental Organizations (YOUNGO) and Indigenous Peoples Organizations (IPO)** called for disaggregated data across the indicators.

Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE)

Fierce debates erupted over language. T**he Russian Federation** insisted on "gender-sensitive" instead of "gender-responsive" policies. **Saudi Arabia** opposed an activity inviting reporting on the protection of scientists, journalists, teachers, and environmental human rights defenders. **The Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, and Paraguay** called for deleting activities related to media and digital literacy to counter misinformation, saying these terms lack internationally agreed definitions. **The EU, UK, Norway, Iceland, Mexico, Canada, and Chile strongly supported this activity.**

Just Transition Work Programme (JTWP)

China, opposed by **the EU**, proposed recognizing the Global North-South development gap. Developing countries preferred agreed language on "agriculture" rather than "food systems". On institutional arrangements, **Brazil, Uganda, Ghana, a**nd others supported a two-tier structure, which **New Zealand** opposed. **China** proposed a dedicated constituted body, which the EU described as a red line.

Climate Finance: Impasse Continues

Negotiations on climate finance remained deadlocked. **The Climate Finance Work Programme (CFWP)** was still caught between the G77 and China's demand for a focus on **public, grant-based finance** and the EU's preference for an **"all-sources" framing**. A procedural dispute over the programme's duration persisted, with options on the table for it to end in **2027** or extend until **2028**.

Private Sector: World Bank's $17.6 Billion Package

The World Bank Group and its partners announced a climate and job-creation package exceeding **$17.6 billion, pairing more than $6.9 billion in direct investment** with an expected **$10.7 billion in private capital** across agriculture, manufacturing, urban infrastructure, and renewable energy.

Türkiye featured prominently in the package, with three named programmes:

- **The Türkiye Agrifood Sector Transformation for Rural Jobs and Growth (TARGET) Project** will help **225,000 Turkish farmers** reach markets and financing, supporting over **100,000 job equivalents.**
- A separate programme will provide Turkish manufacturers, including SMEs, with long-term funds to adopt digital and environmentally friendly technologies, also supporting over **100,000 job equivalents.**
- A joint initiative will fund urban transport, water, and sanitation systems, aiming to bring safe water to **1.65 million people** and improve climate-resilient infrastructure for more than **3 million people.**

The announcement followed the **World Bank Group's fiscal year 2026 results,** which saw **$48 billion in climate-related financing and another $48 billion in private capital** mobilised, lifting total climate funding by **21% to $96 billion.**



Civil Society: Protests and "Blue Carbon Is Not Enough"

350.org staged a protest under the banner "**We are not drowning, we are fighting"** during the day's proceedings. **Amnesty International,** the **Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL),** and the **Environmental Human Rights Defenders Coalition** staged a separate "**Defend the Defenders" protest. Climate Action Network International** activists staged a "**Renewable for Africa**" protest. Activists in costumes made from waste also marched through Antalya. A Palestinian solidarity coalition demonstrated near the main entrance, calling for an **energy embargo against Israel** and for the country's suspension from the UNFCCC.

Small island developing states used the day to highlight that blue carbon finance often falls short, with ministers and experts telling a COP31 event that nature markets are being eyed to boost ocean conservation.

Other Developments

New pledges to the **Global Environment Facility (GEF)** and its family of funds pushed the total amount pledged for the **2026–30 cycle past $4.5 billion. A global blended finance platform for coral reef protection secured $30 million** in new investments. **Spain** announced a **€45 million disbursement,** split between the **Adaptation Fund (€25 million),** the **Loss and Damage Fund (€15 million),** and the **WMO Systematic Observations Financing Facility (€5 million).**





Why This Matters for Youth

1. **The Ocean Finance Gap Is a Youth Employment Gap:** The finding that over 95% of coastal nations have ocean measures in their climate plans, but 60% cannot implement them without external support, is a direct threat to the livelihoods of young people in coastal communities. The Naidiri village in Fiji, where residents financed their own marine protected area, is not an isolated case–it is a snapshot of a generation forced to self-fund adaptation because the promised finance has not arrived.
2. **The Cover Decision Is a Test of Political Will:** The EU's rejection of the draft as a "shopping list" and its insistence on "implementation" over new commitments reveals the fundamental divide that will determine whether COP31 delivers for young people. If the final text is stripped of its ambition on fossil fuels and finance, it will be a declaration, not a delivery plan.
3. **The CFWP Is Our Fight:** The deadlock over whether the Climate Finance Work Programme focuses on **Article 9.1 (public, grant-based finance) or an "all-sources" framing** that counts loans and private investment is the difference between grants and debt. For young people in Uganda and across the Global South, that is the difference between a funded future and a mortgaged one.



WHAT TO WATCH ON WEDNESDAY 18 NOVEMBER

Human and Social Development Day

Day 10 shifts the thematic focus to Human and Social Development, covering tourism, cultural heritage, employment and livelihoods, traditional and local knowledge, vulnerable groups, women's empowerment, and just transition. This is the day YTJN's postponed side event takes place.

YTJN Side Event: "Who Pays, Who Benefits?" at the Uganda Pavilion

YTJN's side event, "**Who Pays, Who Benefits? Financing Youth-Led Implementation of Uganda's NDC Across the COP31 Agenda**," will take place on 18 November, aligning with the Human and Social Development thematic day. The session will feature **Dr. Nqobizitha Mathanda Dube** (Climate Finance Expert), with responses from Ms. **Patriciah Roy Akullo** (Social Safeguards and Gender Expert, Climate Finance Unit, MoFPED), **Emmanuel Muliisa** (Member of the Climate Mitigation Working Group, Uganda UNFCCC Negotiation Team), **Laban Musinguzi** (OPM Advisory Committee on Climate Finance & Executive Director, GRO Foundation), **Allan Murangira** (Team Leader, YTJN), and will be moderated by **Jon Kafuko** (Programs Manager, YTJN).



Other Sessions to Watch

- **The Just Transition Mechanism:** Thematic discussions on employment and livelihoods will feed directly into the Just Transition negotiations, which remain deadlocked over financing arrangements and institutional structure.
- **Ministerial Consultations:** The ministerial pairs on **Climate Finance** (Monique Barbut and Robert Borje), **Just Transition** (Alicia Bárcena and Krzysztof Bolesta), and **Adaptation** (Jiwoh Abdulai and Miatta Fahnbulleh) are expected to continue their closed-door consultations in an attempt to bridge the divides exposed in the technical negotiations.
- **The Cover Decision:** The Presidency is expected to release a **revised draft** of the cover decision, incorporating feedback from the consultations. Watch for whether the language on fossil fuel phase-out and adaptation finance survives, or whether it is softened to accommodate the EU and Arab Group objections.