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Answer given by Mr Hoekstra
on behalf of the European Commission
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The fact that the Representative Concentration Pathway (RCP) 8.5 scenario is no longer considered part of a ‘range of plausible futures’¹ is an indication that climate policies and deployment of innovative technologies have slowed the growth in global greenhouse gas emissions, but it does not mean that current global action is sufficient to avoid catastrophic climate impacts. The highest-emissions scenario now considered by the scientists² still leads to a 3.5°C increase of global warming on average by 2100³, with +4°C not ruled out.

It is important to recall that every fraction of a degree has increasing impacts on our health, security and prosperity. Staying as close as possible to 1.5°C – and getting back below 1.5°C – remains our goal. Scientists have repeatedly warned that the only way to prevent dangerous impacts is to limit global warming to 1.5°C in the long run⁴, which requires achieving global net zero greenhouse gas emissions.

The RCP 8.5 has never been a basis for EU legislative acts and no longer using RCP 8.5 will not lead to any change in the European Climate Law or free trade agreements. The scenarios underpinning the 2040 target agreed in the European Climate Law are described in the Commission Impact Assessment⁵. The Commission does not therefore plan to review the European Climate Law Regulation and the legislation underpinning the 2030 target. That legislation remains proportionate and in line with the impact assessments and other analysis accompanying those proposals^{6,7}. Similarly, the Commission does not plan to re-evaluate the sustainability and climate clauses of free trade agreements.

¹ The team selected scenarios that collectively span what they assess to be ‘the range of plausible futures’ (which now excludes RCP 8.5), but they explicitly refrain from assessing the likelihood of any of those scenarios.

² This work was coordinated by the World Climate Research Programme, which is independent from the IPCC. Their new scenarios should inform the upcoming IPCC 7th Assessment Report (AR7), but the IPCC can assess other relevant scenarios as well.

³ Global warming for this scenario would even reach 4-5.5°C by 2150 and further increase thereafter.

⁴ See IPCC Special Report on 1.5 (<https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>). IPCC, 2018: Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty [Masson-Delmotte, V., P. Zhai, H.-O. Pörtner, D. Roberts, J. Skea, P.R. Shukla, A. Pirani, W. Moufouma-Okia, C. Péan, R. Pidcock, S. Connors, J.B.R. Matthews, Y. Chen, X. Zhou, M.I. Gomis, E. Lonnoy, T. Maycock, M. Tignor, and T. Waterfield (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA, 616 pp.

⁵ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52024SC0063>

⁶ 2030 climate target proposal in the European Climate Law: https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/climate-strategies-targets/2030-climate-targets_en, and its impact assessment: SWD/2020/176 final.

⁷ All legislative proposals of the Fit for 55 package can be found here:

https://commission.europa.eu/publications/proposals-delivering-european-green-deal_en

Each proposal refers to its own impact assessment.