

Message from Tim Johnson

International Coalition on Sustainable Aviation (ICSA)

Sometimes, challenges arise that require immediate unity and a common vision. Responding to the IPCC's 2018 special report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels is one such occasion. The message for governments and society is as stark as it is clear: we need to reach net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by the second half of the century. The UN Secretary General is already calling on states to show more urgency and ambition in delivering their nationally determined contributions. This expectation of further action will also apply to activities that cross national borders, like emissions from international aviation and shipping. Having a collective answer and a clear sense of direction is perhaps the singularly most important environmental challenge facing the aviation sector. With almost 60 per cent of its emissions coming from international aviation activity, that puts the International Civil Aviation Organisation centre stage.

ICSA, the International Coalition for Sustainable Aviation, has been representing environmental non-governmental organisations at ICAO, reflecting the views of civil society, since 1999. During these 20 years, ICSA has devoted significant time and resources to its participation in ICAO's Committee on Aviation Environmental Protection, working alongside States and other Observer Organisations to help shape outcomes including the aircraft CO₂ standard, sustainability criteria for aviation fuels, and ICAO's work on a market-based measure that has culminated in the Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA).

Important tasks still remain to finalise CORSIA and ensure its environmental integrity, to deliver ICAO's immediate goal of keeping carbon dioxide emissions from international aviation at or below 2020 levels. But looking ahead, we cannot afford to pause our consideration of how to reduce aviation emissions in the long-term. According to IPCC, to prevent an overshoot of 1.5°C, global net anthropogenic CO₂ emissions must decline by about 45 per cent from 2010 levels by 2030, reaching net zero around 2050. On current forecasts, aviation emissions are forecast to continue growing to 2050, with actual emissions potentially increasing by around 150% compared with CORSIA's likely 2020 baseline. Contributing to the delivery of a net zero future presents a fresh challenge for the sector, and for ICAO.

Potential solutions include continued efficiency improvements from technology and operations, potential step changes such as electrification, the use of sustainable biomass and synthetic fuels, and market-based measures. But one lesson that has been learned to date is that ICAO progress has gained momentum once it has identified a clear rationale for the application of measures. This is exemplified by CORSIA: despite ICAO having a long record of analysing the potential for market-based measures, work to deliver CORSIA really only took off once ICAO confirmed its 2020 goal.

So it's clear that having a clear vision will lay the foundation for future action by all. The unity that comes from identifying a long-term climate goal, or environmental goals generally, gives everyone a sense of purpose and a benchmark to measure progress. That vision needs to be set now, and by the time of the next ICAO Environment Report in 2022, we hope we can reflect on the progress made.