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Katrina's fury delays climate change forum

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Sydney Morning Herald

By: Cynthia Banham

The first meeting of the US-led Asia Pacific Partnership on climate change, which was to be held in Adelaide next month, will now take place next year because the Americans and Chinese could not attend this year.

Ministers of the six countries to sign up to the pact billed as an alternative to Kyoto - Australia, the US, China, India, Japan and South Korea - will meet in the first quarter of next year, government sources said.

The sources said Hurricane Katrina had caused the US President, George Bush, to change his travel plans for the latter part of this year, and those of his Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, who was originally due to visit Australia next month for the climate change meeting.

It is understood that the US Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, has confirmed he will attend this year's meetings of Australian and US foreign and defence ministers, but it is unlikely Ms Rice will.

Meanwhile, President Bush is believed to have chosen a new ambassador to Australia, who is being vetted and is likely to start early next year.

There has not been a US ambassador to Australia since Tom Schieffer departed in February. The candidate originally chosen to replace Mr Schieffer dropped out

because of social security issues over the hiring of an illegal immigrant worker.