

Briefing Note in Support of Amendments 109, 118, 120 and 131 on 'cumulative budgets'

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Friends of
the Earth
Scotland

Please note: we have provided this additional written note to selected TICC members in recognition that some of these amendments have been debated, but have yet to be voted on.

“Emissions targets must be placed in the context of a cumulative carbon budget if we are to avoid dangerous climate change” (Allen et al 2009, in Nature)¹

Stop Climate Chaos Scotland and Friends of the Earth Scotland strongly urge TICC Committee members to vote for: amendments 118, 120 and 131 in the name of Cathy Peattie, and amendment 109 in the name of Patrick Harvie.

1. Reasoning behind a Cumulative Budget

Leading climate scientists, and the latest climate science are clear on the basic fact that the cumulative release of greenhouse gases is what matters most for climate outcomes. Two recent major studies have been published in *Nature* in the last month, suggesting similar magnitude cumulative carbon budgets for the world remaining to 2050². Previous work by the Tyndall centre for the UK suggests a 2000-2050 budget within the same range³. The scientists published in *Nature* also collaborated to write a commentary, concluding that, alongside shorter-term targets, *“the scientific logic for some kind of limit [on cumulative emissions] is inescapable.”* They also argue that cumulative budgets can help ensure that we take appropriate clear and early action, and thus avoid needing to deliver late and rapid reductions, which they describe as *“risky, expensive and disruptive”*.

2. Importance of Cumulative Emissions Reporting

With commendable foresight the Committee recognised the importance of cumulative budgets in its stage 1 report, and called for reporting of cumulative totals in annual emissions reports.

Amendments 118, 120 and 131 would require such reporting in annual, interim and final reports respectively. These proposals are very welcome and we believe they should be supported by all committee members.

3. Need for a Scientific Benchmark

At a minimum the reporting of cumulative budgets needs a benchmark against which it can be assessed. Without independent scientific advice of what a fair and safe cumulative budget would be, such reporting risks creating confusion. In the context of such advice it adds admirable clarity to the whole process.

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It should be noted that the Climate Change Committee for the UK uses a cumulative analysis to recommend its periodic carbon budgets, interpreting the desired global temperature outcome in terms of an acceptable concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, and then applying a burden-sharing methodology to determine the emissions share available to the UK. In other words the first three UK budgets have already been set with reference to an overall cumulative budget calculation. We believe that Scottish targets would benefit from a similar discipline.

Amendment 109 would do this by requiring the advisory body to have reference to the 'objective of not exceeding a fair and safe cumulative budget' in giving advice on annual targets (and by implication to consider what such a budget would constitute). As a result this simple amendment would offer greater clarity as to the scientific validity of any proposed targets.

We urge all members to support amendment 109. We note that there is a minor drafting concern, but the missing 'and' can easily be inserted at stage 3. The intent of the amendment should be embraced now.

4. Ministerial Rebuttal

The Minister has suggested on several occasions, including in the public debate in Parliament undertaken as part of stage 1 that he is not opposed to the calculation of a cumulative budget, suggesting that the aggregation of all the annual targets set under the Act would constitute a cumulative budget.

Unfortunately this is not entirely correct: the final batch of annual targets will not be published until 2036. Until then the total cumulative budget would remain uncertain. Worse, by this time a fair and safe budget could all have been consumed, leaving Ministers needing to set negative net targets! The benefit of obtaining advice on a fair and safe cumulative budget is that it can help stimulate timely cost-effective action as both cumulative totals year on year and proposed new annual targets are assessed against a scientific benchmark.

Amendment 109 effectively combines one of the strengths of the UK approach to budget setting with the annual targets framework of the Scottish Bill. It is not appropriate to seek to set a cumulative budget on the face of the Bill, but scientifically right to take advice on such a budget when setting targets and to report against it annually.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion members are urged to support both clear reporting on Scotland's cumulative net emissions, and a duty on the advisory body to provide its advice on annual targets in the context of scientific guidance on what a fair and safe cumulative budget to 2050 would constitute for Scotland.

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1 Meinshausen, M., et al Greenhouse gas emission targets for limiting global warming to 2°C. Nature, doi: 10.1038/nature08017 (2009); Allen, M. et al Warming caused by cumulative carbon emissions towards the trillionth tonne. Nature, doi:10.1038/nature08019 (2009)

2 Meinshausen, M., et al Greenhouse gas emission targets for limiting global warming to 2°C. Nature, doi: 10.1038/nature08017 (2009); Allen, M. et al Warming caused by cumulative carbon emissions towards the trillionth tonne. Nature, doi:10.1038/nature08019 (2009)

3 Dr Alice Bows, Dr Sarah Mander, Mr Richard Starkey, Dr Mercedes Bleda and Dr Kevin Anderson Living within a carbon budget July 2006 Tyndall Centre Manchester