

UK Climate Change Bill: committee reports

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Friends of
the Earth
Scotland

Introduction

The UK government published their draft Climate Change Bill in March 2007¹. Three parliamentary committees² took evidence on the draft Bill and have now published their reports³. This briefing summarises the findings of all three committees.

Is the target to cut emissions by 60% by 2050 adequate?

Environmental Audit Committee

The Government's policy towards the UK's 2050 target is clearly incoherent. The Government remains committed to limiting global warming to a rise of 2°C; but it also acknowledges that, according to recent scientific research, a cut in UK emissions of 60% by 2050 is now very unlikely to be consistent with delivering this goal. ... We recommend that the 2050 target be strengthened to reflect current scientific understanding of the emission cuts required for a strong probability at stabilising warming at 2°C. (Paragraph 69)

The Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research have made a very strong argument that the UK ought to make carbon reductions of 70% by 2030 and 90% by 2050. We recommend that the Government respond to Tyndall's recommendations; and if it is rejecting them, explain why. (Paragraph 73)

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

Whilst we agree with the substantial amount of evidence calling for the 2050 target to be higher than 60%, we recognise that this target itself is still extremely ambitious. We are not in a position to suggest whether the 2050 target should be higher than 60%. However, we recommend that the first task of the Committee on Climate Change should be to assess the current state of knowledge regarding climate science in order to determine what the 2050 target should be and the trajectory for achieving it. (Paragraph 32)

Joint Committee on the Draft Climate Change Bill

We understand, and sympathise with, the argument in favour of setting a higher target for the long-term reduction of carbon dioxide emissions. But recognizing how very demanding the target set out in the draft Bill for 2050 is, and facing up to both the complexity of domestic budgeting and international requirements, we conclude that the approach adopted by the Government is appropriate provided that it is understood that this is but the first step along a path towards a low-carbon future for the UK. (Paragraph 44)

Bearing in mind however the weight of scientific evidence before the Committee that a target of more than 60% is likely to be necessary, we believe that as soon as possible after it is established, the Committee on Climate Change should review the most recent scientific research available and consider to what extent the target should be higher than 60%, with a view to making recommendations on the appropriate amendment to the long term target. (Paragraph 45)

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Are five year budgets without annual milestones or targets adequate?

Environmental Audit Committee

The Government should still set out an indicative target for UK emissions in each year, so as to apply continual pressure to reduce emissions. We also recommend that the successive series of carbon budgets should extend out all the way to 2050, so that all carbon budgets are consistent with the UK's overarching emissions objective. (Paragraph 118)

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

We recommend that clear annual 'milestones' are set—and published—by the Committee on Climate Change in order that it may become apparent well before the end of a budgetary period whether or not policies are working. This also reflects the fundamental significance of cumulative emissions, and the trajectory involved, by which the fiveyear budgets are reached. (Paragraph 51)

Joint Committee on the Draft Climate Change Bill

We recommend that, in setting the level of future budgets, the Government should also provide indicative annual milestones to help assess progress on an annual basis. (Paragraph 69)

Should emissions from international aviation and shipping be included in the Bill?

Environmental Audit Committee

Overall, we are unimpressed by the Government's arguments for excluding international aviation and shipping emissions from the UK's carbon reduction regime. While the draft Bill contains provisions that allow these emissions to be included in the future, we recommend that they be included immediately. ... There already is an internationally agreed methodology for attributing and recording these emissions as memo items to national Kyoto accounts; the Government should simply use this to track these emissions within the UK's carbon budgets. (Paragraph 96)

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

As the years pass it will become increasingly artificial not to take account of the UK's share of emissions from international aviation and shipping, as indicated by the Government's Aviation White Paper. The Government argues that there is not yet any internationally agreed basis for allocating responsibility for emissions from international aviation and shipping. But these emissions are already reported to the UN as a 'memo item'. This suggests that some basis for reporting has in fact been agreed. **The inclusion of the UK's share of emissions from international aviation and shipping will have significant implications for the validity of the 2050 target. We recommend that the Committee on Climate Change should be required to report on the UK's emissions from international aviation and shipping, whether or not they are counted as part of the statutory target, in order more accurately to inform its recommendations regarding budgets and targets which will affect all other sectors of the economy.** (paragraph 128)

Joint Committee on the Draft Climate Change Bill

The draft Bill currently does not include within the scope of the targets, and the net UK carbon account, emissions from international aviation. We consider this to be a serious weakness which, in view of the significant likely growth of such emissions, has the effect of reducing the credibility of the 60% carbon reduction target.

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¹ Draft bill and accompanying documents are available here:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/climatechange/uk/legislation/index.htm>

² The three are the Environmental Audit Committee (EAC); the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee (EFRA); and the Joint Committee on the Draft Climate Change Bill. The latter comprises members of both houses of Parliament.

³ The reports are available here:

EAC report: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmenvaud/460/460.pdf>

EFRA report: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmenvfru/534/534i.pdf>

Joint committee report: http://www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/climatechange.cfm