



Stop Climate Chaos Scotland Briefing on the Public Engagement Strategy

Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee
meeting, 25th January 2011

Background

The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 required the Scottish Government to publish a Public Engagement Strategy before the end of December 2010. The strategy was published on 30th December and Stop Climate Chaos Scotland (SCCS) welcomes its publication. SCCS recognises the scale of the challenge of engaging the public in climate change, however, we have a number of concerns regarding the contents of the strategy and its development.

Content of the strategy and 2011 Delivery Plan

The Act states the strategy must:

- inform persons in Scotland about the targets specified by virtue of this Act
- encourage them to contribute to the achievement of those targets
- identify actions which persons in Scotland may take to contribute to the achievement of the targets

While the strategy sets out how persons in Scotland may be *informed* about the targets, and identifies priority areas of focus for them to reduce their carbon footprint, it does not set out how their behaviour will be *changed* in relation to these issues.

The delivery plan includes a comprehensive list of relevant groups, organisations, businesses etc that are working on issues related to climate change, and various events that could be used to communicate with various audiences. It also includes a list of 67 actions which can be carried out in relation to these various communication channels. This includes work which is already happening and presents broad ideas for encouraging further action within each of these groups. However, the strategy provides no real framework within which all of this will happen. These lists do not constitute a sophisticated, consolidated strategy for change.

Rather than stating clearly how the public will be inspired and encouraged to take action to reduce carbon emissions, the list attempts to 'cover all bases'. A more targeted approach for the 2011 delivery plan could provide a solid foundation for expanding climate communication outwards in subsequent delivery plans.

The 2011 delivery plan focuses too heavily on public and private sector organisations and initiatives. These organisations already have their own channels of communication with the Scottish Government, e.g. the 2020 group brings together businesses to promote action on climate change; and public authorities have the Public Sector Climate Change Action Group and other structures.

Clearly the public and private sector have a crucial role to play in disseminating climate messages. They can contribute by providing channels of communication, and can bring expertise in communicating with people as customers, clients or citizens. That said, the Public Engagement Strategy and associated 2011 delivery plan focus too heavily on those sectors, and do not hone in on concrete ways in which to engage with the general public.

Questions for the Minister:

- Does the Minister consider that the Public Engagement Strategy provides the necessary direction and ambition needed to push forward climate action under the delivery plans for 2011 and beyond?
- Does the Minister consider that the actions listed in the 2011 delivery plan fully illustrate the urgency with which climate action is needed by individuals and communities?

- The strategy places its emphasis on talking to different audiences. How will it deliver the second part of engagement - action?

Voluntary approach and regulation

The Parliamentary debate on the Report on Proposals on Policies (RPP) on 12th January, highlighted concerns regarding a focus on voluntary measures. As the Minister for the Environment and Climate Change stated during this debate: the Public Engagement Strategy “will have an impact on the extent to which the voluntary approach is successful or otherwise.”

SCCS acknowledges that voluntary measures will play a key role in meeting Scotland’s emissions reductions targets. But, since uptake of voluntary approaches is not guaranteed and hard to predict, we cannot rely solely on assumptions that communications with the public about climate change will result in certain levels of action. SCCS supports the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee’s recommendation that the Scottish Government should “define a failure criteria for voluntary measures”¹. There must be a commitment to regulation and/or greater incentives if voluntary action does not deliver the required emissions reductions within the specified timescale.

As stated in a recent UK Department for Energy and Climate Change report², there is a need to:

“Be honest about the limitations of voluntary private-sphere behavioural change, and the need for ambitious new policy interventions that incentivise such changes, or that regulate for them. People know that the scope they have, as individuals, to help meet the challenge of climate change is extremely limited. For many people, it is perfectly sensible to continue to adopt high-carbon lifestyle choices whilst simultaneously being supportive of government interventions that would make these choices more difficult for *everyone*.”

Questions for the Minister:

- Will the Scottish Government commit to providing performance indicators with monitoring to include targets and timeframes for voluntary approaches?
- Will the Scottish Government commit to regulation and/or greater incentives if voluntary action fails within the specified timeframes?

Development of the Public Engagement Strategy

While the Act did not formally require a consultation draft, it is surprising that a strategy to promote public engagement has been developed and published without a formal opportunity to contribute ideas and comments. The fact that the strategy was published between Christmas and New Year contributed to concerns that this strategy is not something the Government wish to draw attention to.

Question for the Minister:

- Why was the publication of the strategy put off until just one day before the deadline, when this has been in development since before summer 2010?

Climate Challenge Fund (CCF)

SCCS warmly welcomes the Scottish Government’s decision to continue funding the CCF in 2011-2012. This provides a tremendous resource to help communities to respond to climate change and is therefore closely linked to the strategy. However, the CCF is not without flaws, and with a little more focus, greater cohesion and a more flexible view of the eligible recipients, it could achieve more. The current evaluation of the CCF (due to be published this summer) is an ideal opportunity look into ways to increase the positive impact of the CCF including:

¹ TICC Committee report, paragraph 50

² Climate Change Communication Advisory Group: ‘Communicating climate change to mass public audiences’

- It could focus on key areas where behaviour change is clearly the key way to reduce carbon footprints, for example transport, home energy or waste.
- Based on the successful blueprints from existing schemes it could encourage community groups to share 'off the shelf' projects that have been developed in one community and that might have a wider application.
- Any non-government and non-local authority groups with good projects should be able to apply if their project can be demonstrated to support local community action.

Taking this forward

Stop Climate Chaos Scotland is committed to help strengthen the Public Engagement Strategy and future Delivery Plans to create behaviour change across Scotland, which will contribute to meeting our emissions reduction targets. This commitment could be translated into action through our wide range of member organisations and we would be happy to discuss this in relation to the Public Engagement Strategy.

For more information please contact:

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Stop Climate Chaos Scotland (SCCS) is a diverse coalition of over 60 organisations campaigning together on climate change, including environment, faith and development organisations, trade and student unions and community groups.

www.stopclimatechaos.org/scotland

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