

Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
The Rt Hon Greg Clark
1 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0ET

Dear Secretary of State,

Re: Pending implementation following Energy & Climate Minister's expression of intent at CHOGM Meeting, April 2018

The key goal of the Paris Agreement is to pursue efforts to limit global warming to 1.5°C. The minimum aspiration of the Paris Agreement is to limit global temperature rise to "well below 2°C". But it would be perverse to equate this with a 66% chance – ie. a 2 out of 3 chance – of avoiding "around" a 2°C temperature rise, which was the original basis for the prescribed 2050 target of the 2008 Climate Change Act.

One can only argue that the current target is technically consistent with the Paris goal to limit warming to below 2°C IF one has a casual approach to the odds of exceeding planetary boundaries, lack of concern for intergenerational equity and the UK's responsibilities for its major component of global warming to date (See below).

Since 2008, there have been considerable advances in climate science, such as understanding of ice sheet dynamics and permafrost status, these not only raise the risk level but also now point towards a more dire prognosis for a 2°C world; even if one believes we can constrain ourselves to that limit. Whilst the 2013 IPCC 5th (working group 1) assessment report's scenarios are liberally underpinned by the idea of carbon-capture and storage (CCS), there is now also a growing appreciation that industrial scale CCS is infeasible to effect any significant mitigation before 2050.

In recent years the UK Government has made a number of decisions that have impeded progress even on attaining the current 2050 target. These include reneging on a commitment to zero carbon development from 2016; failure to support sustainable urban drainage; cut backs in onshore renewables – notably in the months just before COP21 in Paris – as well as being slow to implement the green finance initiative.

Consequently, the UK is not currently on track to meet its 5th Carbon budget. Furthermore, capacity of central and local government institutions to deliver both mitigation and climate change adaptation is currently inadequate even for the short-term challenges ahead.

Quite simply, the UK not only seems adrift from its 5th Carbon Budget objectives but it is not plausibly on track to meet its implied commitments to the Paris Agreement targets, an agreement it ratified in late 2016.

The UK may be responsible for around 1% of global emissions but historically it has a crucial responsibility, at 5%, for the single greatest component of historical global temperature rise* since pre-industrial times. Yet the UK's existing long-term target is based on the judgment that it should be no more than an average emitter in per person terms by 2050 on a global 2°C path. The intergenerational inequity of that impact alone behoves the UK Government to exercise global leadership and take action. Meanwhile,

the carbon footprint culture of the UK remains one as if we had three planet earths, helped by the carbon externalisation in the way we consume.

*[[Matthews, et al. \(2014\) National contributions to observed global warming, Environmental Research Letters 9](#)]

Manchester Climate Change Agency is already advising Manchester City Council on the need for a 2040 zero carbon target (Excluding aviation & shipping). And this is likely to be extended to all the Greater Manchester Authorities. 2018 will see their local councillors and officers undergoing carbon literacy training.

Meanwhile, this country suffers from some of the greatest levels of ignorance about climate change in Europe. This comes about not just from its media but is abetted by organisations such as the Met Office and, notably, the Environment Agency (Nb. I write with experience as an EA employee) who do not see it as part of their role to educate the public. The culture needs to change and not just for the public but also across government (including within the Treasury) where acknowledgement of the challenges is at best patchy and does not match the systematic appreciation of the CCC's reporting.

There needs to be a relentless series of radical measures promoted now by this Government, and successive administrations, if it is to conform to a suitable trajectory to achieve 'zero carbon'. The UK Government knows full well the technical contents and scientific basis of this year's IPCC 1.5°C report on potential global impacts and has known for most of this year, which is merely now in the throws of finessing the executive summary. A revision of the 2050 target, of the 2008 Climate Change Act, is long over due and there is no excuse for anything other than an immediate review to be expedited.

A more stringent target, with compressed timeframe, would inject a great beneficial impetus into all levels of spatial, development and economic planning right across the UK and would act as a catalyst for the transformation of the UK economic culture. Above all it would be sending a strong political message, both at home and abroad, about the imperative of addressing climate change. It requires bold political leadership, which would derive best effect before the COP24, in Katowice this year, in order to help with leverage for all NDC global ambitions.

Any further delay, backsliding, in reviewing the 2050 target simply amounts to politicians cheating on our future generations and kicking the burden of action down the road; as were Minister's promises of March 2016. Needless prevarication, or inaction, will be rightly judged with utter contempt by those cheated generations.

Months actually do matter. JFK's policy determination for the US to go to the moon took less than five weeks in the absence of an assured technology. Whether our government is capable of such leadership seems to be the question.

Yours faithfully,

Richard A Shirres

CC. The Rt. Hon John Gummer, Lord Deben, Chairman of Climate Change
Liz Saville Roberts MP
Mary Creagh MP, Chair, HoC Environmental Audit Committee
Lord Teverson, Chair, EU Energy and Environment Sub-Committee
Rebecca Long-Bailey MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
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