

EAC INQUIRY INTO NET ZERO GOVERNMENT – Submitted by Richard A Shirres*, MSc, MICE, C Eng

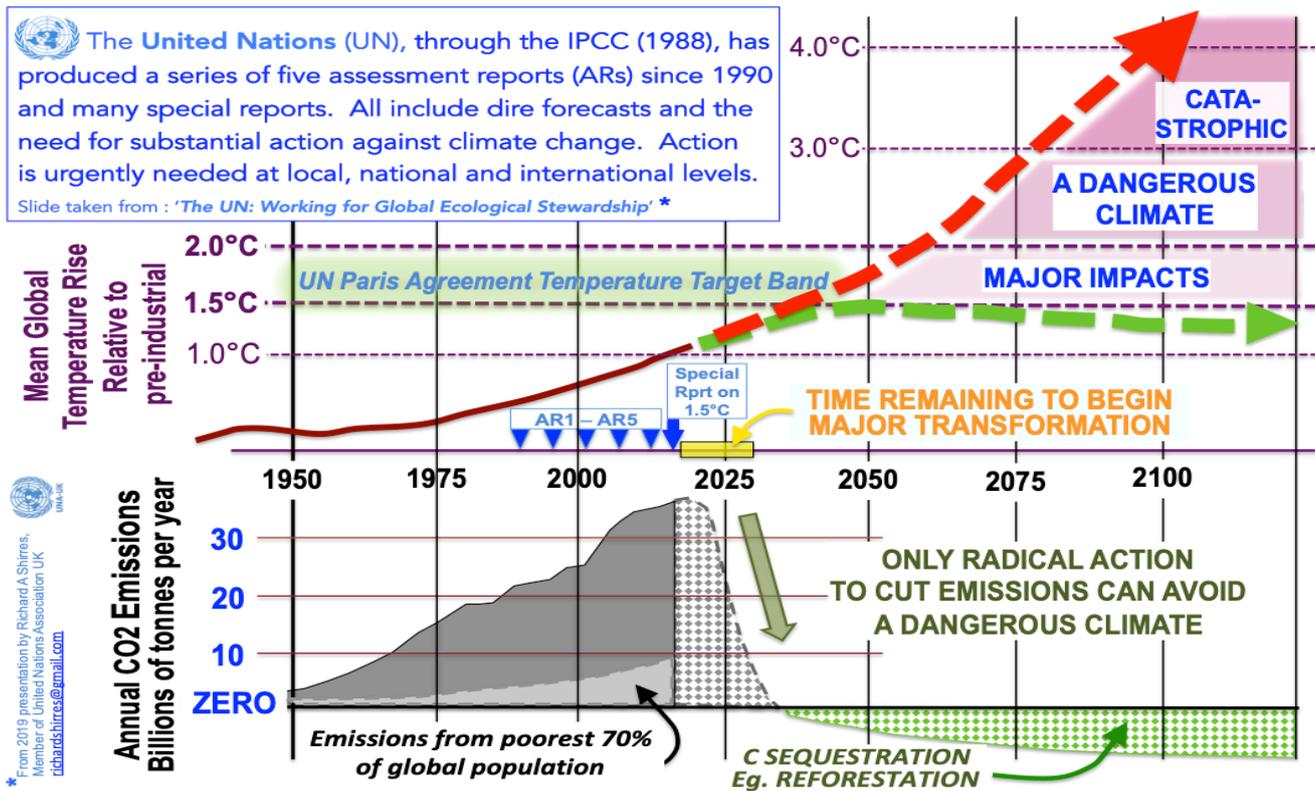
*[A retired chartered engineer with a second degree in applied environmental science and a member of the United Nations Association UK, also with decades of experience covering local government & private sector, overseas development and civil society roles and engagement; in the last few decades, experience in promotion & delivery of urban & landscape-scale climate change adaptation and habitat creation have been prominent.]

This submission focuses on selected priorities, of which the most important is item E, for:

‘WHAT ACTION DOES GOVERNMENT NEED TO TAKE TO ACHIEVE ITS NET ZERO EMISSIONS TARGET’

[SUMMARY: This paper stresses why there is an urgency for Government Action; argues why the Government’s (June 2019) target is unambitious; the importance of Natural Resource Catchment Management, and, **most emphatically**, that Government needs to resource and facilitate formal nationwide public engagement amongst local communities in order to have the mandate for the extensive logistical and societal actions much needed to confront the climate emergency declared by Parliament in May, 2019.]

A. WHY THERE IS AN URGENCY FOR EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT ACTION – SEE FIGURE BELOW



B. THE QUESTION OF NET ZERO CARBON (NZC) TARGET BY 2050 OR SOONER?

1) The 2050 target lacks ambition and is insufficient to galvanise needed societal & economic change.

B.1.1 The May 2019 CCC report was overly reliant on technological carbon capture & storage (CCS) – this will contribute nothing of any significance until, at best, late in the 21st century. The IPCC SR1.5C output places us now with about 10-year carbon budget if the BAU pathway continues. Even with IPCC’s carbon budget pathway for 1.5°C, we only have a 50% chance of keeping within 1.5°C. In terms of global risk management this is ludicrous but it is a point upon which the CCC shows complacency in arguing for a 2050 target. Hence, we are confronted with a chronic climate emergency! A more apposite target would be 2040 at the latest.

B.1.2 The CCC NZC report was unambitious in many areas; Eg. Offshore wind generation potential. Other examples of assumed factors to reduce energy demand by 2050:

- Transport modal shift - Only a 10% shift from car trips to walking/cycling
- Buildings – domestic: Only 21% reduction in energy efficiency
- Buildings – commercial: Only 25% reduction in building energy efficiency
- Dietary: Only 20% reduction in meat consumption

B.1.3 A rigorous analysis is called for about the shortcomings of the CCC NZC reports. Evidence should be taken on that, not least from Centre for Research into Energy Demand Solutions (CREDS), CAT Zero Carbon Britain (NB. Revised edition of its 2013 available by October 2019) and the eminent Prof. Kevin Anderson. This should also trigger an urgent review of the 5th Carbon Budget previously approved by Parliament.

2) Why world-leading Government action should be taken to meet net zero carbon well before 2050

B.2.1 In setting the timescale for net zero carbon, the UK has so far failed to address its own issues of international and intergenerational equity. The UK is responsible for almost 5 % of global temperature rise to date with less than 1% of the global population. A significant proportion of the UK population fall within the 10% most affluent people on the planet, a category that is responsible for almost 50% of global GHG emissions. As a member of the UN Security Council, the UK should be addressing global risk management.

B.2.2 Thus, the UK should give defining global leadership owing to its past responsibilities, its current administrative and technological capabilities in order to be at the forefront of mitigating global climate change. The Paris Agreement implicitly relies on peer pressure to encourage greater ambition amongst the Parties. The UK should be supplying that peer pressure and not lagging behind, as it was when it failed to be one of the first 55 signatories that triggered the Paris Agreement to come into force in Autumn 2016.

C. STRATEGIC ACTION FOR ENABLING LANDSCAPE-SCALE & URBAN CLIMATE ADAPTATION & MITIGATION

C.1.1 **Natural Resource Catchment Management (NRCM):** The hydrological catchment should be used as the key geographical management unit for landscape-scale climate adaptation. Land use, ecosystems & ecological condition, soils, agriculture, afforestation, biodiversity, flood risk and environmental regulation are all bound up with how land is managed for the economy and well-being of the catchment population. The lead actors would be democratic authorities and aided by bodies such as CEH, NRW or Environment Agency. Regional spatial planning authorities need to be reinstated at the higher – river basin – level. This higher tier would provide a crucial framework for the catchment planning and local authority's own subset of town & country planning. Only by such fundamental change can the UK hope to implement the needed strategic integrated approach for sustainable land use planning as a response to the climate emergency.

D. THE INHERENT OBSTACLES TO RADICAL GOVERNMENT ACTION

D.1.1 From experience, conviction is perceived to be lacking about societal and economic changes needed. This stems both from within Government and some of its senior civil servants – notably in the Treasury - and, especially, the population at large. Ultimately it will be the overall permissiveness of public opinion about potential Government policy that risks braking progress on the scale of radical change necessary. This needs to be confronted immediately by Government through enabling mass public engagement*.

***[THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF THIS SUBMISSION – FOR ELABORATION SEE BELOW]**

E. THE ISSUE OF PUBLIC CONSENT ESSENTIAL FOR RAPID GOVERNMENT ACTION ON NET ZERO TARGET

E.1.1 For the emergency, Government must not only demonstrate political leadership but should empower local change. Solutions should both come from 'top down' by Central, Regional & Local Government, driven strategically through policy and planning, and also more 'bottom up' through local initiatives & actions.

E.1.2 Rapid economic and societal change in a democracy can only be politically tolerated through the permissiveness of its citizens, something only achieved by informed consent of the majority. Yet, the majority of UK society has still to appreciate the depth of the crisis we do actually face, in contrast to many involved in recent XR demonstrations and school strikes. In this context, citizen assemblies can only be a useful adjunct to majority informed consent because the nature of transformation is not a single issue.

E.1.3 Communities throughout the UK have to engage urgently about the true extent of the climate crisis for themselves and understand its implications. A consensus building process through local engagement will be essential, both to develop some common level of knowledge and for people to influence for and promote local changes. This offers the best hope of avoiding polarisation amongst public opinion in the short term whilst mobilising the potential of local communities.

E.1.4 The younger generation will need carbon footprints of only a small fraction of today's politicians and older generation. There will be the potential for rising chronic dissonance between lack of action on climate change and a growing appreciation of need, especially from the younger generation. Whilst Government will need to encourage and facilitate greater school engagement about 'climate solutions', it must also grasp the need to champion inter-generational engagement and foster a national dialogue.

E.1.5 Unlike the grossly under-resourced Local Agenda 21 process, of the 1990s, **Government must formulate a comprehensive approach to resourcing and facilitating a nationwide conversation, to be carried out at the local level. Without this, the UK will fail to bring forward the radical changes needed to ramp down dramatically its greenhouse gas emissions, and move to a sustainable society, in the short time frame available;** all of which is important for global leadership.

"A RACE WE CAN WIN. A RACE WE MUST WIN" but ONLY if the majority leads on the demands for action.