

The future of the BBC

A couple of tweets by the Culture Secretary does not create a new policy. It appears for the next few years the Licence Fee remains, though for a couple of years it may not increase. What she has done is invite those interested to debate the future financing of this important national institution.

The Licence fee is becoming increasingly difficult to collect as many people turn to social media and commercial entertainment and news services which they say they can legally access without paying the Licence fee. The Fee is also resented by more people who are paying for access to non BBC service but still have to pay the tax because of the way they watch other services. The BBC continues to antagonise people who legally do not need to pay with their intimidating emails and messages demanding payment.

One of the reasons BBC support is dropping is the attitudes and content of much BBC output. Although the BBC sought to be impartial over the formal period of the EU referendum. for the rest of the time before and after , it is remorselessly pro EU putting the EU case against the UK and refusing to treat the EU to critical pieces on its policies and on its ways of arriving at them in the way it does for any UK government. It campaigns relentlessly for net zero policies, weaving them into the fabric of many of its programmes, and favours the experts of world organisations however wrong they turn out to be. It plays up Scottish and Welsh identity but refuses similar treatment for England.

It also has some great back catalogue material, employs some talented and interesting people and produces some good programmes. If it wishes to re establish itself as the accepted voices of the UK it needs to become the people's BBC. I suggest that the government should now move to decriminalise the licence fee, making it a bill like other household bills. Enforcement occupies too much time and resource in magistrates courts. The BBC should also be told to offer the same level of support and service to England that it shows to Scotland by having BBC Scotland.

The continuing shortage of wind on some days means there is an urgent need to change energy policy

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how much additional carbon dioxide is generated by importing and burning LNG compared to using more natural gas delivered by pipeline from UK fields.
(96748)

Tabled on: 04 January 2022

Answer:

Greg Hands:

The Oil and Gas Association published analysis in May 2020, comparing the carbon intensity of United Kingdom Continental Shelf gas with imported liquified natural gas and pipelined gas:

<https://www.ogauthority.co.uk/the-move-to-net-zero/net-zero-benchmarking-and-analysis/natural-gas-carbon-footprint-analysis/>.

This analysis shows that gas extracted from the United Kingdom Continental Shelf has an average emission intensity of 22 kgCO₂e/boe; whereas imported liquified natural gas has a significantly higher average intensity of 59 kgCO₂e/boe. The process of liquefaction, combined with the emissions produced by the transportation and regasification of the liquified natural gas once in the United Kingdom, is responsible for the higher emissions intensity.

The answer was submitted on 12 Jan 2022 at 16:57.

Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what his policy is on the required minimum level of oil stocks for national resilience. (96749)

Tabled on: 04 January 2022

Answer:

Greg Hands:

Emergency oil stocks are a critical tool to defend against the harmful impacts of major disruptions to global oil supply. The UK holds emergency stocks of oil, primarily to release in a co-ordinated fashion with other members to the international market in the event of such major supply disruption. As a member of the International Energy Agency the UK is obligated to hold a minimum of 90 days of net imports. This obligation is passed on to companies that supply more than 50 thousand tonnes of key fuels to the UK market in a twelve-month period.

The answer was submitted on 12 Jan 2022 at 16:12.

These two answers illustrate different features of the unsatisfactory energy policy pursued by the UK government. The government is still failing to licence the output of more gas from the UK North Sea, even though on their own figures for carbon dioxide output it would be hugely beneficial on this ground alone to substitute more UK natural gas for imported LNG. As officials and the Regulator seem to regard cutting CO₂ as the main requirement, often ignoring the need to maintain a secure supply and to keep prices down they should deduce from their own figures that they must substitute UK natural gas for imported LNG on green grounds alone. Price, security of supply, availability and the jobs, tax revenues and incomes UK gas would generate also are potent arguments for more UK gas. Ministers have said they want

this, so where are the new permits and where is the policy of encouragement to operators in the UK North Sea?

The government adopts the minimum standard for oil reserves and leaves that to the private sector, meaning the stocks are not held in a UK strategic reserve here at home as some other countries do. The derisory level of gas stocks is a wanton disregard for national security.

The Prime Minister and Brexit

There can be little doubt that Boris Johnson became Leader of the Conservative party and went on to win a substantial General election victory to get Brexit done. He replaced Theresa May whose civil servants negotiated the UK into a very weak position creating a Brexit that looked like membership without the seat around the table. She left office owing to the Parliamentary pressures. The Opposition worked with Remain forces inside government to create a Brexit in name only leading to enough Conservative MPs wanting her to resign to uphold the result of the referendum.

Two years on from his victory at the polls, and one year on from getting the UK out of the EU formally, the Brexit voting public wants him to use the freedoms the UK has now regained to make us a more prosperous, independent, well respected country with global reach and more domestic activity. Many people are pleased the UK did use its freedom to stay out of the EU vaccine policy, leading to the early development and deployment of a successful UK vaccine. We want more examples of how we can do better for ourselves and the wider world by nurturing talent and trusting policy makers and inventors at home.

My advice to the Prime Minister is to rebuild lost voting support by enjoying some Brexit wins. This should begin with energy policy. We should detach from more and more dependence on energy short Europe, linking our fortunes to a continent that relies on Russian gas and too many windfarms. The UK needs to extract more of our own gas and oil pending the investment in reliable renewable power, perhaps through pump storage and hydro, perhaps through green hydrogen from windfarms when they are working.

It should continue with banning large supertrawlers from the continent and rebuilding a UK fishing industry with proper regard for our fish stocks. It should include growing more of our own food with suitable support for farmers. It should entail remodelling VAT, taking it off green products and energy. He needs urgently to reassert control, unilaterally if necessary, over GB/NI trade.

He will lose his core supporters and more of his Brexit voters if he does not return to this unfinished agenda.

Attitudes to the Prime Minister

In the last twenty four hours I have had around 50 emails hostile to the PM over the culture in Downing Street. Some of these came from longstanding opponents of the PM, but some from new voices. I have also had strong complaints about the lack of support for UK farmers to grow food and the licencing of foreign supertrawlers to plunder UK waters. In previous days the main preoccupation was the domestic energy shortage and prices.

I consulted the Executive of the local Conservative party this morning. The overwhelming view was to await the Report on what happened in Downing Street, who attended which gatherings and whether any of them broke the guidance or law at the time. There was widespread disapproval of senior civil servants holding drinks events during lockdown and a wish to see appropriate disciplinary action taken where the facts justified it.

Energy self sufficiency

Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what assessment he has made of (a) the implications for his policies of rising UK import dependence in energy and (b) the potential to expand domestic production. (96751)

Tabled on: 04 January 2022

Answer:

Greg Hands:

Great Britain benefits from highly diverse sources of energy. The Government plans to increase energy production from a variety of sources, including nuclear and hydrogen will ensure that dependency on foreign fossil fuels is decreased. Around half of Great Britain's annual gas supply is already met by domestic production, and Great Britain's electricity mix includes significant sources of domestic generation.

The Government is taking steps to support investment in new sources of electricity generation, including 40 GW of offshore wind by 2030, a first of a kind power plant enabled with Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage technology, and new nuclear projects. The Net Zero Strategy also sets out the Government's ambition to decrease Great Britain's reliance on natural gas, such as by blending hydrogen into the gas grid.

The answer was submitted on 14 Jan 2022 at 15:01.

This answer is most disappointing. It states that we will rely on future nuclear and hydrogen based power. Nuclear power will decline this decade, with no new station not currently in build possible before the 2030s. All but one of our current nuclear stations will close this decade. There is no large scale hydrogen currently available and that too will take time to build up, with current plans not large. Hydrogen will need to be green hydrogen produced from renewable electricity, as it is not a primary energy source.

The phrase "around half of GB's natural gas is already met by domestic production" implies it is on the rise, whereas we have gone from national self sufficiency to under one half so far this century. UK policy has been to restrict new UK gas extraction and to manage a planned decline in UK output. That is still the official policy though Ministers have started talking about adding to current gas fields.

The chilling phrase that electricity includes "significant sources of domestic generation" shows officials are keen to press on with making us more dependent on imported power. Last century we used to plan to be self sufficient with a margin of excess capacity to take care of shut downs of major power stations and surges in demand. We should revive that policy.

The wish to create 40GW of offshore wind needs to be linked to methods of storing the power when the wind blows, especially at night, to help with periods of low wind. Storage could be via production of hydrogen or battery or pump storage. Yesterday our substantial wind capacity only managed to meet 1% of our power needs, demonstrating that rated capacity is a meaningless figure to guide power availability when you can get so little when the wind does not blow – or blows too strongly so you have to shut the turbines down.

The government needs to concentrate on self sufficiency to keep the lights on and to prevent Mr Putin and an energy short Europe holding us to ransom.