

Is the UK leading carbon dioxide reduction?

I receive a number of enquiries, often from students and schoolchildren, about net zero issues. I am going to publish a few background pieces so these exchanges can be better informed.

The answer to the common demand that the UK leads the world in carbon dioxide reductions is that we are doing just that. The figures for the thirty years from 1990 reveal that of the major economies the UK has cut its emissions by far more than the rest of them.

Increase or decrease in output of CO₂ 1990-2020

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|--------------|--------|
| China | +381% |
| India | +302% |
| South Korea | +129% |
| Brazil | +97.9% |
| Mexico | +40% |
| South Africa | +38% |
| Australia | +38% |
| Canada | +19% |
| Spain | - 7% |
| Japan | -8% |
| USA | -10% |
| France | -27% |
| Russia | -30% |
| Germany | - 37% |
| UK | -46% |

These numbers should lead to some questions about the huge variation in achievement between differing countries.

China produces 30 times as much CO₂ as the UK each year. If China's CO₂ output goes up 3.3% next year on the previous year the increase in China's CO₂ is the same as the whole amount of CO₂ generated by the UK. China plans to carry on increasing her CO₂ until the end of this decade. Those who want

to bring world CO2 down should as these figures show direct far more attention to China and India, the main sources of growth in the gas.

If the UK carries on cutting its CO2 by stopping producing its own oil and gas, and ending the manufacture of steel, glass, ceramics, aluminium, petrochemicals and other energy intensive products it loses us well paid jobs and tax revenues but it does not cut the world's CO2 output. We import these items instead, usually increasing the amount of CO2 generated, at least by the extra transport requirement.

We also make ourselves dangerously dependent on imports of important items, which can be disrupted by wars, shipping problems or disease patterns as recent years have shown. It also widens the balance of payments deficit which requires us to borrow more or sell more assets to afford the extra imports.

All the time China and India carry on expanding their CO2 output it is difficult to see the world progressing to net zero.