

Speech: Green Great Britain: Climate Policy and Energy Transition

Thank you for the invitation to speak with you this morning on a subject that has been right at the centre of the UK-Norway relationship for many years.

Ten years ago, the British Parliament came together to pass the Climate Change Act, with strong cross-party support, binding the UK to ambitious reductions in carbon emissions by 2050. For those who followed the debate at the time, amid the warnings from scientists and the strong moral arguments for climate action, there were voices explaining the economic rationale for change, even touting industrial opportunity for the UK if it could lead on climate action.

Ten years later and after one of the hottest summers on record when we have all experienced first-hand the changing climate, the wisdom of those who called us to action a decade ago is sinking in. With this sobering realisation however, comes the exciting evidence that those who promised economic opportunity were every bit as visionary.

Since 1990, UK emissions are down by more than 40% and today there are almost 400,000 people working in low carbon businesses and their supply chains, from the innovators creating better, more efficient batteries to the factories putting them in less polluting cars.

Britain has been the most successful of the G7 nations in growing our economy while cutting emissions. Currently the UK uses three times less carbon to produce a £1 of GDP compared with 1990. This makes us a world leader in clean growth and demonstrates the real wealth creation opportunity that comes with building the new climate economy.

The UK could not have achieved its world-leading position on the low carbon economy without international partnerships. Norway has been at the forefront of countries that have worked with us on the energy transition. Norwegian companies were early movers in developing offshore windfarms in UK waters.

We are moving ahead rapidly with deployment of other zero carbon energy sources. Over the summer, the UK generated record levels of solar power. This success means we can confidently commit to a 2025 phase out date for coal generation, putting us ahead of most of the OECD nations and able to help other countries plan their own post coal transition. We want to lead the world to move beyond coal, which is why last year the UK together with Canada launched the Powering Past Coal Alliance. This partnership now numbers over 70 signatories with coal phase out dates, including global businesses, states and cities like Los Angeles, who signed up this summer. Among the industry partners is the Norwegian company Storebrand who have committed to restricting financing and investment in unabated coal power.

While the UK has made huge strides in decarbonising power generation and

waste, there is still much to do in transport, buildings and agriculture. In the next decade, we will build on our clean growth success to create the businesses and technologies to decarbonise these sectors. Again, the partnership with Norway will be very important. Electric vehicles as part of climate-friendly future mobility is an area where we are keen to build collaboration.

The low carbon economy could grow by up to 11 per cent a year up to 2030 – four times faster than the rest of the economy. And as other countries follow our lead and embrace our clean growth model, British businesses could be exporting £170 billion worth of low carbon goods and services. The City of London already leads the world in green finance and working with experts through the Green Finance Initiative, we want to mobilise the trillions required to deliver the global transition.

The UK Clean Growth Strategy, launched last year, sets out how we are investing more than £2.5 billion in low carbon innovation as part of the largest increase in public spending on science, research and innovation in over three decades. This investment is helping us lead the world in new technologies like carbon capture, smart grids and hydrogen fuel cells. I think that Norway is well placed to partner with the UK on these cutting-edge technologies, just as Norwegian companies did a decade ago with offshore wind development in UK waters.

Although more than three quarters of the British public are concerned about the climate, the clean growth story which I have described is less well understood. That's why two weeks ago, the British Government hosted Green Great Britain Week to showcase the opportunities and benefits of taking bold action to tackle climate change. Up and down the country businesses, academics, civil society groups and the Government join forces to tell the story of clean growth and how acting to tackle climate change is a shared opportunity, as well as a responsibility. During Green Great Britain Week, we also highlighted international partnerships.

The British Embassies in Oslo and Stockholm collaborated on a Green Finance event with the City of London. I was pleased to announce the embassy's new Beyond Plastic strategy to eliminate all avoidable single use plastic from our operations by 2020.

As the UK prepares to leave the European Union, we must remember that our ambition to protect our planet goes hand in hand with seizing new growth opportunities. Climate action continues to be a pragmatic economic strategy and one of the biggest industrial opportunities of our generation. The UK could have no better partner than Norway in this endeavour. Thank you for listening.