

Statement to parliament: Climate Change Protests

Mr Speaker, with permission, I would like to make a statement on the current climate change protests and on our climate change policy. I apologise to Members of the House if we are covering ground we have covered extensively earlier but I think it is a subject that will bear as much scrutiny as we care to give it.

Colleagues will be aware that public concern about climate change has grown to levels never seen before. In recent weeks, it has been incredibly powerful to see people of all generations across the world voicing their concerns about a warming climate and demanding a global response to this global crisis.

We've heard loud calls today that we should declare a climate emergency, and my answer to that is that we can say words all we like from the dispatch box but what counts is actions and what I would hope to set out is the many actions that we are taking that have enjoyed cross-party support. It is my fervent hope that we will continue to tackle this enormous crisis in that spirit going forward.

There is no doubt that climate change is the most profound environmental challenge facing the world today – and one where more action is urgently needed. We should not shy away from that fact; we must recognise the fact and I think should welcome the strong and growing pressure for more action to cut our emissions. But we should also ensure that while we acknowledge the scale of the challenge ahead, we do try as hard as we can to build a consensus around change so that communities across the UK and indeed across the world feel secure, feel optimistic and feel involved in our shifts to decarbonise the economy.

As I said earlier today I think we should be talking about hope, not fear and communicating the progress that we have made globally and have made here in the UK which does demonstrate that this urgent action to decarbonise our economy can sit comfortably alongside opportunity, growth and employment going forward.

We entirely accept that concerted and more action at national and international level is urgently required. I still feel we must focus on the fact, because it shows it is possible, that we have shown real leadership in the UK thanks to the cross-party consensus we have forged on this since the passage of our world-leading Climate Change Act over a decade ago.

I want to update colleagues on this progress and to outline our priorities moving forward.

In 2008 we were the first country to introduce legally binding long-term emission reduction targets through the [Climate Change Act](#) – which did enjoy

strong cross-party support. The Climate Change Act for me has been an absolutely seminal piece of legislation because I am one of the few Ministers in the world who stands here with high ambition, high aspiration and a legally binding set of budgets that we have to report on to Parliament. It is a great way of ensuring climate action survives the political cycle.

Since 1990, we have cut our emissions in the UK by 42% while growing the economy by 72%. We are independently assessed as leading the G20 in decarbonisation since 2000.

People talk a lot about the disparity between territorial emissions and consumption emissions and I would invite Members to consider the latest data that shows our greenhouse gas emissions on a consumption basis fell by 21% between 2007 and 2016. They fell 6% year on year in the year to 2016.

Across the UK, almost 400,000 people are working in low carbon jobs and their supply chains. A sector that is bigger than aerospace and is growing at a factor of two or three times the mainstream economy.

We have continued to be active on the international stage. My Right Honourable Friend, the Member for Hastings, was the Minister who carried the baton of the Paris Climate Change talks which were instrumental in coming together as the world previously had done in the Montreal Protocol to show there is concerted support and action for tackling these enormous international challenges.

At COP24 in Poland last December, at Katowice, a city where you could taste the hydrocarbons on the air. That's what happens when you burn coal and it must have been what London was like in the 1950s. We in the UK helped drive the work of progressive groups and secured global agreement on a robust rule book that brings the Paris Agreement to life. If you can't measure it you can't manage it.

And we are taking targeted and impactful actions to support ambition internationally through promoting global alliances and collaborations from the Powering Past Coal Alliance – which now has over 80 members and like the UK is committed to rapidly ending the use of coal as a source of electricity generation – to the Carbon Neutrality Coalition.

I was asked frequently this afternoon what are some of the things you have done in the last six months so I will focus on a few choice morsels to share with colleagues. Colleagues will be sick of me waving the [Clean Growth Strategy](#) around but I will continue to do so, which was published in November 2017. I believe it is one of the most comprehensive documents any government has put out across the world detailing how we will take decarbonisation action across the economy.

To date we have taken action on the vast majority of those actions, and to highlight some:

- Only last month I launched the [Offshore wind Sector Deal](#) (March 2019): including a new £250 million Growth Partnership with investors to ensure

that we will continue to invest in the North Sea, the best place in the world for offshore wind. We will crucially drive up the UK content of that nascent industry to over 60% and we will ensure the industry employs at least a third women by the year 2030. This is an industry that is regenerating our coastal communities right around the UK and one where we absolutely lead the world and will continue to do so.

- In the Spring Statement the Chancellor introduced the Future Homes Standard (March 2019) which said that all new homes will be required to have low carbon heating systems and world leading levels of energy efficiency by 2025. Something that will radically transform house building in constituencies like mine where most homes are not connected to the gas grid.
- He also announced that we will increase the proportion of Green Gas (March 2019) used in the grid in a bid to drive down the carbon profile of the UK's gas heating network.
- Only this Easter weekend we have had the longest run ever in this country of no coal contributing to power generation on the grid. When many of us were elected to this House coal contributed 40% of our electricity system and it is a testament to our own unilateral policies, including a carbon tax and emissions targets, that has led us to do something utterly transformational that other European countries have been unable so far to replicate.
- We also continue to contribute internationally – we are one of the largest donors of international facing overseas development assistance, with over £6 billion committed in this Parliament and in January the UK Climate Investments announced almost £30 million of investment in a dedicated African renewable energy company, trying to make projects, marketable and investable in so much of the developing world, so those countries never have to go through a high carbon stage in their growth cycle.

And it's not just in BEIS it is right across government.

We've published an ambitious [25 Year Environment Plan](#) and kick-started the creation of a vast Northern Forest, which will see 50 million trees planted from Liverpool to Hull. Tree planting is one of the most cost-effective ways to sequester carbon and improve conditions as I know colleagues will know.

And our new [Resources and Waste Strategy](#) outlines steps to reform the packaging producer responsibility system, introducing deposit-return schemes and food waste collection scheme.

We should celebrate these actions – not in order to imply we are in any way complacent and not to suggest we don't need to go very much more rapidly and further, but to demonstrate that this is a win-win both for the planet and for future generations in terms of their jobs and prosperity.

As colleagues will know last year we celebrated our first ever [Green Great Britain Week](#) and I can announce to the House tonight that we will be continuing this process and it will be returning for a second year on 4 November. We look forward to the celebrations and also the challenges around that.

We also, however, have not shied away from our responsibilities going forward and that's why we were the first industrialised economy after the publication of the chilling IPCC 1.5 degree report to ask our own Committee on Climate Change for advice on our own long term targets, in particular on the net zero target and I am looking forward to receiving their advice on 2 May and will engage colleagues across this House on next steps in the light of this.

It's worth pointing out the last time we asked for this advice the Committee advised us that it was not feasible to do either from a technological or cost point of view so it will be extremely interesting to see what has changed and how we can rise to that challenge.

I have the utmost respect for those pushing for stronger action to address the risk of uncontrolled climate change. The right to protest peacefully is a long-standing tradition in this country and a vital foundation of our democracy. It has been good to see that the demonstrations have by and large been good-natured, and the police response has been sensible and proportionate.

I welcome the passion and fervour of the protesters, and their constant reminder to us of the duties we face in raising our eyes for the next few years of the conversation about our relationship with Europe and thinking about the long-term challenges that we face.

I hope those who have taken their passion public will continue to express their views without disrupting the daily lives of ordinary people, and without endangering the safety of the public. And also without undermining the consensus we will need to support further, bolder action.

We must work together to solve this challenge of climate change – in this House, in the other place, in classrooms across the UK, in boardrooms across the UK, in international negotiating huddles, in homes and through civil society – to deliver the broad, just and progressive action on climate change that we urgently need.