

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.

Putting things right

The significance of officials inviting each other to a bottle party when their rules and words told the rest of us to stay at home alone or with our immediate family is twofold. It implies they did not think the virus was as serious as they told us it would be, as they were willing to take risks themselves. It reinforced the view of a technocracy that lectured the rest of us but lived by different standards. Apparently officials decided what was right and asked the PM to drop by his own garden to thank the staff. He was clearly not in charge of working arrangements. Some argue he should have been. It leads to more questions about the way advisers used statistics and one strand of scientific opinion to take over government and dictate controls and interventions on a war time scale.

Ministers and the Prime Minister not only allowed them to do this, but made it all visible by thrusting forward one group of advisers to front news conferences and to explain policy. You cannot allow government policy to be dictated by the “science”. Ministers should of course place public safety as a central aim of policy and should take best medical and epidemiological advice. They must however balance that with assessments of what lockdown will do to mental health, other causes of death, to jobs, incomes and livelihoods. They should also test out the official advice by hearing from other scientists. There were other views to consider on treatments, air flows, infection control and expanding capacity that were not welcome as part of the official narrative. There were other ways than locking us up at home of limiting spread, abating the impact and fighting the virus that we needed to do more about. My questions and comments to get these actions were often accepted by Ministers but not progressed with energy or pace.

Sorting out the question of what senior officials and maybe some Ministers and the PM did in lockdown is less important than ensuring they govern well today, though the one does reflect on the central problem of when will the government as a whole bend to the will of the people that pay for it? People would be less angry about the office arrangements if they were getting what they voted for. The government needs to reset, to show Ministers are in charge, and to demonstrate they can work productively with civil servants to

deliver promises.

Many people would be happier to see a curb on the UK's carbon dioxide output begun by reducing immigration numbers. The more people in the country the more CO2 they will generate themselves and in meeting their needs. The same policy would allow us to keep more green areas free from new houses, a popular green policy with many. We would be happy if the government kept its promise not to raise taxes and if it wound down wasteful expenditures like the excessive CV 19 testing programme and the large costs of hotel accommodation for people claiming asylum who are not refugees.

We want the Brexit wins. Why hasn't the government even taken VAT off green products yet? Given the passion they show for net zero it looks as if the officials are blocking tax changes which would start to differentiate us from the EU. Why are the Freeports not up and running, and why does the draft not offer much freedom in the freeports proposed?

Of course Ministers are ultimately to blame. They are meant to be in charge. Too many of them seem unable to apply common sense to official advice and to reach sensible judgements that powerful advisers do not always like.

[Time for the government to move on from managing Covid](#)

The latest case numbers for Covid suggest this latest wave is peaking. The figures also suggest thanks to vaccines serious cases and hospital stays will be lower proportionately than previous waves. On 26 January the government review should be able to decide the remaining restrictions can be lifted. The pandemic disease can move to being endemic, something we will live with. Everyone can make their own decisions about vaccines and how much risk to run of catching it.

The government needs to refocus. At the high Prime Ministerial level we know what this government is about – getting Brexit done, levelling up, improving public services. At departmental level there is often a lack of clarity or a failure to work away at contributing to the main aims. Particularly disappointing is the 2am so many departments have gone out of their way to avoid using Brexit freedoms. So many advisers and civil servants seem to want to keep us closely aligned to the EU.

There is also a slow start to levelling up. This should be primarily about helping people on their journeys to ownership, self employment, better training and qualifications. So where are the Freeports as centres of investment and new jobs? Why aren't they up and running, with low taxes and friendlier conditions for setting up and expanding business? Where are the plans to help us grow more and make more of what we want?

Cabinet Ministers need to set out how their departments will shape the post pandemic world and how this contributes to growth and levelling up.

[My speeches in the Remaining Stages of the Nuclear Financing Bill, 10 January 2022](#)

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con)

I welcome proposals that will create more generating capacity in the United Kingdom. As the Minister knows, I am extremely worried that we are already typically 10% dependent on imported electricity and that the current plans envisage our becoming more import dependent, with the preferred route for electricity provision being the construction of more interconnectors. I am worried about this on security grounds, because we link ourselves at our peril into an energy-short system on the continent of Europe that is far too dependent on Mr Putin and Russian gas. I also worry about it because we are short of electricity and gas at the moment, and we see the price pressures that that creates. I think we should be doing more to expand the supply of both electricity and domestic gas.

I think the Scottish National party has made some important points, although it comes at nuclear power from a different perspective from that of the Government. While we could usefully enjoy more nuclear power, it is very important that those projects are timely and cost-controlled, with technologies that will deliver reliable power on a sustainable basis. Does the Minister agree that nothing in this legislation, and nothing that he can now do, can prevent the proportion of our electricity that is generated by nuclear from declining for the whole of this decade? As I understand it, these projects take a long time to get type approval and financing, and a long time in construction. As I also understand it, all but one of our current nuclear power stations is scheduled to close by 2030, and although one large new nuclear power station should come on stream during that period, it will not offset all the capacity that is taken out.

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John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con)

I wish the Secretary of State, the Minister and the Bill every success. I think we might call this Secretary of State brave, because experience tells us that it is extremely difficult to land one of these really big projects and keep it to time and budget, and it is extremely difficult to get agreement to cheaper power. I am delighted that Ministers are motivated by the wish to have both more reliable generating capacity and more affordable

power. Those are two excellent objectives of energy policy.

However, I fear that what I have learned from this debate, and from previous debates like it, are these things. First, we are going to have less nuclear power in 2030 than we have today, whatever Ministers do—they are prisoners of their inheritance. Secondly, it will be difficult signing up big projects in particular, or getting smaller projects that are available and working in good time so that there is more nuclear, rather than less, in the decade that follows, and it will be difficult securing that at prices that customers think are good.

In the meantime, we have the problem that, on a typical day, we are already 10% import dependent for our electricity—I think it should all be generated in the UK—and that we are very dependent on the sun shining and the wind blowing, but the wind not blowing too much. When those things did not happen towards the end of last year, we had to reopen three old coal plants. People would rather not have to burn coal, but coal stations were reliable and actually worked when the wind did not blow and the sun did not shine. If the plan is to close them down and make them unavailable in future before we have anything else as a good stand-by, we will be trying the patience of the international community and trying our own luck rather too far.

I urge the Secretary of State, on the back of this Bill, to consider ways of increasing reliable power for this coming decade—the decade that we are living in and that we will be battling over in immediate elections to come—because that is what will matter to our voters. We should have in mind security of supply, availability of supply and affordability as the crucial things that we need to take care of so that we do not have a self-imposed energy crisis. Linking us into the European system is not a secure thing to do, because those countries are chronically short of reliable green power. Poland and Germany are in the middle of trying to phase out coal and lignite. Germany is in the middle of phasing out nuclear altogether. France needs to think about replacements for its ageing nuclear fleet and it is chronically short of gas, which is a sensible transition fuel, so it needs to rely on Putin and Russia.

[Hospital bed capacity in winter 2021-22 for all health pressures on hospitals](#)

Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he has taken to increase hospital bed capacity in winter 2021-22 for all health pressures on hospitals. (96741)

Tabled on: 04 January 2022

Answer:

Edward Argar:

The National Health Service is working with local authorities and partners to release the maximum number of beds through ensuring that medically fit patients can be discharged home as soon as possible, seven days a week. The use of non-acute beds in the local health and care system is also being maximised, including in hospices, hotels, community beds and the independent sector. The NHS is also expanding the use of 'virtual wards' and 'hospital at home' models of care, allowing for patients to be safely cared for in their own homes and creating additional bed capacity in hospitals. NHS trusts are also reviewing plans to expand general and acute and critical care bed capacity in hospitals as needed, learning lessons from the pandemic to date.