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“David Cameron announces climate change strategy

David Cameron will today set out his approach to dealing with climate change and carbon emissions during a visit to the Eden Project in Cornwall. He will outline plans for the establishment of a new statutory framework with specific year-by-year requirements for carbon reduction.

The statutory framework would include a new Carbon Audit Office to act as an independent monitoring body which would perform a role in monitoring carbon emissions similar to that played by the Monetary Policy Committee in monitoring and forecasting inflation. The levers of action on carbon reduction would remain with Government, but responsibility for measuring the appropriateness of government policy for achieving the agreed statutory reductions would lie outside politics.

David Cameron will say:

“With global poverty and terrorism, climate change is one of the three greatest challenges facing mankind today.

The Earth’s climate has changed continuously since it was formed 4,600 million years ago, but the rate of change has accelerated dramatically over the last hundred years.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, average surface temperatures rose by 0.6% in the 20th century – and the 1990s were the warmest decade in the last 1,000 years.

We're seeing massive changes taking place. Arctic sea ice has reduced by about 40% in recent decades; ice sheets in Antarctica and Greenland are retreating; mountain glaciers are retreating, and the frequency of extreme weather like floods, droughts and storms is increasing.

The IPCC has predicted that by the end of this century, global average temperatures will rise by between 1.4 and 5.8 degrees. This compares with an increase of 5 degrees since the last Ice Age, 15,000 years ago.

For Britain, it has been predicted that by the 2080s, temperatures will increase by 2 - 3.5 degrees; that the South-East could be 5 degrees warmer; and that the frequency of summer droughts, winter floods and storm surges at sea will increase.

A 2004 report by the Association of British Insurers found that claims arising from storm and flood damage in the UK doubled to £6 billion in the period 1998-2003 compared to the previous five years, and predicted that claims from river and coastal damage could increase from £1 billion a year to £20 billion by 2080.

Already, the Thames Barrier, designed to be raised once every six years, is now being raised six times a year.

There is a clear scientific consensus that man-made greenhouse gases have accelerated what was a wholly natural process of global warming.

The most significant of these gases is carbon dioxide.

Kyoto

Under the Kyoto Protocol, countries committed to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions compared to 1990 levels. Globally, the commitment was for a 5.2% reduction; in the EU an 8% reduction, and Britain's commitment was for a 12.5% reduction by 2012.

The Government has since gone further and promised to cut 1990 carbon dioxide levels by 20% by 2010. And the 2003 Energy White Paper set an aspiration of reducing carbon emissions by 60% by 2050.

Britain's performance

But our performance in recent years has fallen far short of the Government's rhetorical ambitions. Our carbon emissions have increased in five of the seven years from 1997 to 2004, with a 1.5% increase between 2003 and 2004.

We topped the European league for increases in carbon emissions from electricity and heat production in 2003, and with Italy and Finland produced the largest emissions increases in absolute terms.

We're now on a track which, without a significant change of course will lead to an increase, not a reduction, in carbon emissions in this country. We will certainly fail to meet the Government's 20% target by 2010.

Shared responsibility

I've argued that shared responsibility should be a central component of our approach to politics. We're all in this together, and we will never tackle the great

challenges we face unless all of us – government, business, individuals and families – play a part.

This approach is vital if we're to tackle climate change.

Power generation currently accounts for 30% of our carbon emissions. Domestic housing accounts for 27%, and transport for 26% - of which 5% is accounted for by aviation.

But this is expected to rise to 10-12% by 2020, and by 2030 the UK's combined domestic and international aviation emissions could account for up to a quarter of our contribution to climate change.

So we have a shared responsibility to act.

Overall approach

Faced with the facts about climate change, a number of different responses are possible.

One approach is to say that the science is not proven. That the changes in our climate are simply part of the earth's natural development and that there's no need to worry.

I disagree. I believe that the scientific consensus on the impact of carbon emissions on our climate cannot responsibly be ignored. By the time we find out whether or not the science is unambiguously right, the costs of remedying the situation will be vastly greater than the costs of taking precautionary action today.

Some people suggest that the only solution is to return to a world of near-medieval simplicities, living like monks and abandoning the pursuit of wealth creation which has delivered such phenomenal rises in living standards and human achievement since the advent of the Industrial Revolution.

Others argue that the costs of tackling climate change are disproportionate: that we would be better off focusing on more immediate challenges like tackling global poverty.

I believe these views are equally wrong. I believe we can perfectly well combine the priorities of economic growth and security of energy supply with the need to move to a low carbon world. Indeed, as cheap oil and gas becomes a thing of the past, this is an economic necessity as well as an environmental priority.

Leadership

I want Britain to play a leading role in fostering a new international accord on reducing the emissions that contribute to climate change.

We will only be able to play that leading role if we ourselves become a low-carbon economy. This will of course take far longer than the span of any one government.

We need intelligent, consistent and long-term measures. That's not what we've had from this government, which has said all the right things about climate change, but has failed to grasp the nettle in terms of the tough long-term action required.

Our objective should be to harness the power of the market and advances in technology by taking the right political approach, creating the right statutory framework, and creating the right market incentives.

I want the Conservative Party to be the champion of all three.

The right political approach: taking the politics out

I want the Conservative Party to show real leadership on this vital issue. I want us to initiate work on a co-ordinated climate change programme designed for the next fifty years. That requires a radically different approach - a change in how British politics has handled this issue up till now. We need to take the politics out of it: we need to constrain future governments in the face of the natural tendency to put short-term electoral considerations above the long-term interests of the country and the planet.

This means a coherent approach to energy, transport, housing, planning and agriculture. It also has to mean a consistent policy framework pursued in the long term interests of the country over several decades.

So first, I want us to establish a cross-party commission to create a long-term policy framework for energy and the environment.

The right statutory framework

Second, as part of a new cross-party consensus on climate change, I would like to see the establishment of a new statutory framework with specific year-by-year requirements for carbon reduction, and independent monitoring.

The right market incentives: a new Carbon Audit Office

Third, a central component of this new statutory framework should be an independent monitoring body, a new Carbon Audit Office, which performs a role analogous to the monitoring and forecasting roles of the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England with respect to inflation. The levers of action on carbon must remain with Government, but responsibility for measuring the appropriateness of government policy for achieving the agreed statutory reductions should lie outside politics.

This new statutory framework, independently monitored, will be key to establishing the right framework of market incentives that brings forward investment in the least-cost and most environmentally sensitive solution to the production of zero-carbon energy.

Carbon neutral campaign

And I want to emphasise that concern with climate change is not going to be an afterthought for the Conservative Party under my leadership. It is going to be a priority. That is why I am starting with a carbon-neutral campaign for the leadership. With the help of the Carbon-Neutral Company, we are planting enough trees to counteract the additional carbon emissions generated by our campaign.””