

GREENPEACE MEDIA BRIEFING

Blair's Legacy: 10 years of hot air

"We are heading towards catastrophic tipping points in our climate unless we act."¹

Tony Blair, October 2006

The climatologists who make up the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) have just confirmed that the science of climate change is more certain than ever – including the devastating impacts that are a consequence of a warming world. The need to act urgently and effectively has never been more acute. Yet despite fine words about the problem, the UK Government's response is to usher in a new generation of climate damaging coal fired power stations, and attempt to spin their failure on climate change as a success.

Tony Blair has done next to nothing to implement the solutions needed on the scale required during his decade in power. UK CO₂ emissions have risen². Coal burn is going up. Our current centralised power stations waste two thirds of the energy they generate. Blair has ignored the solution to this scandalous waste: decentralised energy³. A change in government policies could make it cheaper to use the cleanest fuels in energy generation, and to use these fuels far more efficiently. Instead of taking urgent action to tackle climate change, all Blair has delivered is hot air.

UK TRENDS – heading for climate disaster

1. They claim:

"We're on track to double our Kyoto target"

The reality:

a) The Tories met most of the Kyoto target

Figures from the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) show that the majority of the Kyoto target for reducing greenhouse gases by 12.5% below 1990 levels had already been met by the time Labour came to power. The target was hit in mid 1998.⁴ This was mainly due to reductions in CO₂ from the energy sector, brought about primarily by a switch from coal to gas under the Tories in the 1990s.

When Blair came to power in 1997, greenhouse gas emissions were already down by 8.8% on 1990 levels. Blair has therefore presided over a further 6.2% cut in greenhouse gas emissions since coming to power. This cut was achieved however through simple measures that reduced methane and nitrous oxide emissions, not through reductions in CO₂.

b) Blair only went beyond the Kyoto target with easy wins and without tackling CO₂ – the main greenhouse gas. He achieved this by:

- Reducing methane emissions through a) closing coal mines and b) capturing and burning landfill gas. This has now reached its limit and there is negligible potential for further exploitation of landfill gas.⁵
- Reducing nitrous oxide emissions from industrial processes, specifically nitrous oxide emissions from adipic acid production between 1998 and 1999, used in Manufacturing nylon. Emissions from this source fell by 96 per cent in 1999 following the installation of emission abatement technology in the nylon industry.

¹ Writing in The Sun, 30 October 2006

² from 548.4MTCO₂ in 1997 to 554.2MTCO₂ in 2005 – see <http://www.defra.gov.uk/news/2007/070131a.pdf>

³ Generating power close to where it's needed, and capturing any waste heat to heat local buildings.

⁴ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/statistics/globalatmos/gagccukem.htm#gatb4> See also the excel spreadsheet behind this.

⁵ See the graph of methane emissions since 1990 here:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/statistics/globalatmos/kf/gakf08.htm>

Other greenhouse gas emissions have remained more or less stable during this time, including emissions of both methane and nitrous oxide from agriculture, while emissions of nitrous oxide from transport have quadrupled. In short, in the areas where savings have been made, there is little potential to go further.

c) They are far from doubling the target

At the moment greenhouse gas emissions are only 15.3% below 1990 levels⁶. In order to double the target by 2010 (achieve a 25% reduction of greenhouse gases below 1990 levels), the government will have to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by another 10% in just 3 years – more than they have managed in 10 years in power. To meet their more challenging domestic target of reducing CO₂ by 20% by 2010 they would have to achieve around 14% further CO₂ reductions in 3 years, nearly 3 times what has been achieved in the last 17 years.

The only way the government thinks it can double the Kyoto target is to count permits bought through emissions trading. While the European Emissions Trading Scheme (EU ETS) is heralded as the key plank of government climate policy, emissions from the sector covered by the EU ETS cap are actually increasing, thanks to increased coal burn. It has had no discernible impact on the power sector's behaviour at all. So only by buying cheap credits from other European countries can the UK *claim* to have reduced emissions. Government is using the EU ETS to cover up its failure to reduce power sector emissions at home. It is attempting to meet its own targets by exporting our climate change responsibility elsewhere and clearing it from our books.

d) They're trying to confuse the public by interchanging greenhouse gases and carbon dioxide emissions

A doubling of the Kyoto target would still constitute a failure to meet the 2010 domestic CO₂ target, as it represents only 16.2% CO₂ cuts. By shifting attention on to the Kyoto (greenhouse gas) target, the Government is masking its failure on the CO₂ target.

CO₂ from fossil fuel combustion is responsible for the overwhelming majority of global climate change. Other greenhouse gases also contribute to global warming to a much lesser extent, most notably methane, nitrous oxides and some fluorinated gases (such as CFCs and HFCs).

The government has taken some simple steps in reducing the more marginal greenhouse gases (methane and nitrous oxides), but has failed catastrophically to address the CO₂ emissions that make up 85% of all the UK's climate change emissions⁷.

2. They claim:

“CO₂ emissions have gone down between 2004 and 2005”

The reality:

- **Overall CO₂ emissions have risen** since Labour came to power - from 548.4 million tonnes CO₂ in 1997 to 554.2 million tonnes CO₂ in 2005.⁸
- While March 2006 figures showed an increase of 0.25% in CO₂ between 2004 and 2005, new **revised figures** claim that emissions actually went down 0.1%. They also acknowledge a margin of error of +/-0.5%.
- This decrease is attributed to household emissions going down, but **in all other sectors CO₂ emissions increased** during the same period.
- These figures also fail to include emissions from **international aviation**, (flights from the UK), which the government admits increased by 5.7% between 2004-5.⁹

⁶ See Milliband's quote in the DEFRA press release, 31 Jan 07

⁷ DEFRA, January 2007

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/statistics/globalatmos/gagccukem.htm>

⁸ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/news/2007/070131a.pdf>

⁹ DEFRA press release 31 Jan 07

This represents an increase of 1.9MTCO₂,¹⁰ which would give an overall CO₂ increase between 2004 and 2005.

- **Emissions from road transport continue to rise** – from 117million tonnes of CO₂ in 1997 to 119.6million tonnes in 2004, and by a further 0.4% in 2004-5.

3. They claim:

“Global warming is the greatest long-term threat to our planet's environment...We need therefore the most radical overhaul of energy policy since the War”¹¹

The reality: Blair is pursuing an energy policy from the 1950s

a) Coal burn is on the increase

- Coal, the dirtiest (most carbon intensive) of all the fossil fuels, is responsible for around 22% of overall UK CO₂ emissions¹². Burning a tonne of coal emits around twice as much CO₂ as burning a tonne of gas, yet coal burn in the UK is rising. Since Labour came to power in 1997, the use of coal for electricity generation has gone up from 47.3 million tonnes a year to 52.5 million tonnes a year¹³.
- Demand for coal in the third quarter of 2006, at 13.5 million tonnes was 18.5 per cent higher than demand in the third quarter of 2005; consumption by electricity generators was higher by 22.7 per cent.
- The UK produces the 3rd highest amount of electricity from coal in the EU, after Germany and Poland.¹⁴

b) New coal fired power stations are proposed in the UK for the first time in over 20 years

- They will be barely more efficient than those built in the 1960s, and none have plans to capture and use the waste heat. Britain's centralised coal-fired power stations continue to waste two-thirds of the energy they generate in the form of waste heat escaping up cooling towers.

4. They claim:

“Britain only accounts for around 2 percent of total emissions”

The Reality: The UK is the 7th largest emitter in the world, and is responsible for more CO₂ emissions each year than the 112 lowest emitting countries put together.¹⁵

Time to Decentralise Power

The only sustainable solution to climate change and energy security is to reform the centralised UK energy system. Currently, two thirds of the energy from power stations in the UK is lost as wasted heat up the chimneys and down the power lines as it is produced a long way from where it is required. We need to generate power close to where it is needed, allowing us to use both the heat for central heating and hot water, and the electricity. This is known as a decentralised energy system. We also need a massive uptake of energy efficiency and renewable energy.

Sounds revolutionary? Other countries in Europe already generate power locally and use renewable technologies as well. Decentralised energy systems account for 50% of Denmark's electricity production. Closer to home, Woking council has slashed its carbon emissions by 77% since 1990 through a strategy of decentralising its energy production

¹⁰ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/statistics/globalatmos/gagccukem.htm> (see excel spread sheet)

¹¹ Blair's Labour Party Conference speech

¹² E digest of Environment Statistics, DEFRA, 2006, table 5

¹³ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/statistics/globalatmos/gagccukem.htm>

¹⁴ Digest of UK Energy Statistics, Long Term trends table 2.1.2

¹⁵ <http://www.dti.gov.uk/energy/statistics/source/coal/page18529.html>

¹⁶ Key World Energy Statistics, IEA, 2005 p25

¹⁷ <http://cait.wri.org/cait.php?page=yearly&mode=view&sort=val-desc&pHints=open&url=form&year=2003§or=natl&co2=1>

and reducing its energy use. The result is cleaner, cheaper, more efficient energy than will ever be possible from our large, centralised coal (or nuclear) power stations.

Nuclear power has no role to play in tackling climate change. Nuclear power will cost the Earth, will not stop climate change, produces deadly waste and is a target for terrorists. Nor is nuclear the answer to energy security - nuclear power only produces electricity and thus only marginally deals with hot water, central heating and cooling, which come mainly from gas. Furthermore it plays no role in providing power for transport. So its overall contribution to total UK energy demand is small - only 3.6%. Therefore replacing our existing fleet of nuclear reactors over the coming decades will still leave us reliant on significant amounts of energy from other sources.

If the government is worried about becoming over dependent on foreign gas supplies, then the answer lies neither in more coal burning nor in nuclear expansion, but in decentralised energy. In a decentralised energy system, the heat produced as a by-product of creating electricity is captured and used to heat people's homes and businesses, instead of using extra gas to do this. This is why decentralised energy systems not only cut our CO2 emissions, but slash our use of gas too. A study commissioned by Greenpeace and the GLA showed that by 2025 London could cut CO2 emissions by 27.6% by following a decentralised energy pathway for the city. And that's without using nuclear power. Furthermore, **London's gas consumption could be 7-15% lower under a decentralised energy scenario** than under a centralised nuclear scenario.

Greenpeace is calling on the government to:

1. Switch the UK to decentralised energy and support Combined Heat and Power (CHP)

Decentralised energy involves generating power close to where it's used. At the moment the UK is mainly powered by coal, gas and nuclear stations situated many miles from where energy is used. These power plants waste two-thirds of the energy they generate because heat escapes up their cooling towers or in their cooling water, while electricity is lost as it's transmitted across large distances on the out-dated national grid. The benefit of localised power stations is that the heat normally thrown away can be used – thereby more than doubling the efficiency of the plant. This is called combined heat and power or CHP. The Government should regulate and fund changes to local electricity networks to encourage uptake of CHP plants and local renewable energy generation at domestic, community and district level.

2. Rule out a new generation of nuclear power stations

3. Facilitate the rapid expansion of renewable energy sources

Wind and solar power work well with a decentralised energy system. The government should ramp up the funding for domestic renewables and ensure a fair price when domestic producers sell renewable electricity back to the grid. Large scale offshore wind and emerging marine technologies such as wave and tidal could also work in a decentralised energy system feeding in to areas of high demand. The Government should fund power grid connections for offshore renewable energy to ensure the full development of the UK's huge wind, wave and tidal power capacity

4. End all government subsidies, at home and abroad, for dirty fuel industries

All subsidies for oil, coal and nuclear power – including export credit guarantees – should be stopped, and this money invested instead in renewable energy schemes.

5. Set much tighter restrictions on UK industry emissions of CO2 under the EU Emissions Trading Scheme and work with the EU to make the whole scheme much stronger.

For more information, contact the Greenpeace press office on 020 7865 8255.