

Statement of witness Zac Goldsmith

1. Zac Goldsmith was the Editor of the Ecologist Magazine for 9 years. He stepped down last year after being selected as the Conservative Party Parliamentary candidate for Richmond Park and North Kingston. He remains Director of the Ecologist.
2. In 2005 he was asked to oversee a wide-ranging review of environmental policy for the Conservative Party. The Quality of Life Policy Review was delivered to David Cameron in September 2007. Many of the recommendations have since become Party Policy.
3. In between his work with The Ecologist and the Conservative Party, Zac raises funds for groups around the world dealing with issues ranging from agriculture and energy to climate change, and trade.
4. In 2003 Zac was the recipient of the Beacon Prize for 'Young Philanthropist of the Year'. In 2004, he received the Global green Award for 'International Environmental Leadership.'

Q –

What is your analysis of the political importance of climate change in Britain and in particular it's importance in the months prior to October 7th 2007?

A –

There is a gap between rhetoric and action.

Gordon Brown has publicly acknowledged the seriousness of climate change. However, he has failed to deliver any real policies to tackle it.

Ministers and senior government advisors have made it clear that the UK government considers climate change to be one of the greatest threat facing humanity and that it seriously threatens property, people and the environment. The government has clearly identified the need to reduce emissions of CO2 into the atmosphere as central to minimizing this threat. (see appendix of relevant statements).

But despite the rhetoric, the government has failed to pursue policies to meaningfully address climate change. Worse, the government has pursued policies that by the government's own logic can only exacerbate the threat – eg Kingsnorth, plans to greatly increase airport capacity. The government is therefore behaving in a dishonest and misleading manner.

Q –

Was there any evidence that government was failing to act in proportion to its own stated concerns about climate change and the damage that it was causing and will cause?

A –

CO2 emissions had risen since 1997 under Labour. At the time of October 2007 they had been rising in total and in the electricity sector specifically because of increased coal burning. The last figures before October 2007 were described as 'worrying' by then Environment Secretary David Miliband and the rise was attributed by him to coal use. Coal increased emissions so much that it outweighed improvements in emissions from the domestic sector.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/6506223.stm>

The UK domestic CO2 target for 2010 had been dropped due to failures in policies to achieve emissions reductions. New spin was being applied to the issue of Greenhouse Gas targets ('on track to meet double our Kyoto target') to make it look better for the UK, but it was plain that policy was failing.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2007/jan/31/greenpolitics.politics>

An Oxford University task force slammed the (then) recent Energy White Paper and described government energy policy as incoherent. For example they said: "The UK, in common with other OECD countries, has failed to prioritise the transfer to low-carbon technologies."

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2007/jun/04/politics.greenpolitics>

Q –

How did the national political discussion reflect the role of coal burning in contributing to climate change and to UK failure to reduce emissions and meet its domestic CO2 targets?

A –

Widespread concern was well developed about new coal power stations in developing countries. Ministers mentioned it regularly and had been doing so for some time.

The continued use of coal in Europe and in particular the return to coal use in the UK, which was reversing emissions reductions of previous years had been highlighted and received widespread coverage. For example a list of the 30 most polluting power stations in Europe had been produced by WWF and it identified that a third of them were in the UK – a very high percentage. Kingsnorth was mentioned among them and the report identified that CO2 emissions at Kingsnorth had risen by over 14% in the previous year – amongst the highest increases in emissions in the list.

"A third of Europe's most climate polluting power stations are in the UK, a new report from WWF has found. The 'Dirty Thirty' reveals that ten of Europe's 30 biggest emitters of carbon dioxide are in the UK. The combined emissions from these ten power stations increased by nearly 8% last year, highlighting a dangerous return to coal as an energy source..."

...In March a WWF report showed that the total emissions from the UK power sector have risen by 28 per cent since 1999(2), further evidence of an increasing reliance on coal...

...Dr Keith Allott, Head of Climate Change at WWF-UK, said: "The UK's

welcome attempts to show international leadership on climate change are being undermined by the dismal failure to cut our own emissions – or to reverse our increasing reliance on coal, the most polluting energy source of all.”

http://www.wwf.org.uk/news/n_0000003912.asp

Another WWF report, still recent at the time, showed that UK power sector CO2 emissions had risen by 29% since 1999 – a catastrophic reversal of previous reductions and totally the wrong trajectory.

“The UK power sector's carbon emissions have rocketed by nearly 30% since 1999 with a rise of 6% in 2006 alone, a new WWF report has revealed.

The findings, published in WWF's report [*UK Power Sector Emissions - targets or reality?*](#), show that in 2006 emissions from power stations shot up to 178 million tonnes of CO₂ - an increase of 6% over 2005 - after a sector-wide return to coal use driven by high gas prices and increasing electricity demand. The sector's emissions have now reached the highest level since 1992, cancelling out all of the gains from the so-called dash for gas in the 1990s.”

http://www.wwf.org.uk/news/n_0000003754.asp

This report had been picked up by the mainstream media and there was discourse arising from that about a ‘roll to coal’ in the UK.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/climate-change/co2-emissions-targets-at-risk-from-the-roll-to-coal-442156.html>

The Climate Camp had been to Drax raising the issue of coal emissions to national prominence.

And the wider coal threat, including in the UK, was getting attention in mainstream national media - <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2007/aug/30/comment>.

Q –

Why could the normal democratic process not address this concern? For example the Climate Change Bill was being discussed at the time of the incident at Kingsnorth, would this not have been a better way to address the rising emissions?

A –

There is nothing wrong with democratic process in principle. On the contrary, it is the best system and it should work. The problem is that the way we do democracy in this country is limited. Voters are given one opportunity every 1500 days or so to replace the government, and in between there is virtually no public involvement. There ought to be more popular participation in decision making. This happens in the US, where referendums are often used, and still more so in Switzerland, which is the most democratic country on Earth.

In relation to the environment, there is little the public can do to pressure the government to act. As a result, there is a staggering mismatch between what the

current government says and what it does on environmental issues. It says for instance that climate change is a pressing issue, but pursues policies that can only exacerbate the problem – planning for massive airport expansion, Kingsnorth etc. The Government is apparently committed to reducing emissions, and yet, partly because of coal burning, in October 2007 they were actually increasing (by 14% at Kingsnorth itself and 29% across the whole UK power sector in just a few years).

Before the Climate Change Bill the government *already had* CO2 targets – such as the domestic CO2 target for 2020 – which it had recently confessed it no longer intended to meet and had effectively dropped. Government targets are little more than aspirations, and because of the lengthy timetables, there is no real pressure on the government to demonstrate clear pathways for achieving them.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2006/mar/28/greenpolitics.politics>

Under the EU Emissions Trading Scheme (which was the other targeted or ‘capped’ emissions reduction instrument after Kyoto and domestic emissions targets) emissions had still risen. UK emissions exceeded the ETS cap, and UK industry therefore bought permits from the scheme. But because most EU countries had massively over allocated, those permits were cheap. At one point permits reached almost zero cost. In other words, ETS was not working and had been widely criticised. It had also clearly done nothing visibly to reverse the trend of coal

burning in the UK and EU power sector and had not delivered actual CO2 reductions in the UK where emissions were rising.

Moreover, it had been shown that the power companies had received an enormous windfall as a result of the ETS permits they were given for free. For example in June before the action at Kingsnorth it was reported that in the UK utilities including E.ON had made billions of pounds in windfall profits. One report put E.ON's windfall in the UK alone (it was bigger across the EU) at £466 million from the free pollution permits they had been given for their British plants (see Times link below).

The government's electricity regulator Ofgem had effectively said that the system designed to make companies pay to reduce their emissions had led to consumers paying companies for polluting more. Steve Smith, managing director of markets for Ofgem, the electricity regulator, said: “In essence rather than the polluter paying, the polluter is actually getting paid. It is a straight transfer [of cash] from customers to generators' shareholders.”

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article1875565.ece>

Therefore new targets, such as those proposed in the Climate Change Bill, would not help unless there was real and immediate implementation that actually resulted in directly stopping CO2 going into the atmosphere from UK facilities such as Kingsnorth.

The discussion around climate change has reached a new pitch, with all the UK's main political parties apparently agreeing on the need for action. There is no doubt that voters are given the impression that something is happening, despite the government's inaction. They are therefore being misled, and it is important that this political dishonesty is exposed, as GP sought to do through its actions.

My view is that Gordon Brown does recognise the importance of climate change. But because he views it only as a threat, he has failed to grasp the opportunities it presents. A transition to a clean economy opens up huge possibilities for entrepreneurs, businesses and investors. Some other countries, notably Denmark, have seen in climate change an opportunity to export clean technology. The UK has failed.

Another reason for the government's inaction is that its approach is almost always based on use of the stick, rather than the carrot. Instead of seeing green taxation as a mechanism for reducing the cost of green choices, the government has focussed only on making the least green choices more expensive, without boosting the alternatives.

A further reason for the government's inaction is the influence of vested interest. The government will always tend towards the advice of the CBI, which it sees as THE voice of business, instead of casting the net more widely in the business community. Within the business community there will always be voices cautioning against any change. But equally, a wide range of business voices demand action now. The Climate Leaders Group is one example. They and others have seen that the City of London has become a magnet for green investments in clean technology. (Renewable Energy Systems and Vestas), researchers on the cutting edge of new technology (Marine Current Turbines, Wavegen and Ocean Power Delivery also Bioregional, ZEDFactory and Utilicom). The government should seek advice beyond the CBI.

Q –

But as a prospective MP do you not think that waiting for a possible change of government is a better way to secure the change required. Surely democracy can operate to correct problems without the need for direct action?

A –

The Conservative Party's opportunity to address these problems will only come at the next general election. Action on climate change is urgent. Many scientists warn that we must ensure global emissions peak in just 100 months if there is to be a chance of staying within 2 degrees average temperature rise globally. In October 2007 Gordon Brown had just decided not to call an election – almost guaranteeing that there would be no change of the current course in the short term.

It's also worth noting that policies pursued by the current government in relation to large-scale infrastructure will commit the UK for a considerable period of time. It would not necessarily be possible or practicable to change these if / when a Tory government came to power. By the same token, increased emissions levels in the run up to a delayed election would make the job of reducing them more difficult and more expensive for a new administration. Professor Stern repeatedly emphasised that delayed action was harder and costlier than early action.

In any event, the GP demonstration was about the current operation of the power station and the CO2 being emitted at the time so what the Tory government might deliver in up to 2 years time was irrelevant to that aspect of the action taken.

Q –

Is it reasonable to take direct action in order to affect pollution happening now and political decisions/action relating to the regulation and long term prevention of that pollution?

A –

In some instances direct action is appropriate and necessary and this was one such instance. Direct action is right if circumstances demand it and if it does not endanger national security and / or people's lives or health.

This direct action was important principally because it brought to people's attention problems with the future development of Kingsnorth Power station. It also stopped the current operation of the power station and prevented CO2 entering the atmosphere which would otherwise have directly contributed to global warming.

There are many historical examples of direct action being used legitimately and successfully to prevent a wrong and to create necessary political change.

Direct action for example undertaken by suffragettes and civil rights activists have always been considered reasonable given the failure of the democratic political system to deal with the problems those movements were addressing.

In a more recent example, Greenpeace activists were cleared for trying to remove a GM trial crop to prevent the greater crime of contamination to other crops and plants. That direct action both prevented harm being done at the time and also helped influence the wider political conditions so that a more permanent ending of the GM crop risk in the UK could be achieved.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2000/sep/21/activists.gmcrops>

Politicians often refer to direct action as an essential part of democracy. One recent example of this is Conservative Party Leader David Cameron, who has said of Greenpeace and the organization's history of direct action.

"I want to start by thanking Greenpeace, not just for hosting today's event, but much more importantly for all you've done over the past thirty six years to make our world a better place through your campaigning.

Of course we don't agree on everything - and I suspect you would be rather concerned if we did.

After all, it's your job to put pressure on politicians, and that will often mean taking positions and taking action that go further - sometimes much further - than we are able to go.

But I believe that what you do is vital for our democracy.

Always raising awareness of the big issues affecting the future of our planet. Always looking ahead to identify the big changes that will improve the quality of life for people here at home and around the world. And always developing creative and innovative solutions: not just campaigning against things, but campaigning for things.

You can all be proud of what you've achieved, and I'm proud to be standing here with you today.

And Gordon Brown's personally appointed advisor on climate change and environment (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/6096084.stm>), Al Gore, was quoted in the New York Times and then very widely reported as saying civil disobedience was needed to tackle the climate change crisis. This happened just two months before the Kingsnorth action:

"We are now treating the Earth's atmosphere as an open sewer," he said, and (perhaps because my teenage son was beside me) he encouraged young people to engage in peaceful protests to block major new carbon sources.

"I can't understand why there aren't rings of young people blocking bulldozers," Mr. Gore said, "and preventing them from constructing coal-fired power plants."

http://select.nytimes.com/2007/08/16/opinion/16kristof.html?_r=1&oref=slogin

**APPENDIX –
Statements on urgency and importance of climate change by UK
Government and government advisors.**

GORDON BROWN, Prime Minister on October 7th 2007

For while the UK's record on greenhouse gas emissions is among the best in the developed world - we are on course for a 23% cut by 2010, nearly double our Kyoto commitment - *we know this is not enough.*

http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/newsroom_and_speeches/press/2007/press_28_07.cfm

For tackling climate change - *the world's biggest market failure* – not just an environmental and economic imperative, but a moral one: as much an injustice between generations as it is between nations, with the poorest people in the world suffering worst.

<http://www.britischebotschaft.de/en/news/items/061030b.htm>

(emphasis added)

TONY BLAIR, former Prime Minister on 7th October 2007

Global warming is the greatest long-term threat to our planet's environment. Scarce energy resources mean rising prices and will threaten our country's economy.

In 15 years we will go from 80% self-sufficient in oil and gas to 80% imported.

We need therefore the most radical overhaul of energy policy since the War.

(Tony Blair's final speech to the Labour Party conference)

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/5382590.stm

AND

Mr Blair said the consequences for the planet of inaction were "literally disastrous".

"This disaster is not set to happen in some science fiction future many years ahead, but in our lifetime," he said.

"Investment now will pay us back many times in the future, not just environmentally but economically as well."

"For every £1 invested now we can save £5, or possibly more, by acting now."

"We can't wait the five years it took to negotiate Kyoto - we simply don't have the time. We accept we have to go further (than Kyoto)."

(Tony Blair responding to Professor Stern's report to the Chancellor of the Exchequer)

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/6096084.stm>

SIR DAVID KING, Chief Scientific Advisor on October 7th 2007

"In my view, climate change is the most severe problem that we are facing today, more serious even than the threat of terrorism."

- Sir David King, quoted in *Science* magazine, January 2004.

(<http://www.commondreams.org/headlines04/0109-02.htm> only available from Science or The Independent (this article is a reprint of The Independent) with subscription.

HILARY BENN, Environment Secretary on October 7th 2007

(Speaking as Secretary for International Development in February 2006):

Climate change is increasing the intensity and severity of natural disasters. 2005 was an unprecedented year for disasters - some made worse by our behaviour - the hurricanes in the USA and the Caribbean, and the food crises and drought across Africa, and some just natural in origin - the tsunami and the earthquake in Pakistan.

Disasters, as we know, affect poor people most. 97% of all deaths due to natural disasters occur in developing countries. The super cyclone that hit the Indian state of Orissa in October 1999 destroyed or damaged every single aspect of the state's infrastructure including roads, communication systems, public offices and schools. And as the sea temperature rises, cyclones we are told could become even more intense.

Climate change will have gradual but just as devastating effects. Sea levels are rising - a 1 metre rise projected over the next 100 years - and the result will be that people will be flooded from their homes. In sub-Saharan Africa, where a third of men, women and children are already malnourished, climate change could mean that food production is reduced by a fifth. Higher temperatures and shorter rainy seasons in Tanzania are expected to cut the main food crop, maize, by a third, making more people even more hungry.

Competition over natural resources already causes conflict. Climate change will make this worse. By 2025, only 20 years away, more than 3 billion people could be affected by serious water shortages. Some argue that we need a new agricultural revolution for water - a "blue revolution" to ensure the gains in food production are not wiped out as rivers run dry and underground reservoirs empty.

The truth is if we if we don't do something about climate change, aid from rich countries will look pitiful by comparison with the consequences and the costs for developing countries.

And yet climate change is not, primarily, the fault of developing countries.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2006/feb/24/development.internationalaidanddevelopment>

(Speaking about climate change as Environment Secretary on 26 September 2007):

I believe we are at a turning point.

If we don't respond then we have a bleak future, and the generations that follow us will simply not understand, given that we knew what we knew, why we did not act.

If we do respond, then I am sure we can move the earth away from catastrophic climate change.

It is really that simple.

The choice is ours.

The test is the greatest this generation will face.

So I think we should just get on with it.

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/ministers/speeches/hilary-benn/hb070924.htm>

DAVID MILIBAND, Foreign Secretary on October 7th 2007

(Speaking as Environment Secretary, April 26 2007 at the Vatican)

The wealth of evidence on the scale and impact of climate change has produced a major shift over the last 12 months. Paradoxically, the most urgent environmental challenge facing the planet has stopped being primarily an environmental issue. Climate change is not just as Al Gore puts it, 'a planetary emergency' but a humanitarian one.

Climate change has also become an economic issue: catastrophic climate change will, according to Sir Nicholas Stern, have a greater economic impact than two world wars and the Great Depression put together. Dealing with the consequences of climate change will cost between five and twenty times more than arresting climate change.

Climate change has become a national security and foreign policy issue: scarcity of natural resources, in particular water and food, could be a major source of future conflict. Climate change presents a major risk to these essentials, and could trigger unprecedented migration.

Climate change has become an international development issue: much of the developing world will have to adapt to the climate change already in train from the developed world's emissions. Unless we prevent further climate change, the economic prospects of the developing world will be severely

damaged. Our development funding must help countries become low-carbon economies and support adaptation.

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/ministers/speeches/david-miliband/dm070426.htm>

(Speaking as Environment Secretary to the Local Government Association Conference in July 2006.)

Slides of the need for CO2 reduction, the scale of the challenge and the impacts of climate change including damage to property presented by the

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/ministers/speeches/david-miliband/dm060704-slides.pdf>

PROFESSOR NICHOLAS STERN, holder of the [I. G. Patel](#) Chair at the [London School of Economics and Political Science](#) on October 7th 2007 (former [Chief Economist](#) and Senior Vice-President of the [World Bank](#) from 2000 to 2003).

"The scientific evidence is now overwhelming: climate change presents very serious global risks, and it demands an urgent global response."

"...the evidence gathered by the Review leads to a simple conclusion: the benefits of strong, early action considerably outweigh the costs."

"The evidence shows that ignoring climate change will eventually damage economic growth. Our actions over the coming few decades could create risks of major disruption to economic and social activity, later in this century and in the next, on a scale similar to those associated with the great wars and the economic depression of the first half of the 20th century. And it will be difficult or impossible to reverse these changes. Tackling climate change is the pro-growth strategy for the longer term, and it can be done in a way that does not cap the aspirations for growth of rich or poor countries. The earlier effective action is taken, the less costly it will be."

(From The Stern Review: The Economics of Climate Change:
http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/4/3/Executive_Summary.pdf)

AL GORE, environment advisor to Gordon Brown and Nobel Peace Prize winner

"...the Earth is moving closer to several negative "tipping points" that could -- within as little as 10 years -- make it virtually impossible for us to avoid irretrievable damage to the planet's habitability for human civilization. That is one of the reasons why it is urgent we take action as soon as possible."

Al Gore's blog, August 2007 (<http://blog.algore.com/2007/08/>)