

Climate change and 'Net Zero'

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Actions you can take:

- **Sign the cross-party letter:** Sincere thanks to the 180 MPs who signed the cross-party letter to the Prime Minister calling for a net zero target to be enshrined in law before 2050. If you have not yet had the chance to sign, it's not too late – just email campaigns@theclimatecoalition.org to do so
- **Ask an Oral Question:** Consider asking an Oral Question to BEIS Minister, Rt Hon Claire Perry MP, Minister for Energy and Clean Growth, **before the end of March**. This could be one of the following:
 - *What will the Minister do to bring forward legislation for a net zero before 2050 target?*
 - *How will the Minister tighten the 4th and 5th carbon budgets to ensure sufficiently early action?*
 - *Will the Minister commit to the UK's net zero target being delivered fully through domestic action, rather than buying low emitting countries' carbon budgets?*
- **Write to BEIS:** Consider writing to the BEIS Minister, Claire Perry, **by the end of March**, asking for her to support the Committee on Climate Change's advice once it is published. Consider stressing the following points:
 - *The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) made clear last year the need for "rapid, far-reaching, and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society" if we are to avert catastrophe*
 - *Despite these stark warnings of imminent catastrophe, greenhouse gas emissions globally are rising, with emissions in 2017 being the highest in human history. The UK is way off reaching this target—but the UK government now has the chance to become a global leader with meaningful, ambitious and bold action that can set a standard internationally.*
 - *The use of carbon offsetting, thereby 'exporting' our problems, cannot replace meaningful domestic action in reducing our greenhouse gas emissions. Christian Aid and others advocate that these are best achieved through a combination of consuming less energy and material, with a complete end to use of fossil fuels and using resources more efficiently (efficient homes, public transport, etc)*
 - *[See briefing below for additional points to raise]*
- **Speak at the forthcoming parliamentary debate on Net-Zero:** Look out for the forthcoming Westminster Hall debate on Net-Zero, which will likely take place in the Spring. Please do attend, speak and publicise, to represent the extent to which Net-Zero matters to your constituency and your constituents.
- **Tweet your support:** Tag in @christian_aid and @TheCCoalition and using the hashtag #NetZero when tweeting your support for Net Zero by 2050

The impact of climate change on us all

- Climate change, which has been largely caused by developed countries, is wreaking havoc in many developing countries. It is the biggest factor setting back development progress across the developing world.
- Extreme weather hit every populated continent in 2018, killing, injuring and displacing millions, and causing major economic damage. 2018 was the fourth-hottest year on record, with average global temperatures nearly 1°C above the pre-industrial average. Current international pledges to cut emissions place us on track for around 3°C of warming – which could have a catastrophic impact.¹
- From droughts in East Africa, to a lack of water availability in Bolivia and stronger typhoons in the Philippines, climate change's impacts must be slowed.

The IPCC: the time to act is now

- In October 2018 the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published a widely-cited report stressing the need for “*rapid, far-reaching, and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society*” if the world is to avert catastrophe.² The report drew on 6000 scientific studies over two years, and has been adopted by UN member states.
- The IPCC predicts that anything over two degrees would spell the end of all coral reefs, seriously reduce polar ice, and raise the sea level by an extra ten centimetres. The damage would be significantly less if the increase could be limited to 1.5°C, reducing the risk to millions of coastal dwellers around the world. The IPCC states that this is achievable.
- The IPCC has made it clear that drastic action is needed within the next 12 years – beyond this timeline, action may be futile. Such action must include the rapid decarbonisation of energy use, to reduce CO² by 45% by 2030, and to net-zero by 2050. Such change, the panel says, would deliver “*clear benefits to people and natural ecosystems*”, as well as “*ensuring a more sustainable and equitable society*”.
- Ambitious changes are needed to avert catastrophe and it is needed imminently – **that's why Christian Aid is calling for a legally-binding commitment to Net Zero on greenhouse gas emissions to be met by 2045.**

Why 'Net-Zero' – and how?

- The most important factor in determining how much warming the Earth will experience is the cumulative emissions of greenhouse gases – which is why a commitment to 'Net Zero' emissions, as soon as possible, is crucially needed.
- Despite continued warnings that climate catastrophe is imminent, greenhouse gas emissions are rising globally. After emissions in 2017 were the highest in human history, it is likely that 2018 emissions will again break the record.³
- In the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement, in an effort to limit the impacts of a warming world, 195 countries agreed both to “pursue efforts” to limit warming to 1.5°C and to achieve net zero emissions – **where any emissions produced are counterbalanced by an equal amount being absorbed.** To reach 'Net Zero' developed countries like the UK will need to use energy more efficiently, especially drawing on renewable energy technology. To this end, the principle of 'off-setting' our carbon emissions, essentially exporting our consumption problems elsewhere, should not drive activity.
- **Christian Aid and others advocate⁴ that these are best achieved through the hierarchy of:**
 - **consuming less energy and material, with a complete end to use of fossil fuels**
 - **using resources more efficiently (efficient homes, public transport, etc)**
 - **using renewable energy and sustainable materials**

What has the UK said and done on Net-Zero?

- The UK has been a global leader on climate change. Our Climate Change Act 2008 was one of the first comprehensive pieces of climate change legislation in the world, and many other countries followed our lead. The Act calls for comprehensive action to limit climate change to 2°C.
- However, the Paris Agreement (in which the UK played a leading role) achieved global agreement to limit climate change to 1.5°C, based on new science and expertise. **This new revision has not been reflected in UK law.** After

¹ climateanalytics.org/blog/2016/the-1-5climit-in-the-paris-agreement-why-there-is-no-time-to-lose.html

² <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>

³ *Counting the Cost: A Year of Climate Breakdown*, Christian Aid (2018)

<https://mediacentre.christianaid.org.uk/download/?id=4170&pn=21e38f435ea050ce63ac6b7e52c58d72-pdf>

⁴ See *Achieving Net Zero Greenhouse Gas Emissions in the UK*, Christian Aid (2018) https://www.christianaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-10/Achieving-net-zero-greenhouse-gas-emissions-in-UK-report_0.pdf

the UK signed the Paris Agreement in 2016, then Energy Minister Andrea Leadsom MP said, “we will need to take the step of enshrining the Paris goal for net zero emissions in UK law. The question is not whether but how we do it”.

- In reflection of this, 180 MPs and 53 Members of the House of Lords signed a cross-party letter late last year, calling for the Prime Minister to back a UK net zero emissions target ahead of 2050.⁵ The letter reads: ‘Thanks to the actions of Governments of many different parties, and the cross-party consensus that exists in the UK on the need to tackle climate change, since 1992 we have led the world in emissions reductions. We can continue in this proud tradition of leadership by becoming one of the first countries in the world to set a net zero target in law’
- In October 2018, the Climate Minister, Claire Perry, asked the CCC to provide independent advice setting a date for achieving Net Zero emissions in the UK. The CCC’s advice to government is due to be published in April 2019. **The advice is not legally binding, which is why campaigners are calling on the government to follow this advice once it is published and for the Government to go for the most ambitious target possible.**
- Recent polling shows that 64% of UK adults agree that the UK should aim to cut its carbon emissions to zero in the next few decades⁶, and 75-80% support renewable energy and measures that cut energy waste.⁷
- **If the UK Government wishes to remain a global leader on climate change, our Climate Change Act should be updated to reflect the Agreement, the IPCC’s urgent report and latest science.**

How should the UK update its Climate Change Act?

- The Climate Change Act sets in law a commitment to reduce UK greenhouse gas emissions by at least 80% on 1990 levels by 2050. However, if the Act is to be in line with the Paris Agreement, we should be aiming for a greenhouse gas emissions target of ‘net zero’ before 2050, ideally by 2045.⁸ This would allow for a small amount of emissions and include negative emissions technology such as native tree planting.
- We think UK Government should update the Climate Change Act 2008 to include a net zero target of 2045. If this involves new primary legislation, this should be done as soon as is practicably possible. If not, then alternative mechanisms should be pursued.
- **The advice from the UK’s Committee on Climate Change, when published in Spring, is not actually legally binding. That’s why we need your voice to make clear to the UK government that constituents, representatives and civil society from around the UK want to see a radical commitment to Net Zero by 2045 enshrined in law.**⁹

Other countries’ net zero commitments

2030 – Norway
2040 – Iceland
2045 – Sweden
2050 – France and New Zealand

Turning the Net-Zero target into a reality

- Achieving Net-Zero emissions by 2045 at the latest is feasible, but the Government needs to accelerate the transformation of many sectors of the economy as a matter of urgency.
- The UK’s Clean Growth Strategy published last year is already falling short of the legally binding 4th and 5th carbon budgets set by Parliament for the period up to 2032. To achieve net zero emissions in a cost-effective way, the Government must tighten the 4th and 5th carbon budgets and immediately announce new policies across energy production, low carbon homes, low carbon transport and the extraction of fossil fuels. Barriers such as policy delays, lack of up-front investment and lack of coordinated cross-government action must be overcome by clear support from the Cabinet, Prime Minister and Treasury.
- The Government should aim to be in a position to announce these new policies for different sectors alongside the decision to set a net zero target by 2045 at the latest, to show that it is turning targets into meaningful action.

⁵ Organised by the Climate Coalition <https://www.theclimatecoalition.org/joint-letter/>

⁶ <http://brightblue.org.uk/sam-hall-public-attitudes-to-uk-climate-leadership/>

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/energy-and-climate-change-public-attitudes-tracker-wave-25>

⁸ This target should be met by action in the UK.

⁹ Sweden’s Climate Change Act has a legal requirement to set a net-zero target, but the target itself is not legally binding. If the UK were to set a legally binding net-zero target then it could possibly be the first in the world.