

Policy Briefing

Draft Climate Change Bill

In March 2007 The UK government published its draft climate change bill, providing for:

1. A target 60% cut in CO₂ emissions by 2050, with substantial (26-32%) reductions by 2020. International aviation and shipping are not included. Interim targets would be established based on five-year budgets – i.e. it would be the five year average that mattered rather than the emissions in any one year. There would also be some flexibility – for example allowing emission allowances to be banked if they are not used, or borrowed from future budget periods. The UK could meet targets by “importing” emission allowances from overseas (through emission trading and other mechanisms).

2. A new committee to advise government on the timetable for emission reductions. This would be an expert committee with an analytical role, advising the government on the “optimal” emission reduction path.

3. “Enabling powers” so the government can introduce emission trading schemes. This is the only provision in the bill for new policies to reduce emissions. It would allow the Secretary of State to impose an emission cap on any group of individuals or organisations in Britain and allocate emission allowances which they could trade. They would also be able to buy allowances from elsewhere to enable them to exceed the cap.

4. Annual reports to parliament on progress in reducing emissions.

Consultation responses were invited by June 12th but it is still worth taking action (see overleaf for some ideas).

Our Quaker response starts from our testimonies to truth, equality, simplicity and peace, and from our own experience of responding to climate change. The main points are:

The target cut should be deeper

The government says that a 50% reduction in global CO₂ emissions is needed by 2050. In fact, based on the recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a reduction of 50-85% is needed to limit global warming to 2-2.4°C.

Meanwhile poorer countries cannot and should not be expected to achieve the same reductions as rich countries. So within this overall goal we believe that the UK should be aiming for much deeper reductions of perhaps 85-90%, that international aviation and shipping should be included, and that there should be much less flexibility in terms of importing, borrowing and banking emission allowances.

Some members of our network have developed lifestyles with GHG emissions 60-70% below the UK average. We find that a simpler lifestyle brings great satisfaction, especially when supported within a strong community. We therefore believe that, with appropriate infrastructure, technology, and economic and social developments, much deeper reductions are both possible and desirable, and could be achieved along with a considerable improvement in the quality of life.

Underlying principle of “optimal path”

We believe that the government’s emphasis on adopting an optimal emission reduction path represents excessive confidence in the ability to economic models to predict the future. The truth is, we do not know how climate change will evolve, or how

ecosystems and human society will respond. Short term comfort and even moderate changes in economic output are unimportant compared with the potential for catastrophic climate change. Given the risks we seem to face, we should be doing everything possible to reduce our emissions.

Emphasis on emission trading and establishing a globally uniform carbon price

Emitting greenhouse gases causes harm. We are worried that emission trading turns a licence to harm into a desirable asset or commodity. An alternative legal framework might 1) establish the legal liability of the emitter for rectifying any harm caused by greenhouse gas emissions, following the internationally-recognised Polluter Pays Principle; 2) require anyone emitting greenhouse gases to purchase insurance against the risk incurred.

We are also concerned by the emphasis on just one policy mechanism, which seems to reflect the dominance of free-market thinking in the bill. The government has adopted a wide range of climate-relevant policies and is in the midst of numerous consultations – including those on planning, energy, waste. However, these are poorly co-ordinated and include many conflicting elements. For example, how will faster approval of new airport capacity affect our ability to meet the greenhouse gas targets? We would like the bill to empower the Committee on Climate Change to scrutinise, and the Secretary of State to co-ordinate, policies across government that affect greenhouse gas emissions.

We do not agree with the principle of a globally uniform carbon price, which could lead to continued growth in price-inelastic emissions (e.g. air travel by the wealthy) while constraining the world's poorest from meeting basic needs. The UK's emission reduction effort should reflect its historical responsibility and current economic, technological and institutional strength.

What can we do about it as Quakers?

Inform yourself. The consultation documents for the draft bill are available on the DEFRA website – www.defra.gov.uk. For more information on Quaker activities see www.quakergreenaction.org.uk and www.livingwitness.org.uk. For wider information on climate change there are plenty of sources – in particular try www.ipcc.ch and www.coinet.org.uk.

Write to your MP, the Prime Minister, or to David Milliband (currently Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) at the House of Commons, London SW1. Set out your views on the bill and ask your MP to raise your concerns with the Secretary of State and Prime Minister.

Organise a discussion or worship sharing group in your meeting to explore your responses.

Connect up with other groups; join the Living Witness Project – details at www.livingwitness.org.uk