

Briefing: Scottish Climate Change Bill (2) – Jan 2009

Statutory annual targets of at least 3% reductions in greenhouse gas emissions year on year: critical.

Introduction

Climate change is happening and because of the greenhouse gases already put into the atmosphere we have committed ourselves to more of a global temperature rise in coming years. Climate change is already having a significant impact on people and nature across the world, especially the poorest and most vulnerable.

In order to avoid even more catastrophic and dangerous climate change it is widely agreed that the world needs to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 50% by 2050 and for rich, industrialised nations that means a reduction of at least 80% by 2050. This reduction is needed to avoid the critical temperature rise of more than 2°C which could risk crossing severe tipping points and triggering feedbacks that will accelerate climate change further, such as the collapse of the Greenland ice sheet and die back of the Amazon rainforest.

Current proposals for annual targets

In 2007, the SNP manifesto set out a commitment to deliver a Scottish Climate Change Bill that would set in place a statutory framework to deliver an 80% cut in emissions by 2050 and mandatory annual reduction targets of 3%.

The draft Climate Change (Scotland) Bill does set out the long term target of at least an 80% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 that is required to deliver the absolute minimum necessary reduction agreed by scientists. It also proposes an interim target for 2030, which although welcome, does not ensure we reduce our emissions at the necessary rate to help prevent dangerous climate change. Indeed, early calculations indicate that aiming for the 2030 target would result in an additional 200 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent to be emitted into the atmosphere by 2050 than would be based on the manifesto commitment. However it *does not* set out the annual targets of 3% per annum in line with the commitment in the SNP Manifesto. Instead it would establish a framework which requires the annual reductions for 2010-2019 to be less every year and *then* from 2020 annual reductions to be at least 3% per annum.

The 80% greenhouse gas reduction target equates to year-on-year reductions of just over 3% across the basket of six greenhouse gases. Set out in statute the annual target of 3% would ensure that there is year-on-year progress towards required reductions. It is widely understood that reductions in the next decade of *at least* 3% per annum, are absolutely critical to averting the risk of dangerous climate change.

UK Climate Change Act

The UK Act does not establish annual targets. It establishes longer-term budgets and a system of banking and borrowing on emission reductions – allowing them to ‘borrow’ from future years if it fails to meet its targets. WWF strongly opposes this approach, recognising that the dangerous situation we are in is because of a failure to take responsibility for our actions today and this should not be continued. It is welcome that the Scottish Climate Change Minister has ruled this out completely in Scotland¹.

The urgency

Action needs to be taken to tackle climate change right now, not put off into the future and the necessary reductions just employed from 2020. It is internationally agreed that we need to take urgent action that makes a significant cut in our greenhouse gas emissions globally in the next few years. It is clear that the earlier we start the easier it will be to meet the long term target. The longer we fail to cut emissions by 3% each year the greater, more difficult and more expensive the necessary annual cuts will become and the greater the risk of going over the critical tipping point of 2°C.

Draft Climate Change (Scotland) Bill

The Scottish Climate Change Bill must set in place annual greenhouse gas emission reductions of at least 3% year on year, right from the start. Without an annual statutory target of at least 3% per annum from the start, the risk of inaction in early years and the risk of delays in making significant early progress towards the 80% cut are significantly increased. A fixed percentage cut is an equitable approach – each administration will have to try as hard as the last and the next – and the 3% a year target will focus Ministers’ mind *today* on the need to get things moving rapidly.

Only statutory commitment to annual reductions targets of at least 3% or more from the outset would ensure we reduce our emissions at the necessary rate to prevent dangerous climate change and make sure the 80% reduction goal will be achieved.

Only this will ensure the final Act fulfils Scottish Government’s ambition of providing ‘a strong example to other countries showing what can be done’.

Draft Climate Change (Scotland) Bill:

Scotland could have the strongest climate legislation in the world. If it is the blueprint for other nations following in our wake – then it is even more important it addresses the urgency rather than delaying the shift to a low-carbon economy into the future.

Tackling Climate Change. As a nation Scotland could lead the way.

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¹ Scottish Climate Change Minister, Stewart Stevenson ruled this out at the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee on November 11th 2008.