

Climate: The UK's new green priorities

Progressive realism and
climate action

Luke Murphy MP

Money for war—but not
the climate?

Pa'olelei Luteru

The UK can lead on
carbon markets

Mirabelle Muûls



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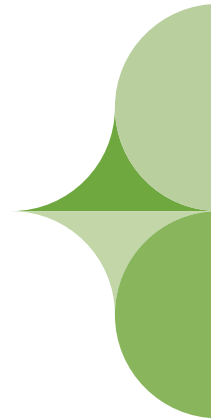
Now or never

If Keir Starmer was looking for a reprieve from the fire-fighting that has characterised his first 100 or so days in office, this year's *State of the Climate* report, published in the journal *BioScience*, wasn't it. "We are stepping into a critical and unpredictable new phase of the climate crisis," the report, written by an international team of scientists, says. Out of 35 "planetary vital signs" that the academics track, "25 are at record levels".

Unlike the Sunak era, the Labour government has shown signs that it takes the crisis seriously. As Luke Murphy, chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Climate Change, writes (pages 2-3), last month the UK removed coal from its electricity system. And the energy and net zero secretary Ed Miliband plans to attend the COP29 summit in November as the UK's chief negotiator, another indicator that the cabinet has policymakers who understand the urgency. Last year at COP28 a minister of state, Graham Stuart, represented Britain (and caused fury when he left early to attend a Commons vote on the Rwanda immigration scheme).

But to be listened to on the world stage, the government must show it can lead a just energy transition at home. Amid rising energy bills this winter, Labour must prioritise supporting the "working people" it so often speaks of in making changes that will help the shift to greener energy. With populists seeking to divide voters over net zero, it cannot afford to lose the argument. ♦

Alona Ferber
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Policy
Insights

December 2024

Leading from the front

At COP29, the UK will show how Labour's progressive realism can push climate action

As the climate crisis reaches a new and dangerous phase, world leaders are in full preparation for next month's United Nations climate summit.

At the global level, we are watching the aftermath of hurricanes in the Americas. Back home, families in Britain continue to face shockingly high energy bills, owing to our reliance on volatile fossil fuels. The latest annual *State of the Climate* report, published this month, indicates that 25 of Earth's 35 "vital signs"—including increased CO₂ levels and heat in the oceans—are worse than ever before. There has never been a more important time to act.

The new government is taking these threats seriously, and has adopted real domestic ambition, which is the foundation of global climate leadership. But if we are to tackle the climate crisis, we need to actively promote international agreement and action.

In an increasingly unstable world, getting leaders to agree to collective endeavour is a difficult task. But the UK has distinct advantages that can enable us to show the way. The government has adopted a more committed approach to tackling our own emissions than any other major economy. This gives us legitimacy in dealing with countries in both the Global North and the Global South. We can show the former that climate action can drive economic growth, while supporting the latter to develop without risking environmental degradation.

Labour's approach to this new internationalism has been described as "progressive realism". The new foreign secretary, David Lammy, has made clear that this means being honest about the state of the modern world and the UK's place within it. But he and the new government have also made it clear that this pragmatism will be in service of, and not in opposition to, the delivery of just goals, including tackling climate change.

Luke Murphy MP

Member of the Energy Security and Net Zero Select Committee and the chair of the APPG on Climate Change

Just as climate change impacts us at home, it exposes all countries to new existential threats. We must be proactive in dealing with international partners, and harness the legitimacy of our own actions to push for greater global climate ambition. There are vital decisions that need to be taken at this COP. The architecture of the world's financial system must be updated so that developing countries can build up industry in a sustainable manner and experience the same advantages from which the Global North has benefitted for so long. We also need an international consensus that the era of fossil fuels is coming to an end and clear agreements to phase out their use.

The UK can lead the push for these ambitions because we have a history of being at the forefront of efforts to tackle climate change. In the 20th century, British scientists were among the first to identify that CO₂ levels in the atmosphere were increasing and causing global warming. In 2008, we were the first country in the world to introduce legislation to reduce emissions, in line with the Kyoto Protocol. And at the end of last month, we became the first country in the G20 to remove coal from our electricity system.

This last achievement, ending 142 years of coal-fired electricity in the UK, was the culmination of 15 years of work by policymakers, unions and industry. In 2009, when the decision to end the use of unabated coal was made, it was widely believed to be unfeasible. But by taking bold, early action, the UK has been able to show partners around the world that coal-free power can be achieved without a catastrophic impact to economic growth or energy security.

This progress has helped us push for greater climate ambition internationally. Last year's COP28 conference saw parties agree to "accelerate efforts towards the phase-down" of coal use. This year, we should be pushing for the world to go further, using our example as proof that we can end the use of coal and stop the construction of new coal-fired power stations.

That Ed Miliband, the secretary of state for energy security and net zero, will be the UK's chief negotiator at COP29 demonstrates how seriously the government is taking negotiations. This will give the UK diplomatic weight to reach a more ambitious deal. The new, UK-led Global Clean Power Alliance, announced by the foreign secretary, is also aimed at accelerating the worldwide shift to renewable energy.

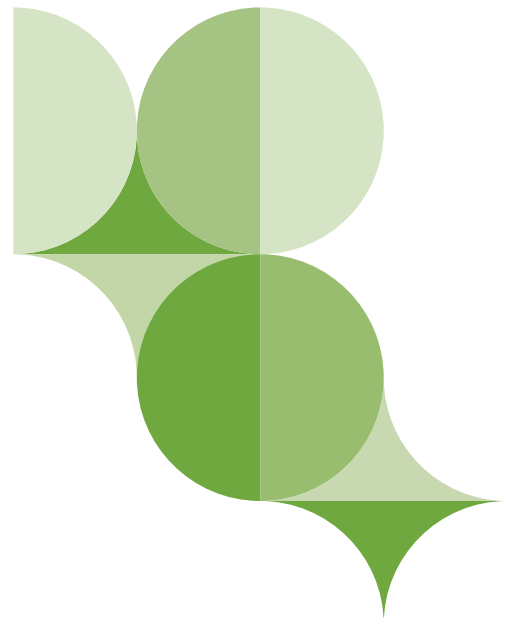
Admittedly, not every country is as bold on climate as we are, and progressive realism means accepting the

world as it is. However, it also means striving for change and using our example to push the international community further.

Fulfilling our mission of 100 per cent clean power by 2030 would make the UK the first major economy to remove fossil fuels from its electricity system. It would show that there is a path to growth beyond burning more carbon. Likewise, fulfilling Labour's manifesto commitment to end new licences for fossil fuel extraction would make the UK among the first countries committing to a world beyond coal, oil and gas.

In recent years, the phrase "world-leading" has been used as filibuster in place of actual policy or real action. But achieving change, both at COP29 and beyond, would make this phrase tangible. We have shown the world that climate change can be legislated for, and that coal can be "switched off" without imperilling economic security. As we prepare for the next round of climate talks, the UK will go further, highlighting the zeal of our clean energy mission and taking our place at the forefront of ending fossil fuel extraction.

Climate change is the greatest danger we face. I'm confident that the UK, under a new government, will demonstrate global leadership by harnessing our own climate ambition to show the world that we can overcome this challenge together. ♦



The UK's climate finance opportunity

Amid dwindling aid budgets, private funds channelled to communities that are vulnerable to the climate crisis can have a huge impact

In Sacha, a village in the mountainous Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region of northern Pakistan, the effects of floods in 2022—which left a third of the country underwater and 1,700 people dead—are still being felt. The floodwater took out the Sacha and Mairah bridge, a vital local crossing over the Panjkora river. Without it, villagers must travel 2.5km over mountainous terrain to the nearest crossing. The most deleterious consequence of all, locals say, has been on children's education.

“We have to pay 2,000 rupees [about £5.40] per child each month for transport,” says Nayyab, a local mother. Because of the cost, she adds, “many of us have stopped sending our children to school after primary, as there is no middle school in the village.”

Pakistan has been ranked as the country eighth-most vulnerable to climate change by the Global Climate Risk Index. It is also the world's fifth-most populous nation, meaning it is one of the places most exposed to the increase in floods, heatwaves and droughts brought on by rising temperatures.

Across the Global South, climate disasters have hit vulnerable countries. Having been ravaged by civil war for three decades, Somalia has experienced both floods and a drought in recent years. The situation is exacerbating existing rifts, with various groups fighting for resources.

As these nations look for ways to mitigate climate impacts locally, domestic and global finance institutions are finding new ways to

help. Climate finance flows reached \$1.3 trillion (£973bn) in 2021-22, according to the Climate Policy Initiative, a thinktank. This was almost twice the amount in 2019-20. And yet, the need for climate finance is projected to rise to \$9 trillion a year by 2030. Just over half of the current sum comes from the public sector, including governments and development funding initiatives—but the private sector is responsible for a substantial part, providing \$625bn of funding in 2021-22.

The effect of this finance, when properly deployed, can be transformational. For villages like Sacha, it means a new bridge that can withstand the next wave of flooding or extreme temperatures. Adam Smith International (ASI), a global advisory company, is working with the provincial government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to create a new, standardised bridge code. It will include modular designs that can be used across the province, with blueprints and building materials that can withstand large volumes of water or high levels of heat. The last formalised code was created by British colonialists in the 1930s.

In Somalia, which was hit in 2022 by its worst drought in 40 years and in 2023 by a “once-in-a-century” flood, one challenge is ensuring that the government has a pipeline of projects available to fund. This means it has to be proactive, rather than reactive, in response to the climate crisis.

Droughts and floods induced by climate change “are happening every year, and we respond by providing humanitarian assis-

by **Emma Haslett**

Pakistan faces ongoing threats from floods, droughts and glacial melts. The Sustainable Energy and Economic Development (SEED) initiative, a partnership between the FCDO and ASI, builds climate resilience through sustainable development—the children shown (right) crossing a newly rehabilitated bridge to reach school, embody hope for a climate-resilient future

tance every year,” says Suvojit Chattopadhyay, who heads ASI’s operations in Africa. “But who is taking a long-term systems approach to addressing this? There is no better way than to build human capital and institutional capacity in the country.”

Those working behind the scenes are helping Somalia’s young government—a new internationally backed administration was established in 2012, following years of conflict—to create internal frameworks that will allow it to put incoming climate finance to good use. Steps include creating government departments able to handle capital inflows, as well as ensuring universities and civil society groups have the resources in place to respond to the damage caused by floods and drought. The Somali government has prioritised accessing climate finance, and established its National Climate Fund after becoming the eighth member of the UK-led Taskforce on Access to Climate Finance. This is an example of the kind of initiative the international community should support—especially key donors like the UK, which can lead the way through its climate finance commitments, seizing the opportunity to drive global impact.

But all of this comes amid aid budgets dwindling globally, as a result of economic constraints and growing right-wing sentiment. In 2020, the UK cut its aid budget from 0.7 per cent to 0.5 per cent of gross national income, and since 2019 its spending on aid fell to £12.8bn in 2022 from a peak of £15.1bn three years prior. In 2023, aid budgets across the 21 countries that make up the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee fell by 7.7 per cent.

Despite these challenges, the UK has pledged £11.6bn of climate aid by 2026 through its International Climate

Finance strategy, focusing on adaptation, resilience and sustainable infrastructure. Multilateral development banks have also plugged some of the gaps left by falling budgets, and are seeking to leverage private finance. Between 2018 and 2020, such organisations are thought to have mobilised \$33.8bn per year from private investors. Meanwhile, the International Energy Agency suggests \$4.6 trillion will be needed annually by 2030 to reach global net zero goals.

In an ideal world, says Nick Parkhill, ASI’s director in Pakistan, more climate finance would be driven directly by the communities that need it most: “You could plug more resources into local groups who could develop more locally driven climate solutions. And that could be bridges, it could be new crops, it could be whatever that local community has as a real climate problem.” For the residents of villages like Sacha, the prospect of adequate climate finance can make the difference between their children getting a proper education, or not.

\$4.6 trillion will be needed annually by 2030 to achieve global net zero goals

Opportunities for the private sector are growing in countries in Africa and Asia in step with increasing demand, says Nick Haslam, ASI’s head of climate finance. The energy sector, for instance, attracted 44 per cent of mitigation climate finance in 2021, most of it private. The cost and risks of establishing new sustainable infrastructure are, admittedly, high—but the returns can be attractive. “With the right planning, instruments and guarantees, it’s a good investment opportunity,” he says.

This year’s COP29 summit has been dubbed “the finance COP”, and is being seen as a chance to ensure funding is sufficient. Haslam is optimistic about how climate finance can help countries in the Global South: “It has the potential to be really transformational, and that’s exciting.” ♦



IMAGE: SAHAR ZAFER / ASI

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We need more funds, and from more sources, to adapt to the climate crisis

Flooding in Asia, hurricanes in the Americas, wildfires in Europe—these will make up the sobering backdrop for negotiations around new climate finance at COP29 in Azerbaijan. We cannot deny the threat of climate change or that its effects are now a reality for billions of people. So when delegates arrive to set a new global climate finance target, they must be bold on both mitigation and adaptation.

For years, climate finance has focused on mitigating climate change by supporting countries in reducing their emissions. Indeed, the best way to avoid the needless deaths and casualties caused by rising temperatures is to curb the emissions that exacerbate extreme weather events in the first place.

With the effects of climate change intensifying, we will also need to help communities rebuild after natural disasters and to make these communities more resilient to begin with. Work continues on the global goal on adaptation, a framework for which was agreed at COP28 in Dubai, which should help to protect at-risk communities and inhibit disruption and migratory flows.

But right now, the money available for climate finance is limited. The current global finance goal of \$100bn per year was only reached last year, despite being in place since 2009. In any case, this \$100bn target is no longer sufficient even just for mitigation, so any new finance goal will need to be substantially higher.

At present, only 23 countries are obligated to pay climate finance, a list that was set more than three decades ago. Without expanding this list, donor countries will be spread too thin to properly fund climate action, especially given significant pressures on domestic spending.

Greece, for instance, is currently trying to build new defences after wildfires nearly swept through Athens this summer. Yet, because it is one of the 23 countries obligated to pay climate finance, it will also have to contribute to other countries' adaptation. China, the world's biggest carbon emitter, and Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest exporter of petroleum, will not have to pay a penny, as they were not on the original list.

This is blatantly unfair both to donor countries dealing with their own vulnerabilities and to poorer countries which are reliant on this relatively small pot. If we want to be serious about tackling climate change, as well as adapting communities already feeling the heat, we will need to get more money and from more sources. That will mean making sure that countries like China and the Gulf states also contribute to climate finance.

Only 23 countries are obligated to pay climate finance, a list that was set over three decades ago

Other countries, such as Canada and Switzerland, have already called for this list of donor countries to be expanded. If we want the UK to be a global leader in climate finance—and the foreign secretary has made clear that he does—we should join them in arguing for more money from new and existing donors alike. Further, we must use the UK's world-leading expertise in the finance sector to bring forward other new sources of funds to help deliver on this vital agenda. ♦

David Simmonds MP
Member of the Conservative Environment Network and shadow minister for housing, communities and local government

Why can wealthy countries find money for war—but not for the climate?

With just weeks to go before COP29, the critical UN climate negotiations taking place in Azerbaijan, we residents of small island developing states find ourselves watching our hopes for the future sink below rising tides. My people wonder if larger countries are drifting further and further away from the unity and moral fortitude required to protect us and better our world.

In the past few months, climate change has caused an onslaught of record-breaking temperatures, wreaking havoc on our vulnerable regions. Our brothers and sisters in Tuvalu and Kiribati, grappling with severe flooding from high tides and storms, are struggling to save their crops and secure drinkable water. Families in Vanuatu continue to reel from the effects of Cyclone Niko, which displaced thousands of people. Small islands in the Caribbean have had to deal with the misfortune of a Category 5 hurricane that arrived in the Atlantic earlier in the year than had ever been recorded.

We have said time and again: as governments continue to drag their feet, the impacts of climate change will continue to worsen, with devastating consequences. Why, then, does our international response continue to be so inadequate?

Climate finance is at the core of addressing the crisis. Without adequate and efficient financial flows, adaptation and mitigation efforts will remain unfulfilled, and damage payouts insufficient. Finance is the key to ensuring the world can keep the global temperature rise below the crucial limit of 1.5°C. Take heed: if financing is not there, we will veer off track. The damage could be irreversible.

It is shocking to witness what seems to be an egregious lack of urgency on the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) on climate finance, a key part of the Paris agreement. The NCQG, currently under negotiation, is expected to be agreed by next year. As we approach what many are referring to as the climate finance COP, the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) and the world's least developed countries are struck by the divide between our nations, which are committed to achieving a robust agreement on climate finance, and

those which seem set on ignoring obligations in favour of political expediency.

Climate commitments cannot fall by the wayside. We certainly understand the hardships of economic budget restraints. But it is a very bitter pill to swallow when we see larger countries somehow conjuring endless streams of money to finance military conflicts, with no end in sight.

In 2023, the world's military expenditure increased for the ninth consecutive year, reaching a total of \$2.44 trillion. Funds for military conflicts and aggressions?

Readily available. Yet funds to save lives and livelihoods from the climate crisis are continuously delayed. Vulnerable states cannot forget the long overdue delivery of the annual \$100bn goal, pledged by developed countries at COP15 in 2009, to help us address the effects of climate change. It was not until last year that the goal was reached.

At this year's conference, we urge the international community to commit to a climate finance agreement that supplies trillions of dollars. It must consider the special circumstances of the most vulnerable nations, as per the provisions of the Paris agreement.

A robust finance goal would operationalise the many promises and protections in Article 9 of the Paris agreement, which clearly states that “developed country Parties shall provide financial resources to assist developing country Parties with respect to both mitigation and adaptation”. This would produce the accelerant needed to fill the implementation gap.

Small island developing states are paying the price for what bigger countries have brought upon our world. But the climate crisis will not dissipate once it has unleashed its fury upon our lands. As it grows, it will rage beyond our borders.

Unprecedented impacts are coming for larger countries, too. We must use the critical opportunity at COP29 not only to stand up for small island developing states, but to ensure a liveable world for all. ♦

Pa'olelei Luteru

Chair of the Alliance of Small Island States

Q&A

Mirabelle Muûls on how the UK can help shape carbon markets at COP29

Why are carbon markets so high on the agenda at this year's COP?

Carbon markets facilitate the trade of carbon credits derived from greenhouse gas reductions or removals. They are viewed as a vital mechanism for meeting global climate goals. Article 6 of the 2015 landmark Paris agreement on the climate enables countries to collaborate in order to fulfil their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)—the commitment that countries make to reduce emissions—including through the transfer of credits for emissions reductions achieved elsewhere. This allows for global reductions targets to be met efficiently, and it incentivises investment in carbon removals and climate restoration. But the effectiveness of carbon markets depends on ensuring that any reduction by a ton of carbon is only counted as one credit for one single market and that only high-integrity credits are traded.

Why have carbon markets been such a thorny issue at successive COPs?

Regulatory carbon credit systems are present in various geographies, most notably in the European Union. Voluntary carbon credits

are also being issued independently at a small scale. But the development of global carbon markets and trade as part of the implementation of the Paris agreement has been slow and contentious. Talks have faced repeated delays and disagreements. At COP28 last year, there was a breakdown in negotiations, highlighting the challenges and risks these markets face. Article 6.4 of the Paris agreement, intended to establish a global crediting mechanism, has become highly politicised. This has undermined the creation of a stable system that investors and companies can depend on.

Reaching a solid agreement at COP29, including the finer regulatory details, is crucial to creating a functional and trustworthy international carbon market.

Can the UK help make carbon markets work?

The UK was at the forefront of the negotiations that led to the establishment in 2005 of the EU Emissions Trading System. While less so recently, the UK was for many years considered a leader in climate policy. This all means that the UK has the potential experience and influence to play a role in shaping

high-integrity carbon markets. Britain can promote stringent standards for carbon credits and advocate for transparency and robust regulation, which would help prevent the market abuses that have previously undermined confidence in carbon credits.

Furthermore, Britain's expertise in the financial sector could help create a strong infrastructure for carbon trading, providing guidance and support to emerging markets. Through its involvement in global initiatives, such as the private-sector-led Taskforce on Scaling Voluntary Carbon Markets, the UK can work to establish common international standards that enhance trust and participation in carbon trading.

However, Britain is not on track to meet its upcoming carbon budgets and NDC targets. The independent Climate Change Committee (CCC) has highlighted gaps in policy implementation and the sectors where progress is lagging. To play an important role in shaping carbon trading rules, Britain needs to be seen as a leader in climate policy.

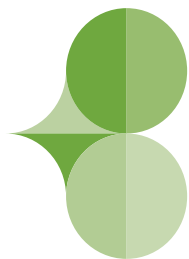
How can we stop companies from using carbon credits to avoid reducing their own emissions?

Companies might be keen to cut emissions for various reasons, such as meeting their customers', investors' or employees' preferences. It might, in some cases, even make economic sense. But it is more likely to be a response to public policy. Governments can use different tools to incentivise companies, such as creating national carbon markets, taxing emissions or providing subsidies for clean energy investment and innovation.

Including voluntary carbon credits as one of the ways in which a company can meet such objectives is risky, however. Firms could pay for other companies who might not be regulated in line with the Paris targets to reduce emissions, rather than taking the necessary steps to limit their own carbon footprint. To avoid this, governments can choose to strongly limit the proportion and type of international carbon credits that can be considered valid within a national policy, or to only accept them when a certain threshold of reductions has been achieved in-house. This is a way of ensuring that credits are high-integrity and correspond to real carbon reductions. It also helps make sure credits are not double-counted. Say that a farmer in Brazil plants trees on his plot of land. Brazil's government could count this towards reaching its national emission reduction targets. But if that farmer then sells to a company a voluntary carbon credit reflecting the carbon-reducing impact of the trees, it would also be counted towards the firm's targets.

Are we likely to see the UK Emissions Trading Scheme (UK ETS) apply to more industries?

The UK government and the CCC have discussed the potential expansion of Britain's trading scheme. The EU has put in place a second carbon market, EU ETS2, that is expanding the continent's emissions-trad-



ing system to more sectors, such as maritime shipping, construction and road transport. This is part of Europe's efforts to meet "Fit for 55", the EU's legislative package aimed at achieving a 55 per cent reduction in emissions by 2030. This puts pressure on the UK to follow a similar path with its own UK ETS.

In the EU and the UK several obstacles remain before the systems can include agriculture. Measuring emissions accurately across diverse farming practices is complex, but further advances in carbon accounting and measurement could bring progress. The potential economic impact on farmers is a challenge, as is the importance of food security. So far the EU has opted to encourage decarbonisation of the sector through other policies instead.

Could carbon credit trading impede development in countries with offsetting projects?

The correct pricing of carbon credits is key to ensuring that carbon markets do not impede development. Many of the countries in the Global South, where many carbon offsetting projects are located, have a large comparative advantage in potential sources of carbon removal and abatement. This can lead to investment at large scale into growth-enhancing initiatives, such as renewable energy generation or other infrastructure projects.

Carbon credits can also lead to the transfer of funds—for example, for reforestation projects, where payments are not only needed to plant trees but also to remove cattle from the land and incentivise farmers to invest in other economic activities. This is why carbon credits are often seen as a potential tool

to promote decarbonisation and sustainable development concurrently.

How can we safeguard against ineffective offsetting projects?

Voluntary carbon markets have suffered a serious reputation problem. In 2023 the volume of credits traded on the voluntary carbon market decreased significantly, as did their value. Corporate buyers have been put off by scandals. Some project developers claimed credits for protecting forests that were not at risk of being cut down, for instance.

To safeguard against ineffective carbon offsetting, several key measures are required. Governments, companies and other organisations should adhere to high-integrity standards and undergo independent third-party verification to ensure credibility. Projects must report transparently and prove additionality, meaning that they must show that emissions reductions would not occur without the funding. Long-term monitoring is needed to ensure ongoing impact and decarbonisation. Governments can also set standards and enforce compliance, ensuring accountability.

Involving local communities and favouring projects that have mutual social and economic benefits will improve public trust and sustainability, too. Stringent standards, verification, community involvement and government oversight can help ensure that carbon offsets deliver. ♦

Dr Mirabelle Muûls is an associate professor in economics at Imperial College Business School and co-director of the Hitachi-Imperial Centre for Decarbonisation and Natural Climate Solutions

The future is in climate and nature diplomacy

Twelve months ago, the UK's green credentials were in decline. Rishi Sunak's government had just made major U-turns on policies designed to decarbonise the economy. Shortly afterwards, it approved drilling at Rosebank, the UK's largest undeveloped oil and gas field. During the lead-up to last year's annual United Nations climate summit, the government had no climate envoy and fuzzy positions on the phasing out of fossil fuels. One general election later, things have changed.

Since gaining power, Keir Starmer's government has made strides towards turning Britain into a clean energy superpower—Labour's second declared national mission. In the first 100 days of the new Labour administration, the UK has become the first G20 country to end coal power, a ban on onshore wind has been lifted, 131 new clean energy projects have been secured and legislation to establish the publicly owned company Great British Energy has been introduced. This boost in domestic ambition provides Starmer and his cabinet with an opportunity to spur global action at COP29 in Baku next month.

The new government is already taking steps to increase its diplomatic presence at this year's summit in Azerbaijan. Ed Miliband, the energy security and net zero secretary, will lead negotiations for the UK. Furthermore, the government has restored the role of UK climate envoy—which the Conservatives left vacant for

more than a year—appointing Rachel Kyte to the position. It seems unlikely that the UK will be left without high-level representation at this year's conference.

Making progress on the UAE consensus, which denotes the agreement made during COP28 between 200 countries to “transition away from fossil fuels”, is vital. But it will be a challenge as countries descend on Baku, especially as many governments are planning to permit more oil and gas than a safe planet will allow. Worryingly, discussion stalled on this topic at the Bonn Climate Change Conference in June and the Azerbaijani COP29 Presidency has not listed the phase-out of fossil fuels as a summit priority.

Oil and gas activity is eroding global biodiversity

The impacts of a volatile, expensive international energy system based on fossil fuels are clear. Climate change is intensifying menacing weather events like Hurricanes Helene and Milton in the United States, the former having devastated whole communities and killed hundreds of people. Meanwhile, global gas prices are causing energy bills for UK households to rise again this winter. The impetus to move at pace away from coal, oil and gas and towards alternatives is in the interest

of climate safety, energy affordability and national security.

The UK is well placed to generate momentum on the phasing out of fossil fuels on the world stage. Starmer was elected on a manifesto that promised to end licensing for new oil and gas exploration—once the commitment is fulfilled, the UK will be the first G7 nation to do so. Following the Supreme Court’s Finch ruling, which demands that downstream emissions be considered in approval for new fossil fuel projects, the government’s decision not to defend legal challenges against the massive Rosebank and Jackdaw oil fields demonstrates some good faith regarding ending reliance on oil and gas.

But the government must show that its support for a just transition away from fossil fuels is unwavering. That means properly engaging with unions and impacted groups. In the past decade, jobs supported by the North Sea’s oil and gas industry have more than halved, despite hundreds of new exploration licences during that time. Ahead of the upcoming budget, climate groups and trade unions are calling for a training fund to support workers as they transition to employment in renewables, as well as £1.9bn of further annual funding to support local jobs in wind manufacturing until 2030. Successive leaders have failed to

create a transition that is fair for workers and communities. This would be the correct move for a government that doesn’t want to leave people behind.

Internationally, the government must work with other oil-and-gas-producing nations, particularly those in the Global South, to offer political, economic and technical support as they embark on their own journeys to increase wind, solar and tidal power. Some countries, including Denmark, which ended new oil and gas exploration licensing in 2020, and Colombia, which produces roughly the same amount of oil as the UK, are among the growing group of countries signed up to the Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance.

At COP29, the UK should announce an intention to join this group of like-minded partners working to fairly phase out oil and gas production—and work to satisfy the requirements for membership before COP30. This would signal that the UK is serious in its intentions.

This is also important for nature. Colombia, which is hosting the UN’s lesser-known biodiversity summit in Cali this month, is pushing for greater synergy between reducing emissions and protecting nature. Oil and gas activity is eroding global biodiversity and threatening key protected areas for precious marine life in the North Sea. By moving away from fossil fuels, the UK and others will be contributing to efforts to protect and restore the natural world.

To avoid the most catastrophic levels of warming, governments around the world must raise the ambition of their current climate and energy policies. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is clear about this. The new Labour government, with its fresh approach to green issues, should use COP29 to show that the UK’s commitment to a fair global transition away from fossil fuels is alive and strong—and that it will play a leading role in this mission. ♦

Robbie MacPherson

is a Churchill Fellow who is currently spending time in Denmark and Colombia investigating what the UK can learn from their experiences of moving away from oil and gas



Food security is national security

For too long in the UK, we have tended to view the climate crisis as something happening elsewhere—whether it be hurricanes in the United States or floods in Bangladesh—while imagining ourselves to be relatively shielded. But this complacency is no longer tenable; climate change is already devastating our communities, and no one is feeling it more acutely than farmers.

In the past 18 months, England has experienced its wettest period since record-keeping began in 1836. Across the UK and Ireland, the recent wet winter was made ten times more likely due to climate change. Extreme weather is a brutal new norm.

In my constituency in Hitchin, I meet many farmers struggling with the heavy rains. While costs have skyrocketed in recent years, wet weather has meant that farmers have planted fewer crops and experienced reduced yields. This combination has resulted in a hit to their bank balances and taken a toll on their mental health.

But this isn't just a crisis for farmers—it's a crisis for us all. The health of our agricultural sector is fundamental to food security. As global food systems become ever more fragile—largely owing to the escalating climate and nature crises, but also because of geopolitical conflicts—an increased reliance on imports makes us vulnerable to supply shocks and price hikes. The impact is already being felt in the UK, with climate change adding £361 annually to the average household food bill since the beginning of 2022.

Food security is national security. Supporting farmers is therefore an investment in our collective prosperity. This means we need policies that allow farmers to create diverse and resilient businesses. Central to this will be getting the Environmental Land Management scheme, the main post-Brexit mechanism for providing financial assistance to farmers in England—and a key lever for tackling the climate and nature crises—to work for all farms. But aid will need to go much further.

Farmers will play a vital role in the green revolution, and must benefit from it commensurately. This is why it's

so important that we connect renewable energy on farms to the national grid through Great British Energy (GBE), a newly created and publicly owned company.

It also means supporting farmers to export their produce overseas and backing them in trade deals, including through the government's plans to negotiate a new veterinary agreement with the European Union. We must also deliver on our commitment to use the public purse to ensure that 50 per cent of public sector food is locally produced or certified to high environmental standards.

It is no wonder that farmers are worried about climate change, given their proximity to its effects. It's also no surprise that farmers overwhelmingly back efforts to reach net zero, and at rates higher than the general public. With climate extremes threatening their livelihoods, the need for swift, decisive action is clear. In addition to working with farmers to store carbon in trees and soil on farms, one of the most effective ways to take action is by transforming the UK into a clean energy superpower.

Supporting farmers is an investment in our collective prosperity

This is one of Keir Starmer's core missions. It's not just about cutting emissions—it's about bringing down energy bills and reducing our dependence on costly, volatile energy imports. The government's ambition for a clean energy electricity system by 2030 is within reach, but it requires boldness. That's why initiatives like GBE are crucial in driving investment in renewable energy across the country, including on farms and in rural communities.

Helping farmers to build resilient businesses is not just vital for their prosperity, but essential to national security. Supporting them to restore nature on farms is a primary tool for reversing nature loss across the UK; it can aid in tackling the very climate crisis that threatens to undermine the agricultural sector. Climate change demands urgent action. By addressing it head-on, we can ensure that UK farming remains resilient and a cornerstone of our nation's prosperity. ♦

Alistair Strathern MP

Chair of the APPG on the Environment

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