

Climate Change Committee: 2021 progress report to parliament

Westminster Hall debate, 21 October 2021



Summary

In June 2021, the Climate Change Committee (CCC) assessed [the UK's progress](#) in reducing its carbon emissions in line with its climate targets. It found that the UK is not on track to meet its climate targets through to the late 2030s. To ensure the UK meets its target to reach net zero CO₂ emissions by 2050 and fulfils its climate pledges under the 2015 Paris climate agreement, it is imperative that the government redoubles efforts to reduce emissions. Leadership on the domestic level is particularly important in the year that the UK is hosting the UN climate summit in Glasgow (COP26).

Targets must now be translated into robust policies, delivered at pace, with measurable results over the next decade. The government has the active support of the public to do so, 70 per cent of voters want “urgent political action to tackle climate change and protect the natural environment”.

CCC progress report and recent government announcements

The UK has committed to reaching net zero carbon emissions by 2050 and has a series of legally binding carbon reduction targets ('carbon budgets') to meet along the way.

The CCC is an independent, statutory body established under the Climate Change Act (2008), which advises the UK and devolved governments on how to set and reach these emissions targets. It also provides an annual assessment of the UK's progress in reducing emissions to parliament and produces a biennial assessment of progress on preparing for and adapting to the impacts of climate change.

The UK has a strong track record of climate ambition: it has reduced emissions by 41 per cent since 1990, including international aviation and shipping. But it is not on track to meet its emissions targets for the period 2028-32 (fifth carbon budget) and the period 2033-37 ([sixth carbon budget](#)). In June, the CCC estimated that credible policies for delivery only covered around 20 per cent of reductions required to meet the sixth carbon budget, under which the UK must reduce emissions by 78 per cent (relative to 1990) in the period 2033-37.

The key message of the CCC's [2021 progress report](#) was:

“The government has made historic climate promises in the past year, for which it deserves credit. However, it has been too slow to follow these with delivery. This defining year for the UK's climate credentials has been marred by uncertainty and

delay to a host of new climate strategies. Those that have emerged have too often missed the mark. With every month of inaction, it is harder for the UK to get on track”.

The CCC provided [policy recommendations](#) to the government, including:

- A net zero test to ensure that all government policy, including planning decisions, is compatible with UK climate targets.
- An ambitious heat and buildings strategy that works for consumers.
- New policy on surface transport, aviation, hydrogen, biomass and food.
- Strengthening plans for the power sector, industrial decarbonisation, the North Sea, peat and energy from waste.
- Tackling the big cross-cutting challenges of public engagement, fair funding and local delivery.

Since the progress report was published in June, the government has published the transport decarbonisation plan and the hydrogen strategy, and it has announced a commitment to decarbonise the UK power sector by 2035. The heat and buildings strategy and BEIS’s overarching net zero strategy are expected to be published imminently.

However, there is still a long way to go to put the UK on track to meeting its climate targets.

More action is needed from the government

Reducing emissions to reach our climate targets

Green Alliance has the following recommendations to help put the UK on track to meeting its fifth and sixth carbon budgets.

Transport (31 per cent of emissions in 2019)

Transport is the UK’s highest emitting sector. Cars and vans are responsible for the majority of emissions. The government must encourage greater use of public transport, as well as cycling and walking. The transition to electric vehicles must be accelerated, including through the implementation of a zero emissions vehicles mandate (‘ZEV mandate’), which would encourage the sale of electric vehicles and ensure delivery of the government’s commitment to ban sales of new petrol and diesel cars by 2030. With aviation responsible for eight per cent of emissions in 2018 and no solutions to reduce emissions this decade at the scale required, the government should introduce policy to limit growth in air travel, including a ban on airport expansions.

Buildings (16 per cent of emissions in 2019)

The government should put in place a strategy to upgrade the UK’s inefficient homes over the next decade. This should include regulation on minimum energy efficiency standards to ensure all homes are rated EPC band C or above by 2030 at the point of sale; phasing out gas boilers and improving the attractiveness of clean heat options by extending the Clean Heat Grant and through financial mechanisms, like reducing levies on electricity bills; and bringing VAT on renovation and low carbon installations in line with the zero rate for VAT on new build.

Agriculture and land use (12 per cent of emissions in 2019)

The government's proposed Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme could be a vehicle to support farm businesses in adopting sustainable land management practices which sequester carbon. The government should also put in place measures to restore upland peat by 2045, rewetting 60 per cent of lowland peat by 2050, and increase afforestation rates.

Power (11 per cent of emissions in 2019):

The government recently committed to decarbonising the UK's energy system by 2035. This should be complimented by guarantees around security of supply, the rapid adoption of policies to support flexibility and storage, and new ambitions around onshore wind and solar deployment in England. The government should also end subsidies for oil and gas production, redirecting investment towards ensuring a strong renewables sector in affected areas, and into retraining programmes to ensure that oil and gas workers are able to transition into these new industries.

Industry and waste (22 per cent and 6 per cent of emissions in 2019, respectively):

Resource efficiency is essential to reduce emissions from industry over the next decade and will play a vital role in supporting resource productivity and levelling up. The government should set an economy wide target to reduce resource use by 50 per cent by 2050, with separate targets for high impact sectors and strategic materials, backed by policies to deliver near term business investment in solutions for better resource use. Furthermore, the government should commit to **near [zero emission steel making](#)** by 2035, as recommended by the CCC, with funding and commitment for a pilot to trial hydrogen based steelmaking.

The government's upcoming net zero strategy is a good opportunity to make progress in these areas.

In the comprehensive spending review, the Treasury must make available £62.9 billion over the three year period of the comprehensive spending review (ie £21 billion a year) to tackle the climate and nature crises. The spending review is an opportunity to invest in public transport, walking and cycling, as well as nature restoration and emerging green technologies.

The UK's taxation system should be aligned with environmental goals, and the budget is a good opportunity to make progress on this. VAT should be reformed, and the government should consult on ways to reform fuel duty as revenues decline due to the transition to electric vehicles.

Protecting the UK from the effects of climate change

The CCC's advice on adapting to the impacts of climate change is available [here](#).

The global and UK climate will continue to change, with floods, heatwaves, droughts and storms becoming more frequent and more intense, and warming at much higher levels than two degrees remains possible in the second half of the century.

The CCC recommends that the government should set a clear vision for a well prepared UK, and back this with quantifiable targets to embed adaptation in policies across the natural environment, planning, infrastructure, homes and transport.

The government's national adaptation programme has not developed national preparedness for a two degree global temperature rise, let alone higher levels of warming.

Key recommendations include:

- Reinstating support services and resourcing for local adaptation action.
- Restore 100 per cent of upland peat by 2045, including through a ban on rotational burning.
- Bring forward proposed plans to address overheating risk in homes through building regulations.
- Make the government's next round of adaptation reporting mandatory for all infrastructure sectors.
- Build a strong emergency resilience capability for the UK against climate shocks, learning from the Covid-19 response.
- Implement a public engagement programme on climate change adaptation.

Further reading

CCC risk assessment, June 2021, [Independent assessment of UK climate risk](#)

The prime minister's ten point plan, November 2020, [The ten point plan for a green industrial revolution](#)

Green Alliance's [Net zero policy tracker](#) (September 2021) highlights that current government policies only add up to 24 per cent of emissions cuts needed over the fifth carbon budget. Note that Green Alliance's analysis is based on assessment of the fifth carbon budget aligned with the CCC's balanced net zero pathway, which is more ambitious than the government's currently legislated carbon budget for that same period.

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