

P-05-869 Declare a climate emergency

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 7 Mai 2019

Petitions Committee | 7 May 2019

Research Briefing:

Petition number: P-05-869

Petition title: Declare a Climate Emergency and fit all policies with zero-carbon targets

Text of petition: We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to:

1. Declare a Climate Emergency.
2. Ensure all current and future policies are consistent with averting further climate change and ecological collapse.
3. Enact legally-binding policy measures to reduce carbon emissions to net zero by 2025 and to reduce consumption levels.
4. Implement a Citizen's Assembly of Wales to oversee the changes.

We call upon the Welsh Government to declare a Climate Emergency immediately, and commit to executing the remaining actions by June 2019.

WAG targets for a zero-carbon public sector must be used as a catalyst to engineer rapid decarbonisation in the private sector through procurement, taxation and subsidy. Across the UK, twenty city, town and county councils have already declared a Climate Emergency, including Powys and Machynlleth. Citizens must be involved to ensure the necessary change is made across society, as demonstrated in a Sortition model of participatory democracy. Initiatives to partner with include: The Climate Mobilization; Beyond Zero Emissions; Rapid Transition Alliance; Green New Deal Group; One Million Climate Jobs; The Breakthrough Institute; and Zero Carbon Britain.

Background

The [Environment \(Wales\) Act 2016](#) (the Act) placed new duties on the Welsh Government to reduce emissions, including a requirement to ensure that net emissions for 2050 are at least 80% lower than the baseline.

The Act places several duties on Welsh Ministers to ensure the 2050 target is met. These include:

- By the end of 2018, the Welsh Government must set interim emissions targets for 2020, 2030 and 2040;
- For each five year budgetary period the Welsh Government must set a maximum total amount for net Welsh emissions (described as a carbon budget), with the first two budgets to be set by the end of 2018; and
- The Welsh Government must take into account international agreements to limit increases in global average temperatures.

In developing the interim emissions targets and carbon budgets, the Welsh Government commissioned advice from its statutory advisory body, the [UK Committee on Climate Change \(UK CCC\)](#). The UK CCC published its [first piece of advice](#) to the Welsh Government in April 2017. It was concerned with carbon accounting and the design of Welsh carbon budgets and other targets. The UK CCC published its [second piece of advice](#) to the Welsh Government in December 2017. It assessed the appropriate decarbonisation pathway for Wales, including specific recommendations on interim targets for 2020, 2030 and 2040, together with carbon budgets running to 2025. In its advice, the UK CCC concluded that the circumstances in Wales make achieving an 80% reduction more challenging than the equivalent reduction for the UK as a whole. It attributes this to Wales having a greater share of 'hard to reduce' emissions, for example in agriculture and industry. The UK CCC advice suggests that the maximum feasible reduction for Wales by 2050 is 85%.

In December 2018 the Welsh Government laid [five sets of regulations](#) to give effect to some of the commitments arising from the Act. They are:

- The Climate Change (Interim Emissions Targets) (Wales) Regulations 2018;
- The Climate Change (Carbon Budgets) (Wales) Regulations 2018;
- The Climate Change (International Aviation and International Shipping) (Wales) Regulations 2018;
- The Climate Change (Credit Limit) (Wales) Regulations 2018; and
- The Carbon Accounting (Wales) Regulations 2018.

The first set of regulations set interim emissions targets:

- The maximum amount for the net Welsh emissions account for 2020 is **27%** lower than the baseline;
- The maximum amount for the net Welsh emissions account for 2030 is **45%** lower than the baseline; and
- The maximum amount for the net Welsh emissions account for 2040 is **67%** lower than the baseline.

The second set of regulations set the first two carbon budgets:

- For the 2016 to 2020 budgetary period, the carbon budget is limited to an average of 23% lower than the baseline.
- For the 2021 to 2025 budgetary period, the carbon budget is limited to an average of 33% lower than the baseline.

Paris Agreement and IPCC Report

In November and December 2015, the [21st Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change \(UNFCCC COP21\)](#) took place in Paris. UNFCCC is an international environmental agreement on climate change, of which there are 195 States Parties, including the UK. The meeting in Paris was hailed as a make-or-break opportunity to secure an international agreement on approaches to tackling climate change, a commitment to a longer-term goal of near zero net emissions in the second half of the century, and supporting a transition to a clean economy and low carbon society. The key points of the [Paris Agreement](#) are:

- Agreement on a long-term goal of keeping the increase in global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels;
- Agreement to aim to limit the increase to 1.5°C, since this would significantly reduce risks and the impacts of climate change;
- Acceptance of the need for global emissions to peak as soon as possible, recognising that this will take longer for developing countries; and
- Agreement to undertake rapid reductions thereafter in accordance with the best available science.

In October 2018, the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\)](#) published its latest report, [Global Warming of 1.5°C](#). The special report looks at the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways. The authors of the report say urgent and unprecedented changes are needed to reach the target, which they say is affordable and feasible despite the fact that it lies at the most ambitious end of the Paris Agreement pledge to keep temperatures between 1.5C and 2C.

Declaring a climate emergency

On 30 April, the Welsh Government declared a [climate emergency](#). This followed a [similar announcement in Scotland](#) earlier in the week. In her written statement, the Minister for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs said “We hope the declaration by Welsh Government can help to trigger a wave of action at home and internationally, from our own communities, businesses and organisations to parliaments and governments around the world”. The announcement came the day before a [Plaid Cymru debate](#) in the Assembly, calling on the Welsh Government to declare a climate emergency, and recognise that a rapid and urgent global response to climate change is now necessary.

A number of towns, cities and local authorities across the UK have [declared a ‘climate emergency’](#). There is no universally agreed definition of what constitutes a climate emergency. Some towns and cities (including Sheffield, Plymouth and Carlisle) have pledged to become carbon neutral by 2030. Some, including Gwynedd and Bradford, have declared a climate emergency, but with no target date for action. The petition states that Powys and Machynlleth have declared a climate emergency. However, the letter from the Minister to the Committee says that the Powys County Council meeting which considered the proposed declaration amended the relevant motion for the meeting on 24 January to remove any reference to an emergency before it was passed. The amended motion, with no reference to an ‘emergency’ can be [found here](#). On 20 February, Carmarthenshire County Council [declared a climate emergency](#). It committed to becoming a net zero carbon local authority by 2030, and to develop a clear plan within the next year.

Citizens’ Assembly

According to the [UK Parliament website](#), a citizens’ assembly is a group of people who are brought together to discuss an issue or issues, and reach a conclusion about what they think should happen. The people who take part are chosen so they reflect the wider population – in terms of demographics (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, social class) and sometimes relevant attitudes. Citizens’ assemblies aim to give members of the public the time and opportunity to learn about and discuss a topic, before reaching conclusions. Assembly Members are asked to make trade-offs and arrive at workable recommendations. Citizens’ assemblies, and other similar methods, have been used in the UK and other countries – including Australia, Canada, and the United States – to address a range of complex issues. A citizens’ assembly is [currently taking place in the Republic of Ireland](#) – established by the Irish Parliament – to address a number of important legal and policy issues facing Irish society. These have included equal marriage, abortion and the opportunities and challenges of an ageing population.

Welsh Government action

The background section of this briefing sets out the context for the Welsh Government's action on climate change.

Consultation on a low carbon pathway and the Low Carbon Delivery Plan

In July 2018, the Welsh Government launched its consultation on '[Achieving our low-carbon pathway to 2030](#)'. The consultation (which ran until early October) sought views on what actions the Welsh Government should take to reduce emissions to 2030. It presented a number of potential actions that could be taken across sectors such as industry, waste, agriculture, land use change and forestry, transport, power and buildings. The consultation stated that the potential actions within it were developed by considering recommendations from the UK CCC, wider evidence, discussion with stakeholders, learning from others, and through consideration of the five ways of working under the *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015*. The results of the consultation were used to help develop the Welsh Government's first low carbon delivery plan, setting out how Wales will meet its first carbon budget, which was published in March 2019.

The delivery plan, [Prosperity for All: A Low Carbon Wales](#) sets out how Wales aims to meet its first carbon budget (2016–2020) and consequently the 2020 interim target. It does this through 76 existing policies from across the Welsh Government, UK Government and the EU – and 24 new proposals. The plan comprises five parts:

- Part 1 Introduction, Vision and Context: explains why the Welsh Government is acting on climate change, its 2050 vision for a low carbon Wales, and the wider legislative and international context;
- Part 2 Leadership, Integration, Collaboration and Involvement: sets out the cross-cutting actions the Welsh Government is taking through integrating decarbonisation across government policy and delivery. It also highlights the need for involvement and collaboration across society and the role of others in the low carbon transition;
- Part 3 Sector Emissions Pathways: sets out the pathways for the different emissions sectors, including ambition, emissions profile, actions and how the sectors are contributing to the well-being goals. The sector chapter pathways are power, buildings, transport, industry, land use, agriculture, waste and f-gases;
- Part 4 Methodological approach: sets out the methodological approach for tracking policies and proposals, and how these contribute towards meeting targets and budgets through policies and proposals;
- Part 5 Next steps: highlights steps over the coming years in terms of the timeframe for setting the third carbon budget, and developing the second delivery plan.

In relation to the plan, the letter from the Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs says:

[The Plan] will include actions relating to engaging more people in Wales with tackling greenhouse gas emissions. All Welsh Government policies are already subject to a range of impact assessments during development. Along with statutory biodiversity and Strategic Environmental Assessments where relevant, we have introduced a climate change impact assessment to ensure we are considering the effect of our policies on emissions and our ability to adapt to changing weather patterns.

Further advice from the UK CCC

On 15 October 2018 the governments of the UK, Scotland and Wales [asked the UK CCC to provide advice on the UK and Devolved Administrations' long-term targets for greenhouse gas emissions and the UK's transition to a net zero-carbon economy](#). [Specifically they asked](#): when the UK should reach net zero emissions of carbon dioxide and/or greenhouse gases as a contribution to global ambition under the Paris Agreement; if that target should be set now; the implications for emissions in 2050; how such reductions can be achieved; and the costs and benefits involved in comparison to existing targets. In her letter to the Committee, the Minister says she expects to receive the advice from the UK CCC in May, and that she “will consider this advice and its implications for our statutory framework, including the 2050 target”.

National Assembly for Wales action

The [Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs \(CCERA\) Committee](#) has an ongoing programme of work on climate change. This includes:

- Annual scrutiny of Welsh Government progress on climate change mitigation. The [Committee's last report](#) was published in May 2018;
- Scrutiny of the [Climate Change \(Wales\) Regulations](#);
- Engagement with climate change experts through stakeholder workshops and its [expert reference group](#); and
- Analysis of the Welsh Government's recently published [Low Carbon Delivery Plan](#).

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.