

In the hot seat

Our government's response to climate change should be 'Further and Faster', says author and campaigner **George Monbiot**

The Stern Report demonstrated what many of us suspected: it will cost much less to prevent runaway climate change than it will to live with it. Useful as this finding is, let's hope it doesn't mean the debate will now focus on money. Because the principal costs of climate change will be measured in lives, not pounds.

To prevent global temperatures rising by 2°C (3.6°F) above pre-industrial levels, we, the rich nations, need to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions by 90% by 2030, and the greater part of that reduction needs to be made at the beginning of this period.

Picture two graphs with time on the horizontal axis and the rate of emissions plotted vertically. On one graph the line falls like a ski jump: a steep drop followed by a shallow tail. On the other it falls like the trajectory of a bullet. They fall to the same point by the same date, but far more gases have been produced in the second case, making runaway climate change much more likely.

Here are ten drastic but affordable steps the government could take:

1. Set a target for reducing greenhouse gas emissions based on the latest (not outdated) science. Timescale: immediately.

2. Set a carbon cap that falls like the ski-jump trajectory, allowing a free but limited annual quota of carbon dioxide for each person (those who use less than their quota can sell it). It's a simpler, fairer approach and creates a powerful incentive for people to demand low-carbon technologies. Timescale: by Jan 2009.

3. New building regulations introduced with three objectives. A: strict energy-efficiency requirements on all refurbishments costing £3,000 or more. B: landlords to increase energy efficiency of dwellings before renting. C: new homes in the UK built to the German Passivhaus standard (which requires no heating system). Timescale: 2007-2012.

4. Incandescent lightbulbs, patio heaters, garden floodlights, etc, to be banned. Introduce a stiff 'feebate' system for all electronic goods sold in the UK, the least efficient taxed heavily and the most efficient receiving tax discounts. Each year the standard increases. Timescale: immediately

5. Money now earmarked for nuclear missiles redeployed and invested in energy generation and distribution schemes that require government support to make them commercially viable, eg very large wind farms, many miles offshore, connected to the grid with high-voltage direct-current cables, and a hydrogen pipeline network delivering fuel for home heating. Timescale: by 2018.



6. City-centre coach stations shut down and moved to motorway junctions; urban public transport networks extended to meet them. Coaches travel on dedicated lanes and never leave the motorways, making them as fast as cars and saving 90% of emissions. Timescale: by 2020.

7. Chains of filling stations to supply leasable electric-car batteries, effectively providing electric cars with unlimited mileage. Batteries recharged overnight using surplus electricity from offshore wind farms. Timescale: by 2011.

8. Abandon road building and road widening. Spend the £11.4bn earmarked for road expansion on tackling climate change. Timescale: immediately.

9. Freeze and then reduce UK airport capacity. Freeze all new airport construction and introduce national quotas for landing slots, to

be reduced by 90% by 2030. Timescale: immediately.

10. Close out-of-town superstores and replace with a warehouse-and-delivery system. Shops use six times as much electricity per square metre as many factories; warehouses containing the same quantity of goods use roughly 5% of the energy. Vehicles use 70% less fuel delivering goods than cars use going to shops. Timescale: by 2012.

Climate change is not just a moral question: it is the moral question of the 21st century. There is one position even more morally culpable than denial. That is to accept that it's happening and that its results will be catastrophic, but to fail to take the measures needed to prevent it.

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