



2020 NPF Consultation

"Protecting the natural environment after coronavirus"

June 2020

LCHR's National Policy Forum Submission

1. What environmental conditions should be attached to government support for business during and after the coronavirus crisis?

Each application needs to demonstrate how their business will help the UK achieve the IPCC 2018 carbon budget and the IPBES biodiversity targets (a plan for Planetary Repair). We should refuse to bail out companies based in tax havens and take stakes in carbon-intensive industries. There are some industries, such as the arms industry, that should receive no public money.

2. How can national, devolved and local government most effectively redeploy workers to "shovel-ready" green infrastructure projects such as renewables construction, nature conservation and home insulation?

"Shovel-ready" schemes could be deployed quicker with government support to remove some consultation obstacles - e.g cycle routes and pedestrianisation projects - and the rapid roll out of street by street insulation programmes (TUC recent research puts these at the top of job creation projects). Consider the need for adaptation - for example, Natural Flood Management and the use of other natural processes (hedge-laying), which can be rolled out rapidly. Contact the Centre for Alternative Technology for more on this (Paul Allen) and the Rapid Transition Alliance (Andrew Simms).

We should also be looking to share technology and knowledge with countries across the world, as well as learning from sustainable practises in the majority world.

3. What economic reforms and fiscal incentives should the government introduce to ensure that the post-crisis economy is a sustainable one?

Universal Basic Income at a liveable rate, so the need to support destructive industries due to protecting jobs is removed. These proposals would guarantee the human rights of individuals, whilst also being shown to increase productivity and wellbeing. Crucially, everyone would feel supported and more sustainable lifestyle patterns would develop naturally.

Abandoning GDP as a measure of economic success and reorienting our economy so that it is based on wellbeing. See Positive Money's recent report on the Tragedy of Growth. It is also worth following what is happening in Amsterdam, where the city is currently working with the economist Kate Raworth to move towards a just and sustainable economy.

Pressure the Government to stop investing in fossil fuel projects. We have to prioritise investment in the renewable energy sector, whilst also looking to degrow and reform many of our current industries. The investments the UK Government is now making will end up being stranded assets. They make no sense morally, nor financially. This week, the UK Government invested \$1bn in a gas pipeline in Mozambique. This project alone will displace over five hundred families and poses a major challenge to human rights in the region.

4. What new environmental protections should we be pushing for post-Brexit?

The UK government has recently introduced its post-Brexit Environmental and Agriculture Bills and outlined its trading priorities in negotiating a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the USA. All three signal a shift to weaken environmental standards on air pollution, emissions targets and food and agricultural standards and Labour must ensure it pushes for not only similar standards and legal protections as we had as a member of the EU but even more stringent protections as we emerge from COVID-19 with ever decreasing time to tackle the climate emergency.

Labour must ensure that it pushes for each of these three areas to be strengthened in the Agriculture Bill:

- *Legal targets for air pollution and emissions*: including criteria for determining targets to ensure they are aligned to the UK's commitment for net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 and obligations under the Paris Climate Agreement and a better framework for realisation of targets on air-pollution and emissions with necessary support provided to businesses and industry
- *Non-regression clause*: to prevent backsliding on environmental commitments in the future
- *Watchdog*: the role of the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) must be strengthened to ensure accountability and transparency and any effective government watchdog organisation needs to have oversight from across parliament with cross-party scrutiny over government performance.

In addition, Labour must push for the Conservatives to abandon the proposed FTA with the United States unless and until Trump reaffirms a commitment to the Paris Agreement, which the US is scheduled to withdraw from in November this year. The US is the world's second largest carbon polluter and by withdrawing from the Paris Agreement, Trump will be reneging on the commitment to reduce US emissions by 26-28% by 2025. In addition, Labour must ensure that the government undertakes a thorough and rigorous Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of a UK-US FTA covering emissions from transport, energy production, agriculture and their effects on meeting the UK's Climate commitments, and present this evidence to parliament. The government has reserved only 5 pages in a 184 page document to any form of environmental analysis and Labour must ensure it speaks out during the negotiations to safeguard environmental protections. Such protections are particularly important due to the risks posed by a UK-US FTA on agricultural and food standards, and the famous example of chlorinated chicken being imported from the US is [still a real possibility](#). Whilst the newly introduced Agriculture Bill has some positive standards, it does not guarantee a commitment to maintain UK domestic standards on food imports from trade agreements, and Labour must push for such a protection to be incorporated into the Bill.

Access to clean air is an example of a fundamental right that should be pushed for in the UK's exit from the EU. The Environment Bill 2019-21, designed to succeed EU legislation on the environment, also removes the obligation of publishing detailed plans to show how targets for air pollutants can be met. Indeed, the Bill replaces the need for these detailed plans with the

requirement that Ministers disclose the steps they will take towards targets, regardless of whether the measures are deemed sufficient by industry experts. The EU's air quality directives are explicit in requiring detailed plans. This has meant that campaigners could take the government to court over the UK's air quality and have plans ruled as invalid; we would like to see this continued in UK law.

Furthermore, we suggest that the UK should introduce a law making companies liable for serious environmental harm and any human rights abuses in their domestic and international operations, including in their supply chains. This law would use a due diligence approach which would require companies to demonstrate that they had taken all reasonable steps to prevent environmental harm in their supply chains.

5. How can we promote greater sustainability in land use and farming practices?

Gove's payment for public good is actually a useful starting point - build on this, majoring on carbon sequestration agriculture. Labour should also promote plant-based diets. Whilst it is uncomfortable/ possibly unpopular, it is surely time that these conversations are had at a policy level: increasing plant-based consumption is the single biggest way individuals can reduce their personal impact on the planet. A potential step in this process is reducing and then removing subsidies for meat production.

Another approach that can be taken to address the environmental implications of the food industry is lab-grown meat. This innovative approach has the potential to eliminate the need for livestock, which could reduce the use of energy, land and the production of greenhouse gases. As long as consideration is given to how the energy to make the lab-grown meat is produced, this method in partnership with encouraging plant-based diets can substantially reduce the environmental impact of the average UK diet.

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