

Mrs Kemi Badenoch MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

4 November 2024

Dear Mrs Badenoch,

Congratulations on your election as Leader of the Conservative Party!

I am writing to urge you to re-affirm the Conservative Party's commitment under your leadership to the implementation of the 2008 Climate Change Act, particularly the target of reaching net zero annual emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050.

As you know, the Act was passed in 2008 with almost unanimous support within Parliament. Successive governments have remained committed to the Act, and as Prime Minister, Theresa May amended the Act to include the target of net zero emissions by 2050.

The adoption of the 2050 target followed the recommendations of a detailed analytical report from the expert independent Climate Change Committee, drawing on the special report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change on 'Global Warming of 1.5°C'.

The scientific evidence shows clearly that to have a reasonable chance of limiting by the end of this century the rise in global mean surface temperature to 1.5°C above pre-industrial level, global annual emissions of carbon dioxide need to reach net zero by mid-century. Sustained warming of more than 1.5°C will result in serious impacts of climate change in the UK and around the world, and risks breaching significant thresholds, such as destabilisation of the land-based polar ice sheets in Greenland and West Antarctica.

The impacts of climate change are already affecting the UK, with sea level rise along our coasts, heavier rainfall, and more frequent and intense heatwaves. These impacts are killing people and damaging our economy. The UK is also exposed and vulnerable to the impacts of climate change in other parts of the world which threaten our supply chains, including for food. And population displacement due to climate change impacts in other parts of the world risk driving much higher flows of refugees and migrants.

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Chair:
Professor Lord Stern
of Brentford

These impacts are growing and will continue to worsen until the world reaches net zero emissions. The scientific evidence is clear that the more greenhouse gases, particularly carbon dioxide, that accumulate in the atmosphere, the more warming and other climatic changes that will result. A failure to reach net zero emissions would mean that warming and climate change continues.

Unfortunately, the world is not yet on target to reach net zero emissions by 2050. The most recent assessment by the United Nations Environment Programme warns that current emissions plans by countries collectively would likely result in warming of 2.6-3.1°C by the end of the century compared with pre-industrial, risking a global temperature that was last experienced on Earth about 3 million years ago during the Pliocene Epoch. This would result in impacts that would be undoubtedly severe for the UK and the rest of the world.

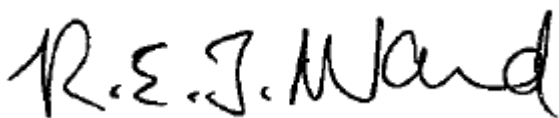
It is clearly in the interests of the UK for the world to reach net zero emissions by mid-century to limit the damage to lives and livelihoods. It is important that the UK increases its investments in adapting and becoming more resilient to the growing impacts, but there are technical and financial limits to what we can achieve. It is simply unsound to argue that the UK could, or should, attempt to adapt to unlimited amounts of warming.

The UK has a track record of international leadership on climate change, having reduced its annual emissions of greenhouse gases by 52.7% between 1990 and 2023 while its GDP increased by 79.5%. Although the UK is now responsible for less than 1 per cent of annual emissions of greenhouse gases, leading by example, and supporting international commitments for strong action, is the most effective way of persuading other countries to accelerate their efforts. The support for the net zero target across the UK's major political parties provides a strong indication of our commitment to the rest of the world.

There are important policy discussions and debates required about how the UK achieves net zero emissions by 2050, while managing the distributional effects across households and businesses. There is a growing body of evidence that the investments required for the transition to a zero-emissions and climate-resilient economy will improve productivity and growth, and ensure that the UK remains competitive. It is clearly in the UK's best interests for the Conservative Party to be an advocate for strong and effective action.

We look forward to supporting your efforts to tackle climate change and promote sustainable, inclusive and resilient growth.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "R.E.J. Ward". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, prominent 'W'.

Bob Ward
Policy and Communications Director
Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment
London School of Economics and Political Science