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# THE COALITION GOVERNMENT: DOES BLUE AND YELLOW MAKE GREEN?

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### Introduction

Further, faster and stronger action is needed to halt the devastating impacts of climate change already hitting poor communities. Floods, droughts and sea-level rises are destroying lives, homes and livelihoods across the world.

Tearfund started working on climate back in 2002, because we started hearing about the impact it was having on the people we serve. ‘It rains a lot when it used to be dry, and it’s dry when it used to rain,’ says a 44-year old rice farmer from Nepal named Ram, who we heard from recently. We have heard similar things from farmers in Africa, Asia and Latin America saying that the weather’s not like it used to be and it’s harder to make a living. In addition Sanjeev Bhanja, head of programmes for EFICOR, one of Tearfund’s partners in India says, ‘Rainfall no longer marks the sowing season from the harvest season, and it’s the poorest people who are most affected. Climate change is a poverty issue that’s going to be with India for years to come.’ Climate change is still often seen as an environmental issue, without being linked to the people who depend on that environment. But it’s a development and a social justice issue too. So Tearfund has been actively involved in the UN climate talks process since 2004, and has been campaigning for increased action on climate change for many years including through the Stop Climate Chaos coalition who organised ‘The Wave’ ahead of the climate summit in Copenhagen in December 2009.

*‘I want us to be the greenest government ever – a very simple ambition and one that I’m absolutely committed to achieving.’*

David Cameron, Prime Minister- 14 May 2010<sup>1</sup>

*‘Climate change is the greatest threat to our common future. We have a very short period of time to tackle the problem before it becomes irreversible and out of control. A lot of progress has been made, but we must now go further, faster and turn targets into real change.’*

Chris Huhne, Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, May 2010

In the UK our mainstream political leaders have all accepted that climate change is real and needs tackling, with David Cameron promising the current government will be the greenest ever in limiting emissions, making provisions for climate change adaptation, and encouraging investment in renewable energy sources. There’s certainly room for political disagreement about the most effective actions to take to respond to climate change, but accepting the reality of the science and the changes being experienced both by the environment and by people isn’t a party-political issue in the UK. Coming after one year in government this briefing seeks to analyse what the coalition government has done to help achieve this ambition and outline some key questions and challenges that remain to be addressed.

### What have they said so far in government and what has been done?

Given the two parties different manifesto commitments and policies on a whole range of issues, the coalition agreement between the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats was seen as a significant document in the first weeks of the new coalition government. The box on the next page outlines what the coalition agreement said about energy and climate change.

The coalition agreement announced strong and ambitious domestic action on climate change. However, there was little mention of the

## **Text of the coalition agreement on energy and climate change**

The Government believes that climate change is one of the gravest threats we face, and that urgent action at home and abroad is required. We need to use a wide range of levers to cut carbon emissions, decarbonise the economy and support the creation of new green jobs and technologies. We will implement a full programme of measures to fulfil our joint ambitions for a low carbon and eco-friendly economy.

- We will push for the EU to demonstrate leadership in tackling international climate change, including by supporting an increase in the EU emission reduction target to 30% by 2020.
- We will seek to increase the target for energy from renewable sources, subject to the advice of the Climate Change Committee.
- We will continue public sector investment in carbon capture and storage (CCS) technology for four coal-fired power stations.
- We will establish a smart grid and roll out smart meters.
- We will establish a full system of feed-in tariffs in electricity – as well as the maintenance of banded Renewables Obligation Certificates.
- We will introduce measures to promote a huge increase in energy from waste through anaerobic digestion.
- We will create a green investment bank.
- We will retain energy performance certificates while scrapping HIPs.
- We will introduce measures to encourage marine energy.
- We will establish an emissions performance standard that will prevent coal-fired power stations being built unless they are equipped with sufficient carbon capture and storage to meet the emissions performance standard.
- We will cancel the third runway at Heathrow.
- We will refuse permission for additional runways at Gatwick and Stansted.
- We will replace Air Passenger Duty with a per-flight duty.
- We will introduce a floor price for carbon, and make efforts to persuade the EU to move towards full auctioning of ETS permits.
- Through our ‘Green Deal’, we will encourage home energy efficiency improvements paid for by savings from energy bills. We will also take measures to improve energy efficiency in businesses and public sector buildings. We will reduce central government carbon emissions by 10% within 12 months.
- We will reform energy markets to deliver security of supply and investment in low carbon energy, and ensure fair competition including a review of the role of Ofgem.
- We will instruct Ofgem to establish a security guarantee of energy supplies.
- We will give an Annual Energy Statement to Parliament to set strategic energy policy and guide investment.
- We will deliver an offshore electricity grid in order to support the development of a new generation of offshore wind power.
- We will encourage community-owned renewable energy schemes where local people benefit from the power produced. We will also allow communities that host renewable energy projects to keep the additional business rates they generate.
- As part of the creation of a green investment bank, we will create green financial products to provide individuals with opportunities to invest in the infrastructure needed to support the new green economy.
- We will work towards an ambitious global climate deal that will limit emissions and explore the creation of new international sources of funding for the purpose of climate change adaptation and mitigation.
- Liberal Democrats have long opposed any new nuclear construction. Conservatives, by contrast, are committed to allowing the replacement of existing nuclear power stations provided that they are subject to the normal planning process for major projects (under a new National Planning Statement), and also provided that they receive no public subsidy.
- We will implement a process allowing the Liberal Democrats to maintain their opposition to nuclear power while permitting the Government to bring forward the National Planning Statement for ratification by Parliament so that new nuclear construction becomes possible. This process will involve:
  - the Government completing the drafting of a national planning statement and putting it before Parliament; specific agreement that a Liberal Democrat spokesperson will speak against the Planning Statement, but that Liberal Democrat MPs will abstain; and clarity that this will not be regarded as an issue of confidence.

international action needed, and no mention of climate finance for developing countries. The coalition agreement and the division of responsibilities between ministers in the Department for Energy and Climate Change also appeared to demonstrate divisions in policy between the two parties on nuclear power, offshore oil drilling and a number of other climate and energy issues; divisions which have the potential to hinder the UK's fight against climate change. In addition a great concern was the absence of targets for 2020 for reducing UK carbon emissions in the coalition agreement.

There have been a number of significant announcements by government ministers and departments since May 2010. Our analysis of the most important developments is as follows:

### **Domestic policy**

Early headlines included that Heathrow's third runway would be axed, although there are concerns that new runways will be built and airports expanded elsewhere. Low-carbon technology development has been allocated £200 million, with £60 million set aside for offshore wind manufacturing. A commercial scale carbon capture and storage plant has been funded with £1 billion, and £860 million given towards a Renewable Heat Incentive.

Three things to highlight here are: the government's commitment to reduce central government carbon emissions by 10% within 12 months of the election in May 2010<sup>2</sup>; a new UK Energy Bill; and the creation of a Green Investment Bank.

David Cameron underlined efforts to build a green economy in his post-election speech: *"We've got a real opportunity to drive the green economy to have green jobs, and make sure we have our share of the industries of the future"*.<sup>3</sup>

**The Energy Bill**<sup>4</sup> is currently going through Parliament and is due to be passed this spring and implemented towards the end of the year. It outlines the details of the Green Deal, designed to help improve energy efficiency in homes around the UK and bring in 100,000 jobs to insulate and upgrade homes in the process. It also includes measures to increase investment in

low-carbon electricity generation and measures to improve energy security.

Tackling climate change requires high levels of investment. **The Green Investment Bank** was conceived as a vehicle to do that. The coalition government originally only set aside £1 billion for a Green Investment Bank which aims to make the UK a leader in the low-carbon economy. A range of business and green groups have emphasised that it requires a minimum of £4-6 billion over the next four years in order to be most effective.<sup>5</sup>

In opposition, George Osborne as shadow Chancellor said: 'The Treasury has often been at best indifferent, and at worst obstructive.... Instead of the Treasury blocking green reform, I want a Conservative Treasury to lead the development of the low carbon economy and finance a green recovery...The Treasury will no longer be the cuckoo in the Whitehall nest when it comes to climate change. If I become Chancellor, the Treasury will become a green ally, not a foe'.<sup>6</sup> However, explicitly labelling the Green Investment Bank as green has made it unattractive to a Treasury that is both highly sceptical about using government guarantees for investment and about the whole green economy narrative.<sup>7</sup> Ministers stress that they are keen on the Green Investment Bank, but the government has appeared divided on the issue with a division between what the Treasury and the Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC) want from it.

A report from Parliament's environmental audit committee on plans for the Bank was scathing – arguing that it was being downgraded. The report found that between £200bn and £1000bn in investment would be needed in the next two decades to generate a low-carbon economy in the UK. But Ernst & Young told the inquiry that traditional sources of private capital would only provide about £50bn to £80bn by 2025. In the Budget on 23 March, George Osborne announced that an additional £2 billion is being made available to the Green Investment Bank (so making a total of £3 billion) and that it will be operational in 2012 - one year earlier than planned. It was also announced that the government is hoping to raise an additional £15bn from

the private sector over this parliament for this Bank. So, the creation of a Green Investment Bank is a positive initiative, but it requires greater investment in order to be truly effective. The government is committed to the **2008 Climate Change Act**; a world class act which requires an 80% reduction in emissions by the year 2050.<sup>8</sup> The Act established the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) to advise on regular targets for reducing carbon to meet the reduction required by 2050. This committee recommended in December 2010 a 60% reduction by 2030, as part of the fourth carbon budget to be implemented.<sup>9</sup>

The government have recently released the 2009 figures demonstrating a decrease in carbon emissions from 2008: a fall of 9.8%. This was mainly attributed to a fall in energy consumption across all sectors and an increase in nuclear power use over coal and natural gas use for electricity production. The contraction of the UK economy was seen to be the largest contributing factor in the reduction of energy consumption by households and businesses.<sup>10</sup>

However, we can't rely on the shrinking economy to deliver all of our carbon cuts. The government also needs to be proactive and chart a clear pathway towards a 2050 emissions reduction target. The world's emissions need to stop increasing and start decreasing by 2020 at the latest, or it's going to be very hard to prevent temperature rises that are very damaging, as opposed to the merely fairly damaging ones that we're already too late to prevent. And it would be much better to peak in 2016 than 2020. The Conservative party, while in opposition, said they would comply with what the UK Climate Change Committee advised. Finally in May this year the coalition government accepted the committee's recommendations for the 2023-7 carbon budget - which means cuts of around 50% on 1990 levels by 2025, which puts the UK on track for achieving 60% cuts on 1990 levels by 2030 (as the CCC states is necessary) and for 80% cuts on 1990 levels by 2050 (the Climate Change Act target). This makes the UK a world leader in cutting emissions and the only country with legally binding commitments beyond 2020. That said, in setting ourselves long-term goals we must not switch attention away from the

urgency of reducing emissions immediately. Every year of delay leads to serious consequences for poor communities being hit hardest by climate impacts. And every year of delay means that the hope of keeping temperature rise below 1.5 degrees becomes more elusive.

#### **International policy**

*'Although the UK is responsible for just 2% of the world's emissions, the consequences of climate change will not respect our borders. That is why we must do everything we can to secure a global solution.'*

Chris Huhne, 17 February 2011<sup>11</sup>

The coalition government has also set out ambitious targets for tackling climate change internationally. William Hague, Foreign Secretary, pushed for international action in a speech to the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, arguing that it is in the interests of national and international security: *"climate change is one of the gravest threats to our security and prosperity. Unless we take robust and timely action to deal with it, no country will be immune to its effects"*.<sup>12</sup>

Three things to highlight are: international climate finance; prioritisation of climate change in international development; and pushing for an increased EU emissions reduction target.

The government announced an International Climate Fund in the Comprehensive Spending Review in October 2010 with a commitment to provide £2.9 billion for climate finance by the end of 2014. The spending review also confirmed that the UK would keep to the commitment made by Labour to provide £1.5 billion of 'fast start climate finance' for developing countries in 2010-12. The UK should meet its international spending commitments on climate change adaptation and mitigation, without raiding the aid budget. Climate change is an additional challenge, and it is not legitimate to divert money away from other under-funded areas (such as water and sanitation, HIV, etc.) to fund our climate change obligations. Therefore climate finance should be new and additional to official development assistance (ODA). The previous government had committed to 90% of climate finance being

additional to aid and also stressed the importance of an internationally agreed financing mechanism. Despite the Liberal Democrats saying in their manifesto that money for climate change should all be additional, and the Conservatives talking previously about finance being additional to that which is needed for international development the coalition government has not made a commitment on additionality.

Andrew Mitchell, the Secretary of State for International Development, underlined the need for an urgent global response to climate change: *“If we fail to act today then we will pay the price tomorrow not just in pounds and dollars but in human life. As in so many other areas of international development, the moral case is a clear, overwhelming and compelling one.”*<sup>13</sup>

The UK government has continued to push within the EU for an increased emissions reductions target of 30% by 2020. In 2010 Chris Huhne with his counterparts from France and Germany made a strong push for the EU to increase its emissions reductions target ahead of the Cancun climate summit in December (COP 16). In March this year environment ministers from seven EU countries, including UK and Germany, announced in an open letter their support for deeper cuts to greenhouse gases beyond the current 20% target. The EU should move to a 30% target by 2020 and from this move swiftly to a 40% target.

Political leaders did move forward on a number of measures in Cancun, including agreement on a process to establish a new climate fund. The UK played a positive role in the negotiations. Chris Huhne, Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change – and the recipient of many thousands of campaign actions from Tearfund and others in 2010 – said on the outcome of the talks that the ‘decisions have provided momentum for the negotiations and the decisions made provide a solid foundation for further work.’<sup>14</sup>

### **What are the main questions and challenges for the government going forwards?**

*“This will be a government where fine words on the environment are finally translated into real action”*

Nick Clegg, Deputy PM, September 2010

*‘When we formed the coalition we said we’d be the greenest government ever, and we mean it. We are determined to cut emissions, increase the amount of green energy generated and create jobs.’*

Chris Huhne, 24 Feb 2011<sup>15</sup>

As the coalition government seek to be the ‘greenest government ever’ they face several challenges, notably the climate change sceptics amongst the backbenchers. It remains unclear what the government’s reference points are in describing themselves as the ‘greenest government ever’, and there are some concerns that this lack of clarity will affect how government action and communication over the effects of climate change will continue to unfold.

As Matthew Spencer, Director of Green Alliance argues, ‘We have a centre right government with a strong interest in being green....It provides a unique opportunity to strengthen the fragile UK political consensus on climate change...It forces us to address the question of how to make the case for radical change to a conservative audience.’<sup>16</sup>

The government needs to communicate well on climate change to the UK public. Climate change is still often seen as about the environment without being linked to the people who depend on that environment. But it’s a development and a social justice issue too. The vast injustice of climate change is that the people who are currently bearing the brunt of it are the ones who did least to cause it and gained the least from the industrial wealth that caused it. A Briton’s average emissions are 10.7 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent per year, a Malawian’s are 0.7 tonnes, but it’s Malawians who might go hungry if the changing climate means a poor harvest or too little grazing to support livestock. There must be an urgency to how the government communicates; climate change is often talked about as something for the future, but it is happening now and hitting the poorest hardest.

The main message of Green Alliance’s report ‘From hot air to happy endings’ is that statistics, information and apocalyptic stories fail to inspire people. It shows that politicians need to

appeal more to values and emotions, creating a positive vision of a low carbon future and leading by example where everyone feels involved and it is not left to NGOs or businesses.<sup>17</sup> Government has a key role in driving behaviour change and has a critical role in achieving change at the scale needed.

#### *The effects of government cuts*

The government's programme of cuts may have a negative impact on the potential for this government to be 'the greenest ever'. Not only is the Green Investment Bank lacking adequate funds, but cuts in other departments such as DEFRA will have an impact on environmental monitoring. Funding for the Carbon Trust has also recently been cut heavily, raising further questions over the government's commitment to monitoring progress on reducing carbon emissions. As Andy Atkins, Director of Friends of the Earth, wrote the effects of the government cuts will be will be "*the litmus test of how green this government is*".<sup>18</sup> The government needs to be pushed to act further, and it often seems very focused on an overriding narrative of dealing with the deficit and making cuts.

#### *A low (or zero) carbon plan for the UK*

There are concerns over the government's failure so far to produce a credible plan to build a low (or ideally zero) carbon economy for the future. Chris Huhne has been arguing strongly that in the context of rising oil prices this is the moment to invest in green infrastructure, homes and transport and that it is 'crazy' not to prepare for a low-carbon future.<sup>19</sup> The coalition government has, to some observers, moved from a low carbon approach to an energy security approach – as this appeals to conservative supporters but may not be good in relation to addressing climate change at the scale and urgency needed.

#### *A joined up approach across government*

Although efforts have been announced to embed 'sustainability' across government, it is not easy to spot the joined up approach that is needed. Cross-Whitehall ministerial meetings have been happening involving a number of government departments including energy and climate change, environment and rural affairs, international development and the Treasury. We look forward to seeing the impact of these

discussions in government policy and practice. A Tearfund, CAFOD and Theos report on 'Wholly Living'<sup>20</sup> was launched in October 2010. The report is a response to mounting evidence that lifestyles and policies of developed countries are both unfair and unsustainable; that poverty, disease and malnutrition destroy the lives of hundreds of millions of people; that economic inequality stands at a completely unacceptable level; that millions of people are effectively excluded from major decisions that affect their lives and livelihoods; and that environmental degradation is threatening the survival of innumerable people, species and ecosystems. The report aimed to analyse the problems and propose an alternative narrative or vision of what development and achieving 'human flourishing' can mean, and so could make an important contribution to discussions to ensure a more joined up approach to climate change across government.

#### *EU budget*

The future EU budget, currently under review, will tackle issues such as energy, the environment, climate, trade, growth and financial stability at the European level.<sup>21</sup> The EU can use this to support the transition to low-carbon development in Europe and so provide an example to the rest of the world.<sup>22</sup> The great concern is that Eurosceptic parts of the Conservative Party will win out meaning less engagement from the government at a time when the UK needs to be more active and seek to play more of a leading role.

#### *International climate finance*

At COP 16 developed countries reconfirmed their commitment to mobilize US\$100 billion by 2020 for climate action in developing countries. \$100 billion is recognized as a starting point, but public sources must be scalable beyond the \$100 billion to meet the identified need of at least \$200 billion by 2020. However there was no agreement of a road map for how international agreement will be achieved for the most promising innovative public sources as soon as possible, and no agreement on further discussion of sources in 2011. There are therefore concerns that the new green climate fund agreed in Cancun will be an empty cup without agreement on innovative sources, such as a Robin Hood

Tax and raising revenue from shipping and aviation emissions. Without these innovative sources climate finance will only come from aid budgets or private sources and not at the scale needed. We have yet to see the coalition government focus on long term finance and sources of this as the previous Labour government did, and as the Lib Dems did before coming into government. Finance is key to reaching agreement on an international fair ambitious and binding climate deal that is needed as soon as possible.

### *Leadership on the issues*

Chris Huhne demonstrated clear leadership at the UN climate talks in Cancun, putting the UK at the forefront of the global response to climate change. However, back on home territory there is some doubt as to whether Huhne is equally influential in the Cabinet on transforming domestic and international policy. In seeking to address climate change long-term thinking is needed rather than short-sighted approaches which lead to a lack of support in key areas. Future generations will not thank this government for any short-sightedness. The process leading to 'Rio+20', a major summit in 2012 twenty years on from the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, provides David Cameron with the opportunity to show UK leadership in the same way that Gordon Brown as Prime Minister did ahead of Copenhagen, and Tony Blair and John Major also did around environment and international development summits.

### **Conclusions**

*'I don't want to hear warm words about the environment. I want to see real action. I want this to be the greenest government ever.'*

David Cameron

This paper has highlighted where the coalition government has done a number of useful things and where it appears to be relatively quietly but actively pursuing a green agenda both domestically and internationally. The acceptance in May this year of the Climate Change Committee's recommendations for the UK's 4<sup>th</sup> carbon budget does help the government's claim that it will be the greenest government ever and it helps show leadership ahead of the UN climate talks at the end of this year. Not to have accepted the advice would have undermined the

importance of the Climate Change Committee and the UK Climate Change Act. The government's acceptance should be seen as a victory in holding on to ambitious targets and the key climate structures in the UK. However, the fact that this victory appears to have been so hard fought within government is something of a warning for further action and a sign of challenges ahead.

This paper has also highlighted several challenges still to be addressed. Having set these goals, it remains to be seen whether the coalition government will achieve them. Therefore the Prime Minister and the coalition government need to be regularly reminded to hold to their promise to be the greenest government ever. The current UK Parliament has a historic responsibility. It is the last Parliament that can take action to avoid runaway climate change.<sup>23</sup> We don't have very long at all to make serious cuts in our greenhouse gas emissions, big enough to mean changes to a lot of the ways we think, live, and run our economy. We now need to see a greater level of ambition, long term vision and a joined up approach across government. The future of communities and livelihoods in the UK and around the world are at stake. Therefore the coalition government should:

- Develop and begin to implement a national strategy for low carbon transition that will make an ambitious and fair global agreement possible.
- Set a further stretching target to go beyond the 10% reduction commitment set for the first year of government.
- Ensure that the Green Investment Bank is founded as an independent institution capable of raising investment at the scale needed in the UK over the next few decades.
- Show clear and strong leadership at the international level to increase the EU's ambition in moving to low carbon climate resilient development pathways and ensure that at least one innovative source for climate finance in developing countries (such as a Robin Hood Tax) is agreed internationally to help meet the challenge of tackling climate change.

## Endnotes

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