

Press release

UK enshrines new target in law to slash emissions by 78% by 2035

The UK's sixth Carbon Budget will incorporate the UK's share of international aviation and shipping emissions for the first time, to bring the UK more than three-quarters of the way to net zero by 2050.

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- UK government to set in law world's most ambitious climate change target, cutting emissions by 78% by 2035 compared to 1990 levels
- for the first time, UK's sixth Carbon Budget will incorporate the UK's share of international aviation and shipping emissions
- this would bring the UK more than three-quarters of the way to net zero by 2050

The UK government will set the world's most ambitious climate change target into law to reduce emissions by 78% by 2035 compared to 1990 levels, it was announced today (Tuesday 20 April).

In line with the recommendation from the independent Climate Change Committee, this sixth Carbon Budget limits the volume of greenhouse gases emitted over a 5-year period from 2033 to 2037, taking the UK more than three-quarters of the way to reaching net zero by 2050. The Carbon Budget will ensure Britain remains on track

to end its contribution to climate change while remaining consistent with the Paris Agreement temperature goal to limit global warming to well below 2°C and pursue efforts towards 1.5°C.

For the first time, this Carbon Budget will incorporate the UK's share of international aviation and shipping emissions – an important part of the government's decarbonisation efforts that will allow for these emissions to be accounted for consistently.

This comes ahead of Prime Minister Boris Johnson addressing the opening session of the US Leaders' Summit on Climate, hosted by President Biden on Earth Day (22 April). The Prime Minister will urge countries to raise ambition on tackling climate change and join the UK in setting stretching targets for reducing emissions by 2030 to align with net zero.

The government is already working towards its commitment to reduce emissions in 2030 by at least 68% compared to 1990 levels through the UK's latest Nationally Determined Contribution - the highest reduction target made by a major economy to date. Today's world-leading announcement builds on this goal to achieve a 78% reduction by 2035.

The new target will become enshrined in law by the end of June 2021, with legislation setting out the UK government's commitments laid in Parliament tomorrow (Wednesday 21 April).

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

“We want to continue to raise the bar on tackling climate change, and that's why we're setting the most ambitious target to cut emissions in the world.

“The UK will be home to pioneering businesses, new technologies and green innovation as we make progress to net zero emissions, laying the foundations for decades of economic growth in a way that creates thousands of jobs.

“We want to see world leaders follow our lead and match our ambition in the run up to the crucial climate summit COP26, as we will only build back greener and protect our planet if we come together to take action.”

Business and Energy Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng said:

“The UK is leading the world in tackling climate change and today’s announcement means our low carbon future is now in sight. The targets we’ve set ourselves in the sixth Carbon Budget will see us go further and faster than any other major economy to achieve a completely carbon neutral future.

“This latest target shows the world that the UK is serious about protecting the health of our planet, while also seizing the new economic opportunities it will bring and capitalising on green technologies – yet another step as we build back greener from the pandemic and we lead the world towards a cleaner, more prosperous future for this generation and those to come.”

The UK over-achieved against its first and second Carbon Budgets and is on track to outperform the third Carbon Budget which ends in 2022. This is due to significant cuts in greenhouse gases across the economy and industry, with the UK bringing emissions down 44% overall between 1990 and 2019, and two-thirds in the power sector.

Moreover, the UK continues to break records in renewable electricity generation, which has more than quadrupled since 2010 while low carbon electricity overall now gives us over 50% of our total generation.

Prior to enshrining its net zero commitment in law, the UK had a target of reducing emissions by 80% by 2050 – through today’s sixth Carbon Budget announcement, the government is aiming to achieve almost the same level 15 years earlier.

Through its presidency of the crucial UN climate summit, COP26, which will take place in Glasgow later this year, the UK is urging countries and companies around the world to join the UK in delivering net zero globally by the middle of the century and set ambitious targets for cutting emissions by 2030.

COP26 President-Designate Alok Sharma, said:

“This hugely positive step forward for the UK sets a gold standard for ambitious Paris-aligned action that I urge others to keep pace with ahead of COP26 in Glasgow later this year. We must collectively keep 1.5 degrees of warming in reach and the next decade is the most critical period for us to change the perilous course we are currently on.

“Long term targets must be backed up with credible delivery plans and setting this net zero focused sixth Carbon Budget builds on the world leading legal framework in our Climate Change Act. If we are to tackle the

climate crisis and safeguard lives, livelihoods and nature for future generations, others must follow the UK's example."

The government has already laid the groundwork to end the UK's contribution to climate change by 2050, starting with ambitious strategies that support polluting industries to decarbonise while growing the economy and creating new, long-term green jobs.

This includes the publication of the Industrial Decarbonisation Strategy (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/industrial-decarbonisation-strategy>), an ambitious blueprint for the world's first low carbon industrial sector, slashing emissions by two-thirds in just 15 years, as well as over £1 billion government funding to cut emissions from industry, schools and hospitals.

Further, the UK is the first G7 country to agree a landmark North Sea Transition Deal (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/north-sea-transition-deal>) to support the oil and gas industry's transition to clean, green energy while supporting 40,000 jobs. Through the deal, the sector has committed to cut emissions by 50% by 2030, while the government, sector and trade unions will work together over the next decade and beyond to deliver the skills, innovation and new infrastructure required to decarbonise North Sea production.

Everyone needs to play a role in tackling climate change and bringing businesses and the public along is vital to reach the UK's climate change goals. Ahead of COP26, the government launched the campaign, Together For Our Planet (<https://together-for-our-planet.ukcop26.org/>), calling on businesses, civil society groups, schools and the British public to take action on climate change. This UK-wide initiative contributed to last month's milestone (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/third-of-uks-biggest-companies-commit-to-net-zero>) achievement of securing pledges from a third of the UK's largest businesses to eliminate their contribution to climate change by 2050.

Each of these leading measures to tackle climate change, alongside the Prime Minister's 10 Point Plan for a green industrial revolution (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-ten-point-plan-for-a-green-industrial-revolution/title>) and the government's Energy White Paper (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/energy-white-paper-powering-our-net-zero-future>), will help the UK's trajectory towards meeting the new sixth Carbon Budget.

The government will look to meet this reduction target through investing and capitalising on new green technologies and innovation, whilst maintaining people's freedom of choice, including on their diet. That is why

the government's sixth Carbon Budget of 78% is based on its own analysis and does not follow each of the Climate Change Committee's specific policy recommendations.

The UK is bringing forward bold blueprints setting out its own vision for transitioning to a net zero economy and how the government can support the public in transitioning to low carbon technologies, including publishing the Heating and Building Strategy and Transport Decarbonisation Plan later this Spring.

The cross-government Net Zero Strategy will also be published ahead of COP26, with Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng currently commissioning work across Whitehall to help inform the ambitious plans across key sectors of the economy.

Moreover, government analysis finds that costs of action on climate change are outweighed by the significant benefits – reducing polluting emissions, as well as bringing fuel savings, improvements to air quality and enhancing biodiversity. The government expects the costs of meeting net zero to continue to fall as green technology advances, industries decarbonise and private sector investment grows.

Reaching net zero will also be essential to sustainable long-term growth and therefore the health of public finances, as well as open up new opportunities for the UK economy, jobs and trade – and the government's ambitious proposals are essential to seizing these opportunities.

HM Treasury will publish its Net Zero Review in the coming months setting out how government plans to maximise economic growth opportunities from the net zero transition while ensuring contributions are fair between consumers, businesses and the British taxpayer.

Chairman of the Committee on Climate Change Lord Deben said:

“The UK's sixth Carbon Budget is the product of the most comprehensive examination ever undertaken of the path to a fully decarbonised economy. I am delighted that the government has accepted my Committee's recommendations in full.”

CBI Chief Economist Rain Newton-Smith said:

“Setting the sixth Carbon Budget in line with the Climate Change Committee recommendations puts the UK on a credible path to achieve its net zero emissions target.

“As COP26 hosts, the UK government is leading by example by setting this stretching target. Business stands ready to deliver with the latest low-carbon technologies and innovations that are driving emissions down every year. By tackling this together, we can reap the benefits of transition to a low-carbon economy.

“The target emphasises the importance of the 2020s as a decade of delivery on our climate ambitions, and urgent action is needed now to make this a reality.”

Executive Director of Green Alliance Shaun Spiers said:

“By accepting the Climate Change Committee’s recommendations for the sixth Carbon Budget, the government has sent out a resounding message, domestically and internationally, that the UK is taking its net zero emissions target seriously. The inclusion of international aviation and shipping is particularly important, showing climate leadership in the year we are hosting the Glasgow climate summit. What we need now is to ensure there is no gap between ambition and policy, so the UK has the right tools in its armoury to meet these targets.”

Executive Director of the Aldersgate Group Nick Molho said:

“The government should be commended for adopting the ambitious and evidence-based recommendations from the Climate Change Committee for the sixth Carbon Budget. The emission cuts set out in the Budget represent essential next steps the UK needs to take to ensure a credible, cost-effective, and timely pathway to net zero emissions by 2050. The inclusion of the UK’s share of international aviation and shipping emissions is a particularly welcome addition and will help to accelerate the development of sector-specific decarbonisation plans.

“Focus must now turn to strengthening the UK’s policy framework to meet this new target, by putting in place a detailed and cross-departmental net zero strategy that will drive private investment in low carbon goods and services, supply chains, jobs and skills.”

The UK is the first country to enter legally binding long-term carbon budgets into legislation, first introduced as part of the 2008 Climate Change Act. Since then, 5 carbon budgets have been put into law putting the UK on track to meet our ambitious goal to eliminate our contribution to climate change by 2050 and achieve net zero emissions.

Notes to editors

- The sixth Carbon Budget will commit us in law to the fastest fall in greenhouse gas emissions of any major economy between 1990 and 2035, making it one of the most ambitious climate targets in the world
- on 9 December, the Climate Change Committee (CCC) published its advice on the level at which to set Carbon Budget 6 (CB6), covering 2033 to 2037. The CCC recommended that CB6 should be set at 965 MtCO₂e, reducing emissions 78% from 1990 to 2035 (including international aviation and shipping emissions)
- the government is laying legislation on 21 April to set the budget at the level recommended by the CCC. This is a highly ambitious target for the mid-2030s – close to the UK's previous 2050 target (an 80% reduction on 1990) just 2 years ago and consistent with the Paris Agreement temperature goal to limit global warming to well below 2°C and pursue efforts towards 1.5°C
- setting CB6 is about the government's ambition to cut emissions, rather than announcing specific policies that will deliver that reduction in emissions. We will bring forward policies to meet carbon budgets, and the Net Zero Strategy, to be published before COP26, will set out our vision for transitioning to a net zero economy
- CB6 includes emissions from International Aviation and Shipping (IAS) for the first time. Previous carbon budgets have formally excluded these emissions, instead leaving 'headroom' for them. However, IAS emissions were included in the CCC's advice, and are included in our 2050 net zero target, which was set on a whole economy basis
- the CCC also recommended in December 2020 that the UK government set a Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) of at least 68% (excluding International Aviation and Shipping emissions) by 2030. The government accepted this advice and communicated its NDC (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-sets-ambitious-new-climate-target-ahead-of-un-summit>) to the UNFCCC on 12 December. Carbon Budget 6 continues the ambitious trajectory recommended by the CCC through the 2030s
- following the CCC's recommended budget level does not mean we are following their specific policy recommendations. Our published analysis is based on the government's own assumptions and does not, for example, assume the CCC's change in people's diet. Ahead of COP26, we will be setting out our own vision for net zero, and ambitious plans across key sectors of the economy to meet carbon budgets

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