

Press release from Owen Paterson MP

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For immediate release

Catastrophic UK energy policy will turn lights out, warns former Cabinet minister Owen Paterson

The lights will go out in Britain within a generation unless radical changes are made to energy policy and impractical carbon reduction targets are scrapped, a former Cabinet minister will warn this week.

In a speech to the Global Warming Policy Foundation, Owen Paterson, the former Environment Secretary, will say that the Government's current policies are fatally flawed and call for a new approach that abandons the current obsession with renewable forms of electricity generation.

"The current energy policy is a slave to flawed climate action. It will cost £1,100bn, fail to meet the very emissions targets it is designed to meet, and will not provide the UK's energy requirements," Mr Paterson will tell the think-tank set up by former Chancellor Nigel Lawson.

"In the short and medium term, costs to consumers will rise dramatically, but there can only be one ultimate consequence of this policy: the lights will go out at some time in the future. Not because of a temporary shortfall, but because of structural failures, from which we will find it extremely difficult and expensive to recover."

Mr Paterson will call for the suspension of the Climate Change Act, and if internationally binding legal agreements are not achieved then ultimately its repeal, arguing that the UK is the only country in Europe to enshrine in law European Union carbon reduction targets by 2050. Mr Paterson proposes a completely new mix of energy generation that will meet emissions targets and energy requirements. His policy is founded on four key pillars:

- promotion of indigenous shale gas
- large scale localised Combined Heat and Power (CHP)

- o small modular nuclear reactors
- o rational demand management

He will warn that the 2050 target of cutting emissions by 80 per cent requires in a mere 36 years the almost complete decarbonisation of electricity supply.

To hit the 80 per cent target, according to the technology favoured by the European Commission, Britain will have to scrap virtually all electricity generation from gas and coal and eliminate natural gas from most homes.

Two thirds of private cars will have to be electric to meet the target.

This will require a huge shift to renewable, mainly wind, energy, with at least two thirds of electricity generation coming from wind turbines.

"This is a point that is little understood. The 2050 target commits us to a huge expansion of electricity generation capacity, requiring vast investment."

But the costs of such a move are so huge as to render it impossible.

"Even if it were forthcoming, the scale of the turbine building programme required is so great that it could not be achieved.

"Wind capacity in the EU 27 must rise from 83 GW (about 42,000 turbines) in 2010 to 984 GW (nearly 500,000 wind turbines) in 2050. And to produce that utterly implausible net increase it will be necessary to replace the older wind turbines as they reach the end of their distressingly short economic lives.

"There, at the heart of the Commission's "high RES" decarbonisation policy, is the fatal flaw. At any practical level, the "high RES" decarbonisation programme cannot be achieved. It simply will not happen. Yet, as far as EU policy goes, this is considered the most promising option, and one on which considerable development resource has already been expended."

The UK Government has recognised the impracticality of the Commission scheme and proposed a different energy mix making greater use of nuclear power, Mr Paterson will say.

But its approach is equally unrealistic since it will require the equivalent of a new Hinkley Point nuclear power station every three years. The nuclear plant given approval last week will take at least 10 years to bring on stream.

Mr Paterson will also highlight the cost to consumers of renewables subsidies to producers.

"It amazes me that our last three energy secretaries, Ed Miliband, Chris Huhne and Ed Davey, who all purport to be in favour of helping the poor and not the rich, have merrily presided over the single most regressive policy we have seen in this country since the Sheriff of Nottingham: the coerced increase of poor people's electricity bills to pay huge subsidies to wealthy landowners and rich investors.

"It is a policy that is nowhere near achieving its objectives and its cost is rising, not falling.

"So what I am proposing is that instead of investing huge sums in wind power, we should encourage investment in four possible common sense policies: shale gas, combined heat and power, small modular nuclear reactors and demand management. That would reduce emissions rapidly, without risking power cuts, and would be affordable.

What's stopping this programme? Simply, the 2050 target is."

"Paradoxically, in order to cut emissions significantly, we must formally abandon the 2050 targets, which are taking us to a dead end of high cost, high risk -- and high emissions.

"The huge problem with 80 per cent decarbonisation, apart from the fact that it cannot be achieved, is that it is an all-or-nothing strategy which does not leave any openings for alternatives.

"It requires very specific technology, such as supposedly "zero carbon" windfarms, and electric vehicles. Interim solutions, such as high-efficiency, low-emission coal-generating plants, installed to reach interim targets, then become dead-end technology: no matter how energy efficient they are, they can never be "zero carbon", so they must be replaced well before 2050.

"Furthermore, because "zero carbon" technology is capital intensive, the drive to meet the 2050 target blocks investment in more modest but feasible and affordable low carbon options.

"Thus, in pursuing the current decarbonisation route, we end up with the worst of all possible worlds. If there is a shortfall in electricity production, emergency measures will have to be taken, or what in Whitehall is known as "distressed policy correction" - bluntly, building gas or even coal in a screaming hurry. The UK ends up worse off than if it adopted less ambitious but achievable targets. Reining in unrealistic green ambitions is to become more "green" than the Greens.

"To summarise, blind adherence to the 2050 targets will not reduce emissions and will fail to keep the lights on. A proper common sense policy would free up the market to enable the promotion of indigenous shale gas, large scale localized CHP, small modular nuclear reactors and rational demand management meanwhile reinvigorating the freedom of the science and business communities to explore new technologies.

"Let us hope we have an opportunity to put it into practice. We must be prepared to stand up to the bullies in the environmental movement and their subsidy-hungry allies."

Notes to Editors:

Mr Paterson will give the annual lecture "Keeping the Lights On" to The Global Warming Policy Foundation on Wednesday, 15 October 2014 at 7pm
Venue: No 1, Birdcage Walk, London, SW1H 9JJ

For media inquiries, please contact Nick Wood of Media Intelligence Partners Ltd on 07889 617003 or Alistair Thompson of MIP on 07970 162225