

March 2026



Fact check: Climate targets

Friends of the Earth's Sandra Bell exposes why scrapping UK net zero targets would wreck climate leadership and economic growth. The 2050 goal is achievable, backed by the Climate Change Committee, and blocking it risks undoing the incredible 50% cut to emissions we've already made since 1990.

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What is disinformation and misinformation?

Disinformation is the presentation of partial or false information with the **deliberate intention of misleading** someone.

Misinformation is incorrect or misleading information. It can exist **with or without specific malicious intent**. It is typically spread unintentionally, through lack of knowledge, misunderstanding or error.

It's imperative to challenge disinformation to ensure that the actions taken now, and those needed in the future, are not undermined.

The threat of halting action to mitigate the impacts of climate breakdown is already here. **National right wing political leaders have pledged to scrap the UK's legally binding climate change targets**. And some councils under Reform UK control have already scrapped their own climate plans.

This article looks at why it's important to stick to the UK's targets for the sake of the environment and economy, shows they're achievable and why it's wrong to say our targets won't make a difference as other countries have started emitting more carbon.

Disinformation about UK climate targets

[The Conservative party's energy policy says](#), "*We've made it clear: the 2050 Net Zero target is impossible*". [Party leader Kemi Badenoch](#) said in March 2025 that she would scrap the 2008 Climate Change Act which contains the 2050 target and the carbon budgets to achieve it, referring to them as "*failed targets*".

[Reform UK leader Nigel Farage has said that it isn't the job of county councils to deal with global issues](#), and it wouldn't make any difference at all if they were scrapped. [He repeated his point about UK action being pointless due to global use of fossil fuels](#) in a speech in Aberdeen, saying that "*2025 will be a year of record consumption of fossil fuels. We can con ourselves as much as we like, there will be more coal burnt this year than has ever been burnt in the history of mankind, and the same applies to gas and oil. Even the most ardent proponent of net zero has to accept the world will still be using oil and gas up until 2050 and beyond. And yet we have decided to sacrifice this industry as a consensus around net zero has emerged.*"

[In an interview on the BBC](#) Mr Farage repeatedly said that the UK's targets would make '*zero difference to the world*' referring in particular to China's emissions.

The 2050 net zero target is achievable with the right action in place

It's simply wrong to claim that the UK's net zero 2050 target is 'impossible'. Evidence from the UK's own climate advisers shows that it's technically and economically achievable with the right policies.

Climate legislation creates business confidence

The target of a net zero greenhouse gas target for 2050 was added to the Climate Change Act in 2019 [on the recommendation of the independent Climate Change Committee \(CCC\)](#) which said that with clear policies from government, "*it (the target) is achievable with known technologies, alongside improvements in people's lives*" as well as being possible within acceptable economic costs.

It's surprising that Reform UK and Conservative politicians should want to scrap a target and legislation [the CBI credits with driving innovation and economic growth for Britain](#). The CBI specifically points to the importance of the Climate Change Act and political consensus for providing the stability that business needs – but some right wing politicians are now doing their best to destroy that consensus.

2050 target remains deliverable and affordable

In 2025, the CCC concluded that the 2050 net zero target remains deliverable and affordable. The CCC's interim chair, Prof Piers Forster said "*We are not a political organisation and our job as a committee is just to look at the evidence, but, in terms of looking at the evidence, we are more optimistic than we were this time last year.*" The targets are tough but certainly not impossible.

The UK is already making good progress

[UK emissions have fallen more than 50% since 1990](#) with the pace of reduction having more than doubled since the introduction of the UK's Climate Change Act in 2008 – showing the importance of the legislation that some parties want to scrap. [Clean home grown renewables are taking over from imported gas](#), and the green economy is booming.

The importance of setting carbon budgets

Targets need clear and ambitious plans to meet them, and another important element of the Climate Change Act is the requirement for government to regularly set carbon budgets and plans to comply with them. The government's most recent climate plan sets out how it'll reduce emissions up until 2037, including switching to electric vehicles, helping industry to decarbonise and insulating homes. [It's not perfect and Friends of the Earth will keep campaigning for more ambition and fair solutions](#) like better buses and bigger grants to help people switch from gas boilers to heat pumps.

While we'd welcome a more ambitious plan, the legal framework and political commitment to climate action have already delivered real progress. Without them, we'd have neither the emissions reduction nor the guarantees for future action.

The UK needs to play a leading role globally - not give up on its own targets

A global solution to climate change isn't going to happen if countries like the UK don't face up to their responsibility and take the lead with urgent and ambitious climate action.

If a wealthy country like the UK won't take climate change seriously, it weakens the case for anyone else to step up. But when we champion climate action, it works: the UK's 2008 Climate Change Act - the world's first legally binding nationwide climate law - [helped encourage over 140 countries, representing 84% of the global population](#), to set their own decarbonisation targets. Scrapping that legislation now would send a dangerous message to the rest of the world.

The UK should also be helping less wealthy nations to cut emissions and protect their citizens from climate change impacts. It's only fair that countries which have historically done the most to cause the problem should now shoulder the burden of funding the solutions. They can raise additional money for this by taxing the most polluting companies and individuals.

The UK must continue to show leadership on climate action

With the US backtracking on climate action, it's even more important for the UK to show leadership. The Trump administration is doing in the US what right wing politicians want to do in the UK – reversing important climate legislation. [Investment in clean energy and decarbonisation is continuing in the US because it makes sense economically, but the pace of emissions reduction is severely threatened](#). It makes no sense for the UK to follow this route which will harm people, the economy and the environment.

Collective impact of small emitters

If all countries that are relatively small emitters in global terms failed to act, it would have a major impact on total emissions. Most countries in the world - including the UK - emit less than 2% of global emissions. However, collectively, all of these countries contribute up to around 36% of the world's CO₂ emissions – slightly more than China. [As explained by Dr Hannah Ritchie](#) *“Imagine if all of these countries decided to do nothing. The biggest chunk of the world's emissions wouldn't be tackled. It's simple: the world won't tackle climate change if countries with 'negligible' emissions do nothing”*.

It's too simplistic to blame China for global carbon emissions

China's emissions are much higher than the UK, but it is a much larger country with a much bigger population. [China's per person annual emissions are much lower than in the USA](#). They're similar to the EU level and have only recently become higher than the UKs.

Although China's emissions have risen sharply in the last few decades, it's important to consider that greenhouse gases accumulate in the atmosphere. In terms of the cumulative impact since 1850, China's contribution to global warming is a fraction of that of the USA, EU and UK.

In addition, the UK is importing Chinese products that are contributing to China's emissions including chemicals – the sector where it's proving hard to cut emissions – directly linking our consumption to their emissions.

China is investing in clean energy and cutting its emissions

China's investment in clean energy is impressive – solar output is increasing 43% year- on-year and wind by 14% and China is also making sure it has plenty of energy storage capacity. While it's true that China is still opening new coal mines, [they're running coal plants less often](#) and [coal plants are no longer competitive compared to clean energy sources](#).

The [latest analysis shows](#) China's CO₂ emissions have now been flat or falling for 21 months, starting in March 2024. This trend continued in the final quarter of 2025, when emissions fell by 1% year-on-year. Emissions are falling in major sectors?– including transport, power, cement and metals?–but rising in the chemicals industry.

It remains to be seen whether China will keep on track to peak emissions before 2030 and meet its commitments under the Paris agreement. But it would be more constructive for UK politicians to follow the Chinese example of expanding renewable energy, than blaming it for the world's emissions while threatening to scrap the UK's own targets.

Why this matters

Reversing climate action and blaming other countries is unfair and dangerous. There's clear evidence that the impacts of climate change are already happening across the UK, and the world, and it's often the people who've done least to cause it who suffer.

The transition to a low carbon economy will cost money but it can be funded fairly by ensuring that the biggest polluters pay the most. Those with the most to lose from the transition to net zero are often the most vociferous opposition to climate action and who stand to benefit most when doubt is sown about the urgent need for it. There are significant benefits to climate actions that can improve the quality of day to day lives -such as cleaner air, thriving nature, new jobs and warmer homes.

It's vital that the UK is a global leader – our position is crucial not just to curb our own emissions but to influence all high emitting countries to act – not least because the UK has been one of the biggest contributors to climate change over the last 100 years.

Fair solutions

Staying on target will be challenging. It will mean changes in our lives - how we heat our homes and how we travel, as well as requiring adaptations from industries that are hard to decarbonise. But it's essential that we rise to the challenge. The negative impacts of climate change are already being felt in more extreme weather events. But the changes needed will make people's lives better - from cleaner air to better bus services and homes that are affordable to heat. Fair solutions include:

- [A robust and fair strategy to reduce the UK's emissions?](#) in line with our existing legal commitments.
- A fair contribution from the UK to the costs of mitigation and adaptation globally.
- [New polluter pays taxes?](#) – taxing polluting companies and the wealthiest individuals who produce the most emissions – could help to raise additional funds for climate action.