

Joint statement on coal and carbon capture and storage

The science of climate change is unequivocal – to avoid catastrophic impacts, industrialised countries like the UK must make steep and urgent reductions in their carbon dioxide emissions. This means that it is unacceptable to build new unabated coal-fired power stations in the UK.

The high emissions from new coal plants would gravely undermine progress towards emission targets under the Climate Change Bill, and lock the UK into a high-carbon pathway for many decades. Granting consent to new unabated coal stations would also severely damage the UK Government's credibility as a leader in international climate negotiations – at precisely the time when leadership is most needed.

Proposals to approve new coal stations that are “capture ready” are a dangerous distraction. Carbon capture and storage may have a role in future to deliver the deep emission reductions that are needed to avoid climate chaos. However, CCS technology has not yet been proven at scale on an integrated power plant and it may prove not to be technically or economically feasible. Building “capture ready” stations now would therefore impose unacceptable risks both to the climate and to the taxpayer, who may well be trapped into footing the bill for any future CCS retrofit.

We call on the Government to implement the following recommendations:

Focus on renewables and energy efficiency:

The absolute priorities for UK energy policy should be the sustainable delivery of the EU target for renewable energy in 2020 and the aggressive promotion of energy efficiency. Delivery of these goals is key to closing the so-called “energy gap”, and to ensuring the UK's energy independence and security.

Introduce greenhouse gas emission standards for new power plant:

The UK Government and the EU should introduce new legal standards setting a limit on CO₂ emissions for all new generating plant which have yet to secure planning consent. A similar policy is already in force in the State of California. A UK standard should be set at 350g/kWh, a level which could be achieved by an efficient gas-fired power station which makes some use of waste heat. The standard should be tightened significantly if CCS technology is proven to be technically and economically viable.

Introduce emission standards for existing plant from 2020:

Given the urgency of the climate change challenge, it will be important to apply an emission limit to existing stations from 2020, or earlier if plant undergoes significant upgrade.

Keep a clear focus in any CCS demonstration programme:

It is alarming that the Government's competition for a relatively small CCS demonstration scheme is being used to justify much larger “capture ready” stations. Any demonstration plant should be established solely for the purpose of exploring technical feasibility and full price discovery at an appropriate scale, and should be fully equipped with CCS abatement. It should also form part of a clear European strategy to assess the viability of the different technical options for CCS (including pre- and post-combustion capture).

Introduce strong legislation on CO₂ storage and transport:

It is vital that a strong regulatory framework is established to ensure that transport and storage of CO₂ is safe, environmentally benign and subject to strong independent scrutiny. Key elements must include robust provisions for storage site monitoring and aftercare, and mechanisms to manage liability for any CO₂ leakage.

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