

ROBERT WILSON MP
Reading East



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA



Dr Caroline Lucas MEP
Green Party
Suite 58
The Hop Exchange
24 Southwark Street
London SE1 1TY

14 March 2008

Dear Dr Lucas,

Thank you for your letter dated 7th March about the Climate Change Bill and EDM736.

Climate change is one of the greatest challenges facing the world today. It is as much a social and economic threat as it is an ecological one. We all need to do our bit as individuals, in business and in Government and I agree it is paramount we take measures to tackle climate change now. Without prompt action we risk causing irreversible damage. The hardest hit will be those areas and populations that have contributed least to the problem and it should be up to the developed nations to lead the way, which is why Conservatives campaigned for the Government to publish a Climate Change Bill.

The Climate Change Bill currently includes several measures aimed at cutting UK greenhouse gasses such as: a 2050 target for a reduction in carbon emissions of at least 60%; 5-yearly carbon budgets with a cut of at least 26 per cent to be achieved by 2020; the formation of a Committee on Climate Change to monitor the Government's progress, the Chair of which was recently announced as Lord Adair Turner (former Director-General of the CBI); and annual statements to be made to Parliament on progress, by the Secretary of State.

I agree that there is more that can be done to ensure that the Bill is as effective as possible. Any response to climate change must be soundly based on the scientific evidence. The Committee on Climate Change as it currently stands is an insufficient tool to ensure that the science has enough persuasive authority, and it lacks independence. Conservatives propose a Commission on Climate Change which would go beyond simple advice-giving and would make recommendations and set out clear strategies for tackling climate change. We want any targets to be set according to the science - and independently of Government and politicians (though subject to Parliamentary approval).

I am also concerned that the present proposal for five year carbon budgets is insufficiently robust. There is a danger that Governments will not be held properly accountable, shuffling their responsibilities onto their successors. We have proposed changes which would strengthen accountability.

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Conservatives have also advocated that it should be the Prime Minister and not the Secretary of State who presents the annual report on progress to Parliament. This is because the subject area concerned encompasses a wide range of issues and should, therefore, be given status beyond that of any single Government Department.

In addition, Conservatives would like to see the principal aim of the Bill set out more clearly, for all future legislation to give a statement of compatibility, similar to that of the Human Rights Act, when introduced to Parliament. We also want to see a cap on the amount of international carbon offsets which can be attributed to the UK's CO2 reduction effort.

I am aware that it has been argued that the proposed 2050 target of CO2 reductions of "at least 60%" is inadequate. Our approach is to enable any targets to be based on scientific recommendations rather than an arbitrary number which may or may not be right. Following pressure from Conservatives, the Government has given an assurance that one of the first tasks of the new Committee will be to evaluate the validity of the 60% 2050 target, and I understand that they will report on this by the end of the year.

Fundamental to our approach is the widely accepted scientific opinion that, to avoid dangerous climate change, it will be essential to keep the average global temperature rise to below 2 degrees Celsius. The UK's long, and short, term targets for CO2 reductions should be set at levels which will ensure that we play our part in meeting that objective. It is perhaps also worth observing the importance of achieving cuts in CO2 in the near term, in order to set a clear trajectory. In that sense, the 2020 target is perhaps the vital one at this stage. It would be inconsistent with this approach for me to sign EDM 736, even though I appreciate that it is well intentioned. I am sure you are aware that EDMs are a very ineffective means of pursuing goals in Parliament and I therefore do not generally sign them.

Conservatives are strongly committed to providing leadership in the fight against climate change, both at home and internationally, and are putting in place policies to deliver a greener, safer society for our children and grandchildren.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rob Wilson'.

ROB WILSON MP

Member of Parliament for Reading East