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Scotland's Greenhouse Gas Emissions 2014

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In 2009, this Parliament unanimously passed the Climate Change Act establishing Scotland as a world-leader in tackling one of the defining challenges of our time.

The Act set out an ambitious long-term target to reduce Scottish greenhouse gas emissions by 80 per cent by 2050, relative to the 1990 baseline. It also contains an interim 2020 target for a 42 per cent reduction and annual targets for each year.

The latest Official Statistics on Scottish greenhouse gas emissions, covering 2014, were published this morning.

I would like to update Parliament on these figures, what they mean in terms of progress towards our existing targets and also set out our next steps in developing new and even more ambitious targets.

Annual target and interim target have been met

Presiding Officer, these statistics show that Scotland is making outstanding progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Not only has the annual target for 2014 been met, but we have exceeded the level of our interim 2020 target six years early.

For the purpose of target reporting, Scottish emissions in 2014 were down by 12.5 per cent from 2013 and down by 45.8 per cent from baseline levels. Over this period, reductions in emissions have been delivered in every sector, including: energy supply, homes, transport, waste management, business and industry and agriculture.

The new figures also show that Scotland has, yet again, outperformed the UK as a whole in reducing emissions. Comparisons to other Western European EU-15 countries are not yet available for 2014 but, as of the previous year, only Sweden had delivered greater reductions.

The meeting of targets reflects real progress

The science of measuring and reporting on greenhouse gas emissions is complicated, but I can assure members that we have met our targets as the result of real progress in reducing actual Scottish emissions.

As in previous years, today's statistics reflect ongoing improvements to the science of how emissions are accounted for. However, even without such revisions both the annual 2014 and interim 2020 targets would still have been met.

Scotland's progress has been independently recognised

The 2014 figures should also be seen in the context of Scotland's strong long-term progress, which has been acknowledged by a range of independent experts.

Lord Deben, the Chair of the Committee on Climate Change, has said that: "Scotland is leading the UK in its ambitious approach... and is to be commended for doing so"

And Christiana Figueres, Head of the UN climate body has described our approach as being "exemplary".

Real-world changes

While emission statistics provide the big picture, what really matters are the real-world, everyday changes - large and small - that underpin this. I want to provide some examples of the transformative changes occurring across Scotland.

On energy efficiency, the Scottish Government's record investment is being reflected in big improvements to Scotland's housing. The share of homes rated EPC band C and above has increased by 71 per cent since 2010, and by 11 per cent in the last year. Our efforts are helping to reduce emissions and also tackle fuel poverty by making homes warmer and more affordable to heat, while supporting low-carbon jobs and regenerating communities.

On renewables, I join the Minister for Business, Innovation and Energy in welcoming the announcement that construction on the £2.6 billion Beatrice Offshore Windfarm will commence later this year.

Scotland's early adoption of clean, green energy technology and infrastructure means that renewables are now Scotland's biggest electricity generator. Projects such as Beatrice will also help to deliver a wide range of employment and community benefits.

The Scottish Government's 2020 target for 500 Megawatts of local and community owned renewable energy capacity has also been delivered - five years early. This has been independently estimated to be worth up to £2.2 billion to the Scottish economy over those projects' lifetime.

On transport, we are determined to free Scotland's towns, cities and communities from damaging vehicle emissions by 2050, with significant progress by 2030. Adequate provision of refuelling infrastructure will be key. The ChargePlace Scotland network now comprises over 550 publicly available electric vehicle charge points, including over 140 rapid chargers, making it one of Europe's most comprehensive networks. This forms part of the Scottish Government's annual investment of over £1 billion in public and sustainable transport.

Since 2008, over 550 Scottish communities have been supported by the Climate Challenge Fund to address climate change and make the move to low carbon living. We are committed to retaining that Fund and sharpening its focus.

FM's commitment to further raise ambition

Presiding Officer, under this Government, Scotland has delivered significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions through initiatives like these and many other actions.

Whilst delighted by this progress, I am in no way complacent regarding the scale of the challenge ahead. But I am also excited by the scope of the opportunity before us.

This is an especially important time for climate change, in light of the international agreement reached in Paris last December. The Agreement represents the first time that all countries have joined in recognising the scale of the challenge and agreeing the route we need to take.

As the Scottish Government hoped and argued for, the Paris Agreement has raised global ambition. It must now serve as a call to action for all governments.

Ours is no exception and we will heed that call. This government intends to raise still further our ambition on climate change and to continue to lead the world in the transition to a low carbon economy.

That is why the First Minister has already confirmed our plan to establish a new and more testing 2020 target. Our manifesto also included a commitment to improve the transparency and accountability of our targets, by basing them directly on actual Scottish emissions.

New announcements

And we are committed to setting emission reduction targets based on the best available evidence and expert, independent advice.

Presiding Officer, I can advise the Chamber that I am writing to the Committee on Climate Change today, seeking their advice on Scotland's future targets in response to the Paris Agreement.

These ambitious new targets will serve as a statutory impetus to further action. Delivery will require co-ordinated approaches across portfolios and the reflection of climate change considerations at the very highest level of Government. In this context, I can also announce that the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Climate Change has been reconstituted.

And, just as we must work across government on this vital issue, so we should engage across Parliament. I have already begun to meet with party spokespeople and am keen to offer regular cross-party roundtables during this Parliament to discuss progress and share ideas and information.

Looking forward

One of the Cabinet Sub-Committee's first tasks will be to develop the Scottish Government's next emissions reduction plan, the Third Report on Proposals and Policies. I intend to lay a draft of RPP3 before Parliament before the end of the year.

This Government understands that tackling climate change requires action not only from the public sector, but also from businesses, charities and individuals. We will capture this through the participation process for RPP3.

Climate change is, of course, a global challenge and other countries must step up and match our ambition and action. In particular, recent UK Government policy reversals on renewable energy and energy efficiency stand in stark contrast to the scale of Scotland's vision.

The UK Government will also bring forward an emissions reduction plan this year. We need the UK to support Scotland's drive to develop renewables and Carbon Capture and Storage, not stymie it as they have done over this past year. And I and my Cabinet colleagues will take every opportunity through our engagement with UK Ministers to make the case to reverse recent decisions.

Conclusion

To conclude Presiding Officer, the statistics published this morning are excellent news for Scotland and for everyone who lives here. They show that through the drive and determination of this Government and by the actions of people, communities, organisations and businesses all around the country, we have met the 2014 emissions reduction target and exceeded the 2020 target for a 42 per cent reduction, six years ahead of schedule.

We set ourselves a high bar and are showing by our deeds as well as our words, that Scotland can indeed lead the world. Our progress provides a strong platform upon which to build.

But there is more to do and the advice we receive from the Committee on Climate Change will inform our next steps, as will the deliberations of the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Climate Change.

Presiding Officer, this Government remains absolutely committed to tackling climate change and to delivering the bold actions needed to meet our targets. I hope all members will welcome the progress shown in today's statistics and support our next steps.

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