

Environment, Energy and Culture | Annual Report

Membership List

HM Opposition

Sue Hayman MP†^{*}
Louise Haigh MP
Tom Watson MP
Alan Whitehead MP

NEC

Margaret Beckett MP*
Kezia Dugdale MSP
Martin Mayer

CLPs and Regions

Nikki Belfield
Amber Courtney
Suzi Cullinane
George Downs
James Elliott
Andy Furlong
Carolyn Harris
Estelle Hart
Simon Henig
Joanne McCarron
Isobel Morris
Wendy Simon

Affiliates

Isabelle Gutierrez
Gloria Mills
Beryl Shepherd
Melanie Smallman

Elected Reps

Seb Dance MEP
Mike Ross
Gavin Shuker MP

* Co-Convenor

†¹ Replaced Rachael Maskell MP

Policy Development

The Environment, Energy and Culture Policy Commission is tasked with considering issues related to environment, food, rural affairs, energy, climate change, culture, digital, media and sport. The Commission was newly formed this cycle and covers areas previously under the remit of the Communities Policy Commission.

At the Annual Conference policy seminar covering these areas, Rachael Maskell spoke in her capacity as Shadow Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs of the need to develop a post-Brexit agricultural and farming system for the United Kingdom and the need for a campaign to tackle air pollution. Delegates raised issues including bovine tuberculosis and free museum entry. A discussion was also held on issues connected to the energy industry with fuel poverty, nuclear power and other low carbon and renewable solutions considered.

At the National Policy Forum meeting in November two dedicated sessions were held to discuss the key challenges across the areas covered by this new commission. In these discussions NPF Representatives spoke about issues such as: air pollution, food security, climate commitments. Cultural issues including active participation funding for museums were considered. In a second roundtable the priorities for further policy development were considered and discussed. It was noted that, in particular, the Party should have a strong rural offer and that cyber security should be addressed in greater detail.

The newly convened Commission held its first meeting in early February. Shadow Ministers gave updates from the Shadow Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Shadow Culture, Media and Sport teams. The Shadow Ministerial update from Alan Whitehead MP covered issues such as decarbonising the heat system and increasing renewable energy in transport as part of a wider policy platform to meet the fourth and fifth carbon budgets. Louise Haigh MP spoke about her work on the Digital Economy Bill, the rollout of broadband, digital skills and the takeover of Sky by 21st Century Fox. Following these updates there was a discussion on the upcoming 'Repeal Bill' and what it would need to contain to allow existing regulations to be followed without interruption.

Members of the Commission considered composites and motions ruled non-contemporary from Annual Conference. The Commission also discussed submissions which had been received via the Labour Policy Forum website. Submissions received covered issues including future energy security, preserving jobs in a new green economy along with reform of the Common Agricultural Policy.

At this first meeting the Commission was tasked with writing a draft consultation document taking on board priorities which came forward from the NPF meeting and submissions made to the Commission. It was agreed that three priority areas were to be taken forward for further examination in the consultation document. Priority issues identified were: continuing to lead in tackling global climate change, developing post-Brexit agricultural and environmental policies for the future, and lastly, widening access to and delivering support for culture and the arts. The Commission also considered potential invitees for a future evidence session to reflect the priority areas.

A second meeting was held in late February. The Commission received updates from the Shadow Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy team. The update was focused on the preparation of a low-carbon industrial strategy and the impact of transitioning to an energy system with 60 per cent of energy deriving from low or zero-carbon sources by 2030. The need to focus future carbon capture and storage investment around energy-intensive industries was mentioned as was the promise held by tidal lagoon projects around the United Kingdom. The Shadow Ministerial update was followed by a discussion on stripping carbon from the energy system and how best to facilitate this. It was noted that projects between unions and industry could help to demonstrate the best ways to go about achieving decarbonisation.

Submissions received through the Labour Policy Forum website since the last meeting were discussed, topics covered a number of different issues, including support for renewables, fracking and reducing future carbon emissions and concerns about environmental protections.

The impact of Brexit on areas covered by the Commission was considered at this meeting as part



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of the work being doing on Brexit by the wider NPF. It was noted that currently applicable EU-derived regulations face future uncertainty across areas covered by the Commission such as the nuclear industry, the environment and climate targets. It was noted by the Commission that, even should existing regulations be kept, they would likely require enforcement by new domestic bodies.

This year's National Policy Forum consultation was officially launched on 17th March between the second and third meetings of the Policy Commission. It invited submissions to be made to relevant Policy Commissions in response to the consultation documents and was due to close at the end of May.

A number of organisations submitted evidence to the Policy Commission as part of the consultation including; SERA, WWF, Wildlife Trusts, Campaign to Protect Rural England, Sustain, Fabian Society and Arts Award.

The Commission held its third meeting and evidence session in March with a number of expert invitees from industry, think tanks and academia. Invitees were: Shane Tomlinson Director at E3G, Professor Adisa Azapagic from the University of Manchester, Andrew Clark the Director of Policy at the National Farmers Union (NFU) and Martin Nesbit a Senior Fellow and Head of Climate and Environmental Governance Programme at the Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP).

The evidence session was split into two parts, with each part taking evidence in line with priorities previously identified by the Commission on energy and climate change issues and separately on the future of environmental and agricultural policy. The evidence received in this third meeting was thorough and spread over a number of issues. During the first part the Commission heard about the benefits of a decentralised energy system, the importance of energy efficiency measures in reducing total carbon emissions, the uncertainty by political factors such as Brexit and the new American President, the role played by setting ambitious climate targets, the Green Investment Bank and the challenges arising from transitioning to a low-carbon system.

During the second part of the evidence session the Commission took evidence on: new regulatory

bodies after Brexit; the issues of trade and labour across the agricultural sector; future trading arrangements for agricultural produce; the threat of a deregulatory agenda and allocating agricultural subsidies by productivity rather than land. Across both sessions the impact of Brexit was highlighted and it was stressed that the impact of Brexit across policy areas overall would be significant.

At this third meeting the Commission received further updates from the Shadow Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy team from Alan Whitehead MP detailing the work of the team since the Commission met last. Alan spoke of the difficulty of 'transposing' existing EU directives and regulations into UK law and noted that this would also be an issue of particular importance to the Shadow Environment, Food and Rural Affairs team. He also spoke of the fact that the Government had not yet released its 'emissions reductions plan' which had been delayed since 2016. Following this update the Commission held a discussion on Hinkley Point C and the ongoing issues with the proposed nuclear project at Moorside.

The Commission considered a number of further submissions which were received as part of the consultation process following the publication of the consultation document. Received submissions spoke about the need to consider a future regime to regulate the genetically modified crops, to have a long-term plan to prevent flooding and to encourage investment into emerging renewable technologies.

Labour's Manifesto

Following the announcement of the snap General Election the Commission convened a conference call in late April to discuss priorities for the Labour Party General Election Manifesto based on the work the National Policy Forum had conducted on policy issues since 2015 and submissions through the stakeholder engagement process on priorities for the manifesto. During this call the Commission members spoke of their policy priorities for the upcoming manifesto based on what had been heard by the Commission throughout the year. This included increased public ownership across the energy sector and strengthened regulation of the media.

During this conference call Sue Hayman spoke of the recurring issue of air quality and the need for action to bring air pollution within legal limits, the issue of fracking under national parks and rural broadband provision.

The conference call was also used to consider further submissions which had been made to the Commission and to consider members' manifesto priorities from the survey launched by Jeremy Corbyn. Submissions considered competition and increased public sector involvement across the energy and media sectors along with cross-departmental measures to better meet carbon goals.

The Commission had identified three priority areas within its National Policy Forum 2017 Consultation document. Each of these issues was touched upon within Labour's Manifesto with many manifesto commitments reflecting and building upon the work of the Commission and submissions received from Party members.

Continuing to Lead in Tackling Global Climate Change

The manifesto put, at the heart of its industrial strategy, the target of ensuring that 60 per cent of the United Kingdom's energy comes from zero-carbon or renewable sources by 2030. The manifesto committed explicitly to putting the UK on course to meet international and domestic climate targets. The manifesto also made an explicit reference to reclaim Britain's leading role in tackling climate change and to take energy back into public ownership to help deliver renewable energy, affordability for consumers and democratic control.

Developing Post-Brexit Agricultural and Environmental Policies for the Future

The manifesto acknowledged the impact of Brexit on existing environmental standards and regulations and in altering the existing support framework for agricultural and fishing activities. The manifesto committed to reconfiguring payments to support smaller traders, local economies, community benefits and sustainable practices. The manifesto committed to the protection and advancement of environmental quality standards and protections.

Widening Access and Delivering Support for Culture and the Arts

The manifesto had a dedicated section on culture entitled 'Culture For All'. It committed to introducing a £1 billion Cultural Capital Fund to upgrade existing cultural and creative infrastructure along with maintaining free entry to museums. A £160 million arts pupil premium was also promised in the manifesto to ensure that arts are not side-lined in secondary education whilst also launching a creative careers advice campaign in schools. The Shadow Culture, Media and Sport team also released a 'mini-manifesto' entitled 'A Creative Future for All' which took forward the key principles highlighted by the Commission of widening access to culture and the arts.

Current Issues

Brexit

All of the areas covered by the Environment, Energy and Culture Policy Commission will be heavily impacted by Brexit, a key area of discussion for the Commission, and an issue which will continue to play a role over the next few years. Leaving the European Union will mean that many of our current regulations and standards, across a wide range of areas, will face uncertainty as the eventual relationship between the UK and the EU and the content of new UK law becomes clear and the content and safeguards contained within the 'Repeal Bill' are publicised.

The exact nature of our future relationship with European partners will determine the nature of our trade, nuclear cooperation, carbon trading and climate arrangements, food standards and wider environmental regulatory standards.

The process of Brexit will also mean the UK being responsible for adopting a new domestic framework for agriculture and fisheries as the country leaves the Common Fisheries and Common Agricultural Policies. It was noted by the Commission that this would be an opportunity to reconfigure the farming and fisheries frameworks and to provide a long-term vision which could invest in technology, productivity and future sustainability whilst promoting environmental stewardship across both areas.

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All of these issues were discussed in submissions made to the Commission and will need to be considered further as we move forwards.

Air quality

Nearly 40 million people across the UK live in areas with illegal levels of air pollution and it is associated with 40,000 premature deaths each year. The Conservative Government has lost three times in domestic courts since 2015 due to its failure to both meet air quality standards and to deliver a plan which would see standards being hit in the future.

The Commission noted and received a number of submissions on the harmful effects associated with high levels of bad air found across our towns and cities. It was noted that repeated rulings in the courts found Government plans unlawful, that carrying on as usual was not an option, and that the Labour Party must be prepared to put forward a detailed and comprehensive and cross-departmental programme to tackle the issue.

The Commission welcomed Labour's commitment to take firm action to tackle illegal levels of bad air and introduce a new Clean Air Act.

Environmental standards

Leaving the European Union presents a unique threat to our natural environment. Current protections derived from Europe cover important issues such as biodiversity, environmental standards, soil quality and waste and recycling regulations. The Commission took evidence from experts on the future of environmental protections and received many submissions stressing the importance of ensuring that environmental protections are not watered down.

Any future environmental framework and legal enforcement of protections would depend both on the eventual Brexit deal and the content of a future 'Repeal Bill'. The Commission noted the role played by existing protections in helping to protect our environment for future generation and pressed for current regulations to be defended and extended throughout the Brexit process.

Climate change

Climate change remains an important issue and it remains both one of the defining issues and greatest challenges we presently face. The UK

is a signatory to the Paris Agreement on climate change and has a number of climate and carbon targets both domestic and EU-derived. The Policy Commission has expressed concern that those targets which come from EU directives will no longer apply, or could face issues of enforcement, as a result of Brexit.

The Commission received many submissions over the past year on the importance of maintaining climate targets and the need to diversify the United Kingdom's energy mix to include more renewable and low-carbon solutions to help meet these targets and to ensure energy security into the future whilst keeping bills down.

The Commission noted Labour's record on climate change with the landmark Climate Change Act in 2008 and representations and submissions highlighted the need to build on these targets where possible.

Energy Markets

The Commission believes that energy markets have failed to deliver value for customers with bill increases leaving consumers hundreds of pounds worse off since 2010. Additionally, one in ten households is in fuel poverty and a recent report by the Competition and Markets Authority has found that customers have been overcharged by billions of pounds in the last few years for their household bills.

Since 2010 the position of the Government has been to promote competition within energy markets. Submissions to the Commission have made clear that pursuing this stance only has let down consumers with bill increases outstripping pay and that additional action is required across the sector.

The Commission noted submissions stating that action was needed in order to make the energy market work for consumers again following on from the Labour Manifesto commitment to cap energy bills. Increased focus on the needs of local people, local communities, the local economy and local infrastructure needs were highlighted as important ways to achieve this. It was felt that improved localisation could come about by encouraging more small-scale start-ups within the industry and by delivering greater democratic control into the energy market.

Media and the Digital Economy

As more people and businesses become connected the Commission believes is only right that all areas across the country can share in the benefits of the digital world. This means that action needs to be taken to bridge the divide between our rural communities and our urban towns and cities. Solutions such as the delivery of superfast broadband, improved mobile coverage and preparatory work for ultrafast broadband projects can be undertaken.

The Commission also made note of the concern of Party members who contacted them about the responsibility of the press and the need to strengthen rules on media plurality and ownership to ensure that no single individual can exert undue influence. Meeting and evidence also noted the high reputation of public sector broadcasters such as the BBC and Channel 4 and the role that these broadcasters can play in shaping public discussion. The Commission discussed how the public status of these organisations could be guaranteed and in the case of the BBC, funding protected, so that they could continue to operate into the future.



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Submissions

All submission received by the Policy Commission are circulated to members ahead of the next meeting for consideration as part of our discussions on policy development. In 2016-17 the Environment, Energy and Culture Policy Commission has received and considered submissions on the following topics.

- Access to cultural and art institutions
- Antibiotic use in animal husbandry
- Arts & culture in school curricula
- Body shaming
- Cap on energy prices
- Carbon capture and storage
- Carbon neutral transport
- Carbon tax
- Clean Air Act
- Climate change levy
- Collaboration across the arts
- Community news forums
- Diversity of staff in broadcasting and journalism
- Energy benefits
- Energy consumer rights
- Energy costs
- Environmental assessment of policies
- Evidence-based energy policy
- Fisheries policy
- Fracking
- Free museums and galleries
- Funded apprenticeships in creative arts
- Funding for cultural organisations
- Grants for local football clubs
- Green economy apprenticeships
- Green industries and jobs
- Green supply chains
- Healthy living
- Independence of the media
- Local community libraries
- Local food production
- National action days
- National Investment Bank
- North-East Atlantic Fishing Agreement
- Nuclear power
- Onshore wind production
- Paris climate deal
- Pesticides ban
- Prepayment meters
- Protections for farmland
- Public ownership of water and utilities
- Public ownership on the national grid
- Publically owned digital library
- Regional co-operative energy companies
- Rural flood defences
- Small-scale fisheries fleet
- Standardised recycling colour code
- Subsidies for low-carbon targets
- Subsidised retrofitting of solar panels
- Technology development for cleaner air
- Tree Planting
- Utility tariffs
- VAT on electric vehicles
- VAT on TV ads
- Wind and tidal energy generation