

Adaptation Sub-Committee Launch Event

Hilary Benn's Speech

5mins

******NOT CHECKED AGAINST DELIVERY******

Good evening and thank you for coming here today to celebrate the formal launch of the Adaptation Sub-Committee (ASC).

All over the world people are experiencing the effects of climate change; and as I speak to you today the Copenhagen climate change talks are underway – arguably the most critical meeting in human history.

Last month, here in Britain, devastating floods hit the homes and lives of thousands of people in Cumbria. We cannot definitely attribute the November floods, or any single episode of extreme weather to human made climate change. But we do keep records, we observe trends and we make deductions.

Globally this current decade (2000-2009) was warmer than the previous decade (1990-1999), which was warmer than the preceding decade (1980-1989), And the World Meteorological Organisation has said that this year is likely to rank in the top ten hottest years since records began.

As a result of current emissions released into the atmosphere, we are already committed to changing and more extreme weather and rising sea levels over the next 40 years; with increased likelihood of droughts, heatwaves, flooding and coastal erosion.

So if we are to avoid any further climate change then it will be essential for our world leaders to get a deal at Copenhagen which will start to reduce global emissions.

But, we also need to make provision – to adapt our buildings, our infrastructure, our agriculture, our industries, our landscapes and our public services – so that we can live with and seize opportunities resulting from the long term impacts from climate change which we know we will all face, come what may.

The provisions of the Climate Change Act make it clear what we have to do here in the UK – this, let me remind you, is the first piece of legislation in the world of its kind – setting the ambitious target to reduce our emissions by 80% by 2050, and laying a duty on Government to assess the risks that climate change presents to us all and to establish a national adaptation programme so we are all able to have a sustainable future.

And the Adaptation Sub-Committee (ASC) – the final statutory body to be established under the Climate Change Act – will play a critical role in this.

Because it is you who we will look to for independent advice on our plans. And it is you who Parliament will look to for independent scrutiny of our work under the Act. And I would like to thank the members, under the leadership of Lord (John) Krebs for taking on this challenge so willingly.

And I know that – although you have only existed as a group since June – you have already started to do some of this.

**On 26 November we laid before Parliament,
Guidance for authorities and statutory undertakers –
people such as Network Rail, the Environment
Agency, Ofwat and the Greater London Authority –
who we will be asking to report on what they think
the impacts of climate change will be on their
organisations and what they will be doing to adapt
to this. The advice and feedback you gave to us on
this was both constructive and valuable.**

We – along with our counterparts in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales – are currently preparing the first UK Climate Change Risk Assessment, which will help us to indentify and understand the level of risk that climate change poses to our homes, our businesses, our infrastructure, our health, our services, our natural habitats and biodiversity and our future, for now and future generations.

We have a challenging timetable in which to produce this first assessment, which will inform the adaptation measures that we take, and advice which the ASC has given to me has already proved invaluable in shaping this assessment – particularly as a number of you found time at short notice to work through some of the more technical challenges which such an ambitious project inevitably creates. I am certain you will continue to provide informed advice throughout the lifespan of this project.

Climate change is going to transform the way we live. As well as cutting emissions, we have to start making changes today and I look forward to working with you.

Thank you.

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