9 October 2023

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing to you with an urgent appeal against the allowance of new oil and gas licences for drilling that you announced at the end of July, and your decision to delay our government’s actions on net zero.

We The Curious is a science centre that communicates current research on a wide range of topics, to our audiences, which include young people, families, underserved communities and businesses. Given our history of engaging the public in scientific research, we have become a trusted and respected source of information for them.

Having listened to experts and scientists around the world including the IPCC, IEA, and 677 academics that wrote to you in March of this year, we cannot in good conscience support the government’s move to grant new oil and gas licences and to roll back our country’s net zero strategy. The development of those oil fields goes against everything we must do to slow down and reverse the damage that has been done via fossil fuel consumption. It has been laid out very clearly by the IEA, “no new investments in oil, gas and coal from now”, and yet the government has continued to go against the advice of scientific experts.

Before we go further into the evidence, we invite you to imagine what our future could look like. It’s 2045. Fresh air, energy security from renewable sources, and clean waterways and coastlines for everyone to enjoy. We are now living within our planetary boundaries, and nature and people are thriving. Our economy, based upon science and green technology, is strong and sustainable. We celebrate achieving a just transition to net zero, five years before we committed to, and we become global leaders in the transition.

Isn’t that the future that we wish for our planet?

To reach that goal, we need clear decisive leadership now, that immediately moves us away from our reliance on fossil fuels and invests in a robust net zero strategy. We appreciate that there is a complex economic landscape but any roll-back on this strategy will mean that there will be an increased burden for future generations with the crisis having deepened further.

Sustainability was defined in the United Nations Brundtland report as, “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. The United Kingdom has thus far been considered a leader in sustainability and climate action but the government’s continued investment in fossil fuels and delay to the net zero plan, undermines that authority and severely compromises our present and future realities.

We ask you to remember that people should be the focus of the climate crisis and your actions and decisions directly impact on us all. Further to this, those who have contributed least to climate breakdown (low-income communities, countries in the global south, indigenous people) are disproportionately bearing the brunt of short-termist decisions. The concern and fear for our future is now very real, with global studies showing that nearly 60% of young people are very or extremely worried about our future and this concern stretches beyond the boundaries of age and class. Those that are feeling anxious are also reporting that these feelings are negatively affecting their everyday lives and when asked about the government’s response to climate change, they have ‘greater feelings of betrayal than reassurance’. These young people are tomorrow’s
workforce and electorate and will surely judge the legacy of this government by the world they inherit.

As the elected leaders of this country you, our government, have a responsibility to the people of the UK and the world to decarbonise across all sectors, not develop any more oil and gas fields in the North Sea and consider the huge weight of scientific evidence. We ask that you take this seriously and not delay action. While we appreciate economic pressures at this time, we know from Chris Skidmore’s review that investment in a net zero strategy will benefit the country financially, create jobs and help to build a strong and sustainable economy but “we must move quickly” to capitalise on this opportunity.

To summarise, we condemn the government’s actions to grant new oil and gas licences and push back our net zero commitments. We implore you to reverse and reconsider these decisions. The IPCC reports say, ‘what we do in this decade will impact our planet now and for thousands of years’. You must want future historians to judge your legacy as having been the prime minister who led a government that made bold and positive changes that protected future generations and forged a low-carbon economic revolution; not as furthering an environmental crisis that will diminish the lives of generations to come.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]
Donna Speed
Chief Executive, We The Curious

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\(^{3}\) Professor Emily Shuckburgh OBE FRMetS. Cambridge Zero Director letter to the Prime Minister. s.l.: https://www.zero.cam.ac.uk/who-we-are/blog/news/hundreds-uk-scientists-and-academics-urge-prime-minister-riishi-sunak-prevent, March 28, 2023

