

An answer to the green lobbyists

I am receiving several copies of a lobbying letter condemning fracking in particular and the new government's approach to energy and the road to net zero. The general complaint is we should not extract any more fossil fuel at home, run down our oil and gas industry quickly and accelerate renewable electricity.

I disagree with these emails. Let me begin by explaining they are wrong in their own terms. Substituting imported gas for home produced gas increases the amount of CO₂ produced globally. LNG in particular requires substantial energy use to liquefy, transport and convert back the gas compared to pipeline gas from the North Sea. Importing energy intensive products similarly entails more global CO₂ whilst cutting U.K. output of energy intensive products. The net zero movement must look at global impact, not just national generation. Every extra amount of home produced gas eases the global shortage a little, and cuts the overall output of CO₂ by saving on LNG volumes.

The pressure to go faster with expanding renewable electricity comes up against the inconvenient fact that most U.K. people heat their homes and water with gas or other fossil fuels, and most drive petrol or diesel vehicles. All the time this is true we need fossil fuels to live. If we accelerated the rate of converting our vehicle fleet to electric it would raise CO₂ output from the scrappage processing and from the manufacture of new electric vehicles. You need to drive a lot more miles than most car owners to make the switch favourable on CO₂ accounting instead of running your older vehicle for its full useful life. The CO₂ accounting for replacing good functioning gas boilers with electric heat pumps is also problematic. Anyway governments cannot make people rip out their gas boilers or replace their cars, especially at a time of income squeeze when most cannot afford to do so.

Meanwhile government has a duty to ensure there is sufficient energy at affordable prices to keep us warm, provide necessary supplies and buttress jobs at home. On any analysis the next few years will see the need for plenty of gas, whether from home or foreign sources and whether used to make things here or imported things from overseas. Indeed if we import more from places like China and Germany more will be made with coal based power, producing more emissions than using gas. The greens say there will be new jobs making wind turbines. There will not be enough to offset the big hit to jobs if we fail to keep enough sensibly priced hydrocarbons for the period of transition. The West is already too dependent on China and her satellites for raw materials and products required in wind farm and battery production. We also need to consider the environmental impact of mining the materials and handling the waste from battery and other electrical products.