# UK faces uphill battle to accelerate net zero ambitions amid political and international pressures



Amid escalating global and domestic challenges, the UK government faces mounting calls to uphold and accelerate its climate ambitions, particularly the pursuit of net zero emissions by 2050. Climate campaigners and political leaders alike are urging decisive action in the face of growing opposition from key political parties and the shifting international climate policy landscape.

Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer has been pressed to maintain a firm stance on green policies as both the Conservative Party, now led by Kemi Badenoch, and Reform UK have signalled intentions to roll back on the UK's climate commitments. Badenoch recently declared the net zero target “impossible” to achieve and pledged to maximise extraction in the North Sea, aligning with Reform UK's vow to fast-track oil and gas licenses while scrapping net zero targets if elected. These positions starkly contrast with Starmer’s plans to accelerate the transition to a net zero economy, emphasising renewable energy’s role in national security, economic growth, and reducing reliance on fossil fuels, as outlined at a recent energy summit.

The government’s resolve on climate policy comes under scrutiny amid reports suggesting Labour officials might exploit regulatory "loopholes" to extend North Sea drilling, a move that campaigners warn would undermine climate progress. However, officials have reiterated commitment to their manifesto pledge to issue no new licences for exploration, only maintaining existing fields for their lifetime. Energy Secretary Ed Miliband confirmed that a forthcoming strategy will articulate this approach, while consultations continue on banning new drilling licences and transitioning the North Sea towards clean energy sources such as hydrogen, renewables, and carbon capture technologies. Nonetheless, trade unions have voiced concerns about the potential impact on jobs and energy security during this transition.

Internationally, the climate context is equally complex. The US, under former President Donald Trump, has retreated from climate action, with Trump publicly denouncing global warming as a “con job” and urging increased North Sea drilling. Conversely, China recently pledged a 7-10% emissions cut over the next decade, alongside ambitious expansions in wind and solar capacity and pollution-free vehicles. Although experts note China's commitments are seen as cautious, it is recognised for typically exceeding its targets. This geopolitical split highlights climate policy’s evolution from debate to a competitive arena for future markets, investment, and job creation, a shift noted by academic voices highlighting the economic imperative behind climate action.

Within the UK, there is recognition that the low-carbon transition is already generating economic opportunities, particularly in sectors like offshore wind where job growth outpaces the wider economy. Yet, concerns persist regarding the sufficiency and ambition of current targets. The Climate Change Committee and environmental campaigners advocate for steeper emissions cuts—up to 81% by 2035 compared to 1990 levels—to meet the scale of the crisis and demonstrate global leadership.

Ed Miliband has publicly affirmed the government’s “strong commitment” to net zero, framing the green transition as both an energy security measure and an engine for job creation. This stance serves as a counterpoint to criticisms from figures like Chris Stark, the outgoing head of the Climate Change Committee, who has lamented the previous government's backsliding on climate ambition.

As the country navigates these competing pressures ahead of the Labour Party conference, the UK’s climate policy trajectory remains a focal point for debate—balancing economic and political realities with urgent environmental imperatives.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/government-urged-to-push-ahead-with-climate-plans-amid-growing-net-zero-pushback-NUKRTRPYEFIUVHYRMOA2WTZBNY/), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/mar/17/conservative-party-to-ditch-commitment-to-net-zero-in-uk-by-2050), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/apr/24/britain-will-accelerate-push-to-net-zero-starmer-tells-energy-summit)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/government-urged-to-push-ahead-with-climate-plans-amid-growing-net-zero-pushback-NUKRTRPYEFIUVHYRMOA2WTZBNY/), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/mar/05/ban-on-new-drilling-confirmed-as-ministers-consult-on-north-seas-clean-energy-future), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/mar/21/government-absolutely-up-for-the-fight-over-net-zero-ed-miliband-says), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/mar/17/conservative-party-to-ditch-commitment-to-net-zero-in-uk-by-2050)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/government-urged-to-push-ahead-with-climate-plans-amid-growing-net-zero-pushback-NUKRTRPYEFIUVHYRMOA2WTZBNY/), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/mar/17/conservative-party-to-ditch-commitment-to-net-zero-in-uk-by-2050), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/apr/24/britain-will-accelerate-push-to-net-zero-starmer-tells-energy-summit), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/mar/05/ban-on-new-drilling-confirmed-as-ministers-consult-on-north-seas-clean-energy-future)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/government-urged-to-push-ahead-with-climate-plans-amid-growing-net-zero-pushback-NUKRTRPYEFIUVHYRMOA2WTZBNY/), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/mar/21/government-absolutely-up-for-the-fight-over-net-zero-ed-miliband-says), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/apr/24/britain-will-accelerate-push-to-net-zero-starmer-tells-energy-summit), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/apr/20/sunak-has-set-britain-back-on-net-zero-says-uks-climate-adviser)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/government-urged-to-push-ahead-with-climate-plans-amid-growing-net-zero-pushback-NUKRTRPYEFIUVHYRMOA2WTZBNY/), [[7]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/oct/26/campaigners-call-for-steeper-cuts-to-uk-greenhouse-gas-emissions), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/apr/20/sunak-has-set-britain-back-on-net-zero-says-uks-climate-adviser), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/mar/21/government-absolutely-up-for-the-fight-over-net-zero-ed-miliband-says)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/government-urged-to-push-ahead-with-climate-plans-amid-growing-net-zero-pushback-NUKRTRPYEFIUVHYRMOA2WTZBNY/), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/mar/21/government-absolutely-up-for-the-fight-over-net-zero-ed-miliband-says), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/apr/20/sunak-has-set-britain-back-on-net-zero-says-uks-climate-adviser)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/government-urged-to-push-ahead-with-climate-plans-amid-growing-net-zero-pushback-NUKRTRPYEFIUVHYRMOA2WTZBNY/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/mar/21/government-absolutely-up-for-the-fight-over-net-zero-ed-miliband-says> - UK Energy Secretary Ed Miliband has expressed the government's strong commitment to achieving net zero emissions by 2050, despite opposition from parties like the Conservatives and Reform UK. Miliband criticized these parties for 'betraying future generations' by opposing climate action and emphasized the importance of transitioning to a green economy for energy security and job creation. He also highlighted the public's support for climate action that ensures energy security and lower bills, underscoring the government's determination to pursue its green agenda.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/apr/20/sunak-has-set-britain-back-on-net-zero-says-uks-climate-adviser> - Chris Stark, the outgoing head of the UK's Climate Change Committee, criticized Prime Minister Rishi Sunak for not prioritizing climate action, stating that Sunak's approach has 'set us back' in the fight against climate change. Stark highlighted Sunak's reversal on climate policies, including delaying the ban on new petrol and diesel cars, and expressed concern over the lack of ambition in the government's climate commitments compared to previous administrations.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/mar/17/conservative-party-to-ditch-commitment-to-net-zero-in-uk-by-2050> - Kemi Badenoch, leader of the Conservative Party, announced the party's decision to abandon its commitment to achieving net zero emissions by 2050. Badenoch argued that the target is 'impossible' and criticized current policies for failing to reduce energy costs while not making sufficient progress on emissions. This move marks a significant shift in the party's stance on climate policy, aligning more closely with the right-wing, climate-sceptic Reform UK party.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/apr/24/britain-will-accelerate-push-to-net-zero-starmer-tells-energy-summit> - Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer announced plans to accelerate the UK's transition to a net zero economy, emphasizing the importance of renewable energy for national security and economic growth. Speaking at an energy summit, Starmer highlighted the need to reduce reliance on fossil fuels and invest in low-carbon technologies to boost competitiveness and create new industries. He also addressed the vulnerabilities exposed by over-reliance on international fossil fuel markets, advocating for a shift towards clean energy.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/mar/05/ban-on-new-drilling-confirmed-as-ministers-consult-on-north-seas-clean-energy-future> - The UK government has confirmed a ban on new drilling licenses in the North Sea, initiating consultations on the region's transition to clean energy. Energy Secretary Ed Miliband stated that the consultation aims to prevent job losses in the oil industry during the shift to hydrogen, renewable energy, and carbon capture technologies. However, trade unions like GMB and Unite have expressed concerns about potential impacts on jobs and energy security due to the ban.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/oct/26/campaigners-call-for-steeper-cuts-to-uk-greenhouse-gas-emissions> - Environmental campaigners are urging the UK government to commit to deeper cuts in greenhouse gas emissions, recommending an 81% reduction by 2035 compared to 1990 levels. The Climate Change Committee has advised Energy Secretary Ed Miliband to set this target at an upcoming UN climate summit. Campaigners argue that this is the minimum necessary to effectively address the climate crisis and demonstrate global leadership in emissions reduction.