# Boris Johnson admits rushing UK’s net zero agenda amid calls for cautious approach



Boris Johnson has acknowledged he moved “far too fast” on the UK’s net zero agenda during his premiership, admitting he was overly optimistic about the capacity of renewable energy to meet the country’s needs. In an upcoming book titled Prosperity Through Growth, Johnson reflects candidly on his climate policies, conceding that the surge in energy prices and the repercussions of the Ukraine conflict exposed the limitations of a rapid transition away from fossil fuels. He told one of the book's authors that the initial push for quick adoption of sustainable energy “wouldn’t work” as planned, prompting a more cautious stance that includes allowing continued use of hydrocarbons for the foreseeable future.

Despite his admission of hastiness, Johnson warned against abandoning net zero targets entirely. He stressed the importance of maintaining public confidence in the government’s commitment to environmental goals, saying, “We’re still going to go for net zero, but it’s going to take a bit longer to get there.” Johnson also lent support to former Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair’s recent critique of fossil fuel reduction strategies, agreeing that efforts to rapidly phase out or limit fossil fuel consumption had proven “too expensive for ordinary people” and “too fast.”

Johnson’s tempered view contrasts with the position of Conservative leadership contender Kemi Badenoch, who recently vowed to repeal the UK’s landmark Climate Change Act, which commits the country to cutting greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050. Badenoch characterises the Act as “nonsensical” and has proposed replacing it with a policy focused on ensuring “cheap and reliable” energy supply. This proposed rollback has been met with strong criticism, notably from Theresa May—Johnson’s predecessor—who called Badenoch’s plans “a catastrophic mistake.” Environmental groups have also condemned the move, framing it as a dangerous retreat from the UK’s global climate leadership.

The Climate Change Act itself, enacted by the Labour government in 2008 and later amended to strengthen emissions targets, underpins much of the UK’s climate policy framework. As prime minister, Johnson had previously been a vocal advocate for the Act’s ambitious goals, urging nations around the world to commit to net zero emissions by mid-century and to adopt robust interim targets.

However, recent actions by the government under Prime Minister Rishi Sunak suggest a dilution of those commitments, with delayed implementation of critical green policies like the ban on new petrol and diesel cars and the phase-out of gas boilers. Johnson has publicly criticised these moves, accusing Sunak of “losing ambition” and warning that weakening climate policies risks undermining business confidence and the country’s international standing. Speaking to the media, Johnson emphasised the necessity of sustaining ambition despite the practical challenges, reflecting a nuanced position that balances realism with ongoing support for climate goals.

In the context of ongoing debate within the Conservative Party and across the UK’s political landscape, Johnson’s remarks highlight the tension between economic pragmatism and environmental commitment. His recognition of the costs and challenges of rapid change does not equate to wholesale rejection of net zero but signals a call for a more measured approach that takes into account energy security and affordability.

Meanwhile, at the international COP27 climate summit, Johnson reinforced his commitment to the broader net zero campaign, rejecting calls by “net zero naysayers” to expand fossil fuel extraction through fracking. He framed himself as the “spirit of Glasgow COP26,” urging for a continued global push to reduce reliance on hydrocarbons, despite setbacks and geopolitical pressures.

This evolving discourse reveals a critical juncture in UK climate strategy, as policymakers and politicians grapple with balancing environmental imperatives against economic realities, with net zero ambitions under intense scrutiny but not abandoned.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/boris-johnson-says-he-went-far-too-fast-on-net-zero-report-7CYJAFJT7BJBHEV7AKOU7URPP4/), [[2]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/boris-johnson-kemi-badenoch-new-labour-ukraine-maidenhead-b1251363.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/boris-johnson-says-he-went-far-too-fast-on-net-zero-report-7CYJAFJT7BJBHEV7AKOU7URPP4/), [[2]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/boris-johnson-kemi-badenoch-new-labour-ukraine-maidenhead-b1251363.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/boris-johnson-says-he-went-far-too-fast-on-net-zero-report-7CYJAFJT7BJBHEV7AKOU7URPP4/), [[3]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/kemi-badenoch-labour-maidenhead-nigel-farage-ed-miliband-b1250964.html), [[5]](https://www.itv.com/news/2025-10-02/kemi-badenoch-pledges-to-scrap-climate-change-act-in-favour-of-cheap-energy)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/boris-johnson-says-he-went-far-too-fast-on-net-zero-report-7CYJAFJT7BJBHEV7AKOU7URPP4/), [[4]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2023/09/20/boris-johnson-rishi-sunak-net-zero-2050-target-u-turn/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[4]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2023/09/20/boris-johnson-rishi-sunak-net-zero-2050-target-u-turn/), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/sep/20/boris-johnson-warns-sunak-he-cannot-afford-to-falter-on-net-zero-commitments)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/boris-johnson-says-he-went-far-too-fast-on-net-zero-report-7CYJAFJT7BJBHEV7AKOU7URPP4/), [[2]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/boris-johnson-kemi-badenoch-new-labour-ukraine-maidenhead-b1251363.html), [[3]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/kemi-badenoch-labour-maidenhead-nigel-farage-ed-miliband-b1250964.html)
* Paragraph 7 – [[7]](https://news.sky.com/story/former-pm-boris-johnson-criticises-net-zero-naysayers-who-want-to-frack-the-hell-out-of-the-british-countryside-in-appearance-at-cop27-12740772), [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/boris-johnson-says-he-went-far-too-fast-on-net-zero-report-7CYJAFJT7BJBHEV7AKOU7URPP4/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/boris-johnson-says-he-went-far-too-fast-on-net-zero-report-7CYJAFJT7BJBHEV7AKOU7URPP4/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/boris-johnson-kemi-badenoch-new-labour-ukraine-maidenhead-b1251363.html> - Former Prime Minister Boris Johnson has stated that the UK moved 'far too fast' on achieving net zero emissions. In an upcoming book, he expressed that he was overly optimistic about sustainable and renewable energy sources meeting the country's needs. He acknowledged that the rise in energy prices and the situation in Ukraine made it clear that this approach was insufficient. Johnson also supported former Prime Minister Tony Blair's criticism of efforts to limit fossil fuels, emphasizing the need for a more gradual transition to net zero.
3. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/kemi-badenoch-labour-maidenhead-nigel-farage-ed-miliband-b1250964.html> - Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch has defended her plan to repeal the Climate Change Act, a move criticized as a 'catastrophic mistake' by former Prime Minister Theresa May. Badenoch argued that maintaining the Act is 'nonsensical' and that the UK should focus on affordable and reliable energy solutions. The Climate Change Act, introduced by the Labour government in 2008, committed the UK to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050, with subsequent amendments aiming for net zero emissions by 2050.
4. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2023/09/20/boris-johnson-rishi-sunak-net-zero-2050-target-u-turn/> - Former Prime Minister Boris Johnson has criticized Prime Minister Rishi Sunak for diluting the UK's net zero targets. Johnson accused Sunak of 'losing ambition' for Britain’s future and emphasized the need for businesses to have certainty about the government's climate commitments. This criticism came shortly before Sunak announced delays in implementing key green policies, including the ban on new petrol and diesel cars and the phase-out of gas boilers, both introduced during Johnson's tenure.
5. <https://www.itv.com/news/2025-10-02/kemi-badenoch-pledges-to-scrap-climate-change-act-in-favour-of-cheap-energy> - Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch has pledged to replace the UK's Climate Change Act with a strategy focused on 'cheap and reliable' energy. She announced plans to repeal the Act, which committed the UK to reducing climate emissions by 80% by 2050, and replace it with an energy strategy prioritizing economic growth through affordable energy solutions. This move has been met with criticism from environmental groups, who view it as a 'catastrophic mistake' and a 'monstrous act of economic and environmental vandalism'.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/sep/20/boris-johnson-warns-sunak-he-cannot-afford-to-falter-on-net-zero-commitments> - Former Prime Minister Boris Johnson has urged Prime Minister Rishi Sunak not to 'falter' on the UK's climate pledges, following reports of potential policy shifts. Johnson emphasized the importance of maintaining ambition for the country's future and providing businesses with certainty regarding net zero commitments. This appeal came after Sunak's plans to delay the ban on new petrol and diesel cars and weaken the phase-out of gas boilers, policies introduced during Johnson's tenure, were leaked to the media.
7. <https://news.sky.com/story/former-pm-boris-johnson-criticises-net-zero-naysayers-who-want-to-frack-the-hell-out-of-the-british-countryside-in-appearance-at-cop27-12740772> - Former Prime Minister Boris Johnson has criticized net zero 'naysayers' who advocate for extensive fracking in the UK. Speaking at the COP27 climate summit in Egypt, Johnson described himself as 'the spirit of Glasgow COP26' and called for the legacy of the previous year's climate summit to be 'taken forward' as a 'joint global endeavour'. He emphasized the need to end dependence on hydrocarbons and maintain the campaign for net zero, despite challenges such as the Ukraine conflict.