

**Power stations such as that at Blyth would “fly in the face of reason”
- without 100% CCS, they’re “killers”, says local MEP.**

Cross-Party Support for Campaigners on Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS)

LOCAL MEP Fiona Hall (Liberal Democrat) has slammed controversial plans for another coal-fired power station at Blyth, saying they “fly on the face of reason”.

And two other local MEPs, Martin Callahan (Conservative) and Stephen Hughes (Labour), have also indicated their broad support for campaigners’ opposition to the plans.

Fiona Hall MEP said: “The current proposals fly in the face of reason. The idea of starting with small-scale ‘pilot plants’ for CCS is a sound one. But it is vital that the pilots are designed to capture all the CO₂ being emitted - otherwise we will be trialling a system which is only marginally better than the non-abated coal powered plants that exist at present.

“With climate change happening faster than anyone predicted, the fact is that coal-fired stations without 100% CCS are killers.”

Dr David Golding CBE, who heads up the campaign against climate change in the North East, comments:

“We are most grateful for the support of all three of our recently re-elected MEPs. We seek changes to the Government’s proposals for new coal-fired power stations and associated demonstration units for CCS, as announced by Ed Miliband, the Secretary of State for Energy & Climate Change, on 23rd April 2009, with a view to minimising the UK’s future carbon emissions. The matter is of the utmost importance since coal is the most damaging to the climate of all fuels and because of the need to cut CO₂ as much and as fast as possible.

“We make no criticism of CCS as such. On the contrary, we would warmly welcome appropriate efforts to develop this technology, which would be of incalculable value in the fight against climate change. What we are saying is: *‘By all means press ahead with CCS demonstration plants, but wait until the process is proven before embarking on large scale new coal build. Then, if CCS can be made to work, it can be applied to the entirety of the emissions of new stations from the start of their operation’*.

“In other words, we are totally opposed to the construction of ‘death factories with fig leaves’ - new, full sized, coal-fired power stations, trying vainly to hide behind fig leaf-sized CCS units! The weasel words, ‘Clean Coal’, are routinely applied to such systems, but they are anything but clean! They would start belching out their carbon – tens of millions of tons of it every year – at the very time (around 2015) when global emissions need to begin to decline. Furthermore, if CCS cannot be made to work at an acceptable cost - and we have to face up to the fact that this possibility, however unwelcome, is a very real one – we will have shackled ourselves to these highly polluting monstrosities for decades to come.”

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Cross-Party Support for NE Campaigners' Stance on CCS and New Coal

Martin Callanan MEP (Conservative), Fiona Hall MEP (Liberal Democrat) and Stephen Hughes MEP (Labour) have indicated their broad support for the position adopted by Make Poverty History North East on Carbon Capture & Storage (CCS) and new coal-fired power stations, which is summarised below.

We seek changes to the Government's proposals for new coal-fired power stations and CCS, as announced by Ed Miliband, the Secretary of State for Energy & Climate Change, on 23rd April 2009, with a view to minimising the UK's contribution to climate change.

'Call on CCS and Coal'

A Briefing by Make Poverty History North East acting in support of PANiC Stations (People Against New Coal-fired power Stations)

Coal – “my worst nightmare” (Dr Steven Chu, President Obama's Energy Secretary and the winner of the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1997).

“They talk about goals which sound impressive, but... the actions are such that it will be impossible to reach those goals” (Dr James Hansen, Director of NASA's Goddard Laboratory, 19th March 2009).

The problem of emissions prior to full application of CCS

We have to wonder what would have happened if Mr Miliband had announced the go-ahead for four new coal-fired power stations, and stated that only one would have CCS and that the others would remain entirely unabated until 2025 on even the most optimistic scenarios. We suspect that a storm of protest would have broken about his head for abandoning the fight against climate change, in view of the status of these stations as “*Factories of Death*”, as Dr Hansen characterised them in a letter to President Obama, and the description of coal by Dr Chu as, “*my worst nightmare*”.

Yet for all practical purposes, Mr Miliband's plans differ little from the above. Up to four new stations will probably get the green light, each with a ‘demonstration’ CCS unit initially capable of capturing only a small fraction (probably 20-25% at most) of the station's emissions.

Furthermore, these new stations will start belching out their carbon – tens of millions of tons of it every year – at the very time (around 2015) when global emissions need to begin to decline, according to the Committee on Climate Change and current climate science! This pollution will continue until CCS technology is shown to work and for up to five years afterwards (to allow time to scale up CCS to deal with the entire output of the stations). We fear that this is an example of the “*ineffective governance*” lambasted by the 2,500 scientists who met in Copenhagen in March.

Dr Myles Allen of Oxford University has pointed out (*Nature*, 29th April) that high rates of fossil fuel use in the 2010s will make the reductions required subsequently exceedingly difficult to achieve (well-nigh impossible, we would say). Other recent research by Kevin Anderson and Helen Bowes (published by the Royal Society in 2008), the authoritative World Energy Outlook 2008, and the new analysis published on 19th May 2009 by a team at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, have also revealed how very serious our situation has become. The latter study shows that, without urgent and comprehensive action, warming could be double previous estimates - “*There's no way the world can or should take these risks,*” says Professor Ronald Prinn, one of the authors. We have no ‘wriggle-room’ left - we simply cannot afford the luxury of avoidable emissions! “*The longer we prevaricate, the more difficult the task becomes*”, as Lord Robert May stated when he was President of the Royal Society.

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The problem of CCS proving to be impractical or uneconomic

CCS has never been undertaken at a commercial scale, and as Dorothy Thompson, the Chief Executive of the Drax Group (which runs the UK's biggest power station), stated on 12th May, *"The reality is that CCS may not prove to be the answer we are all looking for and, even if it does, it remains a long way off... and it will be expensive"*. Similarly, Alastair Darling told Parliament (23rd May 2007) that CCS *"may never work"*.

So what happens if problems with CCS prove to be insoluble, or (more likely) it turns out to be uneconomic? Will the new stations be closed down – the prospect simply beggars belief, given the billions of pounds which will be invested in them and the hole in the energy budget which would be created as a result. In this connection, we note that energy firms are already (12th May) seeking for *"opt-outs over carbon capture deadline"* and also recall the long and shameful history of broken promises regarding the expansion of Heathrow. We not only risk locking ourselves into a high-carbon future for decades to come, but will be sending a most damaging message to the rest of the world.

Make Poverty History NE says...

The development of CCS technology would, of course, be of incalculable value in the fight against climate change. Consequently, we would warmly welcome, say, two demonstration plants designed for CCS for their entire output of CO₂, with a capacity for 300-400 MW each, for example. [This would be a very different proposal from the *'Death Factories with Fig Leaves'*, as currently proposed!] One should have CCS of the 'pre-combustion' variety, and the other might be 'post-combustion' and applied to a gas-fired, combined heat and power (CHP) unit. Ideally, a third CCS pilot unit should be retro-fitted to an existing coal-fired power station. If the technology can be made to work, at an acceptable cost, it could then be scaled up to full commercial size. In this way, we would not lock ourselves into a high carbon future, since, if CCS cannot be made to work, little damage will be done even if the units involved continue to be used.

Holding back on non-abated coal combustion should not create insurmountable problems for the security of electricity supply. Closure of existing coal-fired power stations due to new European environmental standards will reduce the contribution of coal by about 10% of current national generating capacity by 2020 (see DECC, Press Release, 23rd April, 2009), and several nuclear stations are nearing the end of their working lives. However, the UK is committed to increasing its level of generation from renewables from 5% to nearly 35% of national capacity and, in addition, to making substantial improvements in energy efficiency – thus amply covering the shortfall. Reserve capacity, if required, could be in the form of gas-fired units, which are comparatively inexpensive to build.

To date, we have looked in vain for the urgent, vigorous and concerted action required to reduce emissions and lead the world in heading off the nightmare of runaway climate change. *"They talk about goals which sound impressive"*, says Dr Hansen, *"but... the actions are such that it will be impossible to reach those goals"* (19th March). Just so. Instead, we see a continuation, as Churchill once put it, *"of procrastination, of half-measures, of soothing and baffling expedients, and of delays"*, thus exposing us to the risk of *"consequences that would haunt humanity until the end of time"* (Professor Ross Garnaut, the Australian government's advisor on climate change, Sept 2008).

"Never have we faced such a global threat", said Lord May. But never have we been offered such an opportunity to bring such benefit to humankind, as that presented by the current challenge to close the centuries-long chapter of carbon profligacy and open a new chapter of environmental responsibility!

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