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**Friends of
the Earth**

Briefing:

Why Climate Change is too risky to ignore

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- the most extensive environmental network in the world, with almost one million supporters across five continents and over 60 national organisations worldwide**
- a unique network of campaigning local groups, working in over 200 communities throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland**
- dependent on individuals for over 90 per cent of its income.**

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**Friends of the Earth, 26-28 Underwood Street, London N1 7JQ
Tel: 020 7490 1555 Fax: 020 7490 0881 Website: www.foe.co.uk**

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Over recent months climate sceptics have suggested that we should not push forwards with policies to cut carbon emissions because climate change is not proven. Friends of the Earth believes that we cannot afford to ignore expert warnings on the risks of climate change. The vast majority of climate scientists agree that man-made climate change is happening - if nine out of 10 pilots said that they thought that a plane was likely to crash no-one would be foolish enough to fly in it.

Of course the earth's climate is extremely complex, so it is not surprising that there is not 100 per cent certainty about the science. However hundreds of scientific authors, thousands of reviewers and all the major scientific national academies took part in the world's biggest climate review which concluded that it was very likely (greater than 90 per cent chance) that humans are responsible for the climate change that is happening.

A more recent report (March 2010) by the UK Met Office said that real-world observations show our planet is changing rapidly and man-made greenhouse gas emissions are very likely to be the cause [1]. For example it found that:

- Temperature increase — global temperatures have increased by about 0.75 °C over the past century and 2000-2009 was the warmest decade on record. Human influence has been detected on every continent.
- Changes in rainfall patterns — wetter regions of the world (mid to high latitudes in the northern hemisphere and tropical regions) are generally getting increasing rainfall, and drier regions less rainfall.
- Humidity — surface and satellite observations show moisture in the atmosphere has increased over the last 20-30 years. This increases the amount of water that can fall in extreme rainfall, posing flooding risks.
- Warming oceans — temperature increases have been observed over the last 50 years in the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Ocean basins. These cannot be attributed to changes in solar activity, volcanic eruptions or variations in ocean currents, such as El Niño.
- Salinity — the Atlantic Ocean is becoming saltier in sub-tropical latitudes. This is because of increasing ocean evaporation due to increased temperatures. In the long-term, ocean regions at higher latitudes are expected to become less salty due to melting of glaciers, ice sheets and increased rainfall.
- Sea-ice — summer minimum of Arctic sea-ice is declining at a rate of 600,000 km² per decade, an area approximately the size of Madagascar. While there has been variation from year to year, a long-term trend has been observed that can only be explained by human influences

Eleven US generals and admirals said we can't afford to take a risk on climate change, they said: *"as military leaders we know we cannot wait for certainty. Failing to act because a warning isn't precise is unacceptable."* [2]

Energy Security

As well as cutting carbon emissions reducing our growing dependency on fossil fuels will strengthen our energy security as well. Our reliance on overseas supplies of gas and oil, with their dwindling supply and yo-yoing prices, is a major threat to the UK economy.

Leading industrialists, including Richard Branson, have recently suggested the global oil resources may peak in five years and then decline. They say that this may lead to the UK's energy security being "significantly compromised" and would hit businesses, consumers and especially the most disadvantaged in society [3]

Economic and social benefits

Slashing energy waste and developing the UK's vast potential for green energy will create new jobs and industries and warmer homes for the poor. Experts such as former World Bank chief economist Nicholas Stern say that action on climate change will be good for the UK economy and warn that failure to invest now in a greener future will lead to a huge bill for tackling climate change later on [4].

Research for Friends of the Earth has shown that 70,000 jobs could be created across England and Wales if councils slashed climate-changing emissions by insulating homes and businesses and fitting green energy to buildings [5]. The UK could be a world leader in green energy – it is the windiest country in Europe and has the continent's best wave and tidal resources – but we are currently one of the worst. We must seize the opportunities to create a booming green technology sector so we aren't left behind by other countries.

Fuel poverty in the UK blights the lives of millions and many more are paying enormous fuel bills because poor insulation leads too much of the energy being wasted. Saving energy, and cutting carbon emissions, brings real social benefits as well as environmental.

Conclusion

Some of the climate sceptics want to use the small uncertainty in the climate science as an excuse for inaction. This briefing demonstrates that not only is this a very risky approach it also means we don't tackle energy security issues or reap the social and economic benefits from cutting energy use. Millions of people in the UK are already benefitting from taking action on climate change. Householders are recycling, insulating their homes and using energy efficient products like light-bulbs.

Businesses are cutting their fuel bills by reducing energy consumption. We need to encourage and support people and businesses in their efforts.

References

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