



Big Ask. Big Month. Big Lobby.

"I was really nervous and worried that I wasn't knowledgeable enough on climate change before I met with my MP. But the meeting went really well, we had a good chat and I'll definitely be going back." Nikki Packham, London

The Big Ask

Since May 2005 Friends of the Earth has been running The **Big Ask** climate campaign. The **Big Ask** is the biggest campaign Friends of the Earth has ever undertaken and is calling on the Government to introduce a Climate Change Bill which would commit it to making year-on-year cuts in carbon dioxide emissions.

So far the campaign has been a phenomenal success. Out of a total of 646 MPs in the House of Commons, well over half (377 as of July 2006) have so far shown their support by signing an Early Day Motion (a type of parliamentary petition) in favour of a Climate Change Bill.

This means there is now a great deal of agreement about the severity of the threat of climate change, and increasing recognition that our current ways of tackling the problem are simply not delivering the cuts in carbon dioxide we need.

This autumn is crucial

We believe it is now time that Parliament debated and passed such a Bill. The support that we have from over half of the House of Commons makes this autumn the best possible time to ask that they should translate their support into action, and write to the Prime Minister and to the Secretary of State for Environment to demand that a Climate Change Bill should be included in the Queen's Speech for the next Parliament.

That's where you come in

Whether they have signed the EDM or not, we need to take this message to where MPs hear it loudest - in their own constituencies. We need each of them to meet with people like you who support this campaign and to hear directly from you that you want such legislation to be introduced in the Queen's Speech.

We designed this pack to help you meet your MP step by step. In it, you'll find:

- [How to lobby my MP](#) - from making the appointment to joining forces with other people
- [Why we need a Climate Change Bill](#) - in other words, what we are calling for
- [Simple answers](#) - to tricky questions
- [Getting media coverage](#) - including a [press release template](#)

Before you go any further, two facts that you should keep in mind:

- **It is your right to meet and lobby your MP, and it is their duty to listen to you and report your concerns to Government**
- **You are not alone! Thousands of people are joining you in this action.**

Thanks for getting this far – now please read on.



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How to lobby my MP

Step 1: Who is my MP?

It's easy to find out who your MP is. Go to the [Big Lobby Message Board](#) and type in your postcode. Or, if you prefer, you can ring the House of Commons information line on 020 7219 4272.

Step 2: How do I find out my MP's contact details?

MPs usually advertise their contact details locally in the Town Hall, the local press and the Yellow Pages. Most MPs also have their own websites with contact details on – you can find out if yours does [here](#).

If you have any difficulty finding your MP's local office details, then ring the House of Commons on 020 7219 3000 and ask to be put through to their office.

Step 3: How do I arrange a meeting/discussion?

Simply phone, email or write to your MP's office to arrange a meeting. Try to make this contact as early as possible so they can't blame 'prior engagements' as a reason not to see you. After all, they are there to represent you. Many MPs hold regular weekend surgeries in their constituency, so you could arrange an appointment in one of these.

If your MP says he or she is not available to meet with you, do persist and call again. MPs will re-arrange their diaries if they feel pressure from local constituents, the media and other MPs. If you really can't meet with your MP, then it may be possible to arrange a time to talk to them on the phone instead. Again, just arrange this by calling his/her office and request a phone discussion.

Remember that your MP is not doing you a favour by meeting you; they are simply doing their job.

When should I arrange a meeting?

Please arrange to meet your MP between mid September and mid October. If they cannot meet you exactly during this period, but suggest a time closely before or after, still take the appointment.

Aren't MPs on holiday during this time?

MPs are on summer recess up until 9 October. As they are always keen to stress in the media, they aren't on holiday during this time, but working locally in their constituency. So, this should be the best possible time to see them.

Step 4: What does my MP think about the idea of a Climate Change Bill?

For the last twelve months people have been asking their MP to sign Early Day Motion 178 (a type of parliamentary petition) in support of a Climate Change Bill.

Nearly 400 of the total 646 MPs have signed this Early Day Motion, so the chances are that your MP will have signed. (If your MP has a position in Government, then they



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won't have signed, because they are not allowed to sign Early Day Motions. But this doesn't necessarily mean they aren't supportive.)

You can find out whether your MP has signed the Early Day Motion [here](#).

Irrespective of whether your MP has signed the Early Day Motion or not, they still need a visit, because the question that you want to ask now is:

“Please write to the Tony Blair and David Miliband (the Secretary of State for Environment) and ask that a Climate Change Bill be included in the Queen’s Speech”.

If he or she personally supports the idea, then your MP really has no excuse for not agreeing to call for a Climate Change Bill to be in the Queen’s Speech. If they do not support the idea, then they still have a duty to represent your views.

Step 5: Get local media onboard

Getting media coverage will make a huge difference. It will help raise awareness on the issue itself, and will also put more pressure on your MP to meet with you. The section [Getting into the media](#) will help you plan your contact with the local media, and includes a press release template.

Step 6: Meeting your MP

MPs have to keep up to date on many issues and can't be experts on everything. You may well know more than him or her.

Don't be intimidated by your MP – they meet with constituents all the time and they're keen to meet with you. After all, they want to make sure you'll vote for them at the next election, so they will be nice to you.

The most important thing for you to keep in mind is: **What are you asking your MP to do?**

To write to Tony Blair and David Miliband and ask that a Climate Change Bill should be included in the Queen’s Speech.

At the end of the meeting remember to ask your MP whether they will contact Tony Blair and David Miliband on this issue, and would he/she be kind enough to send you copies of their letters, and if relevant, the responses they get. However surprising that may sound, most MPs actually do that as it is a very effective way for them to keep in touch with their constituents.

Don't let them blind you by spin

It is likely that your MP will tell you how supportive his/her party are and how much effort they are putting into tackling this issue. We agree that there is now a great deal of agreement about the severity of the threat of climate change but what we need now is adequate legislation, and that is what you are asking your MP to do. The section [Climate Change Bill explained](#) will give you a useful basis to keep your MP focussed.



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Top tips for meeting your MP

Do your homework

- Keep it simple. No one expects you to be an expert. If you are an international climate scientist, then great. But the chances are you aren't. You are probably just a concerned individual, who would like to see the Government committing to taking action. That is justification enough for you to see your MP, and they will understand that.
- Make some notes and stick to your main points.
- Read the [simple answers to tricky questions](#) to prepare how you deal with them in advance.

Don't be scared

- MPs are there to represent you, so you have a right to go and see them, and they expect that.
- We meant that one above – don't be scared. Contrary to popular beliefs, MPs don't get pleasure from belittling their constituents. They will appreciate that you have taken the time to meet with them, they want you to vote for them, and it's unlikely they will know much about the subject themselves. Plus, it's your right to go and see them. Tackling climate change is a good reason to exercise that right.
- Take support. If you are nervous about going alone, then arrange to go with friends, other people from your constituency, or someone who has met with their MP before. You can post a message on the message boards to find out if anyone is interested in teaming up.

On the day

- Take notes if you can
- If your MP asks a question you can't answer, offer to find out more and get back to them. (You can call Friends of the Earth on 020 490 1555 and we can try and help).
- Try to get to commit to writing a letter – if they offer to do something else, like a phone call or a conversation in a Westminster corridor, say that's great, but you want them to write a letter as well.
- Ask your MP to let you know when he/she has written to the Ministers, and if possible to send you a copy of their correspondence.



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Step 7: What do I do after the meeting?

Thank your MP for the meeting, and tell them you will be in touch to follow up any action that was agreed. If you can, send them a letter to thank them and remind them of what has been discussed and agreed and that you are looking forward to receiving copies of his letter to the Prime Minister. Please tell us how it went, by posting a message on the [Big Lobby Message Board](#).

How can I join up with other people in my area?

Go to our online [Big Lobby Message Board](#). You can post a message to inform other campaigners of what you are planning to do, invite them to join you if you want to do a collective lobby, read other people's messages and join other groups in their planned activities.

Remember: more activities in your constituency means that you'll be more likely to draw media coverage. You can post a message any time - before contacting your MP, or once you have an appointment, if you would like other campaigners to join you. Just remember that, out of courtesy, you should let your MP's office know how many people will be coming along.

Will my visit to my MP make a difference?

Yes, definitely! So far we have had great success with mass communications to MPs – tens of thousands of postcards have been sent. But MPs know that if someone takes the time to make an appointment, they must feel very strongly about the issue. So meeting your MP face to face demonstrates to them how important the issue really is.

We need to make sure that we have contacted every single MP across the country. We hope that each MP will also be visited several times. Do let us know about your experience and the result. Your visit is vital in making this lobby a success. Thank you.



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Using the media to influence your MP

Local media is read and watched by huge numbers of people, many of whom never pick up a national newspaper or tune into the national news.

You can be sure your MP follows what is happening in the local media very closely so it's a key way of getting your message across and convincing him or her that your views are shared by voters across the constituency.

"My local newspapers are vital for me to find out about the issues that local people are concerned about, and also to let them know what I am up to. When an issue is raised in local papers - whether as a news story or a debate on the letters page - it has a real influence on my work."

Don Foster, MP for Bath and Liberal Democrat Shadow Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport

Write a letter

Letters are an easy and effective way of getting an issue into the local paper. Letters pages are one of the most widely read parts of the paper and can spark debate and generate wider coverage.

Why don't you write to your local paper to congratulate your MP on supporting a Climate Change Bill – or write to highlight your disappointment that they haven't? If your MP is supportive ask him or her to write to the paper to highlight why they have backed The Big Ask.

Make news

Your local media will be interested in what's happening locally so why not turn your visit to your MP into a media event.

You may find your local media are interested in a simple story of your meeting your MP and the fact that its part of a nationwide lobby of MPs. Or they may be interested in a photo shoot of your newly supportive MP signing a big petition in support of the campaign.

Some top tips for making the news

- Make a list of your local media: it doesn't have to be comprehensive – you can start with the papers and radio stations you know about.
- Give them a ring – you should be able to find their details in the local telephone directory or on their website. Find out where you should email your press release to – sometimes there will be a particular journalist who covers environmental issues or they might give you a general email address and phone number for the news room. Also check their deadlines - you don't want to miss an opportunity to get coverage because you have sent your press release in too late.



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- Write your press release – see an example on the next page. When you write your press release make sure what you have to say is **new** – there's no point sending a press release about something that happened last week or even yesterday. And make sure it relates to your area – the local media want to tell stories about local people (including you!) and what's happening locally. Also make sure you include a phone number where you can be easily contacted by journalists who want to run the story.
- Follow up your email with a phone call to check that it's been received. Make sure you ring well before the deadline for getting news into the paper.
- If you are organising a photo shoot make sure you include the following details in the press release: what is happening, who is involved, when and where it is. Let them know you will be taking pictures. This means they can still run the story - even if they don't send their own photographer.

For more hints and tips on how to get into your local media go to [The Media Trust](#) and click on online guides.



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PRESS RELEASE

Embargoed until: <put in the date that you are meeting your MP>

Littleton Campaigners Lobby Local MP to Take Action on Climate Change

Members of **Littleton** Friends of the Earth Group will be meeting with **Joe Bloggs MP** today (**date**) to ask him to support their campaign for a new climate change law. The meeting has been organised as part of The Big Ask Big Month Big Lobby - a national month of action where hundreds of MPs will receive visits from constituents who want action on climate change.

The group are backed by many of the residents of **Littleton** - over **XX** shoppers sent a postcard to their MP after visiting the groups' information stand in the town centre (*use figures in here from a stall you have run etc*)

Friends of the Earth's climate campaign, The Big Ask, is calling for a new climate change law that would that will commit the Government to cutting the amount of carbon dioxide emitted by the UK by three per cent year on year. These cuts can be achieved through a range a measures such as encouraging energy efficiency and promoting renewable energy supplies. The law has already received the support of well over half of MPs.

Littleton Friends of the Earth member, **Anne Other** said:

"Climate change will affect us all and **Littleton** is no exception. We need to start implementing the solutions to climate change that already exist. That's why we will be asking **Joe Bloggs** to join the hundreds of MPs who already support our campaign for a new climate change law."

For more information on The Big Ask go to www.thebigask.com.

Notes to Editors

For more **[information / pictures / interview]** contact **[insert name and phone number where you can be contacted]**.



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Why we need a Climate Change Bill

Climate change is now recognised by all our political parties as a major threat. They have all set long-term targets for cutting carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions by 60 per cent by 2050. So why do we need a Climate Change Bill?

There are three key reasons.

1. The science: we need to start now

The science tells us that the severity of the change to our climate in the second half of this century will not be determined by how much CO₂ we emit in 2050, but by the total amount accumulated in the atmosphere by 2050. This is because every tonne of CO₂ put into our atmosphere today stays there for around 100 years, adding to the warming. So we cannot carry on as we are and try to cut emissions drastically in 2049: at some point in the 2020s there would already be so much CO₂ into the atmosphere that we would have set our climate on a course of irreversible and devastating change.

The majority of scientists believe we need to stop the climate from warming by more than 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. To do this will require action from all countries and the UK must do its fair share. We want a Climate Change Bill that ensures the UK does its bit.

2. Politics: no room to put it off

Setting a long-term target shows politicians recognise the need for long-term action. But a long-term target can create complacency: after all, it seems there is plenty of time left so we can postpone action.

Setting long-term targets has not created the necessary sense of urgency in Government to tackle the problem. As a result emissions have risen in all but two of the eight years that the current Government has been in power.

By committing Government to annual cuts in CO₂ emissions, a Bill would ensure no administration is tempted to pass the responsibility to those who come after.

3. Signals: sending the right message

A Bill would help send a message that tackling climate change requires action from everyone. We need people to make some positive choices - from small things like switching off TV standby right through to choosing a new car on the strength of its energy efficiency. But we also need changes in business: companies must start investing in more energy-efficient products.



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Government can influence behaviour at both the individual and corporate level by sending clear signals about what we need to do. Showing people that we're all in this together and their actions can make a difference will encourage them to act.

But people are most likely to do this if they feel others are doing their bit: hosepipe bans are undermined if the water company doesn't seem bothered about fixing its leaks. Similarly urging people to save energy will be undermined if Government won't show it is taking the matter seriously. For companies to invest in new carbon-saving products they need to be confident that the Government means what it says. The greater certainty that would arise from setting annual targets for CO₂ cuts would help achieve this.

What the Bill should do

These are the reasons Friends of the Earth is calling for a Climate Change Bill. We believe such a Bill should:

1. require Ministers to draw up plans to deliver a 3 per cent year-on-year cuts in CO₂ emissions
2. require an annual report to Parliament on progress in meeting the target
3. keep Ministers on track with mechanisms to require any Government that is falling behind on the targets to improve policies quickly, and create new powers to hold Ministers to account in this area.

Simple answers to tricky questions

What's the point in the UK taking action when big polluters like China, India and the United States are increasing their emissions?

We do need an international agreement to ensure that all countries cut emissions. But that is no excuse for the UK not to put its own house in order. An international agreement is likely to require the UK to do something like what's in the Bill. The Bill has been designed to ensure the UK does its fair share of cutting global emissions. It makes more sense to start that process now – as every year that emissions remain high, or increase, leaves us more to cut and less time in which to do it.

Don't we need policies to cut emissions, not more targets?

We do need policies as well as targets. But policies without targets are useless. Most parties favour promoting cycling and insulating homes to tackle climate change. But how many homes, and how much of a shift to cycling? And how far will this take us in tackling climate change? If Government has policies but cannot answer these questions, then we are effectively implementing ideas and hoping that they add up to enough to tackle the problem – which is completely inadequate.

No bank would lend you a mortgage without a payment plan to make sure you can repay it bit by bit.

It is too inflexible – emissions won't fall by 3 per cent each and every year.



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It's true that emissions do not move in a straight line, and that things outside the control of Government (cold winters, oil price shocks, natural disasters) might have an impact on emissions from year to year. It is also true that it doesn't matter too much if emissions don't go down one year, but go down extra the following year to compensate – providing the total emissions we make by 2050 do not breach our limit.

But none of this invalidates an annual target. The Bill proposes that progress is reported to Parliament, and if there is a blip one year the Government will report this. But crucially it will also have to report on the policy measures needed to get us back on track. If the reason is simply a freak cold winter, then no further action will be needed. But if the oil price shift could lead to longer-term impacts, policies must respond to this.

Can we achieve 3 per cent cuts each year?

Yes – not least because we are currently so wasteful in our use of energy. We could get a long way to the cuts without changing our lifestyles at all through cutting the energy we waste in draughty and badly insulated buildings; in inefficient car engines; and in an electricity system that wastes huge amounts of energy both in generating and transporting power.

We also need to ask the consequences would be if we do not cut by 3 per cent a year – what would the costs of living with climate change be?

Surely this Government can't bind future governments to a 3 per cent target?

Some MPs would try to have you believe this, but all Government legislation binds future Governments - otherwise we wouldn't have any laws the day after a General Election.

All Governments can then try to amend the laws that bind them, so a future Government could try to amend or get rid of climate laws as well. But that process must be carried out in Parliament, in the full glare of publicity, and can only be achieved if a majority of MPs vote for it. This doesn't make it impossible to get rid of the law – but it makes it less likely.