

Quakers in Scotland response to the Scottish Just Transition Commission interim report consultation

This submission is made on behalf of Quakers in Scotland. It is informed by the longstanding and deeply held Quaker concern for equality and care for the earth, and by our current work focusing on climate justice. Quakers seek to live in accordance with our core values of equality, peace, simplicity, truth and integrity. Led by our experience that there is something of God in all people, we are saddened by, and deplore the vast inequalities that currently exist in Scottish and UK society as well as globally. We believe government has a moral duty to address this crisis of inequality, including through a just transition approach to emission reductions. We believe it is also the duty of government to speak plainly and honestly about the scale of the economic transformation required, and about what this means for high-carbon industries such as oil and gas and aviation.

What do you see as the main economic opportunities and challenges associated with meeting Scotland's climate change targets?

Scotland, like the rest of the global North, faces the immense challenge of managing a transition to an economic system which prioritises equality, health and quality of life, not growth. GDP was never intended as a measure of general prosperity, and its continuing use for this purpose, results in a distorted view of the economy which is still the basis of policymaking. The success of the transition to a zero-carbon economy must be measured in different terms: emissions reductions, and a range of indicators for equality and wellbeing. The unprecedented circumstances of Covid-19 have revealed the inequities within our current system, as well as the public appetite for change: for example, a recent Britain-wide poll for Positive Money found that a majority of people think social and environmental outcomes should be prioritised over economic growth.ⁱ

Justice must be the basis for policies to address the climate crisis, or we are likely to see increased inequality, ill health and social exclusion. We are therefore pleased to see the Scottish government placing the just transition at the heart of its thinking on climate.

Fuel poverty provides a clear example of how a just transition can reduce inequality as well as emissions. Strong government action on energy efficiency of housing, through both retrofitting programmes and standards for new homes, could improve health through better housing conditions, as well as contributing to Scotland's climate targets. Money spent wisely on the just transition is a good investment, not a burden, and the government should present it as such.

One particular challenge in the Scottish context is the need to wind down oil and gas production. Scottish and UK energy policy still includes the 'duty' to "maximise economic recovery from the UK continental shelf", an aim that is directly at odds with the urgent need for a just transition to a zero-carbon economy. The two aims cannot coexist, and attempts to pretend otherwise are hampering the transition.

To assume continued dependence on oil and gas in 2045 presupposes an unrealistically large 'net' in 'net zero', with no evidence this can be achieved. The reference in the consultation document to a 'transition' for the oil and gas industry suggests that it can 'green' itself, when there is no evidence that this is so. We fear that the idea of a 'net zero carbon hydrocarbon basin', based wholly on hoped-for 'further innovation' could be industry 'greenwash' designed to allow little serious change. Government action is needed to ensure that sector-by-sector plans are realistic and in line with the Paris Agreement: voluntary action from industry will not be enough. The just transition must be about protecting workers and communities, not big business. A just transition for oil and gas workers cannot be predicated on fantasies about a continuing role for fossil fuels – it needs to plan for a much earlier phase-out date. The Covid-19 crisis has shown that it is possible for the manufacturing industries to diversify into, for example, the production of ventilators.

What do you think are the wider social (health, community etc.) opportunities and challenges associated with meeting Scotland's climate change targets?

A just transition to zero carbon presents an opportunity to build thriving, resilient communities based around local jobs, environmental protection, community ownership and a circular economy. Our response focuses on two key challenges, but there are many others.

Land use

Scotland's peatlands are a **vital carbon sink and fundamental** to meeting Scotland's and the UK's climate targets. The UK narrative and funding in support of tree planting does not take into account the Scottish context, where grant-backed conifer planting is destroying shallow peatland sites. Restoring all peatlands, including shallow peat, is the most effective action Scotland could take to sequester carbon. Much stronger regulation is needed to prevent damage to peatlands through extraction, burning, draining or tree planting. Expert advice should be available to all farmers and landowners on how to make best use of their land for carbon sequestration.

Incentives to use land as a carbon sink should not undermine sustainable food production where that is the optimal use of the land. Grants and training should be provided for all farmers to cut their emissions and adopt agroecological farming methods, which promote soil health (including its ability to act as a carbon sink) and biodiversity and eliminate the need for highly polluting artificial fertilisers.

Ending car dependency

A transition to electric cars will not solve the problem of transport emissions. An entirely green grid will take time to achieve; and the greater the demand for electricity, the harder it will be. Electric cars are part of the transition, but walking, cycling and public transport must come first, along with reducing the need to travel through provision of local jobs and services and good broadband.

Investment in cycle infrastructure is needed, and would have substantial public health benefits: Western countries with the highest levels of active travel generally have the lowest obesity rates. Estimates vary, but one report found that increasing the cycling rate to 27% of all journeys could save the Scottish economy £4 billion/yearⁱⁱ. However, figures from the new National Transport Strategy show cycling on Scotland's roads declined from 2012 to 2017.ⁱⁱⁱ

The existing commitment to decarbonise rail routes by 2035 is welcome, but needs to be brought forward to ensure zero-emission trains can replace old diesel trains as they are retired. Bus routes need to be protected and improved, particularly in rural areas. We welcome the steps being taken towards this, including the £500m fund announced last year. However, a more comprehensive approach is still needed, to include new research clarifying what it is that people actually need, better integration of different transport modes to enable multi-modal journeys, and a review of all planned transport infrastructure projects, with projects only going ahead if they are projected to reduce emissions.

We support Transform Scotland's call for all organisations to rule out air travel for trips within mainland Britain; the public sector could and should take the lead on this.

What would a successful transition to net-zero emissions look like for your sector/community?

Many Quakers are involved in local projects based on mutual aid, democratic participation and more collaborative and communal ways of living. This is at the heart of our vision for a more equal and sustainable society. A zero-carbon society must embrace these principles and foster strong local networks of sharing and support. This includes support for community farms and gardens, community asset ownership, community energy, co-housing and co-operative housing models, reuse and repair initiatives, 'libraries of things' (as well as more traditional libraries), and training in the skills that make these projects thrive.

We must ensure that the transition to zero emissions does not leave behind the same people who are already struggling and marginalised. All policies should be assessed for their impact on low-income households as well as for their carbon impact. Crucially, the value that is created through public investment – be it land value or wealth enabled by new technology – must be captured and retained for public benefit, through taxation, planning and land use policy, and support for community and employee ownership. Without measures to enable this, wealth will continue to flow upwards, and many people will continue to have no stake in Scotland's prosperity. There is good evidence that emissions

are lower in more equal societies, so policies that promote equality are key to reaching our climate targets as well as being a moral duty.

The major changes that are needed will only be just and sustainable if citizens are involved in decision-making. While there is much that can be done now – from mass retrofitting programmes to investment in public transport – genuine public participation and not “tick box consultation” is needed where decisions could have negative impacts or will involve significant inconvenience. There is widespread support for stronger climate action, and for us not to return, post-pandemic, to a ‘normal’ that was failing so many people.^{iv}

The transition is an opportunity to rethink our relationship with production and consumption and the way we treat our living planet. These are difficult issues, but if we fail to confront them now, a safe, post-fossil fuel era will remain out of reach.

What actions do you think the Scottish Government should take to manage the opportunities and challenges referenced above?

Stop funding fossil fuels and high-carbon infrastructure: end fossil fuel and aviation subsidies; require the carbon impact of all spending decisions to be assessed; publish a carbon impact account alongside future Budgets to show the overall carbon impact of government spending decisions.

Provide more support for a post-fossil fuel future: invest in walking and cycling and rural bus routes; support community renewable energy; invest in energy efficient homes; support sustainable food production; provide adequate funding for peatland restoration; provide funding and support for local authorities and communities to cut their emissions and build resilience. The Scottish National Investment Bank could be key to investment in a just transition. The welcome inclusion of a legislative requirement for the Bank to invest in projects that promote a just transition to zero carbon, needs strengthening to rule out lending to fossil fuel producers and other polluting industries. Oil and gas-based products (as opposed to fossil fuels) must be limited to those with a non-polluting footprint: 1 not fuel; 2 long-term recyclable.'

Design policies to benefit low-income households first: the transition to zero carbon must address economic and social inequalities in the UK, and all policies should be assessed against their impact on low-income households.

Support a global just transition: while this consultation relates to Scotland, it is important not to lose sight of the global picture. Scotland and the UK have overwhelmingly benefited from cheap fossil fuel energy, while communities in the global South who have not enjoyed the same benefits are now suffering the worst impacts of the climate crisis. Scotland and the UK have an opportunity to show leadership by both reducing emissions rapidly and ensuring that policy decisions do not reinforce existing global inequalities. Much of this is in the hands of the UK government, but we urge the Scottish government to align its own policy and investment decisions with the principles of climate justice. To give one key example: in

embracing renewable energy and new technologies, the government should seek to ensure that it is not supporting exploitative and destructive mining in the global South.

We welcome the new Climate Change Act's recognition of the need to address overall consumption emissions, as well as the inclusion of just transition and climate justice principles. We are disappointed that the government blocked amendments that would have required Ministers to set out steps taken to ensure that policies to cut emissions in Scotland do not reduce the ability of other countries to achieve their Sustainable Development Goals. The climate crisis is a global challenge and must be addressed through international collaboration. A zero-carbon transition which pits one country's interests against another's cannot be just, and we hope to see this omission rectified.

The Scottish government could also use its voice in support of debt relief and grants for poor countries hit by climate disasters, and push the UK government to acknowledge the principle of 'fair shares' based on historic emissions, which demands a much greater contribution than the UK is currently making.

**Are there specific groups or communities that may be, or feel that they may be, adversely affected by a transition to a net-zero carbon economy?
What steps can be taken to address their concerns?**

Unless policies are specifically designed to promote equality, the same people who have been left behind under the current system will suffer again. Communities which have suffered as a result of previous economic transitions (such as the decline of coal mining) are likely to be sceptical and should be brought into decision-making at the earliest possible stage. Full participation of unions and community groups will result in better policymaking and broader public support.

i <https://positivemoney.org/2020/05/new-polling-only-12-want-uk-to-prioritise-economic-growth-over-wellbeing/>

ii <http://transformscotland.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Towards-a-Healthier-Economy.pdf>

iii Transport and Travel in Scotland 2017, Table i: Traffic and passenger numbers in Scotland, 2012 to 2017

iv