

Keswick Reminder 09.05.25: NfWW No.86 Why net zero matters

Maybe last week you read about Tony Blair's contentious intervention in what is sometimes called the 'net zero debate'. In this article I don't want to get into the politics of that but I do want to set out the arguments as to why we must not abandon the goal of net zero in this and every country.

Net zero means balancing the amount of greenhouse gases emitted into the atmosphere with the amount removed by the Earth's ecosystems and by any technological fixes that we may come up with. Achieving net zero is a critical goal in the fight against climate change, and is of the utmost importance for the planet, our economies, and future generations – indeed for our very survival.

Why? As it stands we are still putting far more greenhouse gases, particularly carbon dioxide and methane, into the atmosphere than are being taken out. These gases trap heat, leading to rising global temperatures, resulting in increasingly severe weather events – droughts wildfires, floods, and hurricanes – and rising sea-levels caused by melting glaciers and icecaps. By achieving net zero, we stabilise global temperatures and reduce the risk of catastrophic climate disruptions.

How serious is it? In a word: very. For the science is unequivocal: human activity has already warmed our planet by approximately 1.2°C since pre-industrial times. Limiting global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, as set by the 2015 Paris Agreement, is essential to avoid the ever more dangerous impacts of climate change, and at present we are on course for well in excess of 2.0°C.

So what must be done to meet the target? Global emissions must be halved by 2030 and reach net zero by around 2050. Delaying action only increases both the difficulty and the cost of reducing emissions in the future.

But net zero isn't just about preventing disaster: it's also about creating a fairer world. The current impacts of climate change disproportionately affect the world's poorest, those with the fewest resources to adapt. We owe it to them as well as to ourselves to meet the Paris target.

And crucially we have a moral obligation to future generations, for what we do – or do not do – today will shape the world our children and grandchildren inherit. Without decisive action now, they face a future of extreme weather, food and water insecurity, rising sea-levels and displaced populations.

Those who argue that our UK net zero timeline is too ambitious or that we can't afford it are the new breed of deniers: still refusing to accept the urgency of crisis or the need to do something about it.

The fact is that the long-term costs of inaction far, far exceed the investments required to achieve net zero. Each year of delay increases both the dire consequences of climate change and the eventual cost of adaptation.

To join the local effort to reach net zero write to sustainablekeswick@gmail.com

Joe Human
Sustainable Keswick