

Keswick Reminder 28.03.25: NfWW No.83 Looking for hope in the time of Trump

If you are concerned about climate change and the environment – not to say Ukraine and Israel-Palestine too – it's tough right now with the White House gutting environmental regulations, sacking government scientists, ending funding to crucial agencies, and with promises to 'drill, baby, drill'.

So this short piece is an antidote, exploring where we must go to find hope.

First, let's look at the 'net zero trend', by which I mean the commitment of institutions to balance their greenhouse gas emissions with what they remove by a certain date, usually by 2050. Globally, there is a growing number of countries (now around 25) with legally binding targets, including ours and most other European countries.

We were the first major economy to put a legally binding target into law in 2019 and are now, along with Denmark, Sweden, Morocco and Costa Rica, considered to be a strong performer.

In America, in spite of Federal Government rollback, there will be a continued enactment of ambitious climate policies in many if not all states, in part because of the pace of market forces in renewable energy (see below), as well as strong political commitments to meet emissions targets.

There is also an expanding corporate movement, including Microsoft and Apple, Unilever and IKEA, each with ambitious net zero pledges.

What makes many of these corporate pledges meaningful is that they include: specific interim science-based targets, not just distant goals; transparent reporting with third-party verification; and limited reliance on carbon offsets (about which I wrote recently).

Second, there is rapidly growing investment in clean energy (solar and wind in particular), with costs falling dramatically in recent years. This is happening at the same time as a phasing out of fossil fuel power generation, though with considerable regional variations.

Thus, solar panel prices fell around 90% between 2010 and 2023. In many regions, new solar installations are now cheaper than continuing to operate existing coal or gas plants. Wind generation costs have tumbled too as turbine sizes have increased enormously. Between 2010 and 2023 onshore wind costs declined by about two thirds and offshore by about three quarters.

UK's electricity was the cleanest ever in 2024. Just over a third of our energy mix last year was with wind (30%) and solar (5%). The total for all non-nuclear renewables was about 42% and nuclear was about 13% of the mix.

By contrast just over a quarter was from fossil fuels: gas (26%) and coal (0.5%). This is remarkable considering that in 2015 just over half our energy was from fossil fuels. Now the aim of the Government is to totally decarbonise the energy sector by 2035.

So whatever is coming out of the White House, the momentum, here and elsewhere, is unstoppable. This has to be good news!

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