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UK 'failing on greenhouse gases'

The UK is set to miss a key target on cutting greenhouse gases, Tony Blair has admitted.



Fossil fuel burning is one of the biggest sources of CO2 emissions

The prime minister said the UK was not expected to meet its pledge to cut carbon dioxide emissions to 20% below 1990 levels by 2010.

But he stressed it was on course to hit the 12.5% cut demanded in the Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse gases.

Friends of the Earth says emissions are currently down just 7.5% - the same as in 1997 when Labour came to power.

'Embarrassment'

The 20% target is a self-imposed goal for the government, which is also outlining in its progress in a consultation on five-year climate change plans on Wednesday.

Ministers say the UK will do better than the milder goal set in the Kyoto Protocol - the international agreement to cut all greenhouse gases - which for the UK is 12.5% below the 1990 emissions levels.

Last December, the European Commission said only the UK and Sweden were on course with existing policies to meet their share of EU targets.

The prime minister has said he wanted climate change to be a key priority during the UK's presidencies of the G8 and EU in 2005.

BBC environment correspondent Richard Black said the admission the 20% target would be missed was a "very great embarrassment" for the government ahead of its G8 presidency.



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It would be difficult to ask developing nations to take action if too little was being done at home, he said.

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New measures?

Mr Blair was tackled by Liberal Democrat leader Charles Kennedy, who questioned how the news would affect the prime minister's hopes of leading the industrialised world in the issue.

At prime minister's questions, Mr Kennedy asked: "Is it not just again the case, as with so many other things, the prime minister talks a very good game, persuades himself and fails to deliver?"

But Mr Blair said the UK was on course to beat the Kyoto target.

"We set a target of 20%; we are on track to get to 14%. We have years to go before we have to meet that target; we do not accept we won't meet it; we've got to make sure we take the measures to meet it.

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"We've got more to do but we are taking the measures necessary to do it."

Making energy suppliers use more renewable sources and encouraging energy efficiency innovation were among the measures being used, he said.

'Time running out'

News of the British government's failure to meet its targets comes just a day after the US - the world's biggest polluter - again defended its decision not to take part in the Kyoto Protocol.

With just two months before the international agreement to cut greenhouse gases comes into force, senior US negotiator Harlan Watson attacked the treaty as being politically-motivated rather than based on science.

FoE director Tony Juniper has urged Mr Blair to keep to the 20% pledge.

"The UK climate change programme is the last chance for the government to demonstrate it is serious about taking a lead on tackling climate change," he said.

"But time is running out. If the climate change programme fails to make significant cuts in UK greenhouse gas emissions, the prime minister's ability to persuade other countries to take

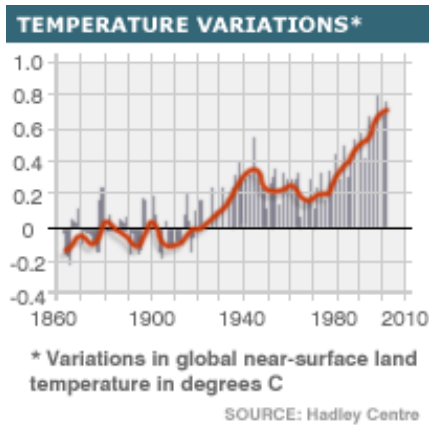
the issue seriously will be totally undermined."

The Confederation of British Industry insisted that business deserved recognition for making considerable efforts to help tackle environmental problems.

John Cridland, CBI deputy director-general, said too many environmental campaigners want to blame business for problems outside the control of companies.

"British business has done more than anybody else to tackle climate change," he said.

"It is business that is responsible for the innovative policy ideas that have a fighting chance of helping solve the problem."



Climate change: The evidence and future predictions

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