



CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Building the North Sea's Energy Future

The [UK Health Alliance on Climate Change](#) is an alliance of 53 UK based health organisations including Royal Colleges, associations and societies representing more than one million health professionals working across all areas of healthcare.

As health professionals, we are deeply concerned about the impact of emissions from fossil fuels on climate change, air pollution and damage to the natural environment, all of which pose huge harms to health and threaten the resilience of our health services.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared climate change to be the major threat to global health, and the risks become more severe with each increment of a degree in global heating. The climate emergency is a health emergency.

The health impacts of burning fossil fuels are already being seen, from increasing risk of pregnancy complications and increasing incidence of children with asthma, to greater risk of stroke, acute kidney injury, and premature death in older adults. We are also seeing the wider impact of climate change on the health system¹. Recent polling has found that almost half of UK health workers have already experienced NHS services being disrupted because of extreme weather and more than two thirds have been unable to get to work because of extreme weather. Our health systems will see increasing patient demand as a consequence of climate change risk factors, and our health infrastructure is at risk from over-heating, flooding and other unpredictable extreme weather events. We must do all we can to tackle climate change to protect the nation's health and the NHS. Accelerating the transition from fossil fuels to clean energy is critical to achieving this.

This is a critical moment for the UK to lead a transformation of our energy system with a robust plan to transition the North Sea in the public interest that has the potential to create high-quality jobs, tackle the climate crisis, and protect health.

The consultation sets out a vision for the North Sea's future. In this response, we set out our views on what is needed to ensure a transition that delivers a fairer, healthier future that protects workers and communities.

¹ [A just energy transition for the good of health](#)

1. Invest in green energy produced in the UK

[Responses related to consultation question 1d: Which locations offer the best opportunities for investment in clean energy industries?]

We support the UK government's focus on fostering an international leading offshore clean energy industry in the North Sea and recognition that opportunities of the transition will require public investment.

By ensuring the costs and benefits of the transition are fairly distributed, there is the potential for the UK to transition to a low carbon energy system while improving the well-being of communities in previously marginalised or 'left-behind' communities.

Achieving this will require increased public investment to grow offshore wind manufacturing in the UK and create good quality jobs.

For years, the UK has entrenched dependency on fossil fuels through subsidies, estimated to be a net total of £15.9 billion in 2022². Instead, subsidies should be redirected to renewable energy manufacturing and technologies and support for policies to achieve a fair transition for workers.

Public funds must be designed to direct new investment, jobs and wealth to regions experiencing decline and high levels of deprivation with credible plans that specify where and how new job opportunities will be created. Doing so could provide job security, help alleviate energy poverty in the longer term, reduce the high levels of air pollution that continue to harm the health of local populations, reduce pressure on the NHS and address inequalities.

This could be achieved by mandating that public investment bodies support workers and communities to transition from high-carbon industries and strengthen their governance to include workers, supply chains, and communities alongside private interests.

2. Support workers and communities to benefit from clean energy jobs

[Responses related to consultation question 1a: What role can government play to ensure that local workers can benefit from the growth of these new energy sectors? 2: What, if any, additional measures could help the oil and gas workforce to transition into a) clean energy and b) other industrial strategy sectors? 4b: What can we do to further support specific local communities that are heavily reliant on oil and gas through the transition?]

The phase-out of fossil fuel industries must be accompanied by opportunities for those who work in the sector to make the transition to clean energy sectors. It has been reported that the UK is facing an estimated shortfall of 330,000 workers in the renewables sector³ and work to develop the workforce must be accelerated to ensure we are not faced with a situation whereby thousands are left out of work through reduction of oil and gas jobs at the same time as gaps in skills needed for renewables.

² [OECD data](#)

³ [Energy Voice](#)

We welcome the UK government's acknowledgement of the decline of the North Sea basin, the impact this will have on the workforce and the urgency of a managed transition. We also support the focus on the workforce transition to clean energy and involving trade unions, workers and communities in the planning process.

While the number of jobs being created in the UK renewable energy industry is growing four times faster than the overall UK employment market, research has shown that more than one-third of the roles are based in London and the South East⁴. In 2023, around one in five of the working population in north-east Scotland were currently either directly or indirectly employed in the offshore energy industry.

Mental health has been identified as critical for oil and gas workers navigating the experience of job loss and unemployment and is further exacerbated by the search for re-employment during this stressful time. Managing the risk mental health spiral has been identified as an important need by supporting workers to find replacement work⁵.

The transition away from oil and gas must protect workers, like those in north-east Scotland who will be directly impacted. This includes removing barriers that make it more difficult for them to move into the renewable industry, ensuring safety, job security and fair pay.

As well as ensuring clean energy opportunities are created in areas most in need of clean energy jobs, the government should work to ensure benefit for the communities most affected from the transition. This could include support for publicly-owned and community-owned energy initiatives that can create and retain wealth locally and community benefit funds for clean energy solutions.

The UK's offshore oil and gas workers and local representatives from affected communities must be given a central role in creating and delivering the transition plan to ensure it meets their needs.

3. End new oil and gas to keep 1.5C within reach

[Responses related to consultation question 11a: To what extent do you agree or disagree that this position on new licenses will support the UK to set a globally leading example in tackling climate change? 11b: Is there anything else you think should be considered in the government's definition of i) licensing and ii) new fields? What would be the case for doing so, including consideration of the commercial and environmental impacts?]

We welcome the UK government's acknowledgement of evidence from the International Energy Agency of the unacceptably high risk that new fossil fuel exploration and production would lock-in global heating exceeding 1.5C and recognition that current plans for global production of oil and gas are not compatible with safe climate limits. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has warned that current policies are insufficient to meet the 1.5C target and that rapid and deep emissions cuts are needed. It has warned that any new fossil fuel projects will push the world beyond the 1.5C warming limit and generate stranded assets⁶. We welcome the UK government's commitment to accelerate away from fossil fuels in an orderly and equitable manner and align future UK production with climate science.

⁴ [The Guardian](#)

⁵ https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/113368/1/Denyer_thesis.pdf

⁶ <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-cycle/>

The commitment to end new licences for exploration is a welcome first step that sends a clear signal to the industry and investors of the government's serious intent to transition away from oil and gas production.

The UK government must also rule out new field approvals under existing licences if it is to succeed in its aim of aligning UK oil and gas production with 1.5C and climate science. This includes new projects like Rosebank and Jackdaw (i.e. fields that have not been developed for extraction).

These oil and gas fields in the UK would be at odds with the government's clean energy and health missions and its commitment to deliver clean power by 2030 and to shift from sickness to prevention.

The UK also has a global obligation to account for cumulative emissions and historical contributions by cutting emissions more rapidly and to meet commitments made at COP28 to transition away from fossil fuels. A commitment to rule out new field approvals would support the UK government to establish credible international leadership, send a clear signal to investors, and secure a healthier future.

The definition of 'new fields' in the consultation should be clarified to align with the commonly accepted meaning of the term (i.e. fields that have not been developed for extraction) to provide assurance that the UK government is serious about taking a climate science-aligned approach.

Conclusion

This consultation is a critical opportunity for the UK government to deliver a transition plan for the North Sea which supports workers and communities to benefit from high-quality, clean energy jobs, helps the UK to achieve targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and keep global heating to 1.5C within reach, demonstrate global leadership, and protect health.

Members of the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change are:

Association of British Neurologists	Greener Practice CIC
Association of Clinical Psychologists UK	Healthcare Infection Society
Association of Coloproctologists of Great Britain and Ireland	Infection Prevention Society
Association of Dental Hospitals	Intensive Care Society
Association of Paediatric Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland	Nursing Standard Journal
Association of Surgeons of Great Britain and Ireland	Paediatric Critical Care Society
British and Irish Association of Stroke Physicians	Planetary Health Report Card
British Association of Critical Care Nurses	Plant Based Health Professionals
British Association of Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition	The Lancet
British Cardiovascular Society	Real Zero
British Dental Association	Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons
British Geriatrics Society	Royal College of Anaesthetists
British Medical Association	Royal College of Emergency Medicine
British Medical Journal	Royal College of General Practitioners
British Society of Gastroenterology	Royal College of Nursing
British Society for Haematology	Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
British Society of Lifestyle Medicine	Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health
British Thoracic Society	Royal College of Physicians
College of Operating Department Practitioners	Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow
College of Paramedics	Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh
Faculty of Medical Leadership and Management	Royal College of Psychiatrists
Faculty of Pharmaceutical Medicine	Royal College of Surgeons of England
Faculty of Public Health	Royal Pharmaceutical Society
Faculty of Sexual & Reproductive Healthcare	Society for Acute Medicine
Florence Nightingale Foundation	Students for Global Health
	The Academy of Medical Sciences
	The Physiological Society
	UK Kidney Association