Influencing UK energy and climate policy, experiences from a think tank

- Chaitanya Kumar
Green Alliance

Green Alliance is an independent think tank and charity focused on ambitious leadership for the environment.

Since 1979, we have been working with the most influential leaders in business, NGOs and politics to accelerate political action and create transformative policy for a green and prosperous UK.
Communicating with brevity and clarity

Better connected
How the UK can make the most of low cost, low carbon energy from Europe
January 2019

Acting on net zero now
Climate change, as an important policy area is now political mainstream

Tories target young voters with eco-plans to ensure Britain goes green by 2050

Today’s climate and energy headlines:
- Tories target young voters with eco-plans to ensure Britain goes green by 2050
- UK needs billions a year to meet 2050 climate targets
- Outlook improves but offshore wind is not yet subsidy-free
- Hundreds of thousands join Canada climate strikes
- It was a momentous week for climate change – but real progress is yet to come
- State of the Climate in 2018
It’s also reflected in the way we talk about it
But politics has been anything but stable

- We've had over 20 ministers (junior, SoS) responsible for the energy and climate brief in the last decade. That is unsustainable and not suitable for long term policy thinking and development.

- Evidence led policy making is experiencing a bit of crisis in confidence. Some of us have moved towards a more, as I like to say, policy led evidence making while others are too cautious of evidence and therefore too incremental.
Changing narratives on energy and climate policy

**Orthodoxy**

- Economic growth / Austerity / Green crap
- Nuclear and gas (and coal) / Big 6 energy market
- CCS essential for heavy industry

**Modified orthodoxy**

- Green growth
- Large scale renewables / GIB ISAs / Big 60,000
- “Resource productivity”

**Alternatives**

- Helicopter Money/ Green New Deal (UK) / Degrowth
- Decentralised / Community energy / public ownership
- Circular economy / access not ownership
Where are we now with party political views on energy and climate?

- Conservative (tech, fusion, free trade, markets with a bit of regulation)
- Labour (state, state and more state)
- Lib Dems (everything that the NGOs want us to do but will never win a majority)
- Greens (a more acute problem as Lib dems)
- SNP & Plaid (ambitious in their own right, willing to act on evidence but represent fewer emissions and depend on national policy to work)
Couching our message through politics

- Language matters.
- We focus on technical solutions with the current government.
- Highlight market opportunities - offshore wind is a great example
- Everybody loves a good jobs story. Local industrial strategy.
- Focusing on *raising the baseline, future proofing and doubling down.*
- Brexit as an opportunity, for eg. in the agriculture sector. Public money for public goods.
- The CCC's recommendations for eg. are a good case study of sound policy recommendations made through political nuance.
- Businesses are coming around to saying we need policy direction and civil servants hear that… but politics if ideologically driven is unhelpful to make sound policy
Building coalitions

• Ministers have immense power to change policy but they respond to pressure
• As a small interest group, we hold little sway and building coalitions becomes critical
• Net zero legislation in the UK is a good example
• Greener UK and Brexit - env bill, agriculture, fisheries, trade and clean air

The coalition

Greener UK is a group of 14 major environmental organisations, with a combined public membership of over 8 million. We are united in the belief that leaving the EU is a pivotal moment to restore and enhance the UK’s environment.
Advocacy

• Communicating your ideas, policy recommendations across different possible avenues.
• Reverberating it constantly, making it irresistible.
• Communicating positions and policy ideas to officials, engaging MPs, fostering champions and drumbeat of media.
• Select committees, PMQs, constituent pressure
• Public events - organizing public forums for leaders to make announcements, share progress, communicate government posturing and sometimes take shots at opposition. Green Alliance events are sought after and leaders of all hues have spoken at our events
Escalation and opposition

• Need for escalation and opposition when necessary

• Eg. No deal preparations. Compromises on environmental protections are no gos. If our red lines are being crossed, then we need to step up the ante.

• Willingness to make new allies and lose old ones.
Example: Clean Energy Alliance influencing the Levy Control Framework

Policy funnel stages:

Influencing activities:
- (Re)framing; influence regional, national & MP opinions on renewables
- New frames & analysis in expert debates
- Aligning NGO and industry advocacy on LCF review
- LCF decision
Change isn’t guaranteed

• Ideology and Onshore wind - ideology and the notion of shire tories hating wind turbines as a blithe on the landscape. A 2015 commitment unnecessarily sustained.

• Lobbying and Energy efficiency - green deal burn, policy put on hiatus. Lobbying led by groups like Persimmon led to a collapse of good standards like zero carbon homes.

• External political pressures and CCS - part of the policy cull in 2015. Another case study of how not to do policy. We are now revisiting it with vigor and making sure CCS is supported.

• Brexit and the threat of unwinding years of progress on other aspects of regulation (like product standards)

• Finance and local authorities – where bottom up ambition remains shackled, unable to fiscally prioritise climate action.

• Projects like HS2, Road building, Heathrow, Fracking, Nuclear, North Sea oil and gas .. Several others issues have become politically toxic and therefore hard to apply simplistic policy analysis.
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