

THE CONSTANT ECONOMY



next page 

HOME

STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3

STEP 4

STEP 5

STEP 6

STEP 7

STEP 8

STEP 9

STEP 10

THE TEN STEPS

The Constant Economy is effectively a programme for action: a ten-point plan for turning Britain around and moving it in the right direction. It looks at the key environmental problems we face as a nation, and provides workable, practical solutions

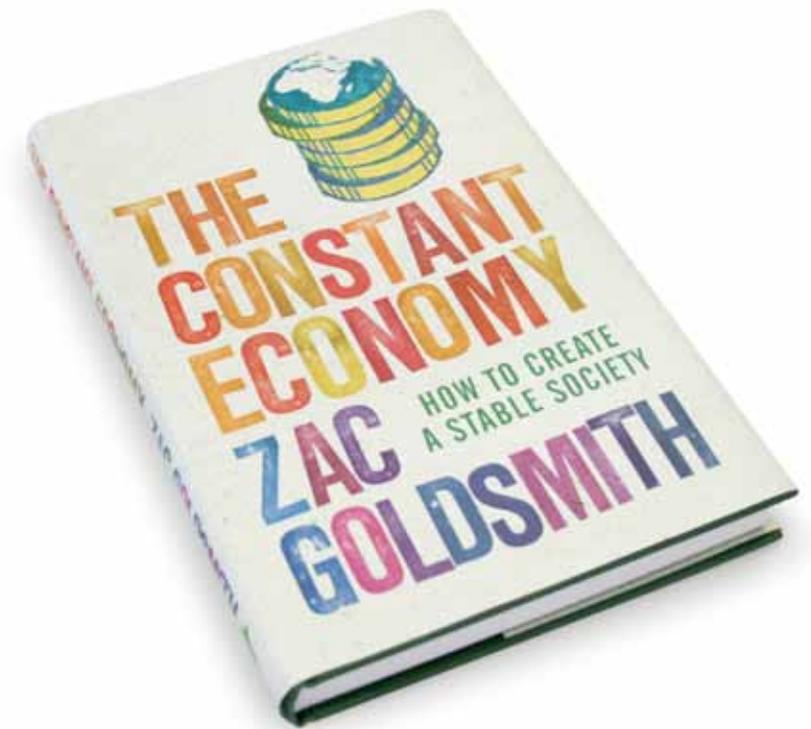
Put in place, they would help us achieve a constant economy; one where resources are valued, not wasted, where food is grown sustainably and goods are built to last. A system where energy security is based on the use of renewable sources, and where communities are valued as our greatest hedge against social, economic and environmental instability. They would deliver an economy that operates at the human scale, and above all, that recognises nature's limits.

Here are the ten steps, brutally summarised for the purpose of the web:



Contents

	Page
Step 1 Measuring what matters	2
Step 2 Power to the people	3
Step 3 The precautionary principle	5
Step 4 Food quality, food security	6
Step 5 Save our seas	9
Step 6 An energy revolution	11
Step 7 Getting around	14
Step 8 Built to last	17
Step 9 A zero waste economy	19
Step 10 Playing our part	21



STEP 1: MEASURING WHAT MATTERS

◀ previous page next page ▶

HOME

STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3

STEP 4

STEP 5

STEP 6

STEP 7

STEP 8

STEP 9

STEP 10

Almost every nation on Earth uses Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to measure its economic growth. The trouble is – it doesn't.

Expressed as a monetary value, GDP simply measures economic transactions, indiscriminately. It cannot tell the difference between useful transactions and damaging ones.

So for example, if every man in Britain were to pay his neighbour for sex, we'd see a marked increase in the nation's GDP. Chopping down a rainforest and turning it into toilet paper increases GDP. If crime escalates, the resulting investment in prisons and private security will all add to GDP and be measured as 'growth'. When the Exxon Valdez oil tanker ran aground and spilt its vast load of oil on the pristine Alaskan shoreline, US GDP actually soared as legal work, media coverage and clean-up costs were all added to the national accounts.

While GDP measures what we produce, it does not have the ability to factor in the cost of what we destroy to make it. It can only add – it can't subtract. We could empty the oceans of fish, chop down every last tree, fill the rivers with poison and pollute every last breath of air, and all the time, GDP could still be rising, and the economy could still be growing.

In other words, what most of us would regard as negatives, the economy measures as positives. Ultimately, GDP tells us nothing about the kind of country we actually inhabit.

VOTER DEMAND: MEASURING WHAT MATTERS

Establish a fully independent 'Progress Commission', staffed by experts from a variety of fields: economists, environmentalists, statisticians etc.

It would identify a set of key indicators for environmental, economic and social health – areas for which data can reliably be collected. Working with a wholly independent Office of National Statistics, the Commission would conduct an annual audit, and require the government to respond. People would be able to judge the effectiveness of government policy on areas that matter to them.

A commitment to green taxation:

We cannot move to a sustainable economy without a radical programme of green taxation. That doesn't mean extra taxation. It means shifting the burden away from taxing good things like employment, and towards pollution, waste and the use of scarce resources. Green taxes should never be allowed to become stealth taxes.

STEP 2: POWER TO THE PEOPLE

HOME

STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3

STEP 4

STEP 5

STEP 6

STEP 7

STEP 8

STEP 9

STEP 10

Over the years, political power has become ever more remote. That is true at every level. International decision making bodies like the EU are almost completely insulated from any real democratic pressure.

Nationally, we have an opportunity every five or so years to choose from one Party or another, and in between we must accept whatever decision is made. It is still truer at local level, where the Local Authorities have been stripped of their powers by successive governments.

It's time for direct democracy. What that means, very simply, is that ordinary people are given significantly more power – real power – to intervene on any political issue, at any time of their choosing. With sufficient popular support, existing laws can be challenged, new laws can be proposed, and the direction of political activity, at local and national level, can be determined by people rather than elites.

This would radically transform politics. Not only would we be able to stop many unpopular policies from becoming law, but we'd also be able to kick-start positive changes. The whole process of calling a referendum would ensure more widespread and much better informed debate.

We'd also see greater legitimacy given to controversial decisions. Under the current system, it's difficult not to feel swindled or hoodwinked when a policy on which you believe you hold the majority view is defeated by votes in parliament or in the council chamber. Under direct democracy the losers at least have the important consolation of knowing that they were given the opportunity to make their case to their fellow citizens on a level playing field.

VOTER DEMAND: DIRECT DEMOCRACY

With sufficient popular support, people should be able to challenge existing laws and propose new ones. The mechanisms of direct democracy are many, and the precise formula would need to be debated.

But three key mechanisms are:

- ▶ Ballot initiatives, where new laws are proposed by citizens.
- ▶ Popular referenda, in which existing laws can be challenged.
- ▶ Recall initiatives, allowing people to remove unpopular public officials.

It should also be possible to trigger referendums and recall initiatives at a local level. In some case that would mean at the level of a Ward, in others, a Borough. The key is that decisions are taken at the appropriate level.

STEP 2: POWER TO THE PEOPLE

(continued)

HOME

STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3

STEP 4

STEP 5

STEP 6

STEP 7

STEP 8

STEP 9

STEP 10

'Our Say', one of the growing number of campaigns backing the greater use of referendums, has set out how Direct Democracy might work in practice:

- ▶ Each year, on Referendum Day, people would be able to vote on issues of concern, both national and local.
- ▶ To trigger a referendum on a particular topic, an agreed percentage of the electorate would need to sign a petition. If it were 2.5 percent, a million signatures would be required to trigger a ballot on a national issue. For local issues affecting, say, a district council, this would require around 4,000 people to back the proposition.
- ▶ The Electoral Commission would check the validity of the petition and agree the wording of the question on the ballot paper to ensure that the question was fair and balanced.
- ▶ People would need to sign petitions in person and the signatures to trigger a vote would need to be collected in a one-year period.
- ▶ There would be strict limits on the amount of money that could be spent on referendum campaigns.
- ▶ Balance in TV and radio coverage of the issues under discussion would be a legal requirement, as well as fair access to other media coverage for each side.

SWITZERLAND: DIRECT DEMOCRACY IN PRACTICE

In Switzerland, if 100,000 signatures can be collected within an 18-month period, then a proposal can be proactively put on the ballot paper and voted on by the general public. If it is passed, then it becomes law.

One example of this in practice is the so-called 'Alpine Initiative'. In 1987, the region of Uri was badly damaged by violent storms. As a result, the transit roads had to be closed. Noticing the beneficial effect this had on the quality of the local air, the people of Uri decided that they wanted the roads to remain closed. So they began organising a referendum to demand that all heavy goods should be carried by rail (with the exception of goods loaded or unloaded in Switzerland), and that there be no further expansion of the alpine transit roads in their region.

Despite heavy pressure from the Federal Parliament, the National Council, the Council of States, the united people of Uri won their battle, and the motion was approved in 1994.

DEMOCRACY MAKES YOU HAPPY

The practice of direct democracy is common in Switzerland, which frequently uses referenda in major decisions taken by the twenty-six different cantons that comprise the country's federal structure. Cantons vary in the thresholds set to trigger a referendum – for instance the minimum number of signatures required. When comparing life satisfaction between cantons, researchers have shown that differences in the structure of direct democracy have a stronger effect on wellbeing than income.

Direct democracy has benefits for people who participate in referenda as well as for the Swiss public generally. A survey comparing budget decisions in over 130 Swiss towns found that public expenditure and debt are lower in cities that require a budget deficit to be approved by citizens. Cantons with direct democracy also report higher overall productivity and lower corruption, and their citizens are better informed about the issue concerned.

STEP 3: THE PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE

HOME

STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3

STEP 4

STEP 5

STEP 6

STEP 7

STEP 8

STEP 9

STEP 10

Whether it's GM food, controversial vaccines, radiation, or fluoride in our drinking water, society is expected to accept, unquestioningly, scientific judgments.

To question such edicts is to court derision; to stand up to the self-appointed experts runs the risk of being branded a 'luddite'. Over the last few decades, however, the fallibility of scientists has become more visible.

We have begun to understand the business of science more clearly than ever before – especially the way it is funded. The vast majority of scientific research is paid for by big business, for commercial ends. There is nothing wrong with this – in fact it's a necessity for advances to be made – but regulatory bodies and the general public should look cautiously at the results.

It's a question of interests. A company engaged in developing GM plants has little incentive to look for potential hazards. Any problems found in development will slow down the process of bringing a product to market. In a highly competitive world, businesses regard science as something of an arms race, and speed is of the essence.

As big businesses hold the purse strings, there are far fewer grants available to examine the safety of new products than there are to approve them. The interests of consumers are therefore very much secondary to the swift return on investment. That, combined with the fact that a revolving door exists between the regulators and the regulated means that consumers are often right to be sceptical of official assurances of 'safety'.

When runaway corporate science combines with a weak and sometimes corrupted regulatory system, consumers are invariably at risk.

We need to move to a position where new products are assumed to be guilty until they have been proven innocent. Otherwise, when dangers are detected after a product has been unleashed, too many people with too much to lose will block honest progress. The Precautionary Principle is not the 'cowardice of a pampered society'. It is the only possible mechanism for avoiding potentially catastrophic errors.

VOTER DEMAND: RAISING THE BURDEN OF PROOF

Our government must have, at the core of its regulatory approach, complete adherence to the Precautionary Principle, where new technologies like GM are assumed to be guilty until they are proven to be innocent. We need to know that proper and thorough research has been carried out – not merely presented by a vested interest to our hopelessly compromised regulators.

STEP 4: FOOD QUALITY, FOOD SECURITY

HOME

STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3

STEP 4

STEP 5

STEP 6

STEP 7

STEP 8

STEP 9

STEP 10

Even as food prices began to soar in 2008 on the back of rising fuel costs, declining harvests and increased use of land to grow biofuels, the government refused to budge from its view that food security is a non-issue in the UK.

“Because the UK is a developed economy”, DEFRA said, “we are able to access the food we need on the global market.” At the time, some 14 countries faced food-related unrest, from ‘tortilla riots’ in Mexico to protests over the price of pasta in Italy.

Until the 1830s, Britain was virtually 100 percent self-sufficient. But we now import anywhere between 40 and 51 percent of the food we need. We are becoming a nation increasingly reliant for our most basic survival on other countries.

But how long can this be sustained? Like all global systems, the global food economy is vulnerable to international political crises, rising fuel costs, terrorism, population increases and any number of other factors. Not only that, but it also heaps increasing pressure on the world’s environment.

According to a report by the UN, a combination of drought, deforestation, industrial agriculture and climatic volatility is responsible for the loss of 250 million acres of fertile soil each year, undermining the food security of 1.2 billion people in 110 countries.

And if this sounds bleak, the future hardly seems rosier. It is estimated that if just one-sixth of the West Antarctic ice sheet melts, the resulting one metre sea level rise will cause 30 percent of the world’s total cropland to be swamped. We are becoming reliant for our survival on a fundamentally unreliable system. We are effectively banking everything on the assumption that we will always be able to pay for the food we need, that the world’s breadbaskets will always be able to provide it, that cheap oil will always be available to distribute it.

VOTER DEMAND: BETTER FOOD FOR US, BETTER INCOME FOR FARMERS

Sustainable procurement:

The government spends approximately £1.8 billion on food for schools, hospitals and prisons. This money should be invested wherever possible in the most sustainable, most local produce.

Invested wisely, it could provide a massive boost to farmers and would make good quality food available to some of the most vulnerable members of society: children, through the school meal service; patients in hospitals; and the elderly in care homes. It would benefit the environment through reduced ‘food miles’, reduced congestion from freight, and by encouraging farming with fewer pesticides and ultimately, greater biodiversity. Without spending more, the Royal Cornwall Hospital Trusts already source 83 percent of their food from local Cornish farmers.

Food as part of the curriculum:

Children also need to know about food, where it comes from, how it is produced. Every school should be helped to include food growing in the curriculum. For some that will mean twinning with farms. For others it will mean literally building their own smallholdings.

STEP 4: FOOD QUALITY, FOOD SECURITY

(continued)

HOME

STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3

STEP 4

STEP 5

STEP 6

STEP 7

STEP 8

STEP 9

STEP 10

VOTER DEMAND: REFORMING THE FOOD SUBSIDIES

The old EU system of subsidising farmers for producing as much food for export as possible, has come in for justified criticism. The process has cost billions, and has caused long term problems. For example, one of the reasons flooding has become so severe in the UK is that for decades we paid farmers to bring marginal land into production. That meant draining wetlands, clearing wooded slopes, straightening rivers and embanking water meadows. Up to 40 percent of the Severn River catchment – site of the worst floods in the wet summer of 2007 – was probably degraded in this way.

We are beginning to see a shift towards paying farmers who manage the environment responsibly. But it has been sluggish. The Common Agriculture Policy budget needs to be reduced, but there will always be a need for a fixed sum to be directed towards paying farmers for services that the market cannot recognise. Upland hill farms for instance will never be economically viable, but they are worth protecting.

Reforming the Common Agriculture Policy:

The bulk of the vast funds made available via the Common Agriculture Policy should be used for compensating farmers who manage the environment responsibly. The remainder should be invested in renewing the infrastructure needed to support a local food economy. Without it, a renaissance of local supply chains can only be an aspiration. This second part needs to be phased out over time, as the infrastructure is built.

Ending perverse subsidies:

We also need to address the indirect subsidies used to support the wrong type of food production. For example, 75 percent of UK drinking water sources are contaminated with pesticides above the accepted levels. Removing them from the water supply in the UK costs us about £300 million annually. Pesticide manufacturers pass on the costs to farmers, who in turn pass it on to water companies, who in turn pass it on to us consumers via water bills. When we talk of 'cheap food' it's worth remembering that more often than not, we have paid twice for it – through our taxes and over the counter.

Subsidies in the public interest:

We should insist that our CAP funds be used exclusively to reward farmers for managing their land in such a way that is beneficial to society, but un-rewarded by the market. The overall CAP budget should halve over a ten year period or so, with the diminishing part of the budget being used to invest in rebuilding the small scale domestic food infrastructure we've lost over the decades.

Make the polluter pay:

The government needs to set about identifying and calculating the indirect subsidies to agriculture. The costs of inappropriate, or polluting agriculture needs to be taken up by the polluter – not the taxpayer.

VOTER DEMAND: BREAKING THE SUPERMARKET ARMLOCK

The four largest supermarkets now control 75% of the retail market, and their growing dominance of the multiple retailers has taken its toll – on farmers, on small shopkeepers and on the environment. More than 2,000 small independent shops close down every year, a number that is growing as a result of the recession.

Remove the planning bias:

The Government is planning to relax these laws to encourage more out-of-town supermarkets. At every level, planning policy should be geared towards town centre enhancement, 'walkability' and maintaining the viability of independent shops.

A code of practice:

Supermarkets with more than eight percent market share need to sign up to a new, strengthened and mandatory code of conduct. Amongst other things, this would ensure fair practice when they deal with farmers.

Moratorium on mergers:

It is already a fact that the big supermarkets enjoy disproportionate market share. Parliament needs to agree a reasonable cap, and set a timetable for achieving it. That may mean breaking up the largest monopolies.

STEP 4: FOOD QUALITY, FOOD SECURITY (continued)

◀ previous page next page ▶

HOME

STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3

STEP 4

STEP 5

STEP 6

STEP 7

STEP 8

STEP 9

STEP 10

VOTER DEMAND: FAIR COMPETITION AND HIGHER STANDARDS

Britain's farmers compete on an uneven playing field. Our regulatory approach assumes that farmers are either incompetent or dishonest, and the effect is a torrent of red tape that damages the smaller operators.

In addition, the standards required of our farmers are already higher than most, and as a result they face unfair competition from cheaper imports from countries where standards are less demanding.

Despite higher than elsewhere, there are profound problems in the way we raise some of our livestock. The conditions in which many are kept are cruel and unnatural, and it is only because of our discovery of antibiotics in the first part of the 20th century that we are able to maintain them at all. The routine use of antibiotics to accelerate growth and to keep animals alive in appalling conditions has led to a rapid spread of antibiotic-resistance among harmful bacteria.

A new approach:

As many environmental payments as possible should be based on existing farm assurance schemes. With standards imposed by these existing bodies, the government could outsource inspection and regulation. It offers real incentives to farmers – payments for environmental goods, and less regulatory intervention. Where that trust is abused, the farmer would revert to a routine of heavy regulation, and loss of assurance status, which might in turn lead to loss of contracts with retailers.

Campaign for higher international standards:

It should be possible for nations to insist that imported foods meet their own standards. France already demands the same animal welfare standards of imported food as it expects at home. We must do the same.

A British label:

If there were a minimum standard label for British food, consumers would be able to apply pressure on the large retailers to favour sustainable produce, which would then become cheaper through a healthier economy of scale. But the label must reflect the truth. At the moment, food can be labelled as 'British', no matter where it has been produced, as long as it is processed in Britain. This practice must be outlawed.

Phase out the antibiotics:

A timetable needs to be set for the banning of routine antibiotic use on farms. In addition, the government needs to lobby for an EU-wide ban, and to push the World Trade Organisation to recognise the move as a non-trade related issue. In other words, countries would be free to ban imports of meat raised on a diet of antibiotics.

Protection against GM:

We should follow the lead of the Welsh Assembly Government which has introduced a law requiring farmers growing GM crops to publicly register with the government, and to assume full financial responsibility in the event that their GM crops cause loss of earnings for neighbouring farms. Under EU law, Wales is unable, and therefore unwilling to declare itself 'GM-free', but such a measure makes it highly unlikely that Welsh farmers will take the risk of growing GM crops. British public remains hostile to GM food, believing rightly that the market is way ahead of the science. We should take a far more robust approach with the EU, demanding the right to declare ourselves GM-free.

STEP 5: SAVE OUR SEAS

HOME

STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3

STEP 4

STEP 5

STEP 6

STEP 7

STEP 8

STEP 9

STEP 10

In just a few decades, we have brought the world's oceans to the brink of exhaustion.

Between 70 and 80 percent of the world's marine fish stocks are either fully exploited, overexploited, depleted or recovering from depletion. 15 of the 17 largest fisheries in the world are so heavily depleted that future catches cannot be guaranteed. There is virtually no area of the world's oceans, nor of individual species, that is immune from our activities. A paper published in Nature suggested that we have lost 90 percent of the world's big predatory fish such as tunas and sharks.

The destruction of our marine environment is more than an environmental issue. About 200 million people depend directly on the fishing industry. For more than a billion people, fish is their primary source of protein. The export value of the world fish trade is greater than the combined value of rice, coffee, sugar and tea exports. If the fishing industry collapses, countless coastal towns and villages will become dead zones. The economic and social effects will be profound.

Our insatiable appetite for seafood, coupled with the brutal efficiency of our industrial fishing technologies, has wreaked havoc. But above all, it has been a combination of Government weakness, industrial greed and a scientific community lacking the courage to sound the alarm that has resulted in one of the greatest ecological tragedies of our time. But the oceans have a remarkable ability to recover when the pressure is eased. When World War II prevented fishing in the Atlantic, fish populations soared.

VOTER DEMAND: A BLUEPRINT FOR MARINE RECOVERY

Reform the Common Fisheries Policy and double our sovereign waters:

The UK should stay in the Common Fisheries Policy, but on radical conditions. We should be willing to withdraw if those conditions aren't met. Above all, it needs to be governed by science, not politics. It is estimated that over the past couple of decades, EU Ministers have routinely set fish quotas three percent higher than stocks can accommodate, against scientific advice.

Specifically, Britain needs to at least double its sovereign waters to 12 nautical miles. Technically, we already have 12 nautical miles of sovereign waters, but the furthest six miles can be used by other countries. The nearest six miles, over which we have exclusive control, are not enough to sustain our traditional fishing fleets. If we asserted our rights over the full 12 miles, and other nations did the same, we would be able to establish new rules and initiatives in the direct interests of our own authentic fishing communities.

Marine protected areas:

By far the most effective measure would be to divide the seas into a vast network of marine protected areas (MPAs), with varying levels of protection. Where MPAs have been introduced, they have worked, and have been embraced by local fishing communities. The Government should lobby hard for the creation of a global network of MPAs, to recover stocks, protect the oceans and the fishing industry as a whole. We should start immediately in our own waters, where just two percent is protected against overfishing.

Ban the tools of destruction:

In a sustainable world, many of the tools of industrial fishing simply wouldn't exist. It is hard to imagine sustainable fishing while 60-mile long lines are permitted. Globally there are around 10 billion baited hooks on these lines, and each year they are responsible for the deaths of millions of sharks, hundreds of thousands of sea birds and marine mammals, and numerous endangered sea turtles.

The same is true of Purse Seine Nets. Some seines are one kilometre long and 200 metres deep and are big enough to engulf two Millennium Domes if placed one on top of the other. They catch and kill entire shoals of fish.

In the 1980s, 'rockhopper' trawls were introduced. These are fitted with large rubber tyres that allow the net to pass easily over any rough surface, and in doing so destroy whole ecosystems – including coral reefs. The largest can move boulders weighing 25 tonnes. Scars up to four kilometres long have been found in the reefs of the north-east Atlantic

STEP 5: SAVE OUR SEAS

(continued)

◀ previous page next page ▶

HOME

STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3

STEP 4

STEP 5

STEP 6

STEP 7

STEP 8

STEP 9

STEP 10

Ocean. In heavily fished areas off southern Australia, 90 percent of the surfaces where coral used to grow are now bare rock.

So-called 'ghost nets' – vast nets that have been lost or abandoned by fishing vessels – also drift through the oceans catching fish indiscriminately and causing havoc wherever they go. An estimated 1,000 kilometres of ghost nets are released each year into the North Pacific Ocean alone.

These tools of destruction are fundamentally incompatible with sustainable fishing, and must be banned.

No more waste: limit the catch:

Industrial fishing generates about 25 million tons of unwanted 'bycatch' every year. These unwanted fish are simply dumped overboard, dead or dying. For every pound of wild-caught shrimp, at least 10 pounds of other sea life is wasted in this way. One clear mechanism for stopping this is to put limits on the total catch irrespective of what it is that's been caught. That would encourage much more selective and careful fishing practice.

A new fishing lobby:

There has never been a battle between ordinary fishermen and conservationists. Both want and need sustainable stocks of fish. The battle is between nature and the vast industrial fishing units.

Consider the Atlantic Dawn, the world's biggest fishing vessel. It has purse seine nets with draw-string necks, 3,600 feet in circumference and 550 feet deep. Its trawl nets are 1,200 feet in breadth and 96 feet in height. It can process up to 400 tonnes of fish a day and can store up to 7,000 tonnes of frozen fish, grossing about \$2 million for each full fishing trip. So huge is the vessel that the Irish Government had to encourage the EU to change its fishing rules to allow the Atlantic Dawn in European waters.

At the other end of the spectrum, over a million households in England and Wales have at least one sea angler. The total number is estimated at three million. The fact that they all catch fish is the only common thread between them. Beyond that, they are necessarily in conflict.

By choosing to identify the factory fishing operations as the so-called 'fishing lobby', our leaders have created a situation where fishing communities, countless livelihoods, the environment and food security itself are all under serious threat.

If instead the government chose to view the fishing communities that line our shores as well as these three million anglers, as the true voice of fishing, the demands

placed on them by this new and infinitely more authentic 'fishing lobby' would be considerably different, and considerably healthier. A first step would be to license Britain's sea anglers in order to create a large body of 'self-regulators' who would effectively police the newly established Marine Protected Areas.

Higher standards for fish farms:

Politicians pin much of their hope on fish farms, hoping that as the seas are depleted, we will continue to find sustenance from artificial systems. Fish farming is already a major source of food for the planet's population; it is also big business. Almost 60 million tonnes of edible seafood were produced by aquaculture in 2004 – 43 percent of all seafood sold globally.

But fish farming is intimately connected with the future of ocean fish stocks. Salmon farmers for example need at least three pounds of wild-caught fish to produce one pound of salmon. Fish farms also spread diseases, and the chemicals used in aquaculture routinely contaminate surrounding waters.

Fish farms are potentially part of the answer, but they require much higher standards, and the focus should be on farming fish that eat vegetable protein. The development of plant-based substitute feeds should be a priority. The list of approved medicines that are used in Aquaculture also needs to be monitored continuously.

STEP 6: AN ENERGY REVOLUTION

HOME

STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3

STEP 4

STEP 5

STEP 6

STEP 7

STEP 8

STEP 9

STEP 10

Energy – the way it is generated and the way that it is used – has been a contentious issue for decades, and as a consequence, much of what makes up Britain’s energy strategy is a rag-bag collection of ideas that do not address the fundamental challenges that we face: energy security and climate change.

Ensuring that we have enough power to function as a nation is an absolute necessity, but doing so is not as easy as it once was. According to PriceWaterhouseCoopers, Europe needs to spend £5.6 trillion on improving its ‘crumbling’ energy infrastructure just to ensure a continuous future supply. From 2020 onwards, on current projections, we are likely to be importing up to 80 percent of our energy. The effect is that we are becoming unnecessarily vulnerable to international events.

Find out the truth about oil:

If oil were to peak suddenly and supplies tail off more rapidly than hoped, it would wipe out most if not all plans on offer from governments across the world. It is no exaggeration to say that our entire economic system and way of life is based on the assumption of ever-available cheap oil.

If this premise is incorrect – whether as a result of geological or geopolitical problems – it’s hard to imagine the upheaval that would follow. A number of high profile oil industry representatives believe it is incorrect. The CEO of Total, the ex head of exploration and production of Saudi Aramco – the world’s largest oil company – and the International Energy Agency have all separately suggested that we are at or are approaching the peak.

A cross-party taskforce should be established to draw up a risk assessment. It should not invite the traditional fuel industry to take part, as it would effectively be studying a risk-scenario that says their maths is incorrect. Finally, the taskforce should be required to publically report its findings within a year.

At the same time, the government should put pressure on the UN, or International Energy Authority to undertake a review of the world’s oil reserves. If the economic models of every nation on earth are based on the assumption of everlasting oil supplies, it is reasonable that they should know how much oil actually exists.

STEP 6: AN ENERGY REVOLUTION

(continued)

◀ previous page next page ▶

HOME

STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3

STEP 4

STEP 5

STEP 6

STEP 7

STEP 8

STEP 9

STEP 10

Capture the heat:

We waste a lot of energy, particularly in the way we distribute it. Most of our electricity is produced using fossil fuels, and the way it is transported to the end-user is antiquated. Huge, centralised power stations transmit energy along transmission lines to houses and offices, yet only two thirds of the energy originally generated reaches its intended recipient. The rest is lost through the lines and as waste heat from cooling towers. A fifth of the UK's emissions of carbon dioxide come from this waste heat alone.

Switching to a decentralised energy system could radically change this. If a small-scale, clean, efficient power plant is constructed near where the energy is to be used, the heat that would otherwise be wasted can be used. Given that in 2000, 83 percent of energy usage in the home was for space and water heating, according to the Energy Saving Trust, the potential to use this type of Combined Heat and Power is vast.

It also improves the resilience of the power supply. A general power cut or interference could, for example, only affect a very small area – something that New York discovered when the East Coast grid failed in 2003, plunging whole cities into darkness, all except the New York skyscrapers that had their own decentralised energy systems.

In little more than a decade, The Netherlands has made combined heat and power the single largest supplier of the country's energy needs. One way for Britain to move in the same direction, is to introduce a levy on waste heat from future electricity generators. This would immediately encourage companies to base their power generating capacity as near as

possible to where it is needed, and facilitate the move towards community level generation. The money raised via the levy would need to be used to invest in a decentralised energy infrastructure.

Reward the pioneers:

The Energy Saving Trust believes microgeneration could provide 30 to 40 percent of the UK's electricity by 2050 and reduce domestic emissions by around 15 percent. According to New Carbon Finance, global investment in new energy alone amounted to \$100 billion in 2006 – up from \$70 billion in 2005. But this still remains much less than the money flowing into conventional energy.

One way to tip the balance is to follow the German example of rewarding homeowners for generating their own energy. It's called the Feed-in-Tariff (FIT), and is a simple concept. Anyone generating solar photovoltaic, wind or hydro electricity is guaranteed a 20-year-fixed payment at a level designed to cut payback time to a matter of years - fewer than 10 years, compared with 25 or 30 years in Britain – and gives industry the certainty of long-term demand to make it worthwhile investing in new technologies and generating plants.

The results have been spectacular. Germany has 200 times as much solar energy as Britain. It generates 12 percent of its electricity from renewables, compared with 4.6 percent in Britain. The industry has also created a quarter of a million jobs – a number that is growing fast. In stark contrast, Britain has only 25,000, a number that represents the amount of jobs created in the industry in Germany in 2008 alone.

Break the planning rules:

Some forms of renewable micro-generation, such as CHP boilers and biomass generators, can be installed within homes and businesses and not be subject to planning constraints. But other forms of micro-generation, such as solar panels and mini wind turbines remain subject to planning rules.

The installation of micro-generators should be classified as a 'permitted development' – essentially a fast track to planning permission – and local councils should be given the right to go beyond existing norms in encouraging micro-generation. Planners should be able to require applicants for new development schemes to include plans for local generation of energy. This approach has worked well in the Borough of Merton.

STEP 6: AN ENERGY REVOLUTION

(continued)

◀ previous page next page ▶

HOME

STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3

STEP 4

STEP 5

STEP 6

STEP 7

STEP 8

STEP 9

STEP 10

Invest:

Thanks to the 7,760 miles of coastline around the UK (excluding the islands), we have the best offshore wind, wave and tidal assets in Europe. The Government itself believes that at least 25% of our electricity could come from wind by 2025, and a recent report is even more bullish – estimating that wind could provide around 45 percent of our annual electricity. 90 percent of this could be from offshore turbines. Add to that the power in our seas – which has the potential to provide 12.5 percent of our electricity by 2025 – and the case for investment grows.

In addition to this, there is no escaping the fact that the use of coal will continue to rise. For one thing, there is plenty of it. For another, China has no plans to stop using coal. In 2008 it added 30 new coal power plants to the 550 it already has, and if trends continue, it will have 800 by 2020. India meanwhile built 40 in 2008.

Whilst new 'clean coal' technologies are emerging, even the cleaner coal stations still have efficiencies of only around 40 percent, a paltry amount when compared to the 90 percent of some biomass and CHP plants in Denmark. The main technological development that could ensure a future for coal in a genuinely low carbon world is carbon capture and storage (CCS). CCS captures carbon from combustion and pipes it into geological formations or old oil and gas beds under the sea.

It's a solution that its backers believe will cut emissions by up to 85 percent, but it requires government leadership.

California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has insisted that no new plant in his state can be more polluting than a modern gas-fired power plant, by far the cleanest of the hydro-carbon technologies.

For the market to deliver clean energy, we need an upgraded grid. Without investment in underwater cables, neither wave power nor off-shore wind will flourish. Without a long network of pipes to carry the captured carbon, CCS won't be possible. Just as all power plants benefit from the national grid, without which they couldn't distribute their product, so too will CCS plants require the infrastructure to be provided for them. Biogas (created by decomposing organic waste) could also massively reduce our dependence on gas imports, but only if the infrastructure for collecting and distributing it is in place. Biogas contributes less than 1.5 percent of current gas use, but according to the National Grid company, with the right infrastructure, it could provide us with half our gas needs.

We urgently need a renewable energy fund to provide substantial grants for the research and development of radical new clean energy technologies. From wave power to clean coal technology, potential solutions remain in the pipeline due to a lack of investment. Government should provide that investment. Diverting money that would otherwise be spent subsidising fossil fuels or the nuclear industry could provide billions of dollars for research, support and crucially, for upgrading the national grid.

Stop paying the polluters:

Huge sums of public money continue to be spent each year to keep us hooked on fossil fuels - a form of energy generation that is wrecking the planet. The estimated global public subsidy for fossil fuels is between \$150 and \$250 billion a year. The former head of BP, Lord Browne, recently called for the dismantling and reallocation of these subsidies, saying that renewables cannot compete unless there is a level playing field.

The 'End Oil Aid' bill, introduced in the US in April 2007, seeks to end US government support for the international operations of oil companies, calling on international financial institutions to stop financing oil and gas projects. Our own government should draw up a roadmap for phasing out subsidies that are harmful to the environment, and should encourage the European Commission to do the same. Support for fossil fuel projects during the phasing out period must be transparent and accountable.

Norway has set up a substantial fund to invest the proceeds of oil taxation to ensure that future generations would benefit once oil has gone. At the end of 2005 that fund stood at \$210 billion – the equivalent of \$45,000 for every Norwegian. The UK should establish a similar fund.

STEP 7: GETTING AROUND

HOME

STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3

STEP 4

STEP 5

STEP 6

STEP 7

STEP 8

STEP 9

STEP 10

As cars became more popular, and more affordable, society quickly began to shape itself around their existence.

Our built environment is now constructed on the assumption of the car. There are 34 million registered vehicles on our roads today. Roughly 28 million of them are cars, and that number is growing. If we all tried to access our towns by car they would be unable to cope with the gridlock. Traffic in London today is, notoriously, as slow as it was 100 years ago, in the days of walking and horses. The average Briton spends 235 hours in their car every year – much of it going nowhere. What was once a great luxury has become a necessity.

For decades, the political response has been to frantically build new roads, or widen existing ones, in a doomed bid to build our way out of the problem. But it doesn't work. Not only do new roads destroy the countryside and local communities, it's practically impossible to build enough roads to keep up with predicted levels of traffic growth. Not only that, but building new roads cannot help but attract new traffic. Clumsy transport policy causes more than just congestion. Overall, the transport sector contributes roughly a quarter of Britain's CO2 emissions, the vast majority of that resulting from road vehicles. Road transport meanwhile accounts for about three quarters of Britain's fossil fuel use. Meanwhile, our train network has been neglected. Fares continue to rise well above the rate of inflation, while services are not improving commensurably.

The government intends to tackle the problem by trebling the number of passengers moving through UK airports. For those living beneath the flightpaths, it's a nightmare vision. But aviation is also the fastest growing cause of greenhouse gas emissions. If the UK meets its target of reducing overall carbon emissions by 80 percent by 2050, the government admits that emissions generated by Heathrow airport alone will account for about a fifth of the country's total carbon budget.

These and other costs of aviation are almost always ignored. The £9 billion tax subsidy, for instance, that accrues to the sector through tax-free fuel and zero-rated VAT isn't accounted for. Nor are the environmental and social costs included, or the effect on house prices beneath the flight paths.

We should be reducing unnecessary flights – short haul flights, for instance, to places already reachable by train. Around 100,000 of the 470,000 flights using Heathrow airport every year are to UK or near-Europe destinations where there already exists a reasonable rail alternative. There are more than 30 flights a day to and from Manchester. Yet fast and efficient trains already exist between these destinations, and with the right approach they could be dramatically improved.

One of the reasons we've got it so wrong in Britain is that politicians have always tended to regard transport as an end, rather than a means to an end. Instead of designing policies to reduce the need to travel, politicians usually end up promoting developments which make it inevitable.

STEP 7: GETTING AROUND

(continued)

HOME

STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3

STEP 4

STEP 5

STEP 6

STEP 7

STEP 8

STEP 9

STEP 10

VOTER DEMAND 1: A CLEAN CAR FLEET

Cars are here to stay. Over time, with the right kind of policies, their numbers could shrink, but until then we need to clean up the existing fleet. We have the technology. If every UK vehicle was powered by clean electricity, we'd cut carbon emissions by more than a fifth, as well as reducing our dependence on other countries.

Demand higher standards:

A review commissioned by the UK Treasury has worked out that emissions from our roads could be halved by 2030 with a focus on cleaner, more efficient cars, using cleaner fuels. By 2050 reductions of up to 90 percent are possible with battery electric systems using low-carbon electricity. The government – ideally working with other European neighbours – should set a far higher standard for cars.

Make green cars cheaper:

Instead of introducing penalties for those of us who have already made our choices, our government should be encouraging change at the point where it matters – at the point of purchase. To trigger a rapid shift in the quality of our collective car fleet, the government should introduce a high 'purchase tax' on the biggest, dirtiest cars and match it pound for pound with tax relief on the cleanest cars. If the incentive to purchase a clean car is big enough, the UK could have a clean car fleet within a matter of years.

Government buying power:

The British public sector operates the largest fleet in the UK, with well over 300,000 vehicles. Government departments should buy only the most efficient models. Given that the British government spends about £2.2 billion every year on the public car fleet, there are huge savings to be made, both financially and in terms of emissions.

Clear standard for biofuels:

We urgently need a stringent international standard for biofuel production. Such a standard should discriminate against biofuels which generate no net carbon saving, are generated at the expense of valuable habitat, or are generated at the expense of food production and security.

STEP 7: GETTING AROUND

(continued)

◀ previous page next page ▶

HOME

STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3

STEP 4

STEP 5

STEP 6

STEP 7

STEP 8

STEP 9

STEP 10

VOTER DEMAND 2: ENDING THE CAR CULTURE

Through better planning and design we need to reduce the need to travel in the first place, and to make it easier to complete the journeys that remain using alternatives to the car. As we build new settlements, and improve existing towns and cities, we should do so with a view to designing out car dependency. People need to have the option of visiting shops, leisure facilities and workplaces close to their homes, which means building mixed-use developments instead of so-called 'dormitory towns' where people reside at night, but rarely during the day.

Where money is invested in transport, there should be a bias in favour of alternatives to the car, for instance, rail, buses, walking and cycling. People should have the choice not to drive, rather than have a car journey forced upon them by bad design. The effect would not only be less pollution and congestion, but also stronger and more vibrant communities.

Invest in buses:

Buses are one obvious alternative to the car. In London, car ownership has declined as a direct result of the promotion and funding of good bus services. But if they are to really change the car culture of Britain, they need to be deployed where they can make the most amount of difference: the school run. In the US, Yellow School buses represent the largest mass transit system in the country. Some 450,000 of them take more than 25 million children to and from school. Each school bus takes between 30 to 60 cars off of the road during peak rush hour times. We need to make school buses available for all schools.

Cyclocities:

Lyon, in France, provides another, non-motorised model. The City's so-called 'Cyclocity' scheme provides residents with 3,000 rental bikes, which between them have logged about 10 million miles since it started in May 2005. It has prevented an estimated 3,000 tons of carbon dioxide from being emitted, reduced vehicle traffic in the city by four percent, and tripled bicycle use. This scheme needs to be rolled out across our cities.

New technology – zero travel:

British Telecom meanwhile is pioneering the use of video conferencing technology. In a survey of teleconferencing by BT employees worldwide, 46 percent of users said that their last conference call had saved them at least three hours of travel time. In total, BT saved an estimated £238 million in a single year through the use of teleconferencing, principally through avoided travel. We need to find ways to reward the use of technologies that eliminate the need to travel.

High speed rail:

We have a shorter distance of High Speed Rail (HSR) track in the UK than they have in Belgium. Our meagre 68 miles of High Speed Rail track is barely a patch on France's 963 miles, or Germany's 545 miles. Eurostar trains now travel from London to Paris in just over two hours, half the time it takes by plane (if the entire journey is taken into account). Without a viable, reliable alternative, it's unreasonable to expect people not to fly short-haul. But an alternative will cost money. Taxing short haul flights where rail alternatives already exist is an obvious means of raising the necessary funds. But to be acceptable, every penny of this new tax needs to be ploughed back into the rail network. Combined with this policy, we could reasonably impose a moratorium on the building of additional airports.

STEP 8: BUILT TO LAST

◀ previous page next page ▶

HOME

STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3

STEP 4

STEP 5

STEP 6

STEP 7

STEP 8

STEP 9

STEP 10

A well designed neighbourhood gives people access to the things they need – shops, schools, hospitals, offices – without dependence on the car.

Unfortunately, most development in recent decades has achieved the opposite. John Norquist, President and CEO of the US Congress for New Urbanism, a leading non-profit group promoting walkable neighbourhoods as an alternative to sprawl says: “When you design simply around vehicular movement as typically happens, you limit the results to a familiar landscape that includes big-box and strip retail. And perversely enough, you get a lot of traffic congestion and outrageous carbon emissions. It shouldn’t be a surprise – when people need a car or truck to get anywhere, that creates a lot of long car trips.”

In addition to building car dependence into our way of life, we have also built in the wrong places. When faced with housing shortages, governments have routinely promised simply to build more homes in places where demand is highest.

Britain is a small nation, but unlike most other countries, we have allowed a disproportionate amount of activity to become centralised in and around London. The effect is that pressure for housing in the southeast is immense, while other parts of the country are experiencing the emergence of ghost towns. The Empty Homes Agency estimated that in 2006 there were 633,328 empty homes – 3.6 percent of the total in England – with 126,416 in the northwest alone.

Instead of promising millions of new homes in areas that cannot take them, the Government should invest in better transport links across the country. The incentive for people and businesses to begin repopulating parts other than the southeast would be immense.

VOTER DEMAND: PROTECT OUR COMMUNITIES AND GREEN SPACES

Protect our gardens and playing fields:

It is absurd that under current rules, gardens are designated as ‘brownfield’ sites – making it easy for developers to build on them and for homeowners to sell them off for a quick profit. Urban gardens need urgently to be reclassified as ‘greenfield’ sites, in order to protect them from destructive development.

Tax incentives for building in the right place:

The current tax system makes it much easier to demolish old buildings and build new ones than to refurbish existing properties.

If you want to build a new home, you pay zero VAT. If you want to make better use of an existing building, you pay the full rate. It’s also easier to build on ‘greenfield’ land than to clean up and develop ‘brownfield’ sites. This needs to be reversed. We also need unequivocal protection for the Green Belt.

Better use of existing buildings:

There are nearly half a million empty homes in the UK. Bringing in tax relief on letting rooms in one’s own home would encourage those who might currently be under-occupying property to take in lodgers, thus helping to ease the pressure on the housing market.

No building on flood plains:

Despite the horrors of the floods in 2008, and promises by ministers that they would stop building on flood plains, the process continues unabated. The Countryside Alliance recently discovered that in 209 local authorities, nearly 150,000 new homes are to be built in high-risk areas. We need an immediate ban on new development on flood plains anywhere in Britain.

A new approach to planning:

At the heart of all planning decisions should be an understanding of and a commitment to ‘walkability’. New settlements and new developments should be designed wherever possible at the human scale, to promote local economic activity and with car dependence designed out of the system.

STEP 8: BUILT TO LAST

(continued)

HOME

STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3

STEP 4

STEP 5

STEP 6

STEP 7

STEP 8

STEP 9

STEP 10

VOTER DEMAND: BETTER QUALITY HOMES

Around half of Britain's greenhouse gas emissions come from energy use in buildings. As three-quarters of the estimated 25 million homes in the UK will still be here in 2050, we need to find ways to improve efficiencies in our existing homes. Up to nine million houses have cavity walls but with no insulation. Millions lack even basic insulation or effective window glazing.

It's an easy problem to solve. But there is a cost. In the medium term, improvements will save money on energy bills, and the cost of the upgrade will quickly be recouped. In the case of cavity wall insulation, the payback is about three years. But the initial investment, combined with the hassle, means people are reluctant to do the necessary work.

It's up to the government, therefore, to create genuinely attractive incentives, which will give homeowners the impetus to upgrade their home. Given that the average home changes hands every seven or so years, any system encouraging people to upgrade their homes at that point of exchange would theoretically deliver a clean and efficient housing stock relatively quickly.

The government is aware of our low standards, but its response has been to introduce ever more complicated regulations. It hasn't worked. The UK has some of the most cumbersome building regulations in Europe, yet still our standards are far lower than other countries.

By contrast, in Germany, builders are required to reach high standards of energy efficiency but not instructed as to how to do it. We need to move towards a system based on outcomes, not processes.

Make it easier to upgrade our homes:

The government should introduce a rebate on stamp duty for houses in which energy efficiency improvements have been adopted at the time of sale, or within a reasonable time afterwards. At a stroke, this would provide all of us with a major incentive to pass on a much greener house to the next owner.

Work with the banks:

Given that existing technology is already cost effective, energy efficiency theoretically already offers an attractive investment opportunity. Using well known landmarks like the Empire States Building, the Clinton Initiative for instance has shown that investments can be repaid within three or four years, after which there are considerable savings. The best long-term plan would therefore involve private institutions developing attractive investment opportunities in this field. UK pension funds for instance are sitting on about £860 billion. If they could be persuaded to invest a portion of that in energy efficiency initiatives, they would see a good return on

the back of low-risk investments, and potentially huge sums of money would flow into low carbon initiatives. To provide reassurance and to trigger a rapid shift, the Government should underwrite initial investments. The only risk is that the price of energy may decline, which would simply lengthen payback times. But the opposite is more likely.

Smart meters in every home:

There should be an immediate rollout of smart meters across the country. Wherever it has been introduced, smart metering has reduced household bills and cut emissions. In Sweden their introduction has led to a 20 percent decline in energy use. Smart meters also make it easier for homeowners to sell homegrown energy back to the grid, as they allow for more accurate measurement of the energy generated. The estimated payback would be anything from four to six years, making it a good investment.

Replace building regulations with standards:

We need the government to abolish its complicated building regulations and replace them with standards. These would be based on a range of outcomes: low emissions, efficient energy use, and the use of sustainable materials etc. It would be results that mattered, and this would provide an enormous impetus to finding new and more cost effective means to deliver those outcomes. The government needs to trust builders to do the right thing, but be willing to impose heavy penalties where that trust is abused. If the regulatory system were turned on its head in this way, we'd see an explosion in innovation and a leap forward in standards.

STEP 9: A ZERO WASTE ECONOMY

◀ previous page next page ▶

HOME

STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3

STEP 4

STEP 5

STEP 6

STEP 7

STEP 8

STEP 9

STEP 10

Every hour, the UK throws away enough rubbish to fill the Albert Hall to the ceiling. That's 335 million tonnes of waste a year. In England alone, roughly 30 million tonnes of construction and demolition material is sent to landfill as waste every year. More than six million tonnes of food waste from the home is thrown away annually.

The vast majority of this waste ends up in the country's rapidly filling landfill sites, where it rots and produces methane – the most destructive greenhouse gas.

Just 27 percent of our domestic waste is recycled. Compare this with the 70 percent in Holland, or the consistently higher levels across most of Europe. Our national bill for disposal of this waste is growing by the year; landfill costs alone have reached the £10 billion mark.

The government recognises that we need a culture change. "If every country consumed natural resources at the rate the UK does," it reported in a recent waste strategy document, "we would need three planets to live on." And yet, if anything, we are even more wasteful than ever. Most resources stay in the economy for less than six months before being discarded.

We are running out of landfill sites. Incinerators are polluting and unpopular. Raw materials are becoming costlier, while the value of the material we could be recycling, rather than destroying, is estimated to reach £1.8 billion per year by 2020. Yet progress remains resolutely sluggish. To actually cut back on waste requires us to think very differently. In the long term we should set ourselves an ambitious but wholly realistic national target: to become a Zero Waste Economy.

VOTER DEMAND: BLUEPRINT FOR A ZERO WASTE ECONOMY

'Take Back':

People should have a legal 'take back' right enshrined in consumer law. This would give everyone the right to take any packaging waste back to the shop it was bought from, and impose an obligation on retailers to recycle that waste once it was received. If the chains are required by law to deal with the mess, they'll design their products more responsibly.

Paying people to recycle:

Encourage recycling by incentivising householders. A new company in the US, Recyclebank, offers householders considerable financial rewards for minimising waste and increasing recycling. It has had extraordinary results, boosting recycling in some cities from a meagre nine percent to 40 percent. There is no downside, but the upside is significant.

No more landfill:

In the shortest possible time, landfill should be banned for anything that can be recycled, composted or reused instead. Landfill tax for remaining rubbish needs to rise, with the proceeds being re-invested in communities affected by landfill sites, and in infrastructure for reducing waste. The government is planning to increase the tax to £48 per tonne by 2010, but to make a real difference, the increase needs to be much bolder. If waste becomes a financial drain, companies will respond by cutting the amount of waste they generate.

STEP 9: A ZERO WASTE ECONOMY

(continued)

◀ previous page next page ▶

HOME

STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3

STEP 4

STEP 5

STEP 6

STEP 7

STEP 8

STEP 9

STEP 10

Using the right materials:

A tax should be introduced on the use of virgin materials to stimulate the market and innovation of recycled equivalents. The tax should be extended to the use of non recyclable materials in new products to discourage the use of materials that can only be used once. The proceeds should be used to bring down the price of recycled materials. For example, we could require all drinks cans to be made from 100 per cent recycled aluminium, or 100 percent of all computers to be recycled by the manufacturer.

Built to last:

The economy is flooded with temporary and disposable consumer goods from places like China. They may be cheap to buy, but they don't last, and when they break down, they accumulate in landfill sites across the country. One solution is to introduce a levy on goods with an average life expectancy of 20 percent less than the product average. So if toasters, on average, last 10 years, a toaster with an average life-span of eight years or less would be taxed, with the money, as ever, being used to bring down the price of those other products designed to last, or be readily disassembled and reused.

Government buying power:

The government must use its vast buying power to stimulate the market and drive innovation. Across the board, its procurement contracts need to have an in-built bias in favour of recycled and sustainably sourced materials.

Incineration, a last resort:

New technology probably makes the process less hazardous, but there is still the problem that contracts with incinerator operators tend to displace activities around recycling. Incineration should be a last resort, of the highest possible standard, and only ever allowed where local people approve it. They should be built to generate power and capture heat – in other words, to work as part of a combined heat and power system.

STEP 10: PLAYING OUR PART

HOME

STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3

STEP 4

STEP 5

STEP 6

STEP 7

STEP 8

STEP 9

STEP 10

Most environmental problems, by their very nature, are international. From climate change to overfishing, water shortages to species loss, the world's most pressing issues ignore national borders.

If we are to shift from a dirty, wasteful and polluting economy towards a system that understands the value of the natural world, it will be through changing the framework in which the market operates. It involves finding ways to price the environment into the market. It will involve shifting the tax burden away from good things like employment towards bad things like pollution and the misuse of scarce resources. It will involve putting a price on carbon, raising standards for cars, electrical appliances and biofuels, and banning the worst offenders.

Only some of this activity can realistically be confined to a single nation. If, for instance, Britain had decided, alone, to ban chloroflourocarbons (CFCs), the environmental benefits would have been minimal. It is because world governments signed up to the Montreal protocol in 1989 that 90 percent of the global production of ozone-depleting-substances like CFCs has been phased out, and the rate of ozone layer depletion in the stratosphere is now declining. We are seeing the first signs of the recovery of the ozone layer.

The global mood is changing, and there is a real opportunity now to press for a coherent global action plan.

VOTER DEMAND: PLAYING OUR PART

Carbon pricing:

Consumers and businesses need to see the environmental and economic costs of carbon emissions translated into actual financial liabilities. Clear price signalling will make polluting activities more expensive, and cleaner activities less expensive.

The Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) is the largest 'cap and trade' system in the world. EU governments agree a cap on emissions for different sectors of the economy within each EU country. Carbon quotas are then allocated by those countries to individual businesses. The quotas are tradeable, so companies that pollute less than they are permitted to, can sell their excess quotas to those who need them. Emissions trading is effectively a transfer of wealth from polluters to non-polluters.

The first phase of the ETS was a failure, principally because the national allocations were set far too high and there was no pressure to cut emissions. The next phase is therefore crucial. The allocations need to be realistic, and the permits need to be auctioned, not merely handed out to companies. If industries have to pay for their quotas, they will be far more likely to value and act on them. It's also crucial that more sectors are included in ETS. It currently covers 45 percent of all emissions including power plants, steel, cement and paper manufacturing. But aviation is excluded, along with manufacturers of aluminium and chemicals.

STEP 10: PLAYING OUR PART

(continued)

[HOME](#)[STEP 1](#)[STEP 2](#)[STEP 3](#)[STEP 4](#)[STEP 5](#)[STEP 6](#)[STEP 7](#)[STEP 8](#)[STEP 9](#)[STEP 10](#)

The forest fund:

The world's great tropical forests are one of the most remarkable features of our planet. They are critical for maintaining the health of the atmosphere, regulating rainfall and fresh water around the world, and they are home to an estimated 50 percent of the planet's species. The world's forests, leaf litter and soil store roughly 50 percent more carbon than the atmosphere.

But these extraordinary services remain largely unvalued by the markets. Tropical forests continue to be destroyed at an unprecedented rate.

What is needed urgently is an international mechanism for compensating forest nations for looking after these extraordinary resources. Broadly there are three options: direct payments by individual countries, perhaps using the proceeds of the sales of carbon permits; direct use of the carbon markets by allowing the trade in forest-related carbon credits; or more likely, a combination of the two, with direct payments being made immediately while the carbon markets develop.

Whatever mechanism is agreed must ensure that the levels of funding remains greater than the potential profits involved in destroying forests. The compensation levels will therefore have to be linked in some way to an index of commodity prices. The mechanism must also distinguish between plantations and natural forests. If it doesn't, we may see forests destroyed, the timber sold and the land replanted with artificial monoculture, all paid for by well-intentioned foreign governments.

Stopping illegal timber:

Placing a value on healthy forests is crucial. But we also need to stifle the market in illegal timber. Nearly a third of the timber and timber products imported into the EU is believed to be illegal. New laws have been introduced in the US to ban the trade in illegal timber, and we need the same in the UK and across the EU. In the immediate term, government departments themselves need to clean up their act. Public sector procurement accounts for about 40 percent of all timber purchase in the UK.