

THE UK CLIMATE ASSEMBLY **MANUFACTURING MANDATES**

Ben Pile



The Global Warming Policy Forum

The UK Climate Assembly: Manufacturing Mandates

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About the author

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Summary

- Since the 2000s, the UK government and EU have set ambitious emissions-reduction targets, but they do not know how to achieve them without damaging the economy and causing a political backlash.
- These targets were formulated in an era of cross-party consensuses, public disengagement, and parties' attempts to reinvent themselves in a new political landscape.
- During this time, green campaigning organisations lobbied politicians for 'top-down' and 'strong climate law' (targets), while generating only modest public support.
- Research reveals that the public is broadly, but only weakly supportive of climate policies. There is no appetite for costly policies that require significant expense and draconian regulation of lifestyle.
- As a result, progress towards the targets has been paralysed, although enthusiasm for tightening targets among mainstream politicians remains undampened.
- Frustration with the slow progress led to an escalation of alarmist rhetoric and new radical political campaigns seemingly demanding a 'citizen's voice'.
- This development was welcomed by politicians, leading to the convening of the Climate Assembly by six government departments in partnership with campaigning organisations.
- The Assembly was a focus group – a proxy for the general public – and was tasked with finding policies that were acceptable to them.
- Four 'Expert Leads' selected the Climate Assembly's advisory and academic panels and invited speakers to present evidence for the Assembly to consider.
- The speakers chosen almost all came from the personal networks of the Expert Leads, and were mostly political activists and/or activist academics. The backgrounds of the speakers were not disclosed to Assembly members.
- Organisations involved with the Assembly, Expert Leads and speakers are opaque and privately-funded, and have unchecked influence in policymaking and research agendas.
- Therefore, the Assembly was denied a full range of independent arguments and policy-neutral expertise to help guide them.
- The Assembly was tasked with settling extremely complex questions, from a very narrow range of evidence and perspectives, in very short order, and given insufficient time to interrogate speakers.





- The Assembly were asked to vote on propositions by stating preferences, but were not allowed to propose their own, or to meaningfully reject options given to them, forcing apparent support from them, where no support should be inferred.
- The result of the Assembly's votes has been falsely taken to represent a 'mandate' from the broader public, and a signal of broader public support for aggressive climate policies.
- The Climate Assembly was hastily arranged and was at times shambolic. It was convened in order to elicit desired results, rather than to meaningfully test public support for climate policies.
- The public's appetite for climate policies remains untested, and further attempts to circumvent necessary democratic processes by convening glorified focus groups will merely prolong the crises that the UK's climate agenda is creating.

“In my opinion the Citizens' Assembly is in no position to pass any comment on the 'implications' of coronavirus on climate change when so little is known about the long-term full scale of the impact, suffering and hardships that coronavirus will have on peoples' lives. Failing to seek prior consensus from the Assembly as to whether the Assembly collectively wishes any statement to be made on its behalf linking Net Zero to coronavirus smacks of political hubris. At a time when lives are being lost and extraordinary sacrifices are being made at the height of a global pandemic, is the Assembly seriously being asked to choose between deciding to fund the future NHS, social care, welfare and basic fabric of society vs Net Zero before the financial and social costs of the pandemic have even started to be felt? I refuse to be balloted on these rash, grossly naïve and insensitive questions and I expect to see this response accurately conveyed to Parliament.”

UK Climate Assembly member



Introduction

Following the publication of the report of the UK Climate Assembly in September 2020,¹ one of its 'Expert Leads', the Director of the Centre for Climate Change and Social Transformations (CAST) at the University of Bath, Professor Lorraine Whitmarsh, said: 'This report gives a clear mandate to policy-makers for bold action to tackle climate change.'² Another Expert Lead, the Chair of the UK Committee on Climate Change (CCC), Chris Stark, said that the assembly 'has shown there is broad support for climate action in the UK', and that the CCC would draw on the views in its report when issuing its next batch of advice to government on the Sixth Carbon Budget.³

This paper argues that taking the Assembly's findings as a 'mandate' or even a reflection of public opinion in this way is a dangerous mistake, with profound consequences for representative democracy.

The Assembly's own summary of its purpose, as set out on its website, makes claims similar to those of Whitmarsh and Stark. A face-value reading raises the question of what problem it was intended to solve and what standing its findings should have in policy-making (emphasis added):

'The UK is committed to reaching net zero greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2050. Climate Assembly UK brings together 100+ people from all walks of life and of all shades of opinion to discuss how the UK should meet this target.'

The assembly members met over six weekends in Spring 2020. They heard balanced evidence on the choices the UK faces, discussed them, and made recommendations about what the UK should do to become net zero by 2050. Their final report will be published on Thursday 10 September [2020].'

The problems with these claims include the fact that, although the Assembly was tasked with finding ways to achieve net zero carbon emissions, the UK's putative 'commitment' to reaching that target was not decided by either the public or by sortition, but by Parliament.

This paper will also show that the Assembly was convened by political campaigning and lobbying groups, funded by special interests. Its composition did not reflect that of the broader public. Moreover, far from hearing 'balanced views', members heard only from a very narrow range of speakers, many of whom have long histories in political activism, a fact that was not disclosed. Finally, Assembly members were given only very limited time to reach decisions with far-reaching consequences; they cannot have done justice to the complex issues involved. These problems demonstrate the danger of allowing the Assembly's report to be passed off as the expression of popular opinion.

The principle of the Climate Assembly was sortition – the convening of political decision-making bodies by lottery. Advocates of this method believe it is a superior form of deliberation than either direct (i.e. referenda) or representative (parliamentary) forms of de-

mocracy. Brett Hennig, the co-founder of The Sortition Foundation, which promotes the method, and which was involved with organisation of the Climate Assembly, explains the problem as follows:

Our politics is broken, our politicians aren't trusted, and the political system is distorted by powerful vested interests. [...] if we replaced elections with sortition and made our parliament truly representative of society, it would mean the end of politicians.⁴

However, his words reveal a contradiction. The decision to adopt a net zero target came from politicians, and politicians, moreover, who had no clear mandate to do so and no idea of how to achieve their aim. So if the cross-party political consensus on Net Zero was produced by the same untrusted and corrupt politicians that Hennig describes, then the CA merely attempts to use sortition to legitimise an illegitimate political agenda.

The policy impasse and Extinction Rebellion

A growing frustration with the slow pace of climate policy is revealed by many recent discussions between politicians, academics and campaigning organisations. In a 2018 report for the Green Alliance (GA), 'professor in practice' at the University of Lancaster, Rebecca Willis, surveyed politicians' views on the public's readiness for climate policies.⁵

One MP told her, 'I've knocked on hundreds, literally thousands of doors, and had tens of thousands of conversations with voters...and I just don't have conversations about climate change'. Another said, 'I can't remember the last time I was asked about climate change. It's very rare to be asked about it.' Willis observes that 'for the overwhelming majority of people, climate change is a non-issue' and that research 'suggests that climate change is of low importance to voters', adding that MPs 'report limited interest from their constituents, and indicate that they need to find ways to make climate action relevant to the daily lives and concerns of the electorate'.

Campaigning organisations, government, and MPs were aware that, despite a decade having passed since the Climate Change Act, the public still did not share their views on global warming. Rather than this provoking reflection on their failure to persuade, the GA report considers how a mandate can be built *despite* public opinion. 'Exactly what 'representation' means has been debated fiercely by political theorists', writes Willis, who argues that 'representation' does not mean perfectly reproducing the views of constituents, but involves instead the use of judgement, while engaging in 'dialogue' with those represented. Whatever the merits of that claim, the problem is that there has been *no* dialogue of consequence between politicians and the public about climate change. Policy advocates – Willis and the GA included – are hostile to dialogue with opponents of any aspect of the green agenda.

The GA report appeared in November 2018, timed to mark the tenth anniversary of the Climate Change Act, and coinciding with the emergence of Extinction Rebellion (XR).⁶ One of the three demands made by that group was that ‘Government must create and be led by the decisions of a citizens’ assembly on climate and ecological justice.’⁷

In April 2019, five months after the first protest, some of XR’s members were invited to meet then Environment Secretary Michael Gove at DEFRA’s offices.⁸ Opening the discussion, its youth representative, 14-year-old Felix Ottaway O’Mahoney, told Gove that rather than realising his ambition of becoming a musician, he, his family and his friends were ‘in the streets, begging for a future’, because they otherwise faced a future of ‘war, famine and mass natural disasters’. Rather than challenging the child’s bleak and scientifically groundless beliefs, Gove told his guests, ‘I absolutely agree with you that the scale of action required is significant and the need to accelerate the scale of action for our undertaking is urgent’, and that ‘initiatives like a citizens’ assembly can play a very, very valuable role in bringing in a wider level of public support’.

On 14 June 2019, The House of Commons Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee heard evidence from XR co-founder, Gail Bradbrook,⁹ who told MPs that:

[XR] don’t recognise the social contract any more because just as my job as a mother is to keep my children safe, your job as government is to keep the British people safe’.

And she said that ‘many credible commentators talk about the collapse of civilisation’. Throughout her evidence, Bradbrook alluded to the situation faced by the British public during the Second World War:

I really think the British people will do whatever it takes if they understand that everything they hold dear, everything that they love, is at stake.

In her view, a citizens’ assembly would ‘come up with a package that people can get behind because it’ll have ordinary people on it who’ve been taught critical thinking skills and been given evidence’. In other words, what had held climate policy back, on Bradbrook’s view, was the public’s mistrust of politics, which had been corrupted by ideology and private interests.

The idea of citizens’ assemblies had drawn the environmental movement’s attention in 2016, following the Irish government’s use of them to develop policies in areas as broad-ranging as abortion and an aging population.¹⁰ Local governments had begun to adopt the idea as early as April 2019, the first being Oxford City Council.¹¹

Concurrently, emphasis began to be placed on methods championed by US-based campaign group, The Climate Mobilization (TCM), which called for the declaration of a ‘climate emer-

gency' – an escalation in alarmist rhetoric of the kind championed by Bradbrook. TCM founder and president Margaret Klein Salamon had used her insights as a psychologist to refocus the green movement on building a popular campaign through fearmongering.¹² According to Salamon, even green NGOs and climate scientists had avoided the 'truth': the worst-possible interpretation of climate change, in which the collapse of civilisation is all but certain. XR's own categorically alarmist and uncompromising propaganda draws heavily on Salamon's work, and she is credited with internationalising the XR campaign.¹³

On 20 June 2019, six parliamentary select committees announced that a climate assembly would be formed, 'to explore views on the fair sharing of potential costs of different policy choices' and to 'inform political debate and Government policy making'.¹⁴ XR had, by blocking roads and damaging property, brought this idea – and the related one of a climate emergency – to the UK political mainstream in less than a year. Favourable coverage in the news media of its protests, and politicians' desire to find public support for their political consensus, made it all seem like the expression of popular opinion.

A failure to reflect the public

The Assembly organisers' attempt to convene an assembly that was representative of the broader public depended first on the random selection of candidates, from which a further selection was made so that those in the final selection matched the attributes of the broader public as far as possible.¹⁵ The parameters included age, gender, educational background, ethnicity, home location and 'attitude to climate change'.

The measure of the public's attitude to climate change used in the selection was a 2019 Ipsos/Mori poll, which asked the question 'How concerned, if at all, are you about climate change, sometimes referred to as "global warming"?'¹⁶ Ipsos/Mori had announced the poll with a press release observing that 'Concern about climate change reaches record levels with half now "very concerned"', and that '85% of Britons are now concerned about climate change'. But as an examination of results from different polling exercises shows (see Appendix A), 85% is a very high figure, and is not reflected in other surveys. Indeed concern over climate change is both unstable over time, and contingent on other factors.

In addition, failing to test for the strength of commitment may have further introduced bias into the Assembly selection process. For example, more committed individuals may have been more inclined to respond to an invitation to give up six weekends to discuss the matter than the uncommitted. In this sense, therefore, Assembly membership may have been self-selecting.

The risk that weighting the Assembly's membership according to the results of the opinion poll might prejudice its findings

does not seem to have been considered by the convenors. Consequently, out of 108 members, 54 identified as 'very concerned' about climate change, 36 as 'fairly concerned', 16 as 'not very concerned', 3 as 'not concerned at all', and 1 as 'other'. This departs from the principle of sortition, which is randomness. Sortition is often compared to a jury. But jury selection is typically random; it is not weighted either to the broader public's demographics or to public opinion about the guilt of the defendant.

The CA process was wholly inadequate

Over the course of six weekends, the assembly held panels on the following subjects:

- introduction to climate change
- overarching ethical questions on how to get to Net Zero
- where our energy comes from and how we use energy
- key practical issues (for achieving Net Zero)
- removing greenhouse gases from the atmosphere
- the coronavirus pandemic and climate action.

On the second weekend, a panel was held in which the assembly members were split into three groups, each of which discussed one of the following topics:

- How we travel
- In the home
- What we buy, and land-use, food and farming.

The Assembly heard expert and advocate presentations lasting a total of just nine hours (including the weekend in which it was split into three groups). The transcripts extend to approximately 101,000 words – slightly fewer than a children's novel such as *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. On any reasonable view, none of the nine issues considered could have been examined in any depth after less than an hour of expert presentations and a discussion amounting to just 10,000 words. Assembly members were allowed to ask only brief questions, in sessions lasting an hour or less. They were given time to discuss the issue between themselves, and were able to submit comments to the organisers. But the notion that this amount of information and time were sufficient to inform a deliberative process, much less a democratic one, is implausible.

Furthermore, as the following sections of this report explain, the quality of information given by the speakers was extremely low, and represented only a very narrow, biased and conflicted section of available expertise.

Moreover, there was little that might be expected in an open, transparent and uncontrolled democratic process: assembly members heard nothing of criticisms of the idea of Net Zero itself, nor of costs and benefits, or the loss of liberties its delivery might entail.

Convening by political campaigners

The total budget for the Assembly was £520,000.¹⁷ Of this, the House of Commons contributed £120,000, while the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation (EFF) and the European Climate Foundation (ECF) contributed £200,000 each. Although both organisations claim to be ‘philanthropic’, there is significant overlap between their philanthropy on the one hand, and lobbying and political campaigning activity on the other.

For example, the EFF’s annual report reveals that in 2019 it gave a grant of £300,000 to the Climate Coalition for ‘unrestricted core costs to shift the political discourse on climate change’¹⁸ – an explicitly political goal that is at odds with the EFF’s charitable status.

The influence of the ECF in UK and EU politics is also unmistakably political. Its stated aim is to ‘harness the power of effective philanthropy to support the climate community in shaping public debate and forging bold solutions.’¹⁹ The ECF describes itself (emphasis added) as ‘a network of 325+ organisations *working strategically* [to] *define and drive the policy* in Europe needed for a net-zero world’. This includes direct funding of radical campaigning organisations such as XR²⁰ and Friends of the Earth, and funding of party-affiliated think tanks such as the Conservative Environment Network.²¹ The recipients of its largesse operate throughout the political sphere, with combined budgets of hundreds of millions of pounds per year. Appendix B discusses some broader questions about the role of the ECF in global, EU-wide and UK policymaking that should be understood as background to the development of UK climate policymaking, and the convening of the Climate Assembly.

The Assembly claims that the ECF and EFF did not have a say over how its design or the way it was run, but their statement cannot be taken at face value. The ECF, for example, is the major funder of several organisations that campaigned and lobbied for the Assembly to be created, provided the research it used, provided its expert and advocate participants, and drafted the policy ideas that it considered. One of these is the Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit (ECIU), which provided ‘communication outreach’. ECF provided the ECIU’s seed funding, and was its largest backer in 2019, providing a total of £360,000, the majority of its funding.²²

The two foundations are also the GA’s biggest donors. Its 2017–18 annual report shows donations of up to £200,000 from the ECF, a further £120,000 from the EFF, and up to £450,000 from a major ECF donor, The Children’s Investment Fund. The GA describes itself as ‘a trailblazer for climate citizen juries’, and says its campaigning has been ‘vital to the set-up of a forthcoming national citizen assembly.’²³ In 2019, it launched a report²⁴ on its work in this area at a summer reception featuring speeches from then Environment Secretary, Michael Gove and Mary Creagh MP.²⁵ The GA also has strong links to many of those who led

activities at the Assembly and to those who gave presentations to it, as described later in this report.

The Expert Leads

The EFF also funds projects with an organisation called Involve,²⁶ which describes itself as a ‘public participation charity, on a mission to put people at the heart of decision-making’. The Assembly website explains that Involve’s role was to ensure the quality of the proceedings. Given the questions about the standards subsequently achieved at the Assembly, and its obvious biases, that role appears to take on some significance.

Most importantly, Involve, along with Sortition Foundation and mySociety, were responsible for putting forward names to fulfill the key roles at the Assembly: the Expert Leads.²⁷ The Expert Leads were supposed to ensure that Assembly members were given information that was ‘balanced, accurate and comprehensive’ and that they were ‘focused on the key decisions facing the UK about how to achieve net zero emissions by 2050’.²⁸

Given the doubt over whether Net Zero can actually be delivered, the requirement to focus the Assembly on how to achieve it arguably meant that the Expert Lead roles were unbalanced from the start. Further bias can be discerned in the biographies of the four individuals appointed, which reveal careers in climate political campaigning, policy advocacy and design. These are set out in the following subsections.

Chris Stark

Chris Stark is Chief Executive of the CCC, the quango that gives advice on carbon budgets and emissions-monitoring to Parliament. It was on the basis of the CCC’s appraisal of the possibility of the UK meeting Net Zero by 2050²⁹ that the target became enshrined in law. But that appraisal has been strongly criticised because it relies on technologies that are not yet economic at the necessary scales, such as carbon capture and storage, and hydrogen, and also because its economic analyses are incomplete³⁰ and wildly optimistic.³¹ In other words, it was the CCC’s misleading advice, and Parliament’s failure to adequately scrutinise it,³² that had caused the impasse that led to a need for the Assembly in the first place. In other words, the Assembly was being asked to rectify problems in the Net Zero agenda that resulted from failings by the CCC. The appointment of Stark – the head of the CCC – as an Expert Lead was therefore clearly inappropriate, and obviates any claim that the Assembly was independent.

Jim Watson

Professor Jim Watson chaired the UK Net-Zero Advisory Group to the CCC,³³ and was therefore an inappropriate candidate for the same reason. And just as Stark is not impartial – ‘balanced’, in the language of the Assembly’s specification of the role – Watson’s cannot be seen as policy-neutral;³⁴ he is very much aligned

to a clear political agenda. His work has been or is funded by the ECF, and he works for the GA in an advisory capacity.³⁵ Between 2015 and 2019, he was chair of the UK Energy Research Centre (UKERC), where his work would have been steered in part by ECF's UK director, Joss Garman, who sits on the UKERC's advisory council.³⁶ Garman's appointment to this position came despite a background in political activism (Greenpeace, the Labour Party and aligned think tanks) rather than academia. It is noteworthy that Watson's successor at the UKERC, Robert Gross, is also funded by the ECF, and has a working relationship with the CCC.³⁷

Lorraine Whitmarsh

Lorraine Whitmarsh (quoted at the top of this report) is Director of the UK Centre for Climate Change and Social Transformations (CAST), which describes itself as 'a global hub for understanding the systemic and society-wide transformations that are required to address climate change'.³⁸ CAST too is intimately bound up with green campaigning organisations. Among its 'partners' are the pressure group Possible (previously known as the 10:10 campaign), and the Climate Outreach Information Network,³⁹ both organisations being recipients of ECF funding. Nor is CAST independent: its advisory panel includes two members of the CCC and two civil servants.⁴⁰

And CAST is not neutral. Whitmarsh is quoted on its website as follows:

We want to work closely with people and organisations to achieve positive low-carbon futures – transforming the way we live our lives, and reconfiguring organisations and cities.⁴¹

So although the Assembly emphasises her academic credentials, her stated objectives, and those of the organisation she leads, are manifestly political, and need democratic scrutiny.

Rebecca Willis

After years at the Green Alliance, and working as a 'consultant], Rebecca Willis is best understood as an environmental campaigner, although the Assembly emphasises her academic credentials: she is 'Professor in Practice, University of Lancaster'. However, 'Professor in Practice' is an honorary title that universities bestow on people with public profiles, hoping to bask in reflected glory. Actress Angelina Jolie, for example, is Professor in Practice at the London School of Economics, the result of her campaigning work for the UN.⁴² Willis's PhD thesis (in sociology) was not submitted until September 2018,⁴³ and she was made a 'professor' the following year. Lancaster University has also awarded the same title to a GA colleague of Willis's, Duncan McLaren,⁴⁴ making a total of five professors 'in practice' at the Lancaster Envi-





ronment Centre.⁴⁵ McLaren describes his research interests as ‘ways in which activist and campaign movements effect change, and in particular, how they engage with, and can be empowered by academic research’. The blurring of academia and advocacy seem to extend further, to include activism, as both Willis and McLaren’s rapid academic rises, and PhD theses, demonstrate.

From 1998 to 2001, Willis was head of policy at the GA, and then its director until 2004.⁴⁶ Although her CV states she was an ‘independent consultant’ between 2004 and 2017, she was retained by the GA in a number of roles, most recently founding and managing its Climate Change Leadership Programme, which lobbies MPs on behalf of the GA’s funders. She is also a trustee of the left-wing (and EEF- and ECF-funded⁴⁷) New Economics Foundation. From 2004 to 2011, she was vice-chair of the Sustainable Development Commission – a quango which advised politicians on environmental matters. Willis is clearly a career political activist, and this activism carries over into her academic work, which she describes as ‘a collaboration between Lancaster University and Green Alliance’. Her PhD, based on her political activism, describes her role with the GA, and how she helped influence Parliament towards establishing the Climate Assembly:

Green Alliance have recently been successful in winning funding for a further package of work with MPs, including the establishment of a Citizens’ Assembly on Climate Change, which was a direct recommendation of this research.

In summary, the four Expert Leads were part of a nexus of government, ‘research’, and political campaigning, something that might have been the subject of scrutiny and debate were the UK’s climate policymaking to be guided by a genuine public and transparent democratic process. But behind closed doors, a single special interest was free to dominate the Assembly’s proceedings, without questions being raised. What is worse, the Expert Leads then created further bias, as explained in the following sections.

Academic and Advisory Panels

The Expert Leads were responsible for appointing Academic and Advisory Panels to assist them in selecting the ‘Informants’ and ‘Advocates’ who would address the Assembly sessions. Informants were supposed to be more neutral, and were asked to ‘explain the range of views or options that exist on the topic’,⁴⁸ while Advocates were told ‘to present your personal opinion – or, where relevant, the opinion of the organisation you are there to represent’.⁴⁹ There was a great deal of overlap between the different roles. Four of the 19 members of the Advisory Panel also appeared as Advocates,

and a fifth spoke (as neither Advocate nor Informant) to offer the Assembly guidance.

The Advisory Panel's make up was less biased than other parts of the Assembly; it included representatives from industry, unions, business and think tanks from across the political spectrum. However, four of the panellists were members of the GA (one a staff member). With the addition of a representative from the New Economics Foundation, a total of five members (i.e. more than a quarter) were thus representatives of ECF-funded organisations.

The Advisory Panel met three times, though only two sets of minutes were published, and neither of these gives any significant information about the process by which Informants and Advocates were selected. Any indication that the panel discussed the candidates' backgrounds and the potential for bias in the selection was missing, as was any detail about the role of the panel in making decisions. This lack of transparency suggests that the Advisory Panel played an entirely peripheral role, inappropriate to a project that was intended to deliver a political mandate.

There were similar problems with the 12-member Academic Panel. Five of its members also appeared as Informants, and eight are involved with the CCC, either directly or through project partnership. No details of the Academic Panel's discussions were published. The Assembly website advises only that 'Panel members were chosen on the basis of their expertise on areas of climate change that Parliament and the Expert Leads felt Climate Assembly UK should examine'. Hence, all of these experts are notable for their commitment to the UK's climate agenda, and perhaps more so than for their expertise.

Bias in the speakers

Assembly members heard arguments from 47 speakers. Four of these were the Expert Leads, with the remainder split between Informants and Advocates.

Informants

Recruiting from within the movement

Informants – the individuals charged with explaining the range of views on a question – appear to have been chosen almost exclusively from the contact networks of the Expert Leads. For example, consider Expert Lead Chris Stark. The analysis in Figure 1 shows that the majority of the Informants were staff members either of the CCC – the organisation he heads – or of one of the array of other organisations with which it works.⁵⁰ The CCC's involvement with these organisations is not fully explained, but it certainly has a clear steering role in their research agendas. For instance, Stark sits on the UKERC Advisory Board, and CCC Chief Economist Adrian

Gault has the same role at the Centre for Research into Energy Demand Solutions (CREDS). In addition, two of the other Expert Leads are involved with these CCC affiliates: Jim Watson was UKERC director until late 2019, and Lorraine Whitmarsh has also produced work for the organisation.

The influence of Expert Lead Rebecca Willis in the recruitment of the (allegedly) neutral Informants is also apparent. Five of them were former staffers or current members and associates of the GA – a campaigning organisation. Libby Peake is its Head of Resource Policy, and has no other expert credentials.⁵¹ Mike Berners-Lee is an associate of Willis's at Lancaster University Environment Centre, and is also a 'professor in practice';⁵² Julie Hill at WRAP was director of the

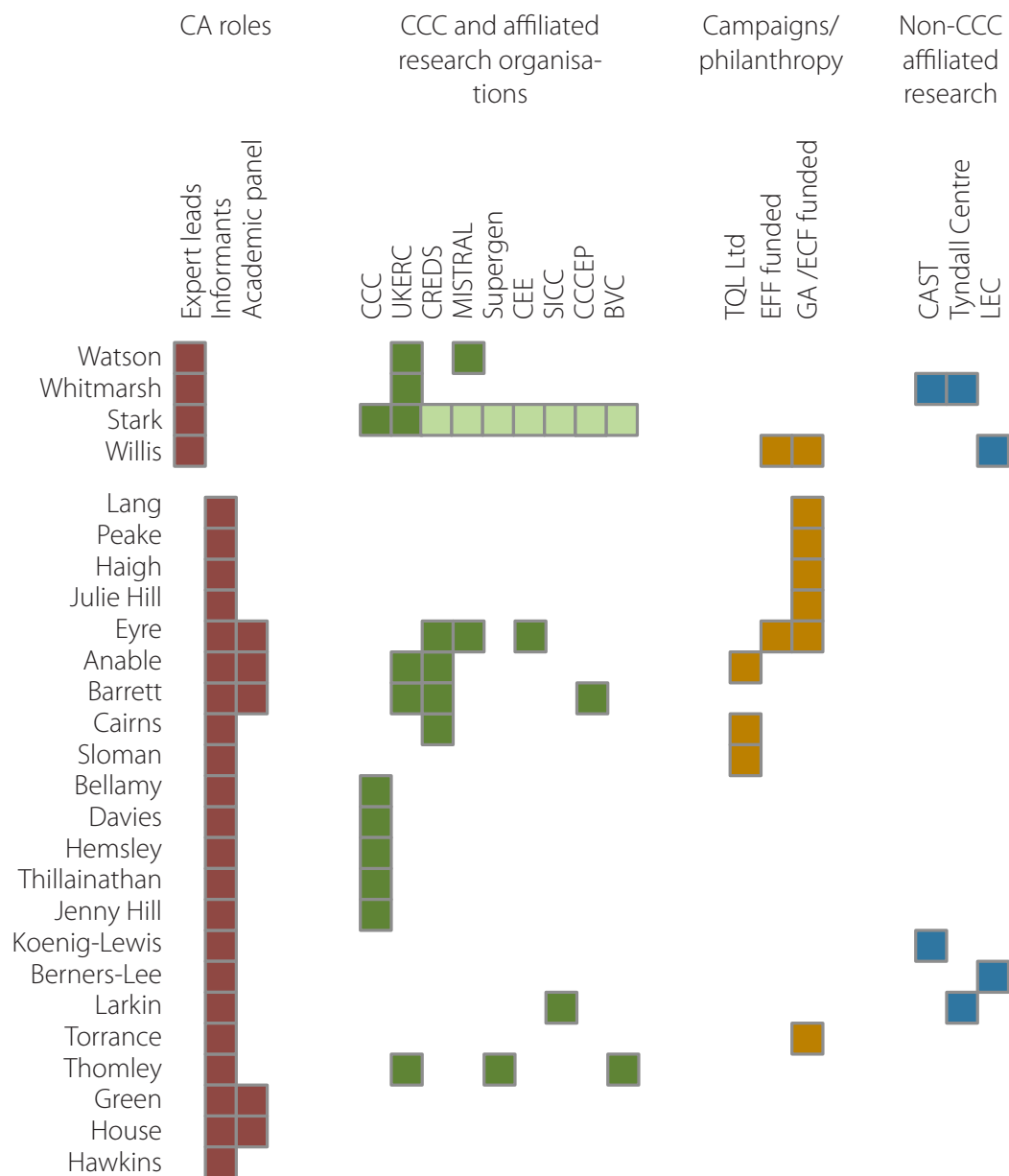


Figure 1: Personal connections among Expert Leads and Informants

Green Alliance 1992–97 and remains, with Willis, an Associate of the organisation;⁵³ Nick Eyre from the Environmental Change Institute at Oxford University, which is funded by the EFF,⁵⁴ is a ‘life member’ of GA, and co-authored a GA report called ‘Demanding Less: why we need a new politics of energy’ with Willis in 2011; Joanna Haigh of Imperial has a longstanding relationship with Green Alliance, working on briefings⁵⁵ (with Willis) and lobbying MPs,⁵⁶ and is on the Advisory Panel of the Energy and Climate Change Information Unit (ECIU).⁵⁷

And the general impression of recruitment from ‘within the movement’ is reinforced by the backgrounds of other Informants. Three came from organisations that count the Expert Leads among their members: CAST and the Tyndall Centre (Whitmarsh) and the Lancaster Environment Centre (LEC; Willis). Nick Eyre is director of CREDS, where Jillian Anable and John Barrett are subject leads and Sally Cairns is a researcher. Nicole Koenig-Lewis is a ‘partner’ at Whitmarsh’s CAST.⁵⁸ Haigh was co-director of the Grantham Institute at Imperial College until 2019. The benefactor of the Grantham Institute, billionaire hedge fund manager, Jeremy Grantham, is also a major donor to the ECF.⁵⁹ As is discussed above, EFF and ECF are major funders of the GA.

Three Informants were associates at anti-car campaigning consultancy, Transport for Quality of Life Ltd, despite two being introduced to the CA as ‘affiliated to the University of Leeds’. Another, Jason Torrance, was introduced as being affiliated to UK:100. But UK:100 is an ECF-funded⁶⁰ campaigning organisation, not a research or policy-neutral organisation. Previously, Torrance worked in management at Greenpeace UK, and earlier co-founded the radical anti-roads protest movement, Reclaim the Streets, and the UK chapter of the anarchist environmental group Earth First!⁶¹

Tim Lang of City University is a former director of Friends of the Earth and green food campaigning organisation, Sustain.⁶² Sustain has a strong relationship with the GA, and one of its directors, Shaun Spiers, is the current GA chair.⁶³

Professor of Transport and Energy, Jillian Anable, and Professor of Energy and Climate Policy, John Barrett, both from the University of Leeds, are both co-directors of the UKERC.

The network of relationships outlined above is not in itself necessarily nefarious. However, it does speak to the fact of a cliquish and incestuous network of organisations and individuals, and that undermines the CA’s oft-repeated claims to independence and academic rigour.

Informants, or more Advocates?

All of these organisations were established and are funded to drive forward a particular climate change policy agenda. But the creation of policy-specific research organisations stifles meaningful research. These organisations are necessarily hostile to debate and criticism, rather than being home to free and independent inquiry. They do not welcome critics of renewable energy or

opponents of the 'sustainability' agenda. Indeed, such critical voices have been largely removed from academe, and without any source of criticism from within the academy, agenda-driven research, of the kind undertaken by these organisations, risks becoming 'policy-based evidence-making'.

The question of whether climate change policy researchers are academics or political functionaries – civil servants, or bureaucrats – is an important one, but it appears that the Informants were presented to CA members and the public as neutral researchers. This was deceptive. As we have seen, nearly all Informants have long working and campaigning relationships with the Expert Leads. Nearly all have careers that place them, at best, at the overlap of academia, advocacy and activism, and some are simply political campaigners. Many have longstanding relationships with government departments as policy advisors. But they were falsely presented to the Assembly as impartial experts, with academic and scientific backgrounds, free from political influence.

Advocates

Rebecca Willis's PhD makes plain a hostility to democratic debate that has been fomented by decades of politically-driven academic research. Although entitled, *How do politicians understand and respond to climate change?*, and being based on interviews with MPs, Willis admits that, 'Known "climate sceptic" MPs...were not approached', because 'the research question focuses on how MPs try to understand and act on climate change, rather than examining the reasons for rejecting the issue altogether'. Willis offers no measure of how it can be determined that the issue has been 'rejected' by MPs, and seems uninterested in winning a 'mandate' through democratic means.

This way of thinking is apparent in the decision of the Expert Leads to exclude critical voices from the Assembly. BBC environment analyst, Roger Harrabin, reporting from the CA's second weekend meeting, explained that 'Organisers say no climate "sceptics" [have been] invited to give expert evidence because the remit is to debate ways of achieving Net Zero by 2050, not to debate the science'.⁶⁴ Moreover, as Harrabin, Willis and the ECF have made clear, criticism of *policy* can be dismissed as scepticism of *science*. Thus, glib comments that make no attempt at such a distinction are intended to exclude diversity of opinion and analysis from a deliberative process and from wider public debate. Such thinking presupposes that the only basis for objecting to any policy, from the regulation of diet to the deployment of wind farms, is hostility to the scientific understanding of greenhouse gases' first-order consequences for the atmosphere. Worse: it *refuses* to hear any criticism of any policy on just that basis.

So, with the allegedly neutral Informants all cut from the same green cloth, the Expert Leads also chose biased Advocates to further narrow the options available to CA members for their

consideration. For example, Leo Murray came from the ECF-funded campaign group Possible, which, as noted above, is the renamed 10:10 campaign. 10:10 was established in 2009 to drive public action on climate change through making personal pledges and to support climate policies. But it instead became noted for its incautious 'Splattergate' cinema advert, which depicted the execution of children. Murray was also a member of direct-action anti-aviation campaign, Plane Stupid,⁶⁵ which sought to raise public awareness of climate change by occupying airport runways, preventing thousands of travellers reaching their destinations. Plane Stupid co-founder Joss Garman went on to become the ECF's UK director.⁶⁶

Greenpeace's Doug Parr spoke to the assembly against investing confidence in technological solutions like greenhouse gas removal. Fernanda Balata, from the New Economics Foundation, argued for an 'economic transformation', locating the source of the problem of climate change within capitalism itself. Tony Juniper was introduced to the CA as being from UK environment quango, Natural England, but is best known from his previous role as Friends of the Earth England's director between 2003 and 2008.⁶⁷ During his tenure there, he organised the Big Ask campaign, which helped pave the way to the UK's Climate Change Act.

Another speaker was director of the ECF-funded UK100 campaign, Polly Billington, who became a special advisor to Ed Miliband in 2007 during the formulation of the Labour Party's Climate Change Bill, which Miliband later went on to steer through Parliament as Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change.

It is clear that these Advocates represented ideological positions, although they were presented to the Assembly as apolitical. In a small number of cases, other Advocates did offer a counter-position, but there were no face-to-face debates. Moreover, there are no written records of the Q&A sessions, where, for example, Doug Parr's arguments against atmospheric carbon dioxide extraction or Leo Murray's arguments against aviation, might have led to debate between Assembly members. This has obvious implications for the transparency of the process.

Bias in the sessions

During the session held on 8 February, the Assembly was split into three groups, one of which heard arguments on 'surface transport'. As might be expected from the analysis above, they heard from a highly unbalanced group of speakers: four informants, including Jillian Anable and Lynne Sloman, from the campaigning consultancy firm TQL, and Jason Torrance from the campaigning group UK:100, and two Advocates. One of these, Steve Melia, was introduced to CA members as being affiliated to the University of the West of England, but in fact he has long used his academic profile to campaign against cars,⁶⁸ is a mem-

ber of Extinction Rebellion, and is involved in direct action, for which he was arrested in April 2019.⁶⁹

As well as the lack of balance in the speakers, there was clear bias in the way the session was conducted. Members were asked to state their preferences among the following options about how to approach decarbonisation of transport:

- fast action to change the cars we drive;
- changing the cars we drive and how much we use them;
- reducing the amount travelled across all [private] transport types.

In Anable's analysis, the CA's vote on this question represented a 'breakthrough understanding and acceptance of the hard choices that are required for the decarbonisation of personal travel'. This 'breakthrough', however, consists of insight no more profound than the fact that if you restrict people's choices and ignore their complaints about the restriction, they will choose the least restrictive option. Option 1 won the most first preference votes, but Option 2 scored the highest in an alternative counting scheme – a fact ignored by Anable, but which reveals a murkier picture of the members' preferences than Anable admits to.

The format for the Q&A sessions was changed part-way through the Assembly's deliberations. Rather than the entire Assembly being able to put their questions to Advocates in the same session, the Assembly was divided into three groups, each of which questioned Advocates individually. By precluding the Advocates's answers being heard by a single Assembly, this division defeated the principle of sortition. The Assembly website offers no explanation for the inconsistencies across meetings.

Covid-19

Many green campaigning organisations have sought to use the crisis as an opportunity to advance their agendas. The UK Build Back Better campaign, for instance, claims to be 'a movement made up of organisations and groups from many different places', which includes 'teachers, healthcare workers, students and organisations who are fighting for change'.⁷⁰ However, it is in fact an ECF-funded campaign. Similarly, a *Mail on Sunday* investigation by David Rose revealed that the widespread road closures imposed by local authorities during the first lockdown were lobbied for by the ECF-funded UK:100.⁷¹

The Expert Leads, government departments and Parliament chose similarly to use the pandemic as an opportunity. In an email sent just prior to the last Assembly meeting, their liaison at the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, Jack Miller, informed Advisory Panel members that the schedule for the weekend had changed: Chris Stark would give a presentation on 'Rebuilding after the pandemic' and other implications of Covid-19. 'Ideally we would have liked to have run these by

you beforehand', explained Miller, 'However, I'm afraid that we wouldn't have been able to do so with sufficient time to incorporate your comments in a meaningful way'.

This on-the-hoof alteration of the Assembly's scope speaks again to the fact of its being a performance to suit the conveners' political needs more than an attempt to measure the public's thinking. While there can be little doubt that the Advisory Panel would have agreed with the conveners' alterations, the wilful departure from the agreed agenda demonstrates contempt for the Assembly itself and for the wider public it is supposed to represent. This was forcibly explained by one CA member, whose comments were published in the final report.

In my opinion the Citizens' Assembly is in no position to pass any comment on the 'implications' of coronavirus on climate change when so little is known about the long-term full scale of the impact, suffering and hardships that coronavirus will have on peoples' lives. Failing to seek prior consensus from the Assembly as to whether the Assembly collectively wishes any statement to be made on its behalf linking net zero to coronavirus smacks of political hubris. At a time when lives are being lost and extraordinary sacrifices are being made at the height of a global pandemic is the Assembly seriously being asked to choose between deciding to fund the future NHS, social care, welfare and basic fabric of society vs net zero before the financial and social costs of the pandemic have even started to be felt? I refuse to be balloted on these rash, grossly naïve and insensitive questions and I expect to see this response accurately conveyed to Parliament.

However, although this comment was published in the CA's final 554-page report, it was not reproduced in its Interim Briefing on *Covid-19, Recovery and the Path to Net Zero*, in which the following conclusions were reported:

79% of assembly members 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that, 'Steps taken by the government to help the economy recover should be designed to help achieve net zero';

93% of assembly members 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that, 'As lockdown eases, government, employers and/or others should take steps to encourage lifestyles to change to be more compatible with reaching net zero.'

A press release announcing the Interim Briefing noted that 'the Chairs of all six commissioning House of Commons Select Committees have written a letter to the Prime Minister, urging him to ensure that the Government takes the Assembly's views into account' in the management of the pandemic and the attempts to recover from the economic crisis. Expert Lead Jim Watson was quoted in coverage of the report, stating that despite the small number of members of the Assembly, they were 'well-informed on net-zero issues after months of discussions'.

But even if the Assembly members were sufficiently in-

formed about Net Zero (which this report has argued they could not have been), they cannot have understood the impact of either the Covid-19 pandemic, then barely three months old and which, at time of writing, is manifestly very far from over. The Assembly heard from just one speaker – Chris Stark – and heard no debate whatsoever.

The Covid-19 crisis and recovery present perhaps the most vexing questions for democratic governments since the Cold War, and perhaps since World War II. The notion that a 108-member focus group can provide the government with a mandate to act on such an important issue after just a 15-minute lecture from a civil servant is absurd and reflects the convening parties' deep cynicism. And it is by that measure which we should estimate the seriousness with which the convenors have treated this task.

Each day during the pandemic has seen the production of countless volumes of comment, debate and criticism. Expert, scientific, political and public opinions have changed. Deep questions have been raised about the most basic principles of democratic governance in general, and in time of crisis in particular. Many questions have been raised about the competences of governments, institutional science, expert advisors, political institutions, businesses, the police, and the public themselves. And very few answers to the questions about the nature of the virus and the best way to respond have been found. If there is any lesson to be learned from Covid-19 for the Net Zero agenda, it is that scientific consensus and strongly supportive public opinion are not a sufficient, nor even a 'strong and stable', basis for governance.

The CA's final report

The Assembly's final report was published on 10 September 2020.⁷² The large volume records the votes, and the comments submitted by its members, including unfavourable remarks about policy choices. These views are summarised in each section in 'pros and cons', but many of the criticisms are buried in what is, by any measure, a long read. At 554 pages, it is far longer than most policymakers would take time to read.

The presentation of the CA's conclusions as a 'mandate from the public' began as soon as the report was published. The BBC's Roger Harrabin reported that, 'A frequent flyer tax, phasing out polluting SUVs and restricting cars in city centres are among climate change solutions suggested by members of the public.'⁷³

But these were not the public's suggestions. They were options that the CA convenors asked the Assembly members to vote on. The members' choices were easily manipulated to conform to the convenors' and journalists' preferred interpretations. For example, on the question of a frequent flyer tax, the report explains that, 'The first ballot paper asked assembly members how much they agreed or disagreed that each policy option should be part of how the UK gets to net zero. The second ballot paper asked

them to rank the options in their order of preference'. The results of these ballots are shown in Table 1.

Although these results seem to show strong support for a progressive tax on aviation, as Harrabin reported, such an interpretation is an example of a common problem – that polling of this kind fails to capture nuance and context, to measure strength of stated preferences or to rank them against potentially competing preferences and priorities (see Appendix A). In contrast, when asked, 'How much do you agree or disagree that investment in the development and use of new technologies for air travel should be part of how the UK gets to net zero?', 61% of Assembly members answered 'strongly agree', 26% answered 'agree', and just 6% each answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree'. On the same basis that Harrabin claimed that the Assembly had suggested the Government should impose a frequent flyer levy, it can be argued that it actually suggested such a levy should *not* be imposed, and that new technologies should instead be used to achieve the sector's contribution to Net Zero. Without context, the members' votes offer no insight that could not be inferred from the weighting used to select the members.

Similarly, Assembly members apparently voted overwhelmingly in favour of changing VAT in order to help the UK achieve Net Zero. However, this vote turned out to include only 'Changes to VAT on energy efficiency and zero carbon heating products', and made no mention of changing VAT on domestic energy. Support for using tax coercively gained only weak support. Just 53% of Assembly members believed that the 'Government should introduce a carbon tax, which is fair for people of different incomes'. The report also found that 'Assembly members did not back voluntary agreements, changes to income tax or working

Table 1: Frequent flyer taxes – ballot results

How much do you agree or disagree that each of the following policy options should be part of how the UK gets to net zero?

	A carbon tax on all flights	Taxes that increase as people fly more often	Taxes that increase as people fly more often and as they fly further
	%	%	%
Strongly agree	15	35	65
Agree	44	35	15
Don't mind / unsure	15	12	3
Disagree	21	3	3
Strongly disagree	6	15	15
First preference %	12	21	68
Borda count	21	29	52

hours, personal carbon allowances, recycling requirements or pay-as-you-throw schemes'. In other words, its members were generally not in favour of policies that they thought would make life harder for people.

In December 2020, a BBC report for its #OurPlanetNow campaigning news strand featured the story of a seventeen-year-old Assembly member, Max.⁷⁴ He had decided to become pescatarian after learning of the CO₂ emissions caused by meat production. The BBC story claimed that the Assembly, on the public's behalf, had recommended that meat and dairy consumption be reduced by 20–40%. Mike Thompson, the CCC's Director of Analysis, repeated the claim later that month, at the launch of the Committee's Sixth Carbon Budget report,⁷⁵ saying, 'The Climate Assembly said they would be happy with a 20 to 40 per cent reduction in meat consumption'.

But the facts are very different. As the Assembly's report shows (see Table 2), just 10 of the 35 members who attended the panel on 'What we eat and how we use the land' chose reducing meat as a policy priority. In fact it was almost the least favoured option. In other words, the Assembly's report flatly contradicts the claims made by Thompson. What is worse, he claimed that the CCC had...

...looked really carefully at the Climate Assembly's recommendations, and actually we were quite engaged in the process as well. If you take the time to guide people through this, to explain why the changes are needed, to explain the sorts of things that need to happen, they're really supportive of action. And actually we were surprised how supportive they were of lots of the things that we were thinking of already. What we've done is we've taken their advice, and we've constructed our scenarios to align to it.

Table 2: The views of the CA panel on food production

Rank	Consideration	% assembly members who chose it as a priority
1	Provide support to farmers	89
2	Information and education	86
3	Use land efficiently	66
4	Rules for large retailers / supermarkets	46
5	More local and seasonal food	40
6	Make low carbon food affordable	34
7	Some, just less, meat	29
8	Part of planning policy and new developments, including allotments	14

If a civil servant, who was party to the Assembly, and who works under the direction of one of its Expert Leads, can, in that Expert Lead's presence, wilfully misinterpret the report, and take the views of ten people as the views of the entire assembly, and thus the entire population, then there exists a prima facie basis for treating the entire project with deep scepticism.

Conclusion

Conspicuous by its absence in the Assembly's deliberations and report is the role of democracy in the formulation of policy. An assembly of 110 people, and sometimes fewer, were asked to make decisions that will impact the lives of 67 million others – 609,000 people per Assembly member – for decades to come. The idea that such a group can reflect the rest of society, and that society will in turn accept its judgement because of their 'ordinary' backgrounds, therefore seems far-fetched. Moreover, the premise of the Assembly itself raises more questions about the climate agenda than it provides answers.

UK climate policy has, from the outset, been developed without regard for the public's views. Rather than testing the desire for a radical, far-reaching agenda, political parties developed a consensus, encouraged by green campaigning organisations that promised to give them a purpose at a time of historic levels of public disengagement and disenchantment. This absence of political debate was then reproduced across academia and throughout civil society by the conditions of public and private funding, which aligned research and campaigning organisations.

Opaque lobbying organisations, styled as 'philanthropic' or charitable, and academics tasked with producing policy-specific research, were brought closer into the policy-making process by politicians, both to shape agendas, and to elicit public support (but not public engagement with the decision-making process). No consideration was given to the consequences for representative democracy. It should be no surprise that the public, having been excluded from the process, remained unconvinced of the climate agenda, either way, and unmoved by increasingly desperate attempts by green campaigning organisations to mobilise them. The Climate Assembly was convened in order to overcome a series of misjudgements, and took for granted the necessity, urgency and legitimacy of an agenda to which public opinion and democracy have been mere afterthoughts.

But as has been shown here, the problems that produced the democratic deficit were merely reproduced in the Assembly. A small political movement, with a radical, unscientific and alarmist interpretation of climate change that demanded Net Zero and citizens' assemblies, was welcomed and indulged by the Government rather than challenged. And rather than debating the problems that had led to the existence of a democratic deficit, the Assembly was instead convened in the hope of sampling what public opinion *might* be, if it were possible to control the information to which

the public was exposed; in other words, by excluding perspectives critical of any aspect of the Net Zero agenda.

The convenors, organisers and speakers that made presentations to the Assembly were drawn from a cliquish political tendency among research, campaigning and philanthropic organisations, the nature of which was not made clear to assembly members. In a normal democratic exercise, questions about the blurred lines between academia, campaigning and lobbying would have been revealed to the public by debate and scrutiny, as would the involvement of special interests.

Critics and advocates of the Net Zero agenda are agreed on one thing: that the policies to deliver Net Zero will require huge public expense, and deep and permanent changes to the economy, lifestyles and culture – interventions that are alien to the democratic tradition. Hitherto, the public have not been party to the climate policymaking process, and to the extent that there has been public debate, it has been abstract, acrimonious, and subject to hostile attempts to exclude dissenting opinions. The actions of the assembly convenors epitomised this tendency to control the arguments, in the hope of producing a mandate for Net Zero.

But public opinion on radical climate policies has yet to form. In 2019, the outgoing Chief Scientific Advisor at DEFRA, Sir Ian Boyd, said that ‘the public had little idea of the scale of the challenge from the so-called Net Zero emissions target’,⁷⁶ and that ‘persuasive political leadership [is] needed to carry the public through the challenge’, which includes ‘[using] less transport, eat[ing] less red meat and buy[ing] fewer clothes.’ Politicians, campaigners, and policy wonks may have persuaded themselves of the success of the Assembly, but in reality the exercise will do little to persuade the broader public that they have given the government the mandate they want.

Appendix A: Measuring real public support for Net Zero

Though the strength of the Westminster consensus on climate change is unequivocal, the public's appetite for radical climate policies remains untested by democratic contest. Attempts to demonstrate public support in favour of strong climate policy have instead drawn from opinion polling.

For example, a 2018 YouGov poll for environmental litigation campaigning organisation Client Earth, found that 62% of respondents believe the UK government is doing too little when preparing for and adapting to the impacts of climate change.⁷⁷ In the same poll, 82% said that it was important for the UK to 'keep to the 2015 Paris Agreement pledge' and that 71% agreed that there should be greater investment in renewable energy.

These figures would seem to suggest strong support for the climate agenda, and were used to make just such an argument. But opinion polling is notorious for failing to capture nuance and context. Polls that ask respondents for their preferences rarely attempt to measure strength of stated preferences, or to rank them against potentially competing preferences and priorities.

A 2019 Sky poll found that 41% of respondents opposed raising taxes to meet the estimated £20–40 billion per year cost of meeting Net Zero, against 36% who supported it.⁷⁸ Forty-five percent (vs 27%) were against borrowing to achieve the target. An earlier Sky poll indicated that respondents were also unwilling to change their driving, flying, and eating habits,⁷⁹ as Net Zero would require.

A yet more complex picture emerges from polls that track opinions through time. A weekly June 2019 to September 2020 YouGov poll survey of 'The most important issues facing the country' asks respondents to choose up to three of fourteen top concerns. From a high of 34% in January 2020, the environment fell to 21% as a top issue, behind immigration and asylum (30%), leaving the EU (46%), health (52%) and the economy (55%), but slightly ahead of crime and the family (16% each).⁸⁰

Similar numbers emerge from academic attempts to explore public attitudes to climate change. A 2020 review of data from 40,000 respondents to the 2016 European Social Survey, found that only 5% of people were 'extremely worried about climate change'.⁸¹ And using data from the 2019 Eurobarometer Surveys, the study found that 'climate change is viewed as a less important problem than parochial issues' (health, social security, inflation, unemployment, and economy). While these results are not peculiar to the UK, they also speak to the viability of EU and global climate policy, on both of which the Climate Change Act is dependent.

These results show that public opinion on green policies is fluid, and contingent on current events and individuals' personal and wider circumstances, *rather than on core beliefs or worldview*. The Covid-19 crisis, and the economic fallout from it, are almost certainly factors in observed development of opinion. On the day that the CA report was published, Sky News published a YouGov survey that suggested, 'Two-thirds of Britons believe tackling coronavirus is more important than addressing climate change'.⁸² This compares with YouGov polls for the Global Warming Policy Foundation in March and May 2020, which asked 'Regarding the overall impact on humanity, are you more concerned about the impact of coronavirus or climate change?' Between the two polls, answers for coronavirus rose from 32 to 54%, and answers for climate fell from 45 to 30%.⁸³ Thirty four percent believed the economy should be prioritised, versus just 14% who believed it should be climate change.

Appendix B: The unchecked undemocratic influence of the ECF

The ECF has been given unfettered access to policy and research agendas across the EU, and within its member states and the UK. For example, its former UK director, Keith Allott, was given a role on the advisory panel of the taxpayer-funded CCCEP.⁸⁴ He had also sat on its steering committee during its foundation, while serving as WWF-UK's head of climate change.⁸⁵ Current ECF UK chair Joss Garman sits on the UKERC's advisory panel.

The ECF is also involved in global diplomatic negotiations. As shown in a transparency document on its website, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation made a substantial donation to the ECF to 'support key countries in demonstrating progress, reaffirming commitments, and showing collective ambition on the global scale in order to align with the goals of the Paris Agreement' and 'ensure NDC commitments are accompanied by Paris-compliant finance agendas.'⁸⁶ The project also received a \$7.2 million grant from another ECF-donor, The Children's Investment Fund,⁸⁷ to 'progressively strengthen and grow the climate movement to deliver an increase in global ambition in 2020'. The ECF's International Climate Politics Hub is an opaque project, which describes itself as 'an informal diplomatic advisory service, helping to support strategic alignment across the wider climate community', adding that it 'shares actionable intelligence on climate politics – prompting our partners to deliver the right message to the right audience at the right time'.

In its 2011 report, ECF's global parent organisation, the US-based ClimateWorks Foundation boasts that the ECF, has 'played a key role' in the formulation of the EU's climate policies, such as energy market reform, the cancellation of coal-fired power plants and the 'European Commission's adoption of a multidecade plan to decarbonize its economy.'⁸⁸ It has also 'contributed to a paradigm shift in the European power sector and regional politics', claims the report, noting that 'These efforts paid off in 2011 when the European Commission published its own 2050 Roadmaps on Climate and Energy, which incorporate much of the findings of ECF's Roadmap 2050', and that 'ECF grantees were also instrumental in tightening the offset provisions of the EU Emissions Trading System'.

Much of the detail behind EU policy is revealed by a 2010 Climateworks report, which candidly explains that a director at the European Commission Directorate-General for Energy and Transport, Christopher Jones, had met then ECF director, Michael Hogan.⁸⁹ 'Jones was unsure how to comply with the new [2009] mandate to slash emissions [by 80%]', says the report, adding that 'Jones asked whether ECF would be willing to take on the enormous analytical task of charting a pathway to full decarbonization'. The Commission thereby outsourced far-reaching policy design to an unaccountable lobbying organisation, and its hand-picked 'academics, transmission operators, and leading NGOs, and [...] representatives from Europe's top utility companies'. The 'roadmap' boasted that it 'breaks new ground by outlining plausible ways to achieve an 80% reduction target from a broad European perspective, based on the best available facts elicited from industry players and academia'⁹⁰.

But contemporary criticism, from the likes of Ted Nordhaus, Michael Shellenberger, Bjorn Lomborg and Roger Pielke Jr., from a 'pro-climate' perspective, explained the problem with 'put[ting] the pollution regulatory "cart" before the energy technology "horse"',⁹¹ an insurmountable problem that had long been recognised. In a stark echo of the UK's Climate Change Act 2008, just a year earlier, the European Commission had agreed targets that it manifestly did not know how to achieve. And a decade later, policymakers agreed a UK Net Zero target without knowing how it would be achieved. The CA was later asked to fill in the gaps – the democratic deficit created by such incautious but ambitious policymaking.

Strict policy frameworks, lobbied for by ECF-funded campaigning organisations, established opportunity for only the most radical perspectives. Critics – whether pro-consensus, pro-climate analyses, such as that of Nobel prize-winning environmental economist William Nordhaus, or the 'climate sceptics' and the 'interest groups' referred to by Harrabin, Willis and the ECF – were excluded, to the advantage of the ECF and its benefactors' ideological or financial interests, unchecked by

democratic debate or oversight.

But those who criticise the lack of policy realism, those who criticise the outsourcing of policy design to opaque organisations, the involvement of questionable academic activists, and the influence of special interests might all be called 'climate sceptics', whether or not they 'challenged climate science'. The Climate Assembly heard from an extremely narrow section of academia and civil society, all of it to some extent involved with the ECF. Moreover, their task was entirely framed by policy ambitions that were established after aggressive lobbying by ECF grantees and the ECF itself.

ECF's claim that it is apolitical and non-interested fails basic tests of reason. Even at face value, the role of such a large and opaque organisation at the centre of a network of hundreds of equally opaque partner organisations, funded almost exclusively by business interests, and in close proximity to diplomatic processes and governments, without democratic scrutiny or oversight, raises obvious questions about conflicts of interest that the ECF is unwilling to answer. Moreover, the agenda ECF campaigns for involves a transformation of politics, spanning from the regulation of lifestyle through to the management of the economy, and the transfer of power to technocracies and supranational political institutions – interventions that are as ideological as any twentieth century movement. The concomitant consequences of these changes for democracy are already grave and should be the fundamental subject of public debate.

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THE GLOBAL WARMING POLICY FORUM

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