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Renewables Manifesto

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Renewable energy protects us against the decisions of foreign governments, global markets and climate change, putting the UK back in charge of our energy.

Renewables come from the wind, sun and the rain. From the energy crops, sewage, wood, food and farm waste we grow. And from the waves and tides off our coastline. They are essential to combat climate change, replacing carbon-emitting coal and gas with low and no carbon power, and directly tackle the global warming that has led to destructive extreme weather. Providing 15% of Britain's electricity today, renewables are set to provide nearly a third by 2020. And renewables will deliver 15% of the UK's total energy needs by 2020. That's 15% of all our heat, transport and electricity coming from renewables. And that could double by 2030.

Renewables are based on new and exciting technologies that are steadily getting cheaper for consumers. For example the cost of solar power has fallen by 65% during this Parliament. Renewables cost each household 71p a week, but provide more and more insurance against soaring bills when gas and oil prices surge due to an uncertain world. Whether through gas shocks from Russia or oil shocks from the Middle East, renewables will protect British businesses and consumers. Energy security matters.

Renewable energy comes in many forms. We provide energy when the wind blows, the sun shines and when the tide comes in and out. But we can also generate large amounts of electricity, fuel and heat at any time from sustainable supplies of forest and farm products, sewage and food waste. Biomass electricity and biogas can heat our homes, power our vehicles and keep the lights on when consumers want, assuring year-round security of supply.

Renewables are also creating new industries and jobs in home-grown energy. They have the clear objective of steadily reducing costs as they become mature technologies, and are determined not just to be environmentally beneficial, but also to be the cheapest source of energy, outcompeting gas, coal and nuclear on price. Overall, renewables are responsible for 100,000 direct jobs. Turnover in wind, wave and tidal power alone has nearly trebled in three years to £8.1 billion.

Much of this growth has been concentrated in small businesses, which are growing by leaps and bounds. This is helping to diversify the energy industry, and is providing more choice and competition for consumers. The creation of new renewables industries brings enormous opportunities which British small businesses are grasping: much of the increase in turnover is among energy suppliers, contractors, and machine makers who employ fewer than 100 people. In the wind and marine sectors over 80% of businesses have 250 employees or less, with half of all companies employing fewer than 25 people.

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The growth of renewables makes Britain – and British consumers – more self-reliant, capable of generating much more of our own electricity and gas without dependence on imports or even the national grid. Decentralised energy – where consumers and communities produce much of their own power – has great potential. We aim to make every British community a power station.

Action for Renewables combines all the leading organisations that represent this growing sector, which are jointly calling for a new commitment to respect the Climate Change Act passed with the support of all three main parties. We ask for a pledge to respect the recommendations of the independent Committee on Climate Change, set up under the Act. In particular, the target for low and no carbon electric power by 2030 should be accepted to provide certainty for investors and lower costs of investment for consumers.

To continue the rapid growth of renewable energy, we believe that the Government should reaffirm the national UK target for 15 per cent of our energy to come from renewables in 2020 and set a more ambitious target for 2030. The goal should be to set as a legally-binding requirement to meet at least 30 per cent of our energy from renewables by 2030.

The industry is now at a tipping point where greater certainty for investors will reap enormous rewards. Far from costing more subsidies, this firm commitment will ensure that renewables becomes the cost effective choice in a low carbon economy. Onshore wind and solar will be competitive even with environmentally damaging coal and gas by 2020. And the industry wants to see all renewables competing in an open market by 2030, where carbon-emitting energy pays for the environmental damage it causes.

The British government should back EU-wide efforts to reform the emissions trading scheme, so that the costs of carbon emissions are properly reflected in the market price of energy. In particular, the system of allowances must be tightened to ensure that the EU stays on track with its goals of a sharp reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. The EU has played a vital and pioneering role in tackling global climate change, and Britain must continue to show leadership within the EU and on the wider world stage.

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Six key priorities

In summary, our test of the parties' commitment to a secure, green future rests on six pledges:

- 1) support the Climate Change Act to keep us on course to meet our carbon commitments and back global efforts to tackle climate change
- 2) set a new renewables target for 2030 of 30 per cent of UK energy
- 3) back the independent Committee on Climate Change's recommendation to set a binding target for low carbon electricity by 2030.
- 4) Fund the Renewable Heat Incentive for new applications after 2016
- 5) Boost the UK's Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation to reach the 10 per cent renewable energy target for transport by 2020
- 6) reform the EU emissions trading scheme to ensure the market takes account of all sectors' polluting cost of carbon emission .