

Our email to the DBERR press office...

Further to our earlier phone conversation, here are some of the points to which your department might like to reply.

If John Hutton were to grant permission to E.On's proposed new coal-fired electricity generating plant at Kingsnorth without full capture and storage it would have the following profoundly negative consequences.

- it would lock us in to inefficient, high carbon energy generation until at least 2020
- it would set a precedent for the other coal-fired power stations that are waiting in the planning pipeline
- it would be a distraction from energy efficiency and renewable energy which are better solutions (and are needed anyway to meet the EU renewables target)
- it would send the wrong signal to developing countries at the UN talks, damage our credibility and compromise the likelihood of success
- it would represent a missed opportunity to take a lead in what Dr James Hansen (director of NASA) hopes will become a political tipping point in our global efforts to protect the climate
- it would run contrary to a massive civil society campaign against new coal without CCS
- it would disincentivise the development of full-scale capture and storage
- it would be incompatible with James Hansen's assertion that a "decision to phase out coal use unless the CO2 is captured is a global imperative, if we are to preserve the wonders of nature, our coastlines, and our social and economic well being" and that "if we continue to build coal-fired power plants without carbon capture, we will lock in future climate disasters associated with passing climate tipping points." (Hansen's letter to Gordon Brown, 19 December 2007)

Kind regards,
Phil England
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Their reply...

Phil,

We cannot comment on any specific live application - such as E.On's Kingsnorth application which is currently with the Government. No decision has been made on this application and at the company's request a decision would not be made until after the Government's CCS consultation, which was launched recently.

However, I am happy to provide you with some information on the Government's general position on coal new-build.

I think the first point to make is that the UK needs a diverse energy mix to ensure secure, low energy supplies in the future. Furthermore, emissions from any new fossil fuel power station would have to fit within the EU ETS emissions cap. This is set to tighten year on year to help ensure that the 2020 target of a 20% reduction on CO2 emissions of 1990 is achieved, with continuing reductions expected thereafter. And through our support for the strengthening of the EU ETS, commitment to a UK carbon capture & storage demonstration project, and the recently launched consultation on CCS, we are showing global leadership in ensuring that this technology becomes commercially viable as quickly as possible

A ministerial quote if you need...

Energy Minister, Malcolm Wicks said:

"We are committed to the development and deployment of CCS technology and we intend to be one of the first countries in the world to demonstrate the technology on a coal-fired station at a commercial scale.

"Coal is and will remain a vital part of the global energy mix and this will be the case for many years to come. The flexibility of coal and gas will have a crucial role in backing up renewable energy capacity and providing us with reliable electricity supplies through the next decade as we move to a low carbon economy."

"The EU ETS caps the electricity generation industry's emissions and any new coal fired capacity would not add any thing to total carbon emissions. The key is to get the level of the cap right. The Government support current proposals for the cap to tighten year on year from 2013 – by 2020, the cap would be 21% below 2005 emission levels."

The role for coal

The flexibility of coal and gas plant will have a crucial role in backing up the renewable capacity and providing us with reliable electricity supplies through the next decade. Coal provides an alternative to gas, which is important as we become increasingly dependent on imported gas. The flexibility of coal also makes it particularly valuable in backing up intermittent renewable sources, such as windpower. The Government has a wide ranging set of policies in place to encourage the development and deployment of low carbon energy generating technology. It will not be possible for all the new capacity we need in a relatively short space of time, to be low-carbon.

CCS

The Government believes CCS technologies have a real potential to help us tackle climate change with the potential to capture up to 90% of damaging carbon emissions from fossil fuel power stations. As such, we are one of the few countries in the world to have committed to supporting a commercial scale demonstration of the full chain of CCS technologies – the completion date for this demonstration is 2014. Additionally, our recently launched consultation will help achieve a safe, effective regulatory regime which is supportive to investment in this technology.

The EU ETS

The EU ETS caps the electricity generation industry's emissions and any new coal fired capacity would not add any thing to total carbon emissions. The key is to get the level of the cap right. We support current proposals for the cap to tighten year on year from 2013 – by 2020, the cap would be 21% below 2005 emission levels

The EU ETS drives reductions in emissions, as well as allowing Industry to select the most cost-effective options for reducing these emissions and because the cap limits total emissions from some 11,000 installations, setting emission limits for one energy producing sector will not reduce emissions overall rather it will transfer emissions to another sector whilst stifling technology diversity.