

UK has imported and dug up more than twice the coal it will ever need

**‘Leading to over consumption of coal globally’ says leading economist
‘A disgrace’ to UK’s ambitions as a global post-coal leader, say UK and international campaigners**

Interviews / questions: info@coalaction.org.uk

Latest government figures show that current stockpiles of coal in the UK are more than twice what the government anticipates coal-fired power stations will need ahead of the 2025 deadline for ending coal-fired power for electricity.

At the end of 2018, 4.1 million tonnes of coal was stockpiled at UK power stations¹. Analysis by Friends of the Earth indicates that this is more than double the 1.6 million tonnes of coal that the government predicts² the UK will need for UK coal-fired electricity generation, which is due to end by 2025.

Findings by Coal Action Network suggested that this excess in coal in the UK is triggering increased exports of the fossil fuel onto the global market. Exports of coal from the UK are at an eight year high, increasing 28% in 2018³, and sourced from the UK’s opencast coal mines.⁴

Despite the figures, the UK is still extracting and importing coal from opencast mines, adding to the surplus in stockpiles.

Isobel Tarr from the Coal Action Network said; "Despite calling a Climate Emergency, the UK government’s inaction on stopping coal mining has contributed to a surplus of the world’s most polluting fossil fuel. This is the consequence of ignoring community calls to leave coal underground. As a supposed global leader in 'powering past coal', this is a disgrace. All existing and planned opencast coal mines, as well as imports of coal must stop immediately. These figures show that the UK is in the strongest position possible to leave coal in the past."

NEW COAL MINES: IMPLICATIONS

The figures came to light as a coalition of campaign groups (Friends of the Earth, Coal Action Network and Save Druridge) made submissions to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, James Brokenshire, as part of a review of two coal mines; Highthorn in Northumberland (proposed), and Bradley County Durham (in operation).

¹ Energy Trends March 2019. Chart 2.4 (Table 2.1)

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/791293/Energy_Trends_March_2019.pdf

² Annex G: Major Power Producers by Source:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/updated-energy-and-emissions-projections-2018>

³ BEIS Coal production and foreign trade March 2019 Import and Exports of Solid Fuels Table 2

⁴ Fieldhouse is operated by Hargreaves which has exported coal in recent months according to Panjiva exporters database accessed April 2018.

June Davison, a local resident and campaigner near to the Bradley site, which has been in operation since June 2018, said; "Every tonne of thermal coal that has come out of the ground at Bradley over the past 10 months has been surplus to the UK's requirements. Banks Group's justification for destroying our valley and seeking to open new mines is based on the lie that they are providing for UK household energy needs. The Secretary of State must stop this and ensure that other communities do not suffer needlessly the way we have."

The Secretary of State is due to make a decision on whether to stop the Bradley mine and the proposed Highthorn mine by 13th June.

INTERNATIONAL REACTION

International campaigners have also reacted angrily to the news that the UK is importing coal in excess of its projected energy needs. In the first two months alone of 2019, 1.2 million tonnes of coal have been imported from Russia, North America and Colombia.⁵

Vladimir Sliviyak, co-chairman for Russian environmental group Ecodefense, said, "The news that the UK power stations continue to buy Russian coal despite having too much already adds insult to injury to those on the frontline of opencast coal destruction. Coal mining in Russia means environmental destruction and human rights violations. The more coal tainted with blood the UK buys from Russia, the more damage caused."

Samuel Arragoces, displaced from the community of Tobacco by the Colombian mine Cerrejon, said, 'We are worried about what is happening in the UK, where the government promised to phase out coal. Coal mining here in La Guajira, Colombia, is causing more suffering every day. Our question for the UK government is, will it keep letting power stations buy this coal now that it will not be needed? Because here the coal mine is seeking to expand, polluting more water sources, stealing more land. Our community leaders are threatened with death for trying to stop this. So will the UK carry on being a marketplace for this coal?'

ANALYSIS: ECONOMICS / CLIMATE CHANGE

Increasingly low coal generation could be one reason why stockpiles have continued to grow; Drax power station has not burnt coal since March 23rd, Aberthaw since 14th March and West Burton since January.⁶

Dr Richard Denniss, Chief Economist at the The Australia Institute, said, "Economics 101 tells us that when you increase the supply of something you push down the price. By mining more coal in the UK than is burned in the UK there is no doubt that the UK coal industry is putting downward pressure on world coal prices and, in turn, leading to an increase in consumption of coal globally. This will undermine international commitments to keep global temperature rise under 1.5 degrees to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. The only reason the UK should approve new coal mines, when it already has more coal than it can burn, is if it hopes to increase coal consumption in other countries."

ENDS

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⁵ 525,000 tonnes of coal have been imported from Russia, 480,000 tonnes from North America and 177,000 tonnes from Colombia in January and February 2019. Data from HMRC

⁶ Calculated by EnAppSys from National Grid generation data.

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NOTES TO EDITOR

Coal Exports

Banks Group have stated their intention to seek new export markets and have exported coal in recent years.⁷ Hargreaves, who opened the Fieldhouse opencast in County Durham in spring 2018, are exporting coal from the UK, as are Celtic Energy who operate three coal mines in Wales (Selar, Nant Helen and East Pit) according to Panjiva exporters database accessed April 2018.

Opencast coal extraction

Opencast coal extraction involves stripping large areas of topsoil and subsoil to extract vast quantities of coal using heavy machinery and dynamite. It is far more destructive to the local environment than traditional mining which it came to replace. As such this opencast is opposed by Durham Miners Association:

"The Durham Miners' Association has opposed opencast mining for many decades. It damaged deep mining in the past and now threatens to ruin our environment for no perceivable benefit. Our communities have suffered enough with the decline of the coal industry and they do not need to have more injury added to insult. There are deep mining projects reopening in various parts of England. So there is little need to rip up the countryside to get coal. We support the locally lead campaign to protect Pont Valley in Co. Durham"

Changes to planning policy framework in Wales in 2018 have effectively blocked future applications for new opencast coal in Wales.

Secretary of State decision (13th June 2019)

Re. "Highthorn" at Druridge Bay, Northumberland & "Bradley" in Pont Valley, Country Durham.

The opencast mine known as "Bradley" in the Pont Valley has been campaigned against by local residents, Campaign to Protect Pont Valley, Coal Action Network, Laura Pidcock MP and the Green Party. Work began in June 2018.

The decision by the Secretary of State (now James Brokenshire) not to revoke the mine was given in July 2018, and the judicial review of the decision was then brought. This compelled the Secretary of State to re-make the decision, admitting that it had not been made using the same decision-making process as when Hightorn was 'called in'. Unlike the Hightorn decision, greenhouse gas emissions were not considered.

The "Highthorn" application was 'called-in' in 2017 by Sajid Javid, the then Secretary for Housing, Communities and Local Government, who then turned it down in March 2018 on the grounds of climate change and damage to the local landscape. Banks Group (behind

⁷<https://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/business/14754283.county-durhams-banks-mining-exports-first-ever-coal-to-spain/>

both Bradley and Highthorn) won an appeal forcing the Secretary of State to review the decision to call it in.

In April 2019 the Secretary of State informed all parties involved in both cases that the decisions would be taken together based and considered on the grounds of whether or not the mine would cause additional greenhouse gases to be burned. In this process the data showing the UK has stockpiled far beyond its projected need was uncovered, showing that any new coal dug up would generate additional GHGs.

UK mining company myths: greenhouse gases

Coal mining companies may claim that their domestic mining is more environmentally friendly than imported coal due to transport emissions. A life cycle analysis commissioned by the Coal Action Network makes clear that transport emissions are only one component of total life-cycle emissions and do not necessarily eclipse other factors such as operational efficiencies at large foreign mine and methane emissions. The life cycle analysis is available on request.

UK mining company myths: coal for steel

Banks Group, operating the Bradley site may argue that the coal from the site can be used for steel and is therefore not affected by the findings that there is a surplus of coal for coal-fired power. But according to the 2014 environmental statement relating to the mine, and to the Inspector's report (para. 28), 520,000 tonnes of coal were expected to be extracted in total, of which 75,000 tonnes (14.4%) were expected to be suitable for coking coal for steel. According to available data the majority is suitable only for coal-fired power.

Coal imported from Russia

Slow Death In Siberia, FERN & Coal Action Network:

https://www.fern.org/fileadmin/uploads/fern/Documents/Slow%20Death%20in%20Siberia_1.pdf

Summary article: <https://www.redpepper.org.uk/slow-death-in-siberia/>

Ditch Coal Report pp 11-22

<https://www.coalaction.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Ditch-Coal-Report.pdf>

Coal imported from Colombia

Ditch Coal Report pp 23-36

<https://www.coalaction.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Ditch-Coal-Report.pdf>

Recent death threat to indigenous community leaders:

<http://londonminingnetwork.org/2019/05/urgent-action-paramilitary-death-threats-to-indigeno-us-critics-of-cerrejon-mine/>

UN report (2007) on Cerrejon:

https://www.humanrights.ch/cms/upload/pdf/071018_DECLARATION_kolumbien_e.pdf