

# David Attenborough on climate change: 'We cannot be radical enough'

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David Attenborough giving evidence to the House of Commons Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee

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By **Adam Vaughan**

The UK must take radical action to meet its climate change targets, David Attenborough told a UK parliamentary committee today. But he warned ministers must carry the public with them because of the financial cost of meeting the goals.

“We cannot be radical enough in dealing with these issues,” he told MPs when

asked if the UK should bring forward [its new target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050](#), as some [campaigners have called for](#). But he said the real issue was what is politically possible.

**Read more:** [David Attenborough finally talks climate change in prime time BBC slot](#)

“Because it costs money in realistic terms, dealing with these problems mean we have to change our lifestyles,” he [told the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee](#). “The question of how fast we can go is how fast we can carry the electorate with us.” Getting to net zero within three decades was a “tough target” but he “hoped to goodness” the UK could achieve it.

Attenborough compared changing morality towards slavery in Britain in the nineteenth century to changing attitudes on [climate change](#) today. “I suspect we are right now in the beginning of a big change. Young people are the stimulus bringing that about,” he said.

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The movement of school pupils striking over climate change, sparked by Greta Thunberg in Sweden last year, was a beacon of hope, he said. “The most encouraging thing I see of course is that the electorate of tomorrow are making their voices very, very clear.” Turning to an audience of young people in parliament behind him, he said: “It is their world we are playing with. It is their future in our hands.”

Attenborough, [who presented a BBC documentary on climate change in April](#) and has become increasingly outspoken on the need for action, denied he had only started campaigning on the issue after public attitudes had shifted. “I didn’t wait for public opinion to change. I waited until the facts seemed incontrovertible.”

The 93-year old said he could “only operate” by remaining optimistic that

humanity will tackle climate change. “I see no future in being pessimistic, because that leaves you to say to hell with it, why should I care. I believe that way disaster lies.

“I feel an obligation. The only way you can get up in the morning is to believe that actually we could do something about it. And I suppose I think we can,” he said.

In a wide-ranging hearing in parliament, he said climate change would cause “huge immigration” to the US and Europe in future, it will be a “sad day” if Donald Trump succeeds in [withdrawing the US from Paris Agreement in 2020](#), and warned of future pressures on food production. “We are going to have to look for new sources of food unless we do something about population,” he said. The naturalist said his “most vivid” firsthand experience of climate change was seeing the damage it had wrought to Australia’s Great Barrier Reef.

He also praised British scientists for leading the world on research in the upper atmosphere, and [for their role identifying the ozone hole in the 1980s](#).