

# The Australian

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## UK says it will halve carbon emissions, but may water down pledge if Europe doesn't follow

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**THE British government has pledged to cut the country's carbon emissions in half by 2025 - an ambitious target which could be watered down unless other European countries cut their emissions accordingly.**

Energy Secretary Chris Huhne told parliament that Britain would reduce the emissions by about 50 per cent from benchmark emission levels in 1990, part of its legally mandated commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 60 per cent by 2030, and 80 per cent by 2050.

Mr Huhne sought to cast the dramatic cuts as a massive boost to the country's green technology companies, telling parliamentarians he was putting Britain "at the leading edge of the global low-carbon revolution."

But Britain's energy-intensive industries, such as steel manufacturers, are warning that the country risks making itself uncompetitive unless other European countries follow its lead. They've pressured the government to put in an escape clause which allows for the target to be scrapped as soon as 2014 if Britain's European partners fail to implement their own carbon cuts.

David Cameron, Britain's prime minister, made the same point in separate comments to politicians on Tuesday.

"It doesn't actually help climate change if you simply drive an energy intensive industry to locate in Poland rather than Britain," Mr Cameron told politicians. "We believe that Europe should follow our lead and go for a 30 per cent reduction."

But, the Prime Minister added, Europe has yet to make the same commitment "so there is a review clause in what is being announced in 2014 to make sure that if they are not on that pathway, then we shouldn't put ourselves on it too".

Carbon dioxide gas - spewed into the atmosphere by cars, planes, factories, and power plants - is a major driver of man-made climate change, which scientists say is already leading to global warming and melting ice caps.

Britain emitted nearly 800 million tonnes of greenhouse gases in 1990, but although the number has fallen

significantly in the past two decades, environmental activists say more must be done and faster. Legislation passed in 2008 made the goal of implementing an 80 per cent cut by 2050 legally binding.

Nevertheless there's lingering opposition to the reductions. Britain is still trying to emerge from a damaging recession, and many business leaders have argued for a reprieve. The issue split Mr Cameron's cabinet, which is composed of politicians from the business-friendly Conservative Party and the traditionally green-conscious Liberal Democrats, of which Mr Huhne is a senior member.

Mr Cameron, who campaigned on the promise to make his administration the “greenest government ever,” reportedly had to personally intervene to secure an agreement.

The announcement delighted environmental groups, as well as the British government's climate advisers, who had pushed for the reductions.

The European Union's Climate Action Commissioner Connie Hedegaard said in a statement that Britain's pledge was “an outstanding example of strong willingness to act despite difficult economic times.”

*AP*



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