



*A grassroots campaign taking action against mammoth fuel bills and working towards an affordable, sustainable and democratic energy system*

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Claire Perry MP  
Minister of State for Energy and Clean Growth  
Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy  
1 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1H 0ET

27 July 2018

Dear Minister,

### **ECO3 proposals risk lives of rural residents**

We are writing about the decision to exclude oil from the next phase of the ECO scheme. We understand that this is due to come into force this October, and that the consultation period has closed, but the dangers are very real and we hope that a change may still be possible.

We agree with the principle already stated by BEIS and others: users of oil should not be penalised without providing realistic ways to move off oil. We cannot add to the statistical arguments advanced by BEIS and by NEA, the Committee on Fuel Poverty and others, and we believe the case has been well made that there are not *currently* any viable alternatives to oil for many off-grid customers. We would however like to make two additional points:

1. With climate change, there is a very real prospect that at least some winters in the near future will be as brutal as the last. In this context a decision not to support repair or replacement of failing or poorly functioning oil-fuelled heating systems will undoubtedly cause ill health and seriously affect the welfare of many people living in the countryside, who have no other realistic way to heat their homes. For some, it is very likely to prove to be a death sentence. Many rural homes, off the gas grid, are also particularly hard to heat and hard to insulate (eg ancient stone-walled cottages). **The combination of such low energy efficiency with faulty or ineffective heating and extreme winter temperatures can easily prove fatal.** NEA estimate that the extreme cold in the 2017-18 winter added over 2,000 *extra* deaths to the already scandalous "normal" toll of "excess winter deaths" arising from fuel poverty and cold homes. People living off grid are particularly at risk.

It is no solution to tell people to use other forms of heating that would drastically increase their costs. Electric heating costs about double the cost of oil. Renewable solutions must be found, and must be rigorously tested to ensure that they are *in practice* good value for money for those who use them; FPA have had many complaints from users of systems that sound great in theory (eg NIBE heat pumps). The cost of energy often comes directly from families' food budgets. If people cannot afford to eat, they also cannot keep warm.

One man wrote that his only option was to go out into the hills to gather wood; he was himself disabled and had a family to keep warm.

Clearly long term alternatives to oil must be found, and financed through ECO, RHI or in other ways, and clearly, where people are forced to live in centuries old buildings, substantial sums should be available to double-glaze them and do whatever can be done to insulate them -- as now often happens when they are used as holiday homes. But until this is achieved, people living off-grid should not be condemned to winters of misery -- and worse. They must not be deprived of the support they need to ensure that their oil-fuelled systems are up to date and in good repair.

2. Fuel Poverty Action has always stood for energy that is both sustainable and affordable: one is as important as the other. It will not help to further a transition to a low carbon economy, for that transition to be blatantly discriminatory and brutal towards people who have no other way than oil to heat their homes. The unavoidable, urgent switch to renewables and zero-carbon homes is dependent on public acceptance. This will not be forthcoming if policies imposed in the name of going "green" further impoverish already struggling parts of the community, or end up costing lives.

We very much hope you will reconsider, before the start of winter 2018-19.

Yours sincerely,

Ruth London

cc

Rt Hon Greg Clark, Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

Caroline Dinenage MP, Minister of State for Care, Dept. of Health & Social Care

Kit Malthouse MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Family Support, Housing and Child Maintenance, Dept. for Work & Pensions

Dominic Raab MP, Minister of State for Housing, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Andrej Miller, Head of supplier obligations and targeting, BEIS Home and Local Energy