



The
British
Psychological
Society

EU Green Paper A European Strategy for Sustainable, Competitive and Secure Energy

Response from The British Psychological Society

The British Psychological Society is the learned and professional body for psychologists in the United Kingdom. It has a total membership of over 42,000 and is a registered charity. Under its Royal Charter, the key objective of the Society is "to promote the advancement and diffusion of the knowledge of psychology pure and applied and especially to promote the efficiency and usefulness of members by setting up a high standard of professional education and knowledge". The Society maintains the Register of Chartered Psychologists and has a code of conduct and investigatory and disciplinary systems in place to consider complaints of professional misconduct relating to its members. The Society is an examining body granting certificates and diplomas in specialist areas of professional applied psychology.

This response has kindly been prepared by Professor David Uzzell (Director, Environmental Psychology Research Group, Department of Psychology, University of Surrey) on behalf of the Society's Research Board.

1. It is widely accepted that technological developments alone will be insufficient to achieve the necessary carbon reduction objectives identified by the IPCC. Behavioural change by consumers as well as producers is essential if a sustainable energy policy for Europe is to be formulated and achieved. Therefore, it is highly appropriate for the Society to comment on the EU Green Paper **A European Strategy for Sustainable, Competitive and Secure Energy**. Significant and sustainable long-term changes in energy consumption will only be achieved at the institutional, household and individual level through changes in understanding, attitudes and behaviours in each of these domains. Psychological research can make a significant contribution to policy makers understanding of the options and mechanisms available to them to achieve the energy goals. Our views have been partly informed by the UK Sustainable Development Commission's submission to the DTI Energy Review, *Meeting the challenge: energy policy for the 21st Century*, which we commend to the EU.
2. While it is understandable that there is an emphasis in the Green Paper on issues such as security of supplies and enhanced competition as a means of securing policy objectives, we are very concerned that so little attention paid and policy options explored in respect of controlling and reducing demand. Although in conclusion the document asserts that one of the three main objectives is to curb energy demand in Europe, there is virtually no discussion of this in the Green Paper. We feel that the emphasis on energy efficiency, while obviously desirable, has to be part of a wider package of measures which convey to the public that uncontrolled growth in energy consumption is not an option for the future. All the evidence suggests that improvements in energy efficiency are usual accompanied by an increase in demand thereby nullifying any potential resource consumption and carbon emission reduction gains.
3. While one of the objectives of the Green Paper is to put forward a strategy for sustainable energy supplies across Europe, we regret that there is not an equally clear statement of a strategy for energy consumption across Europe. This is a serious shortcoming and leaves the document critically imbalanced. Furthermore, we regret that there is no a clear statement of the EU's understanding and goals for sustainability in the context of energy. While some statements are

made, the overwhelming emphasis in the document is on continued economic growth which is difficult to square with current informed formulations of a sustainable future for the planet. For example, in Section 2.1(v) it states that 'Energy policy therefore needs to favour cost-effective options and be based on a thorough economic analysis of different policy options and their impact on energy prices'.

4. A sustainable energy policy should give as much, if not more, priority to the carbon emission implications of different policy options as the economic costs and benefits. Cost should not be the only evaluative criteria if carbon emission reductions are to be met. Likewise, energy reduction and efficiency targets should be based on carbon emissions rather than energy consumption *per se*, as different energy sources have different carbon consequences; this would encourage more imaginative consideration being given to alternative energy sources (e.g., community heating schemes and CHP, renewables, microgeneration).
5. The proposed **Action Plan on Energy Efficiency** is to be welcomed. While the conventional mechanisms of incentives, regulations and education will be important, we encourage the EU to look beyond these approaches to more innovative, theoretically informed and empirically justified approaches that psychology is now putting forward. These approaches represent more subtle, socially-relevant and effective mechanisms to affect the way people organise themselves and make decisions (implicitly or explicitly) about energy consumption (e.g., reduced choice, social marketing, and persuasion through social norms). The instruments identified in Section 2.4(i) will not work in an energy landscape in which consumers neither recognise the need for change nor have the capacity to change.
6. We believe that there is an inherent contradiction in the stated intention of continued growth and sustainable practices. If this is not seen by the EU as contradictory a clear statement needs to be made as to how it can be achieved. This is especially relevant for the European consumer who continues to be exhorted to save energy but at the same time continues to be encouraged to consume more direct and indirect energy-demanding products and services.
7. We would like to see a more active engagement of the public with energy issues in all EU nation states because the new energy landscape of the 21st century will require fundamental changes in lifestyles which will affect both direct and indirect energy consumption. Change will only be successful if the public – in their many different forms, e.g., householders, employers, employees, manufacturers – understand and take collective responsibility for their energy consumption in the light of climate change issues and changes in the supply and security of different energy sources. 'Business as usual' in terms of consumption and 'Not in My Back Yard' in terms of future energy supplies are not sustainable responses. We accept that choice leading to increased competition is in the best interests of the consumer, but as Amartya Sen has recently written, we should be advocating the responsibility of choice as much as choice itself.
8. Consumers need better feedback concerning their energy consumption so that they are aware of the implications of use. Encouragement should be given to governments and the energy industries to install smart metering infrastructure. More comprehensive feedback, for example, about high energy consumption products and services, and carbon emission levels from different products, would lead to a more informed citizenry who are able to make knowledgeable judgments about the economic and environmental implications of their energy use. It is often the case with environmental problems that an individual who receives the benefits of an environmentally damaging action may not be the one who is likely to suffer the consequences and may be unaware of them. Equally, the time lapse between human actions and their noticeable effect on environmental change is measured in years to decades, and may involve generational time differences. Consequently, making energy consumers more aware of the environmental implications of their energy consumption can only serve to create a more informed and responsible European citizenry. The encouragement of decentralised and microgeneration energy provision, apart from environmental, economic and security benefits, would also serve to bring energy production closer to the consumer and thereby make the implications of production/consumption issues more meaningful and foster more sustainable behaviour.
9. Public education concerning the purchasing of energy efficient appliances and encouraging more energy efficient behaviours is essential. However, this must be accompanied by a programme of

reducing energy demand otherwise the economic savings individuals make are negated by an increased demand and a continued growth in carbon emissions.

10. As with energy consumption generally, the increased efficiency of vehicles has been negated by the increase in kilometres driven, thereby offsetting any potential energy saving while at the same time increasing carbon emissions. We believe that there is considerable scope for the EU to introduce measures which will encourage changed behaviours with regards to mobility such as public transport travel incentives and green travel plans for both the public and private sectors. Reducing car vehicle kilometres travelled will not only have beneficial energy consequences but will reduce congestion, improve health, reduce accidents and lead to higher quality of life for all and therefore have significant sustainable development benefits. This is an area where behaviour change strategies should play an equally important role as technological developments. The EU is in a position through its legislative powers and through encouraging good practice to create environments in which dependence upon the car is reduced and public transport options are increased (e.g., through higher housing densities, better land-use planning).

We hope that these comments are useful to you. If you require any additional information, or have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Martin Conway (Professor)

Chair, Research Board

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