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CALL TO ACTION

on global poverty & climate change

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**AN 'OPEN LETTER' TO FRANCES WILKINSON,
PLANNING OFFICER, NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTRY COUNCIL,**

about her 'dismissive' response to scientists' testimony re. the proposed open-cast mine, near Druridge Bay

An extract of this letter was published under the heading, "Opencast – Don't dismiss our concerns" in the Northumberland Gazette, on 17th July 2016:

<http://www.northumberlandgazette.co.uk/news/opinion/letters/opencast-don-t-dismiss-our-concerns-1-8013442>

Please note that the author is writing only in a personal capacity, and as Development Coordinator of North East CALL TO ACTION.

6th July 2016

Dear Frances Wilkinson,

I was astonished, indeed shocked and upset, that I failed to hear the words "*climate change*" so much as pass your lips, during the lengthy, detailed, and well-delivered summary of your Report to the Strategic Planning Committee yesterday. [I did listen carefully, but I might be mistaken – it has been known! If so, please let me know.]

Similarly, in your Report, you stated that, "*The burning of the coal that would be extracted from the site would contribute to CO2 emissions. Establishing the extent of this would be based on very generic estimates and assumptions and so little reliance could be placed on any conclusions*" (p. 57).

Do you *really* think that can so lightly (and so tritely) dismiss the emphatic warnings of the folly of this proposal by six climate and environmental scientists of international renown, three of whom are members of a university nearby, who took time out from their busy schedules to address this issue? Did you or your colleagues even take the trouble to consider them? I believe your treatment of my distinguished colleagues has been - yes, 'dismissive' is the word, even discourteous. They deserved better from you - and from me they deserve an apology for wasting their valuable time. [For a more detailed treatment of your statement, see the Appendix provided.]

According to Lord Robert May, then President of the Royal Society, the UK's national academy of sciences, "***Never have we faced such a global threat. The longer we procrastinate. The more difficult the task becomes.***" That was in 2006, and here we are in 2016 planning to create a massive new coal mine – it simply beggars belief!

But such warning and appeals for urgent and radical action have been made repeatedly. For example, in 2009, twenty Nobel Prize winners, the world's finest scientific minds, gathered for the St James's Palace Symposium to assess the evidence for man-made climate change. In their 'Memorandum', they declared, "***We know what needs to be done. We cannot wait until it is too late. We cannot wait until what we value most is lost.***"

Cont'd

I conclude with the words of someone who, like me, is a scientist but not a climate scientist; and also, like me, a grandparent. I commend them to you, whatever your family circumstances: *"How could I look my grandchildren in the eye and say I knew about this and did nothing?"* (Sir David Attenborough)

Yours sincerely,

Dr David Golding CBE

Development Coordinator, North East CALL TO ACTION

Appendix

Re. *"The burning of the coal that would be extracted from the site would contribute to CO2 emissions. Establishing the extent of this would be based on very generic estimates and assumptions and so little reliance could be placed on any conclusions"* (p. 57).

"Establishing the extent of this would be based on very generic estimates and assumptions and so little reliance..." As it stands, the statement implies that establishing the extent of CO2 emissions *"would be based on very generic estimates, etc."* However, that is palpably false – the extent of CO2 emissions which would result from the combustion of three million tonnes of coal can be calculated easily and with complete confidence.

However, if, as I suspect, you mean that the *"little reliance can be placed on any conclusions"* about the *impacts* of burning the coal, this is equally mistaken, as the views of the scientists made clear – it is mistaken, and more serious. The 3rd Report (2001) of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded that it is *"likely"* (with a probability of 60%) that global warming is due mainly to CO2; its 4th Report (2007) stated that this is *"very likely"* (90%); and by 2013, the 5th Report was confident enough to put the level at *"extremely likely"* (at least 95%) – in other words, beyond any reasonable doubt.

All the world's reputable scientific institutions, including 80 national academies of science, have endorsed this position. Furthermore, last year twenty four leading British institutions (including the Royal Society), put out a Joint Communiqué which stated that *"The scientific evidence is now overwhelming ... we must transition to a zero-carbon world by early in the second half of the century."*

I don't believe we can quantify, with any confidence, the *additional* impacts of burning any given amount of coal, but that is no reason to discount the damage which such burning would undoubtedly do. In much the same way, we could not estimate the additional impacts of throwing a can of petrol onto a house fire, once it was well and truly ablaze. **In each case, the action would make a bad situation worse ('add fuel to the fire'), and would be inexcusable.**

**NorthEast
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