

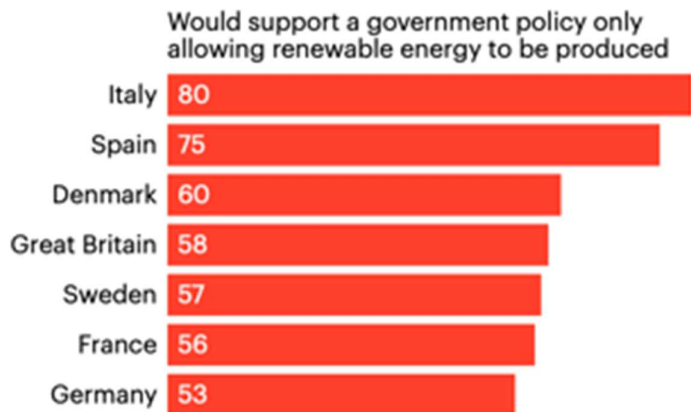
## Steve Baker: “Wanted – a politically and economically viable path to low emissions”

### A rebuttal.

The general tenor of Steve Baker’s article: “Wanted – a politically and economically viable path to low emissions” is that policies for climate mitigation are unaffordable and that he speaks for a majority of voters when he says that policy implementation is “far too expensive” and “will not survive contact with the public.”

But polling, both globally and nationally, shows a clear majority who favour a complete shift to renewables.

% in each country who say they:



YouGov

He claims that “hopes that renewables would become significantly cheaper have been disappointed.” This is demonstrably wrong.

He champions the idea of a new fleet of “new gas powered power stations: suggesting that they “could reduce wholesale electricity prices by as much as a third.”

Yet, the cost to the consumer of fossil fuel power is set to rise inexorably as supplies run out (and pension funds suffer with stranded assets) and the [expectation for 2022](#) is that onshore wind will become 20-27 per cent cheaper than the cheapest new coal-fired generation option.

So, far from being the solution, as [Sarah Kostense-Winterton](#), chair of The Energy Efficiency Infrastructure Group, explains: “The cost-of-living crisis is being driven by soaring gas prices. Energy bills are set to rise to £2,000 per year which risks increasing fuel poverty by 50 per cent, to six million households”

Contrary to Baker’s claims to care about the ability of the poor to cope should we transition to renewables quickly, it seems axiomatic to say falling energy prices would actually mean

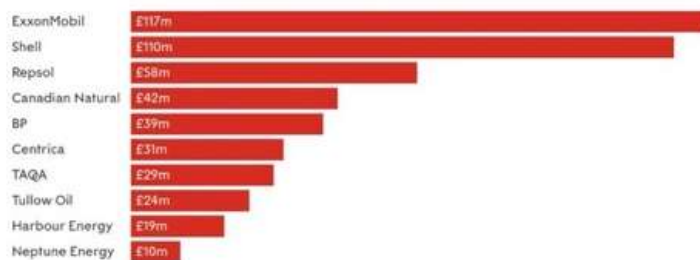
that the real income of people would rise. Investments to scale up energy production with cheap electric power from renewable sources are therefore not only an opportunity to reduce emissions, but also to achieve more economic wellbeing – particularly for the poorest places in the world.

As Sam Hall of The Conservative Environment Network enthuses: “This is incredible: gas power is 4 times more expensive than new solar & wind. The private sector has delivered breath-taking cost reductions in renewable energy, despite the claims of technopessimists.”

The International Energy Agency concluded in its World Energy Outlook 2020 that solar power had become [the cheapest electricity in history](#). And, because solar and wind power is now so inexpensive, when wholesale prices were so high from July to September 2021 the renewables generators subsidised the cost of gas to the tune of [£39.2 million](#).

### North Sea oil companies receive more money from the government than they pay in taxes

Net payments from UK government to oil companies after tax, 2020



Source: Extractive Industry Transparency Index / Paid to Pollute

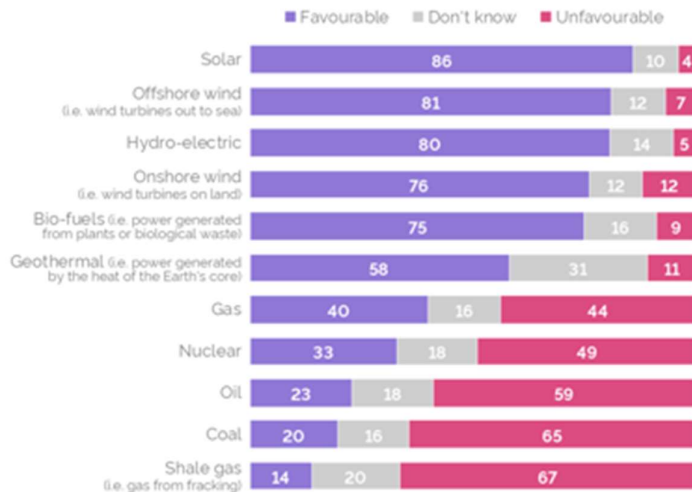
NEW STATESMAN

Analysis of HMRC data from campaigning group Uplift finds that ExxonMobil – a company that is being called to testify before the US Congress on 28 October over its reported campaign to discredit climate science – received the highest payment in 2020, at £117 million.

One of Baker’s proposed solutions is Fracking. He “projects” with his statement that “Thanks to outrageous misinformation, the public are concerned about fracking, but the evidence shows it is a technique which can be safely used.”

[YouGov polling](#) suggests otherwise for the former claim:

Neither can the wealth of peer reviewed data and concerns over safety rationally be regarded as misinformation.



[Studies](#) consistently show that spills have left surface waters carrying radium, selenium, thallium, lead, and other toxic chemicals that can persist for years at unsafe levels.

[In an analysis](#) of more than 1,000 chemicals in fluids used in and created by fracking, Yale School of Public Health research found that many have been linked to serious health problems.

Toxic gases like benzene are released by the fracking process and an [epidemiological study](#) conducted by the John Hopkins School of Public Health found a significant association between fracking and severe cases of asthma. Fracking chemicals are also harmful to pregnant women and their developing babies. [Research has found endocrine-disrupting chemicals](#) in surface waters near wastewater disposal sites which [can harm the developing fetus](#) even at very low concentrations. Another study found a [40% increased chance of premature birth](#).

Another study from University of Pennsylvania and Columbia University found that fracking was [significantly associated with higher inpatient hospitalization](#) for cardiac, urologic and neurologic problems, skin conditions, and cancer.

And Baker's suggestion that fracking should be considered "a sustainable source" ignores the emission of methane [making fracking worse than burning coal](#) in terms of climate change.

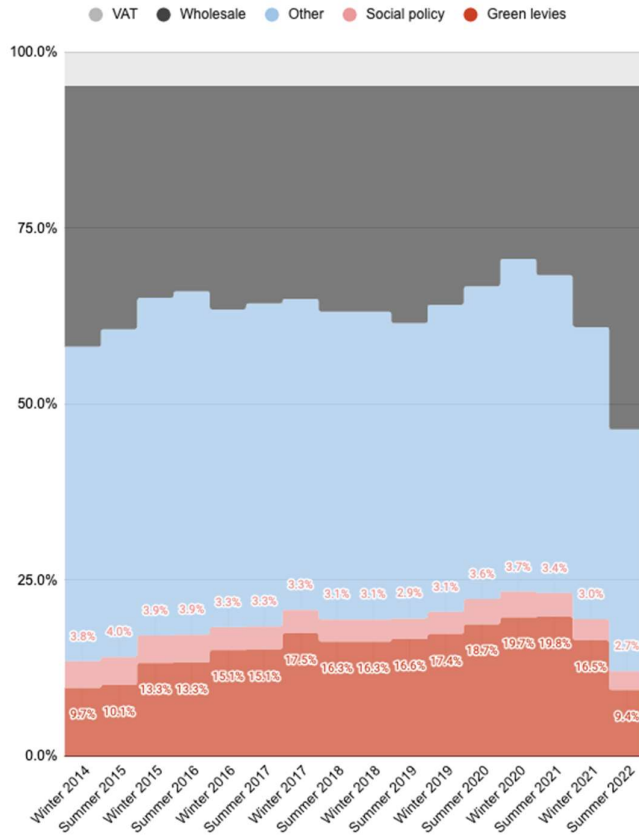
Indeed, thanks to the [falling cost of renewable energy](#), it is now cheaper to switch from coal to renewables than it is from coal to gas.

1. In his support for upscaling fossil fuel extraction, he seems wilfully blinkered to the urgency of action as any benefits from fracking, or indeed new nuclear, would come too late for any chance of net zero before 2050 let alone 2035, the newer more accurate deadline if we are to have a chance of complying with the Paris accords.

Baker's Net Zero Scrutiny members have often repeated the falsehood that [green levies constitute 25% of electricity bills](#). This is disingenuous. They currently make up less than 10%.

### Green levies make up less than 10% of electricity bills

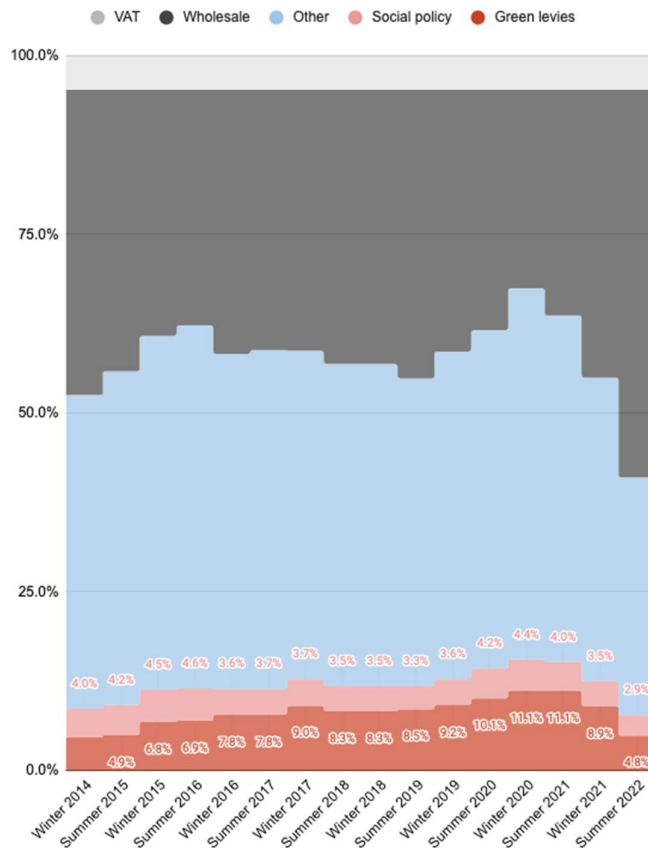
Even at their peak share, they were less than a fifth of the total



This figure is also often used with reference to the overall energy bill. This too is out of date. [In May](#) it stood at 7.8% and [the current figure is 5%](#). The downward trajectory is clear.

## Green levies make up less than 5% of energy bills overall

Even at their peak share, they were just 11% of the total



And, despite his feigned concern for the poor, using rising gas prices as a spurious excuse to force a cut of the green levy overlooks the fact that £1 billion of the levy covers the cost of insulation for 200,000 of the poorest households a year which, in turn, can save households over £500 a year on their energy bills. The Net Zero Scrutiny Group also claims that “heat pumps can actually increase energy use.” In fact, heat pumps have an efficiency of 300% compared to a gas boiler: they use three times less energy.

Lord Deben writes in his foreword to this year’s Committee on Climate Change report that high fossil fuel prices “should have given added impetus to improving energy efficiency, yet the necessary programmes are not in place”. He raised similar points in a press briefing, pointing to the cost savings from cheap renewables: “It is interesting that if we were doing now what we have agreed to do by 2030 people’s bills would be £125 a year less. Renewable energy is the cheapest form of generation. If we want to deal with a cost of living crisis, if we want to deal with the issues in front of us, that’s exactly what we have to do. It’s the same programme.”

Baker also repeats the perennial invention that the “cost of dealing with the intermittency of wind and solar is also rising alarmingly.”

Andrew Dessler, a professor of atmospheric sciences at Texas A&M University for one says: [“It’s wrong to think of renewables as unreliable](#) [...] A lot of people’s understanding of renewable energy is extremely out of date.” We already have the technology for storage and transport of electricity through Hydrogen cells for when the sun doesn’t shine or the wind doesn’t blow.”

**Steve Baker would do well to consider the comparative longer term costs.**

He suggests that “Policy which has been naïve about geopolitical realities [is] too inflexible, too dogmatic, too hasty and far too expensive” and that “A rational policy for reducing emissions must deal with runaway cost problems.”

Notwithstanding [current research](#) which shows that global heating and its devastating effects are escalating exponentially, electoral short term myopia misses the long term existential threat to our economy by kicking the can down the road for another administration to pick up.

[The Stern Review of 2006](#) analysed a number of impact channels from climate change, including water distribution, crop yields, food insecurity, health impacts from malnutrition, heat stress and vector-borne disease and concluded that, depending on the scale of climate-system feedback loops, and including non-market damages, global heating would lead to estimated average losses of between 5.3% and 13.8% of world per-capita GDP in 2200. As heating escalates, this estimation can now be seen as extremely conservative.

	Temperature rise scenario, by mid-century			
	Well-below 2°C increase <i>Paris target</i>	2.0°C increase <i>The likely range of global temperature gains</i>	2.6°C increase	3.2°C increase <i>Severe case</i>
Simulating for economic loss impacts from rising temperatures in % GDP, relative to a world without climate change (0°C)				
World	-4.2%	-11.0%	-13.9%	-18.1%
OECD	-3.1%	-7.6%	-8.1%	-10.6%
North America	-3.1%	-6.9%	-7.4%	-9.5%
South America	-4.1%	-10.8%	-13.0%	-17.0%
Europe	-2.8%	-7.7%	-8.0%	-10.5%
Middle East & Africa	-4.7%	-14.0%	-21.5%	-27.6%
Asia	-5.5%	-14.9%	-20.4%	-26.5%
Advanced Asia	-3.3%	-9.5%	-11.7%	-15.4%
ASEAN	-4.2%	-17.0%	-29.0%	-37.4%
Oceania	-4.3%	-11.2%	-12.3%	-16.3%

[Recent scientific research](#) indicates that even with the implementation of current pledges, likely temperature-rise trajectories, would entail 2.0–2.6°C global warming by 2050. The result is that global GDP would be 11–14% less than in a world without climate change.

[The IEA roadmap](#) advises that “To reach net zero emissions by 2050, annual clean energy investment worldwide will need to more than triple by 2030 to around \$4 trillion. [Other sources](#) suggest that, by 2045, the cost of climate change to the UK could be at least 1% of GDP: £37 trillion.

This warning is amplified in the [UK Climate Change Risk Assessment of 2022](#) which states that "The climate crisis will cost the UK economy £20bn per year, so investment now is

money well spent and will not only stimulate the economy creating millions of jobs but mitigate future losses. Each £100bn of borrowing will repay itself over 5 years.”

Speaking of fuel security Baker warns that the UK is “critically exposed to the regional price of gas, because it is natural gas alone which ultimately guarantees security of supply for the UK electricity network.”

Here he has broken ranks with fellow Conservative MP Kwasi Kwarteng who himself [notes](#) that “The more clean, cheap and secure power we generate at home, the less exposed we will be to expensive gas prices set by international markets.”

Baker might instead pay heed to the wider geopolitical security concerns. In April 2022, The [Journal of Advances in Military Studies](#) published a [research project](#) which framed the climate and environmental emergency in terms of national security as a new type of threat: one they coined as a “hyper threat.”

In parallel, the US Department of the Navy published their own stark warning and [action plan](#): “The DON will invest in areas such as transformational, low-carbon technologies and advanced energy storage and power generation solutions to support national security.”

When nations prepare for a war footing because of the effects of climate change, it would surely be better to address the cause of the geopolitical instability rather than the effect.

With reference to what he calls the “social costs” of decarbonisation Baker posits that “we are probably doing more harm to human welfare than the climate change we are trying to prevent.” That “the cure is worse than the disease”, and that “nearly all our climate policies are significantly more expensive than the social cost of carbon.”

Far from “doing harm”, achieving Net zero would have social benefits that go far beyond reducing carbon emissions. As fellow Conservative MP Jonathan Gullis writes in Bright Blue: “It offers tangible real world rewards for areas that have historically been starved of attention. With the low-carbon transition, there is an opportunity to reignite Britain’s industrial heartlands, providing well-paid jobs, local investment, and room for social mobility for millions of people. [By 2030 the UK will need 170,000 more workers to qualify for jobs in these industries each year.](#)”

As a delayist strategy, Baker feigns accord with the science when he says that: “It’s rational to have a climate policy, but our climate policies aren’t rational” but that there has been a “failure to conduct robust cost–benefit analysis.”

So, again, he ignores the starkest of warnings, from all areas of scientific and economic expertise, of [societal collapse](#) and reveals a complete lack of awareness, not only of the finality of the threat we face but the benefits of a net zero world should we act now.

I would suggest that the above robust rebuttals give the lie to the many counterfactual assertions in this article.

In propagating them, he, and his ilk within the Net Zero Scrutiny Group of backbenchers, beholden to the Big Oil funders of the Global Warming Policy Foundation, are essentially saying that we cannot afford to survive. With close examination of this stance, I wonder how many of his constituents would say he spoke for them.

Tom Hardy

Steve Baker Watch