

What does climate change have to do with us?

Marilyn Mason, co-ordinator, [Humanists for a Better World](#), August 2013

This question, occasionally asked by humanists, warrants an answer, even though, for anyone involved in the climate change movement, it seems obvious that climate change has everything to do with everyone¹, and that taking action on it is urgent.

Many of the organisations and charities that humanists support are already represented in the broad coalition that makes up Stop Climate Chaos²: development charities like Oxfam and Practical Action with experience of how climate change affects the poorest people on this planet; wildlife charities such as the RSPB and the WWF that worry about the negative effects of global warming on the natural world; transport and energy campaigns and trades unions lobbying for investment in clean sustainable energy sources for long-term energy security as well as to reduce CO2 emissions... They are joined by faith groups and the BHA, organisations with ethical concerns about the impacts on present and future generations (and, of course, all parents and grandparents have an obvious personal stake in the future). The scientists that humanists, amongst others, rely on for understanding the world are concerned too: no reputable climate scientist disputes the theory of human-caused global warming, and institutions such as the Royal Society have published statements on it³. Even the institutional investors⁴ that manage our savings and pensions are taking climate change into account when considering mid- to long-term prospects. It would be odd if humanist were not concerned.

Like the humanist movement, the climate chaos movement is keen to show itself as not only anti-something, but in a positive light. It's not always easy - highlighting climate chaos and possible energy shortages and rising prices, contesting economic growth based on endless consumption, asking for any kind of personal sacrifice, are not cheerful messages, but until they are accepted by the majority little will be achieved. And there is a positive side, one that our government would be listening to if its thinking stretched further than the next election. The technologies we need to become carbon neutral by 2030 exist now and more are on the horizon, and there are potentially millions of new jobs in green industries, savings to be made on investing in rail rather than airport expansion, and some kudos and boosts to the economy to be had in leading the way on green investment and renewable energy, rather than dragging our heels and doing the bare minimum.

Humanists can bring useful and distinctive strands to discussions about climate change⁵ - but perhaps more importantly, given the imminence of some crucial government decisions, we can add our numbers to the campaigns needed to keep climate change and truly sustainable energy on the political agenda as what is currently lacking is political will and public investment. The "greenest government ever" has proved a disappointment, seemingly preferring short-term fixes of yet more fossil fuels ("fracking" could come to a site near you!⁶) and energy-switching to investment in long-term secure and sustainable sources. If your MP knows that a substantial proportion of the electorate cares about issues such as clean energy, sustainable public transport, energy efficiency, pollution, conservation of the countryside and wildlife... s/he is more likely to take these issues seriously. An MP once told me that for every letter they receive MPs assume there are 40 or so constituents who would agree but can't be bothered to write, a substantial multiplier which makes writing seem even more worthwhile⁷.

Although there will be humanists who criticise religious leaders, most recently the Pope⁸, for jumping on the green bandwagon with talk about the need for stewardship of God's creation and for reining in human greed and materialism, and some might not want to join that club, it is important in democracies that as many people as possible recognise the problems, sign up to the solutions, and make their voices heard. And that includes us.

¹ <http://www.upworthy.com/the-difference-between-global-warming-skeptics-and-normal-people>

² See <http://www.stopclimatechaos.org/about-us>

³ See <http://royalsociety.org/policy/climate-change/>

⁴ The third annual [Global Investor Survey on Climate Change](#) polled over 80 major investors and found that 53% had used climate change as their motivation when investing in or divesting from certain stocks, a marked increase from 23% in 2012 and 9% in 2011.

⁵ See <https://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/h4bw-article.pdf>

⁶ See <http://www.greenpeace.org.uk/newsdesk/energy/data/fracking-political-map>.

⁷ We have also been told that MPs do not take much notice of pre-printed postcard campaigns and the like, so we do not provide these or template letters. A brief email or letter to your MP, and/or your local council, and/or local and national press, expressing just one or two concerns in your own words, can be very effective.

⁸ As reported in [Huffington Post](#) and [The Guardian](#), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/blog/2013/feb/12/pope-benedict-xvi-first-green-pontiff> July 2013

See also <http://www.upworthy.com/the-difference-between-global-warming-skeptics-and-normal-people>