

Environment

Government will ditch 'ridiculous' net zero policies, say Reform

Fiona Harvey
Environment editor

Labour will be forced to back down on its net zero policies, the deputy leader of Reform predicted yesterday. Richard Tice, who is Reform's energy spokesperson, also said his party, if it gained power, would pull out of the Paris agreement on climate change, which aims to limit global heating to 1.5C above pre-industrial temperatures.

He told the Guardian Reform would end the government's long-standing pledge to spend £11.6bn to help developing countries cope with climate breakdown over the five years.

"The idea we can afford £10bn for climate aid is ridiculous," said the MP for Boston and Skegness. "We have plenty of problems ourselves that we rely on government to look after." On Labour's net zero commitments, Tice, who drives an electric car, said he believed Labour had "a growing anxiety that they have got it wrong on net zero. If energy bills do not come down, they will be in serious electoral trouble".

He accused the government of trying to "bury" the costs of net

zero amid the spending review and called the push for renewable energy "unaffordable" and "a colossal misjudgment". "That's why we will see change; they will back down."

Pointing to a Holyrood byelection last week, which Labour won with fewer than 1,500 votes more than the Reform candidate, he said: "That sends a very serious message to Labour that even where they used to be dominant in Scotland, there are very many people who will say Reform are the right party."

He did not expect Keir Starmer to make a public U-turn on net zero. Rather, Labour would give way gradually: "They will delay, they



▲ Disused oil rigs at Cromarty in the Highlands of Scotland. Reform has said it would reverse Labour's ban on new drilling licences for oil and gas in the North Sea
PHOTOGRAPH: MURDO MACLEOD

climate science has reached new depths. Richard Tice, the party's energy spokesperson, told the Guardian: "Scientists do not all have a consensus on this. Some view things slightly differently ... Do I think that [the carbon dioxide humans are putting into the atmosphere] will definitely change the climate? No. There is no evidence that it is."

More surprising is that Andrew Bowie, the shadow energy secretary, who once said he wanted "Scotland to be one of the lead nations worldwide in achieving net zero", should take a similar line.

He told the Guardian the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the world's leading authority on climate science, was "biased" and the net zero by 2050 target was "arbitrary and not based on science".

will gradually wind down, they will push back the timing of targets and policies. They will be trying to find clever ways to walk back from their clean power targets [of decarbonising the electricity sector by 2030]."

Labour's net zero plans have come under pressure from the Conservatives, sections of the media, and from some unions.

In April, the former prime minister Tony Blair wrote that any strategy based on phasing out fossil fuels in the short term, or limiting consumption, was "doomed to fail".

There have also been unfriendly briefings from within government against Ed Miliband, the energy secretary.

Starmer silenced internal critics of his policies with a landmark speech in April declaring he would go "all out" on climate action and "not wait, but accelerate" on net zero.

In this week's spending review, Rachel Reeves, the chancellor, lavished more than £60bn on green efforts, including £13.2bn for home insulation, £30bn for nuclear power and £15bn for public transport networks outside London.

Miliband was one of the big winners in the review - the budget for the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero ballooned by 16% a year, or 68% by 2029.

A government source said Tice's attacks on net zero would not sway Starmer and were "nonsense".

They added: "We are doubling down on this agenda because it is the way to take back control of our energy, protect households and create jobs. It is in the DNA of this government."

"We will fight Reform's anti-jobs, anti-growth, anti-energy security ideological agenda, community by community, as we make the patriotic case for clean energy and climate action."

Reform's vow to move away from renewable energy would mean job losses and raise costs by increasing reliance on fossil fuels, some experts have said. The New Economics Foundation found that 60,000 jobs would be lost in wind and solar and the costs to the economy would reach about £92bn by 2030.

Jess Ralston, an analyst at the Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit, said: "UK electricity is becoming more British and every bit of renewable power we get from solar reduces the amount of gas we need to import from abroad as the North Sea continues its inevitable decline."

"Campaigns against [renewables] leave the UK more vulnerable to geopolitical meddling of foreign actors like Putin."

Reform has pledged to reverse Labour's ban on new drilling licences for oil and gas in the North Sea after Donald Trump's backing for more fossil fuel production there.

Ami McCarthy, head of politics at Greenpeace UK, said: "While it might be entertaining to watch Richard Tice's Tiny Trump impression, Reform's energy policy is completely deluded. Reform has no solution to the energy challenges we face."

"More drilling for volatile fossil fuels serves no one except the oil and gas bosses who have been profiting exponentially."

of British Industry, said: "Net zero and the new green economy are a growth opportunity for the UK. Businesses understand that."

Reform and the Conservatives, however, have prominent donors and supporters with a climate-sceptic outlook. Kemi Badenoch and her family recently spent a week as guests of Neil Record, who chairs Net Zero Watch, an offshoot of the climate sceptic thinktank the Global Warming Policy Foundation (GWPF) charity. He also funded her campaign for the Tory leadership, giving £10,000.

One of the biggest donors to Reform is Terence Mordaunt, the head of First Corporate Shipping and a former chair and now a trustee of the GWPF. His personal company, Corporate Consultants Ltd, has given hundreds of thousands of pounds to Reform.



▲ Baldío chefs Laura Cabrera Hernández and Ernesto Islas serve up dishes to diners and, left, two of the co-founders, Lucio Usobiaga and Douglas McMaster, a chef and zero-waste pioneer

What, no bin? Mexico City leads the way with its zero waste restaurant

Imogen Lepere

Hunched over the pass in the open restaurant kitchen, chefs are dusting ceviche with a powder made from lime skins that would, in most cases, have been thrown away. The kitchen of the Mexico City restaurant where they work looks like most others, but it lacks one key element: there is no bin.

Baldío was co-founded by brothers Lucio and Pablo Usobiaga and the chef Douglas McMaster, best known for his groundbreaking zero-waste spot Silo London.

The food, which recently earned a green Michelin star, is creative but still quintessentially Mexican, with



▲ Nadia Prince, the head of fermentation at Baldío, and, left, Virginia Martinez Guevara from Arca Tierra, a sustainable agriculture project

dishes such as squash tostada with guaca-broccoli, maguay flower, maguay worm and chinampa flower, and grassed pork from Veracruz with tamarind mole.

The founders work with Arca Tierra, a regenerative agriculture project that includes a network of 50 farmers in central Mexico as well as their own farm in Xochimilco,

an ancient neighbourhood in the south of Mexico City.

"We want Baldío to be a model that shows it is possible to be both zero waste and to rely on farmers rather than supermarkets," says Lucio Usobiaga.

Though the food is finished off in the restaurant's open kitchen, most preparation happens at La

► Young plants are grown using the ancient chapines method in Xochimilco, Mexico City, a Unesco world heritage site
PHOTOGRAPHS: BÉNÉDICTE DESRUS



dries off in koji before shaving it over meat dishes. Helsinki's Nolla (meaning "zero" in Finnish) gives compost to its suppliers and guests.

Baldío goes one step further through its relationship with Xochimilco, the last remnant of the blue-green waterways that dazzled Spanish invaders when they arrived 500 years ago. The Unesco heritage site is a stopover for migratory birds and the only place on Earth where axolotls still live in the wild.

Though the unique ecosystem is severely threatened by urban sprawl, many Indigenous people still farm *chinampas* (a pre-Aztec technique consisting of islands formed from willow trees, lilies and mud), gliding through the canals on canoes laden with lettuce, radish and *verdolagas* (Mexican parsley).

Arca Tierra farms 18 *chinampas*, combining ancestral techniques such as *chapines* - rich sediment cut into squares used for germinating seeds - with compost from Baldío's kitchen and a wood shredder that allows them to create mulch.

The result is a crop that is irrigated with bio-filtered canal water and can be harvested 365 days a year without depleting the soil's nutrients. It's enough to supply 50% of Baldío's needs.

Crops are carried by boat to downtown Xochimilco, before being driven just 5 miles to La Baldega. This results in a fraction of the carbon emissions generated by typical restaurant supply chains.

For Noy Coquis Salgado, 74, who rents land to Arca Tierra, the project offers an opportunity to preserve his identity at a time when just 2.5% of the *chinampas* are still used for traditional agriculture.

"It's very sad that young people don't want to farm any more. But now we are delivering food to the great city like my ancestors did," he says, adjusting his yellow waders.

A pod of young pelicans surfs a warm gust between the banks, practising for the journey they will soon make to California. For Lucio Usobiaga, closing the loop between the *chinampas* and Baldío could be a blueprint for the future.

"Ultimately, I hope the project shows people that a more just and better food system is possible."