

AIRLINES REELING AFTER EU CLIMATE CHANGE VOTE MEPs ADOPT GREEN PROPOSALS TO CUT FLYING'S IMPACT ON CLIMATE



AIRLINES have been left reeling after a vote in the European Parliament called for a raft of measures to tackle their growing contribution to climate change. Euro-MPs in Strasbourg voted by 439 to 74 to adopt proposals drafted by Green Party MEP Caroline Lucas to introduce a range of measures including an airlines-only CO₂ Emissions Trading Scheme and emissions charges to tackle their non-CO₂ greenhouse gas emissions. There were 102 abstentions.

Dr Lucas told fellow MEPs the EU must take action to curb airlines' greenhouse gas emissions if we are to stand any chance of avoiding devastating climate change: *"Doing nothing just isn't an option".*

"The aviation sector is growing fast – aircraft movements are predicted to double by 2020 and triple by 2030 - and technological efficiency gains just aren't enough to counteract the massive increases in emissions that this will generate.

"We simply have no choice but to clip the airlines' wings and force them to reduce their impact on the climate, if we are to stand any chance of cutting our emissions by the level that's needed to halt the deadly march of climate change.

"Airlines currently enjoy a complex array of tax breaks and hidden subsidies - worth more than £9 billion in the UK alone - which are long outdated and totally incompatible with global climate goals. International progress on removing these and getting the industry to pay its way has been pitifully slow, which is why we must ensure the EU really paves the way for global action by introducing the most effective legislation possible.

"Emissions trading has the potential to play a role in reducing the climate change impact of aviation - but only if it is accompanied by other measures to tackle the fact that aircraft emissions are two to four times more potent than those from other industries (because of the altitude at which they are emitted, and the effects of non-CO₂ emissions like condensation trails and nitrogen oxides) – and, crucially, only if it doesn't allow airlines to carry on business as usual by gobbling up the emission rights of other sectors."

MEPs have been intensively lobbied by the airlines in recent weeks – with most calling for air travel to be included in the EU's existing Emissions Trading Scheme: a measure which will do little to deter airlines' future emissions growth. Even Andrew Sentance, BA's head of environmental affairs, openly admitted as much last week.

Dr Lucas's report will now form the Parliament's submission to the EU Commission's forthcoming legislative proposals – which could be on the EU statute book by 2008.

"At a time when few now deny the urgency of addressing climate change, the rapid growth in flying threatens to throw all efforts to reduce dangerous emissions off course," added Dr Lucas, who is also an MEP for South-East England and Green Party Principal Speaker.

"We must work together to find ways of making the aviation industry reduce its social and environmental impact, rather than draining tax payers' cash as it continues to generate pollution, noise, congestion – and climate change."

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