

## **STUART AGNEW MEP**

### **PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF THE GLOBAL WARMING SCAM**

It started in the mid-eighties with a communication that the University of East Anglia were hosting a day-long conference on the new threat facing mankind - 'catastrophic man-made global warming'. This came as quite a surprise to me because a book published in the 1970s, 'The Cooling', predicted exactly the opposite.

So, I booked a ticket and made the 30 mile drive. The atmosphere in the lecture hall was one of deadly earnest. Speakers from around the world with impressive qualifications delivered their doom-laden predictions and I now refer to these individuals as "Professor Hook, Dr Line and Mr Sinker", because they completely took me in.

The highlight of the conference was a series of maps of our Norfolk coastline. The first map displayed the status quo, the second what it would look like if sea levels rose by one metre, the third five metres and the fourth ten metres. We were assured that, within 30 years, sea levels would have risen by at least one metre, probably five metres and possibly ten. For the low lying East and West extremities of our County the consequences were devastating. A ten metre rise drastically altered the familiar bulge of Norfolk into an elongated peninsular. My consolation was that my farm was unaffected. However, some of my siblings would need to relocate and for some years afterwards (to my shame), I would urge them to get out whilst prices were high.

Meanwhile, back in the lecture hall, we were assured that nothing would stop the icebergs from melting, the cause of the rising seas, unless we drastically cut CO2 emissions. I timorously asked that when icebergs melted didn't they reduce in volume? I was roundly slapped down with a barrage of self-important jargon and shut up for the rest of the day.

I was not alone amongst the farming community in getting the message that this global warming would lead to a Mediterranean type climate in the UK of warm wet winters and hot dry summers. Over the ensuing months, we wondered what crops would suit this and the answer came back, durum wheat.

This crop had been launched in the UK for harvest in 1984 because of a very generous EU subsidy scheme. Agronomic ignorance in that first year caused many to reap a tiny harvest and whilst those lessons were well learnt for the following harvest, the wet cold summer of 1985 ruined the quality of the durum wheat. It was therefore quite a bitter pill to swallow to acknowledge that this crop was actually going to be our salvation.

I, and several other farmers, took a long-term view and committed an annual tonnage to the new durum wheat processing factory in Great Yarmouth. The years ticked by. 1987 was an utter disaster (cold wet summer). In other years a late spring frost would seriously curtail the yield. I would lose heart for a year or two and give the crop up, but re-enter the fray after listening to yet another 'warmist rant' that would rekindle my faith. In all, I think I grew durum wheat for 11 harvests, and only made a profit once.

That thirty year prediction of Armageddon is now nearly upon us. If there has been a sea level rise, it is so small as to be irrelevant. However, advisors from DEFRA were still showing those maps of the Norfolk coastline to farmer gatherings right into the late-nineties.

Growing durum wheat was not my only folly when I danced to the warmists' tune. Another EU scheme arrived on the scene at about the turn of the Millennium. Global warming was apparently well underway and CO2 emissions must be reduced and fossil fuel power stations were regarded as the villain of the piece. Farmers were encouraged to plant large areas of willow trees, which would be coppice-harvested every three years and the material taken to a purpose built power station. One of these was planned to be built at Eye in Suffolk. I owned some land close by and signed up to 45 acres.

Right from the start things started to unravel. The promised prices for the material were reduced, the power station was never built and harvesting was far more expensive than quoted four years earlier. It involved the use of a purpose designed forage harvester that drank fuel and pumped out CO2. The crop had to be transported to the nearest suitable power station at Slough, a hundred miles away. Between them, harvesting and transport cost more than the value of the crop. I had to cut my losses and get out. Those losses were increased by the cost of clearing up the willow stumps and the worry that my land drains had sustained damage from the willow roots (this latter fortunately proved unfounded).

I was now well on the way to a Damascene conversion and my election to the European Parliament in June 2009 brought me into contact with 'the other side'. It did not take long for this to happen and I nailed my colours to the mast by

attending the ‘Alternative Climate Change Conference’ in Copenhagen in December 2009. This event was held at the same time and close to the big international jamboree going on there – the ‘United Nations Climate Change Conference’. Thousands of CO2 emitting air miles had been required to get all the delegates to the main event. All hotels were full; I stayed on a cruise liner moored in the harbour. It was early December and I was amused to note how much the temperature was dropping over the three days. Some delegates were clearly under-dressed in the belief that cold winters were a thing of the past, and were looking distinctly uncomfortable. Our own little conference taught me a great deal more about what is driving our weather and I am now a poacher turned gamekeeper.

When the Parliament reassembled after the Christmas break, it became quite apparent that there had been some very severe weather in central Europe, with stories of people dying of exposure. It was cold at home as well for the next month, with snowfalls creating problems for feed lorries getting to the farm, and egg lorries collecting the eggs. For a

~welcome change the ‘warmists’ in the media went a bit quiet. Cold winters were not supposed to happen.

The following September, the Met Office issued a long range forecast, confidently assuring us we could expect a mild winter, as per their computer predictions. Local Councils were relieved to know that gritting costs would be below budget and the airport authorities ordered reduced stocks of materials to defrost planes and runways.

In late October, I was driving back from Hampshire and got caught in a blizzard on the M25. This was, I believe, the week that Parliament voted through the Climate Change Act to legislate against global warming! This is the second time in my memory that politicians have forced God to act. The first was the appointment of a ‘Minister for Drought’ in August 1976, after months of scant rainfall. It poured with rain continuously for six months within a few days of the appointment!

As we progressed through November 2010 it was colder than normal. This resulted in me commenting in an Agriculture committee meeting, near the end of the month during a debate on global warming, that we had 2 inches of snow at home. This heralded the start of the coldest December that I can ever remember. In the Strasbourg session later that month, I had a call from a neighbouring farmer asking me if I was aware that my sugar beet harvesting contractor was harvesting my beet “with frost in them”. This is a mortal sin in sugar beet farming because, if the roots are put into store in this condition, they

will deteriorate rapidly once milder weather arrives. I rang my contractor in quite a panic. He was actually ahead of the game and had, off his own bat, contacted my haulier who was moving some earlier lifted beet elsewhere on the farm. They had agreed that priority should be given to the frosted beet, which were taken to the factory immediately.

From then on, it just kept getting colder. Even if I had wanted to lift beet, it would have been impossible to do a proper job. The roots would have been smashed by the harvester, instead of being 'hoovered' up. In addition, blocks of frozen soil would have been mixed up with those beet that the harvester did manage to lift, producing a totally unacceptable sample that would have been rejected by the factory. For a time, all harvesting stopped in Norfolk, even near the sea where the frosts are never so severe.

Sugar beet are a biennial crop and, therefore, winter hardy. The root, if left unharvested, will produce a large flowering head in the following year. Frosts during the latter part of the lifting season are quite common and the practice is to wait until 'the frost are out of the beet' after a few days of a thaw, when they will start growing normally again. It is just a matter of patience. Not this time. The frosts had been so severe that they had actually killed the roots. When the thaw came in late January, I saw something I had never witnessed before. The green foliage above the roots turned brown and the roots themselves degenerated into a black slimy pulp. The field gave off a smell identical to the aroma around a sugar beet factory. One of the sadder days of my life was the visit of the British Sugar fieldsman to formally confirm that my crop was not fit for processing. A direct loss of £22,000 and a disaster for the business.

During that January in the Parliament, it was quite noticeable that MEPs had deleted the words "we must tackle Climate Change" from their speeches. Hitherto they had always managed to fit this in, whatever the subject of the debate.

The Climate Change Act, passed by the House of Commons on that snowy October day, has forced electricity generating companies to produce 30% of their energy from renewables. This has had another big impact on our business. Since 1995 I have rented the grazing on a former military airfield beside our house. This has been the core of our sheep enterprise and an important part of the business. In the autumn of 2013, I was given notice to quit because the owners wanted to sell a 25 year lease on the land to a solar energy company. It has taken me a lifetime to establish and grow my farming business in Norfolk, where I am surrounded by huge estates, and this came as a very bitter blow. As I write in March 2015, the 250 acres (yes 250), of solar panels have now been erected. Eastern European labour is exclusively employed as far as I can tell,

and I think the panels are made in China, so there is no joy for the British worker in this parish.

Although the panels themselves do not make any noise, the peace is shattered every now and again at dusk by wild geese trying to land on what they think is open water, but instead is a headlong crash into a solar panel. The noise is two-stage. The first is the impact itself and the second is the reaction of the goose to this unexpected event. They don't appear to enjoy it very much. Presumably they will get wise to it as the years go by.

Every cloud has a silver lining and the solar energy company have invited me to graze my sheep on the site, under a long-term management agreement. This I am happy to do, but there is going to be a steep learning curve in shepherding techniques. Whilst the sheep can easily move under the panel frames at their lower end, about 3 feet off the ground, we cannot. Furthermore, it is impossible to see beyond the next line of panels. A really good dog is now essential, and we have an agreement with the solar company to split the site up into 30 acre paddocks with permanent fencing.

This project is, of course, totally dependent on consumer subsidy. I assume that, whilst current contracts will be honoured by future governments for the 25 year period, it is more than likely that this 'renewables scam' will have run its course by then and the entire 250 acres will become one monumental scrap heap. I am determined to live to 90 years old, just to see what happens!

These solar farms are rising like blisters across large tracts of land over the country. To be fair, they do not smell, smoke, flicker, make noise, attract flies, use lights, interrupt the horizon, take mud on the road or require HGV movements. However, this crowded country should be using its arable land to grow our food. We will lose quite enough as it is for houses and roads for our ever increasing population.

As a farmer, I still have more to experience from this global warming scam. Apparently, according to the EU, I can improve the world's weather if I farm in a way that reduces CO<sub>2</sub> and Methane emissions from my farm. With the help of GM crops we might be able to reduce tractor operations slightly and consequently CO<sub>2</sub> from their exhaust pipes. Persuading my sheep, however, to produce less Methane is going to be a considerable diplomatic exercise and I just wonder when the bubble is going to burst on this whole ludicrous saga.

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