

Climate

Fossil-fuel car ban

UK unveils plans for climate conference

LONDON, Feb 4, (AP): Britain says it plans to ban the sale of new petrol and diesel cars by 2035 in a bid to speed up its efforts to tackle climate change.

But the UK government's commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions has been questioned by the woman who was appointed by Prime Minister Boris Johnson to head a United Nations' global climate summit - and then was fired last week.

The UK said Tuesday that it would bring in a ban on fossil-fuel cars and vans even earlier than 2035 "if a faster transition is feasible." The ban will also include hybrid vehicles.



Johnson

The announcement was timed to coincide with the launch of Britain's plans for the climate summit, known as the 26th Conference of the Parties, or COP26. It is scheduled to be held in Glasgow in November.

Johnson was kicking off a year of buildup Tuesday alongside naturalist David Attenborough and Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte. Italy is hosting a preparatory meeting for the conference.

"Hosting COP26 is an important opportunity for the UK and nations across the globe to step up in the fight against climate change," Johnson said in remarks released in advance by his office. "As we set out our plans to hit our ambitious 2050 net zero target across this year, so we shall urge others to join us in pledging net zero emissions."

Britain has pledged to eliminate its net greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. But the government's advisory Committee on Climate Change has warned that domestic action to slash carbon dioxide and other gases that contribute to global warming is lagging far behind what is needed.

Rocky

Britain's tenure at the helm of COP26 is getting off to a rocky start. On Friday, Johnson sacked Claire O'Neill, a former British government minister appointed last year to head up the event. Her replacement has not been announced.

O'Neill strongly criticized the prime minister in a letter to the Financial Times, saying Britain's efforts to fight climate change were "miles off track."

"When you asked me to be your COP President ... you promised to 'lead from the front' and asked me what was needed: 'money, people, just tell us!'" she wrote. "Sadly, these promises and offers are not close to being met. The Cabinet sub-committee on climate that you promised to chair, and which I was to attend, has not met once," O'Neill added.

"You had a vision for Brexit and you got Brexit done. As I write, we have less than 7,000 hours before the start of COP26, where we have a chance to set a new global vision for climate recovery and build a new consensus for global climate action. Please get this done too."

Also:

RIO DE JANEIRO: US Secretary of Energy Dan Brouillette said Sunday the far-right government of Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro is demonstrating its commitment to the fight against climate change by promoting nuclear energy.

Bolsonaro, a climate skeptic, has been criticized internationally for pledging to open the vital Amazon rainforest to development and agribusiness, and make major changes to the South American country's environmental policy.

On Sunday, Bolsonaro got some rare environmental support during a visit by a US delegation to discuss collaboration on nuclear power among other things.

"I think the commitment of Brazil (to fight climate change) has been demonstrated by these conversations around nuclear energy," Brouillette said in an interview with local and international media.

On Monday, Brazil's Eletrobrás will sign a letter of intent with US-based Westinghouse to extend the life of the Angra I nuclear power plant near Rio de Janeiro. "We've demonstrated through the use of a very diverse energy policy that you can grow your economy and reduce carbon emission at the very same time," said the US energy secretary. "That is something that I think Brazil is interested in doing as well."

Meanwhile, Ugandan climate activist Vanessa Nakate and peers from other African nations made an urgent appeal for the world to pay more attention to the continent that stands to suffer the most from global warming despite contributing to it the least.



In this July 16, 2018, photo provided by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries a brown pelican flies over Queen Bess Island in Louisiana. (AP)

Ecology

Large-scale restoration specifically for birds

Oil spill cash rebuilds pelican island

NEW ORLEANS, Feb 4, (AP): A Louisiana island that provides a crucial nesting ground for pelicans and other seabirds is being restored to nearly its former size after decades of coastal erosion and the devastating blow of an offshore oil spill 10 years ago.

About 6,500 brown pelicans and 3,000 smaller seabirds cram their nests every summer onto Queen Bess Island, which shrank from 45 acres (18 hectares) in 1956 to about 5 acres (2 hectares) by 2010, when the Deepwater Horizon spill fouled its beaches with oily gunk.

Though barely a blip of an island off the Gulf of Mexico in Barataria Bay, Queen Bess plays an outside role as one of Louisiana's largest rookeries for brown pelicans, supplying prime real estate for up to a fifth of the state's nests. It's also where the pelican, the Louisiana state bird, was reintroduced in the 1960s after pesticides had killed off the entire population.

Loss of coastal wetlands and other problems have crowded the big birds into far fewer colonies than they had two decades ago, according to Todd Baker, the biologist supervising restoration work for the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. The number of colonies has fallen 54 percent since 2010, he said.

The \$18 million to restore Queen Bess Island and funds for future monitoring and upkeep flow from a \$20 billion settlement that the federal government and the five Gulf Coast states reached with energy giant BP PLC for environmental damage from the 2010 spill.

The offshore explosion and fire that year on BP's leased drilling rig killed 11 people. The well spewed more than 100 million gallons (378 million liters) of oil into the water over 87 days.

When the oil reached the island about 45 miles (72 km) south of New Orleans, brown pelicans and other birds could be seen struggling, their wings weighed down by the black muck. About 1,000 died.

"This is the first time we've done any really large-scale restoration specifically for birds. And I can't wait to see the results" as birds arrive, Baker said.

Restoration

Under the restoration project, contractors for Louisiana's Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority have dredged up Mississippi River sand and pumped it inside two rock outlines. Those outlines were nearly all that remained of failed attempts in the 1990s to rebuild the island using silt dredged nearby. This time around they're using barges to bring in the more stable sand. The authority also has built a line of rock breakwaters 75 to 95 feet (23 to 29 meters) from shore to slow erosion and provide calm water for young birds.

Once a mere strip of land, the island now covers 37 acres (15 hectares), providing much-needed space for the increasingly cramped birds. Most of the island is being restored as a pelican habitat, with 7 acres (2.8 hectares) for skimmers, terns and other birds that nest on rocks. In recent years, Baker said, nests have been so jammed "you can't hardly step on land without touching a nest."

He said the crowding has made the island's woody plants look like apartment houses, with nest above nest above nest: perhaps a laughing gull on the ground, an egret or roseate spoonbill in middle branches and a brown pelican nest at the top.

"It was cool to look at but not necessarily good for those birds," Baker said.

In an assist to the birds, The Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission designated the island a wildlife refuge in November. The commission is taking comments on rules that, among other things, forbid people from stepping on the island or fishing inside the breakwaters for eight months of the year.

Restoration work should be completed by a Feb 15 deadline, Baker said. He added that remaining work includes creating ramps on which young birds that still can't fly can walk in and out of the water.

Contractors also will plant about 24,000 woody plants for species such as night herons and egrets, as well as pelicans, to build their nests. Those are essentially 3-foot-high (1-meter-high) sticks, Baker said. He noted that while pelicans prefer nesting on scrub-shrubs, they can also build nests on grass or even bare ground. The ground-nesting terns, skimmers and gulls will probably use the expanses of bare sand between the plants as well as the rocky area created for them, he said. Most important for Baker: Will pelicans return to the island where they built nests or were hatched? Five hundred were banded last year to help him and other conservationists answer that question.



In this Sept 20, 2017, file photo, an algae bloom from Lake Erie appears in the boat basin at International Park in Toledo, Ohio. Ohio is rolling out a new strategy to save Lake Erie from the toxic algae that overwhelms it in the summer. (AP)

Discovery

Regulators approve review: Minnesota utility regulators on Monday approved a revised environmental review for Enbridge Energy's plan to replace its aging Line 3 crude oil pipeline across the state.

The state Public Utilities Commission voted 3-1 to approve the environmental impact statement for the \$2.6 billion project, saying the new review adequately addressed the impacts of a potential spill in the Lake Superior watershed.

Commissioner Matt Schuenger disagreed with the majority, saying the updated review "doesn't adequately represent the consequences of a spill," the Star Tribune reported.

The new pipeline would replace Enbridge's Line 3, which was built in the 1960s. Enbridge says the old line needs replacing because it is increasingly prone to corrosion and cracking and can run at only about half its original capacity. Environmental and tribal activists have urged regulators to kill the project. (AP)

Sperm whale dies: A newborn sperm whale found beached in Palm Beach on Monday morning has died, authorities said.

The whale came ashore near Via La Selva, which is about 1 mile (1,600 meters) north of President Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago residence, Palm Beach police said in an email.

The Palm Beach Post reported the emaciated whale, which had no teeth, likely got separated from its mother.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission said the whale was approximately 13 feet (3.9 meters) and weighed about 1,500 pounds (680 kilograms).

It's uncommon for sperm whales to beach themselves on the island, Friends of Palm Beach spokeswoman Diane Buhler told the newspaper. (AP)



Schuenger



Buhler

635kg of shark fins seized: Wildlife inspectors seized 1,400 pounds (635 kilograms) of shark fins at a Miami port, officials said on Monday.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service said the shipment of dried fins arrived in 18 boxes and was believed to have originated in South America, and likely bound for Asia.

Officials estimated the total commercial value to be between \$700,000 and \$1 million. (AP)

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