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Climate Care meets climate change activists to explain why carbon offsetting is vital to make deep cuts in carbon now

Activists holding a protest at the offices of leading carbon offset company Climate Care were invited inside for a cup of tea and an amicable discussion on the role of carbon offsetting in tackling climate change. Climate Care commended efforts to encourage more government action, and received acknowledgement from the activists that Climate Care's work was a genuine attempt to cut carbon emissions and had many strong arguments in its favour.

Employees at Climate Care were delighted to take the opportunity to explain why carbon offsetting plays an essential role in tackling climate change, when activists from the Camp for Climate Action visited its office on Monday 20th August 2007.

The action comes at a time of widespread misunderstanding of carbon offsets. Climate Care employees took the opportunity to discuss with the protestors their arguments and put right a number of misconceptions about Climate Care and its work.

The activists' reason for the protest was to publicise their belief that carbon offset schemes are a dangerous distraction from taking effective action. To make the point some of the protestors dressed as red herrings and waved placards outside the office.

During the discussion it emerged that not only did the group have very little evidence that offsetting caused a distraction to the behaviour changes we need, but they were also unaware of the recent Parliamentary findings that there is little substantial evidence that offsetting encourages 'ethical carelessness'.¹

Climate Care was pleased for the opportunity to explain the following points to the activists:

- **Leading environmental organisations support carbon offsetting:**
 - The **House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee** recently published the results of its investigation into voluntary carbon offsets, concluding that they have a 'useful role' in reducing carbon emissions and engaging the public. It

¹ The Voluntary Carbon Offset Market, July 2007, House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, paragraph 27 (p.14). Available at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmenvaud.htm>

recommends that encouragement and assistance should be given to individuals and organisations to offset their carbon.²

- Two of the leading voices in climate change policy have spoken out to defend the important role of carbon offsetting in driving fast, global cuts in carbon emissions. In a letter published in The Independent on 20th July 2007 Jonathan Porritt (Founder of **Forum for the Future** and chair of the Governments Sustainable Development Commission) and Dr Steve Howard (CEO of **The Climate Group**) argue that credible carbon offsets have a 'vital role' and that good progress on standards for carbon offset projects is being made:

“Drastic cuts in carbon emissions are necessary to stabilise climate change and carbon offsetting has a vital role to play in this process. While the first step for any business or individual must be to cut emissions at source, offsetting allows those who are not obliged to take action to balance out their carbon emissions by helping to finance low carbon technology projects around the world.

“Without this valuable source of income, these projects would not be developed. The contribution they make is measured not only in direct reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, but in the social and economic benefits of reducing reliance on fossil fuels.

“Furthermore, voluntary offsets go above and beyond existing government policy and international emissions targets, helping to drive international action while the politics catches up.”³

- **There are now recognised standards for carbon reduction projects** which demonstrate that real, additional carbon reductions have been made. 93% of the carbon reductions currently being funding by Climate Care will be verified under an internationally recognised standard: the United Nations CDM standard, the Gold Standard for Voluntary Offsets (backed by Greenpeace, FOE and WWF) or the Voluntary Carbon Standard.
- **Climate change is a global issue and offsetting helps address it globally:** Climate Change is the biggest global issue we face and we need to make emission reductions urgently around the world. It is not enough to focus just on cutting carbon in the UK. We also have to help promote and fund carbon savings in the developing world – which offsetting is already helping to do.
- **Carbon offsetting funds carbon reductions where money has the biggest impact:** Climate Care was set up ten years ago by

² The Voluntary Carbon Offset Market, July 2007, House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee. Available at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmenvaud.htm>

³ For full text of the letter see climatecare.org Newsoom: <http://www.climatecare.org/news/major-green-ngos-defend-role-of-credible-carbon-offsets/>

passionate environmentalist Mike Mason as a means of raising funds to cut carbon emissions fast. Its employees are committed environmentalists who sympathise with the protestors' assertions that we need to cut carbon emissions quickly, but we believe that carbon offsetting is essential alongside carbon reductions because it allows money to be invested wherever in the world carbon cuts can be made fastest and at the lowest cost.

- **Carbon offsets are funding essential renewable technologies:** Carbon offsetting is raising funds to develop the low-carbon technologies we need, many of which are currently ignored by a regulatory carbon markets.
- **Carbon offsetting is not an excuse to pollute:** carbon offsets are a way of taking responsibility for unavoidable carbon emissions, just as recycling is a way of dealing with unavoidable waste. Offset providers need to communicate this clearly but it is the responsibility of those buying offsets to use them responsibly. Where there is a carbon footprint – and even the most Green have one ! – it should be offset. There is little evidence that carbon offset services encourage people to continue polluting, and all the evidence that Climate Care has points to the opposite effect – that offsetting helps to engage the majority of the public and give them a concrete first step in taking responsibility for their impact. A survey of our own customers showed that **93% saw offsetting as part of an overall effort to reduce their impact on the climate** and that 90% had done one or more of the following: driven less, flown less, made their home more energy efficient.

Edward Hanrahan, Chief Operating Officer for Climate Care, said:

"We were delighted to have the opportunity to explain our work to the activists. Ultimately we are both on the same side – working to tackle climate change – but we believe that credible Carbon Offsetting has an essential role to play and is one of the fastest and most effective tools available to us. We presented strong arguments and evidence that our work helps to encourage faster change at home as well as funding essential technology projects abroad, and I hope that this will cause them to reconsider their blanket condemnation of carbon offsets."

Pictures available:



Edward Hanrahan, Climate Care COO (right) presents Leo Murray (Climate Camp protestor) with a copy of the recent Parliamentary report (July 2007) that concluded that offsets do reduce carbon emissions and should be encouraged. He receives in return an older report by an anti-carbon trading group criticising offsets (February 2007).



David Wellington (Managing Director), far left, and Edward Hanrahan (Chief Operating Officer), far end of table, debate the role of carbon offsets with the activists.

Notes to editors:

For further information on Climate Care please contact Michael Buick, Press Officer on 01865 207012 michael.buick@climatecare.org, or visit the website www.climatecare.org

Background on Climate Care

Climate Care is the world's leading carbon offsetting organisation. Founded in 1998, we make reductions of greenhouse gases (such as CO2) on behalf of individuals and companies. Clients include lastminute.com, Land Rover, Powergen, Aviva, The Eden Project and many more.

These reductions are made through investing in a portfolio of projects which avoid, reduce or absorb greenhouse gases. Sustainable energy projects (renewable energy and energy efficiency) make up 95% of our total project portfolio.

Climate Care's founder, Mike Mason, is an eco-entrepreneur with a number of green businesses. These include innovative renewable fuel production (www.biojoule.co.uk) and the first insurance with carbon offsets built in (www.climatesure.co.uk).

Press pack available at: <http://www.climatecare.org/about/contact-us/>