



Environment and Climate Change Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Mobilising action on climate change and environment: behaviour change

Monday 13 December 2021

2 pm

Watch the meeting

Members present: Baroness Parminter (The Chair); Baroness Boycott; Lord Colgrain; Lord Lilley; Lord Lucas; Baroness Northover; Lord Whitty; Baroness Young of Old Scone.

Evidence Session No. 4

Heard in Public

Questions 23 - 33

Witness

[I](#): Barbara Pompili, Minister for Ecological Transition, Government of France.

Examination of witness

Barbara Pompili.

Q23 **The Chair:** Good afternoon, Minister Pompili. You are extremely welcome to this fourth evidence session of our committee into behaviour change for climate and environmental goals. We very much look forward to hearing from you this afternoon about the experience in France with your initiatives to bring forward behaviour change for the climate and the environment. Before we begin, I remind people that a transcript will be taken and passed to the witness, and you will have a chance to view it before it is published. The session is webcast and will be available on the parliamentlive website.

Madame Pompili, bon après-midi. Nous vous sommes très reconnaissants d'avoir d'accord de nous parler aujourd'hui. We look forward to you now making some opening remarks.

Barbara Pompili: Thank you, dear Chair, and dear members of the committee. I am very pleased to be with you today, especially since I was the chair of the same committee as yours in the French National Assembly just before becoming Minister.

I would like to talk about the steps that France is taking to foster change in response to the climate crisis. I will focus on the recent law reforms that have transformed our climate legislation and our entire approach to environmental policy-making.

The yellow vest movement that my country experienced in 2018 was a revealing crisis. It showed that many people felt excluded from ecological transition, and that a good environmental measure—a carbon tax—was deemed illegitimate because it was hitting the population unevenly.

From thereon, we knew that something had to change if we wanted to move forward with our reforms. In order to initiate that change, President Emmanuel Macron launched a new democratic experiment in 2019 known as the Citizens Convention for Climate. The convention was a practical, bottom-up initiative. One hundred and fifty of our fellow citizens were selected randomly, representing the diversity of the French population, in order to come up with measures and initiatives that would help to reinforce our climate policy.

These citizens, once selected, had to work for an overall period of nine months. They were entrusted with the key task of designing new solutions to the environmental and climate crisis. To help them to get a better grasp of the problems, as part of their work they also met dozens of experts. They came up with many new ideas. Almost 150 proposals were communicated to our Government. Those proposals touched upon political, legal and social matters. They reflected an important ability to think and innovate, and served as the basis of legislation, the Climate and Resilience Bill, which was adopted by our Parliament last summer. The ambition of that landmark law was to lay the groundwork for broad and deep change. Today, the climate Bill is the cornerstone of our climate

policies. In short, the 291 articles of this law have the common ambition to bring deep changes in the very lifestyle of French citizens.

What lessons can be drawn from that experiment? I will summarise it in six points, three positive and three negative. First on the positive side, once the citizens had been briefed by scientists, experts and various professionals, they showed not only readiness to make change happen but a sense of radicalism in their propositions, underlining once again that awareness is probably the mother of the battle.

The youth are more and more concerned and more and more involved, but a big share of our populations, of our voters, still need to be better informed, more conscious of the challenges that we face and the consequences for their day-to-day lives. In order to raise awareness on climate-related issues, an article in my Bill requests that environmental education be provided in all French schools. This is a huge catalyst for change. We must strengthen such action for all layers of society.

Another important element was the fact that President Macron was personally involved in the process of the convention. His patronage gave the convention a source of legitimacy, and gave visibility and media impact to the work of the citizens. Ultimately, it credited the convention with political power.

The last positive point is that most of the citizens involved in the convention continue to be involved in public life. They are either elected in city or regional councils or are part of active NGOs or community associations. Today, they also take part in other conventions that they sometimes helped to design, such as the companies convention on the role of the private sector in ecological transition.

What aspects of that experiment would I change if I could? First, I believe that the scope of the convention was too broad. We asked the citizens to embrace literally the entire problem of the climate crisis and to change the whole system. That was probably too much responsibility and somehow unrealistic for a smooth articulation of the work.

We probably made a mistake when we expressed our willingness to accept all their propositions and convey them to Parliament without somehow filtering them. When the propositions were finally handed to the Government, President Macron gave only three vetoes: on the speed limit on roads, on taxes on companies and on amending the constitution. Consequently, the members of the convention sometimes reacted badly when they felt that their propositions were watered down by parliamentarians. It also sparked a legitimacy problem with the Parliament and the representatives of the people. Some criticised, for instance, the lack of legitimacy of the members of the convention, as they had not been elected.

Finally, it would have been very beneficial to have organised more meetings between the members of the convention and the important doers, the primary actors, of the transition—the private sector and

companies. The confrontation of logics would probably have made the debate in Parliament easier and made the propositions more realistic from the beginning, closer to the status quo in all components of society.

In France, we have a famous line from our beloved writer La Fontaine in his tale, *The Animals Sick of the Plague*: "Not all died, but all were stricken". If some of you know French, the original version reads, "Ils ne mouraient pas tous, mais tous étaient frappés". Put another way, in the famous phrase of the poet John Donne that my British friends tend to use fondly: "No man is an island, entire of itself".

That is why, as Minister of the Environment, I always insist on the fact that ecology is not the business of some people and not of others. Ecology is everyone's business, and all parties need to talk to each other. We need a rich public debate on the transition, with a positive narrative to show the opportunities that these changes can create, and not only the problems.

Voilà. I think you have questions for me, so I will not go any further. I am ready to answer you. Thank you.

Q24 The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister Pompili. I will ask the first question. Which of the specific initiatives that the Government have undertaken do you think has been the most successful in people buying into it and adopting it?

Barbara Pompili: Housing is probably the best example of success. It represents 40% of our emissions, and energy precariousness in housing is important in France. People also felt that it was complicated and that the system was not clear enough. With our programme called MaPrimeRénov we simplified the system, and at the end many more people were able to make repairs in their home. From January, a dedicated professional will help households that so desire to make an analysis of their needs, help them to find adequate financing schemes and even find craftsmen able to do the work. For me, that is the most important achievement.

Q25 Lord Lilley: Minister, thank you for speaking to us today. What do you see as the key considerations in developing policy to enable behaviour change for climate change and the environment?

Barbara Pompili: First, I think it is a matter of awareness. We have to explain why behaviour is critical for the transition. Information is critical. This is what we will be doing on home appliances, for example, with an index of the repair potential of each product, whether spare parts are available, easy to find and affordable.

We are seeing, little by little, the consumer preferring to buy easy-to-repair products rather than rapidly obsolete ones. We must then provide solutions for them and propose viable alternatives, such as taking the train and not flying for small distances. Finally, on the education part, we put veggie menus in schools to gradually initiate a change of habit.

My Government are taking different steps to encourage French people to change the way they travel. Indeed, starting next year with the application of the law, there will be no domestic flights to a particular destination if an alternative journey to the same spot is available by train in less than two and a half hours. In addition, we will provide financial support and incentives to help people to transition away from their old vehicles by helping them to buy an electric or hybrid car instead. That is an example of what we can do to help people into this transition.

Q26 Lord Lilley: Thank you very much indeed. You may already have answered the second half of my question, but I will put it. Are there policy-making approaches or policy instruments which you think Governments should be giving greater consideration to in this area?

Barbara Pompili: I think we have to help people to be actors in the ecological transition. We can support them with special incentives. I will keep to my example of transport and the car. In France, for example, the Government give a bonus of up to €6,000 when you want to buy an electric car. To that can be added €5,000 for taking back your old car or for second-hand vehicles, plus an additional €1,000 in cities under restrictions for high-emitting cars. Finally, there is up to €6,000 from local authorities. For a new car, that means financial support of up to €18,000. Since 2018, 840,000 bonuses have been given to change cars.

The same applies to building insulation or when you want to change your fuel pump for a heat pump. One hundred thousand fuel pumps per year have been changed in this way. The idea is to anticipate, and ultimately reduce, the costs that people have to bear for electricity or energy.

Lord Lilley: Thank you very much indeed.

Q27 Baroness Young of Old Scone: Minister Pompili, did you have to make any changes to the comparative costs of rail, road and air transport to effect your policy of banning internal flights that could be achieved by train? Did you have to change the subsidy to various transport modes?

Barbara Pompili: We work with the transportation company SNCF in France—a rail company—to make it have low prices for some people. When people use transport regularly, they can have reductions in the price. We have a tax on aviation that is called the Chirac tax. It is a tax on tickets to help people understand that it can be more expensive when you travel by plane, and to make them think about taking the train instead of a plane. We have a problem with people who take two planes; they come from Bordeaux, for example, and they need to reach New York, so they need to change planes in Roissy/Charles de Gaulle. We work on tools to help them to take the train to go from Bordeaux to Charles de Gaulle, and after to take the plane to New York.

We need to make SNCF and the plane companies work together on solutions to buying train and plane tickets. It is complicated in France, because everybody works in their silo. It is not so easy, but we are working on it. We are working on luggage efficiency too. When you have luggage and you take one plane and then another, it is easier than when

you take the train and plane. It is a matter of price, but not only that. It is a matter of logistics too.

Baroness Young of Old Scone: Thank you very much.

Q28 **Baroness Northover:** Thank you very much, Minister, for your extremely clear and instructive introduction. What challenges have you and your ministry faced when developing policies on behaviour change for the climate and the environment, and how have you approached those challenges? You have just mentioned silos. How have you worked with other ministries in the French Government to develop a co-ordinated approach?

Barbara Pompili: It is an interesting question. My ministry is called the Ministry for Ecological Transition, with a large scope of responsibility, including housing, energy, transport, environment, climate change, water management, waste management and pollution, and even hunting. This helps to integrate policies and to have a co-ordinated response to the challenges that we face. With my colleagues from the Agriculture Ministry, for instance, naturally we have some debates. We are dealing with different interest groups that might have conflicting objectives.

I believe that a great challenge is being and remaining coherent, but the pace of change has to be bold, so alignment of policies is a key factor in making drastic and fast changes. We need to be coherent and have only one voice to speak to our fellow citizens. Our fellow citizens have to understand that we are concentrated on one goal, which is the climate change fight.

Baroness Northover: Do you find that other ministries understand the need to be coherent, and are they willing to accept your leadership in areas that they feel are theirs?

Barbara Pompili: The Prime Minister is our reference. When we have discussions, the Prime Minister is there to take the decisions and to say, "Okay, I have heard everybody, and I decide that we will do this policy".

I have been involved in ecological transition for 20 years. I have seen evolution, and now all my colleagues are concerned about ecological transition. The real debates that we have are on the reason for the transition—the basis. We have discussions about the emergency. I am the one who always says that we have to act quickly. They say, "Okay, but we need to have everyone on board, so we have to think about people and the interest groups that we need to convince and bring with us". It is a discussion on the reasons, essentially, not on the need for change.

Q29 **Lord Whitty:** Minister, you have made it clear that there are challenges, but there are also problems of false starts. What do you do when a policy that you have proposed or implemented does not work, or is proved not to be the success in ecological terms that you had thought? What if there is a negative reaction to that, either among your supporters or among those who see the negative social or economic effects of some of your

policies? In other words, how do you recover from setbacks? Maybe you have not had any in France.

Barbara Pompili: Yes, of course, we have. The yellow jacket movement is an example. It is an experience. It is a trial and error process. We have to try the implementation. When the implementation is not successful, we have to think about another policy. We cannot succeed in everything we try, because it is new policy. Ecological transition is a tremendous challenge.

I do not think we have had such a huge challenge in past years. It is a matter of changing our culture and our civilisation. We cannot do that so easily. There are people in France who are very concerned by the climate change crisis. They see the effects of climate change, but they are afraid. They see the changes as a threat and not a solution. They want to face the challenge, but not in their garden; they do not want wind farms in their garden, for example. They want us to change the world, but they do not want to change and they do not want to pay for it. That is why, as I told you, education, information and the involvement of citizens by changing consumption habits is very important.

I really think that, if we want to have everyone on board, we have to explain to them that it is not only a threat but an opportunity to build a better world for them and for their children. I am a mother. When I think of what we have to do, it can be exhausting, but it is a great opportunity for my girl and for our children to have new jobs in new industries and to be involved in something very exciting, if we have a good narrative.

Q30 **Lord Whitty:** We can persuade people. We can make new regulations for people, but most behaviour change is driven by the price of things. Do you have a coherent policy of taxation and subsidy that will encourage households and businesses to change their ways through the price signal, or are you trying to do most of it by regulation and persuasion?

Barbara Pompili: It is a mix of policies. We have incentives. I told you about the incentives on cars, housing, et cetera. We have to inform consumers. A huge potential for behaviour change lies in our consumption habits. That is why the climate Bill improves our citizens' access to information. In order to do so, we are currently experimenting with a new initiative, which is to display an eco-score on all products used by our citizens, such as clothing. Should this experiment be successful, the measure, which is still being tested, will be more durably inserted into our law.

I told you about our repairability incentive. We saw that customers choose products that are easily repairable, which changes the behaviour of companies. Companies call the ministry to explain that they are changing the packaging of their products to change the colour of their score to green, because they see that if they do not do that they lose customers. That is why it is about incentives and information.

We also have taxation, of course. We have a carbon tax in France, but we realised that it was more efficient to do it on a European level, because

we need a level playing field for our industries and companies. That is why the work we are doing inside the EU is important, especially the CBAM system—the carbon tax at the frontiers of the EU—to help our industries to change their processes and not be penalised by industries in other countries that do not have the same taxes. It is a mix of policies.

Lord Whitty: Thank you very much, Minister.

Q31 **Lord Colgrain:** Thank you, Minister. How have you worked with local government, business and the third sector on enabling behaviour change for climate change and the environment?

Barbara Pompili: I have already mentioned the new convention of companies taking place at the moment, but in my day-to-day work I am in contact with the private sector. I go all over France twice a week to inaugurate projects and address CEOs in the regions of my country, or to help innovators, start-ups or SMEs making the transition.

To answer your specific question, I have a lot of contacts with the mayors or the presidents of the regions. You might have seen that at the last local elections many big French cities now have mayors from the Green Party: Lyon, Strasbourg, Bordeaux and Grenoble. It is interesting to note that sometimes it is they who are asking for deadlines to implement environmental measures now that they are in the position of conducting policies. Implementation has never been their strong point; that was why I left the Green Party some years ago. Ecological transition is not only a matter of law but a matter of implementation, and for that we need to work closely with all partners. The partners are local policymakers and companies, big and small.

Q32 **Lord Colgrain:** You have given a very balanced response. I wonder whether I can, rather cheekily, ask you to be a little less balanced. Of the three sectors—local government, business and the third sector—which is the most helpful to you in their response to your policies? Which would you seek to prioritise engagement with because you think you will get a faster and better response from them?

Barbara Pompili: It is difficult to answer your question. I work with them, but not on exactly the same issues. With the regions, we work on targets and plan the implementation of national targets at regional level. Regions in France are in charge of transport and skills, and we need to work with them to add a global view of the territory and the changes we need to implement. In the car industry, for example, fewer people are needed to build electric cars than to build the old type of vehicles, so there is a risk of a growth in unemployment on that side.

We try to work with the regions on reskilling and developing tools in those territories to create new industries based on renewables and batteries, for example, and for future industries we can localise in those areas to change and create jobs. For cities, we work on urbanism and city planning, but it is not the same work. It is very different, and that is why it is difficult for me to prioritise.

Lord Colgrain: Thank you very much.

Q33 **The Chair:** We have time for probably one more question. Minister Pompili, you have been very clear about how France has legislated to move this agenda forward. You have indicated some of the policies, like the dedicated person who helps people with home insulation, and you talked about education and the trial on clothes labelling. Can I invite you to say a few words about whether the Government centrally are doing anything on communication individually with citizens? If so, are you focusing purely on the ecological benefits, or are you also talking about the health benefits and other community benefits in making progress on this important agenda?

Barbara Pompili: I am sorry, your question was cut off, but I think I understood it. You are right. We communicate also on the issue of health. The link between environment and health is not so obvious to many citizens, but it is growing. We work on pollution. My colleagues from the French Senate worked on the price of pollution and revealed that it could cost €100 billion per year to fight pollution in France. The consequences of pollution for the population are revealed more and more. The work of NGOs is important in that respect. We have had scandals on pesticides, for example.

It is interesting, because we can implement some policies more easily than before. In my Bill, we have to implement low-emission zones in the cities. It is difficult to make French people understand that they have to leave their car, but they understand that it is not possible to continue like that, and implementation is not as hard as I believed it would be at the beginning. Once again, information is very important. That is why I told you about the consumer information.

The Covid crisis was interesting on this point, because it highlighted the role of biodiversity loss for the health of our people. The One Health concept is one that more and more people understand. For me, it is a way to explain to people that we need to implement ecological transition, because it is not only a matter of economy; it is a matter of well-being and health in our country and all around the world. We cannot act as if nothing has happened.

The Chair: Minister, thank you very much for both that response and all your other responses in your extremely clear English.

Barbara Pompili: I am so sorry for my English.

The Chair: Please do not apologise. It has been excellent and very clear, and I am sure we will get a lot from what you have said as we look at how we in the UK can move forward with behaviour change to tackle this crisis, which both you and our country know has to be tackled. Merci beaucoup for your answers. We really appreciate it.

Barbara Pompili: Merci beaucoup à vous.