

Tony Blair wants a new approach to climate change when the leaders of the industrial nations meet at Gleneagles later in the summer. But it seems he won't get it. The Americans are far and away the world's biggest polluter and he wants them to join the global consensus on the science of climate change. He also wants to tie the Americans into some new international agreement on cutting emissions now that they've pulled out of the Kyoto Protocol. And he wants them to continue their support for new technologies. What their chief climate negotiator Harlan Watson has been spelling out America's resistance to Mr Blair's plans at a G-8 clean technologies meeting in Oxford. Roger Harrabin asked him how far Mr Bush would support Mr Blair, starting with the science.

Harlan Watson:

"I think there's general agreement, there's a lot known, but also there's a lot to be known. In fact Sir David King in his talk last night before the group, did mention about the uncertainties in the science . . ."

Roger Harrabin:

"So there's a big gulf between you still on the science when the European scientists are saying 'the science is still unknown but the risk is so huge that we could possibly destroy the planet as we know, that we have to act now and it is urgent. We're still not hearing that coming from the US Administration.'"

Harlan Watson:

"Yeah; That is, that is, correct. We're still not convinced of the need to move forward quite so quickly, particularly if it would risk not only our economy by the world's economy moving forward too quickly."

Roger Harrabin:

"So no agreement really on the science; what about the 'process'? By process Tony Blair means what are we going to do now you've pulled out of the Kyoto Protocol process, the only international framework for dealing with climate change. How are we going to progress?"

Harlan Watson:

"Well we aren't really pulled out of the overall framework. We're parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). We've just chosen . . ."

Roger Harrabin: [talking through HW] . . .

"But you haven't ratified it and you're not going to ratify it. What future is there for bringing the US into some sort of international framework, like sort of post-Kyoto? That's what Mr Blair is hoping . . ."

Harlan Watson:

"Well, I mean clearly there are going to be discussions within the Framework Convention in itself on the post-Kyoto time-frame, the post-2012. Again, we see that as the place to discuss, you know in terms of process. We don't need to set up another or additional processes."

Roger Harrabin:

"Well some of the delegates after the last meeting, the last Kyoto meeting, were saying that the US were putting heavy pressure on other countries not to take any further steps to cut their own CO2 emissions, even though the Americans themselves had not ratified. Why are you doing that?"

Harlan Watson:

"No no no. We didn't. What we were trying to do was to bridge the gap between Europe and large developing countries, such as China India and Brazil . . .

Roger Harrabin:

"The Kyoto process never envisaged the Indians and the Chinese coming into the cuts yet . . .

Harlan Watson:

"Well, let me get to the reality of American politics. The United States Senate was on record in 1997 and that position simply hasn't changed. By 95-0 the United States should not enter into an agreement that would one harm our economy or two did not include commitments from developing countries. Kyoto provides for neither of those."

Roger Harrabin:

"But a lot of people think that the target that the Americans did agree to at Kyoto was unrealistic at the time. But since then, you've pulled out, you've refused to ratify and you're acting as a brake on everyone else.

Harlan Watson:

"United States has taken many, many actions both addressing the near-term issue of reducing our emissions from business-as-usual as well as supporting billions of dollars of technology programmes that really address the problem in the long-run.

Roger Harrabin:

"So it looks like on the three areas for movement, Mr Blair will gain progress on just one of them. It'll look like, to scientists here that you are just kicking this into never-never-land.

Harlan Watson:

"I don't believe that Prime Minister proposed that people didn't work within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. We are part of that process. We're heavy contributors to that and we participate in that actively. You know we're committing more money than the rest of world put together. On this we're taking a whole number of voluntary and mandatory steps to address the issue. And once again, I would match our record on what we're doing against any other country in the world.

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