

BBC Radio 4 podcast 28 December 2019

Michael Kelly interviewed by Nick Robinson

32:22 BBC Charles Moore - One of the subjects that's very difficult to air on the BBC if you don't share the prevailing view is climate change. So I invited Professor Michael Kelly, a professor from Cambridge and the former chief scientific advisor to the department for communities and local government, on. Michael talks about the immense costs involved of the transition to zero carbon.

32:41 MJK - It's no good looking at a model today and saying it's done well for the last 30 years, you look at a model made 30 years ago and look how well it's done in the 30 years since. If you look at the data for the last 30 years, on average, the models have been heating twice as fast as the data.

32:58 NR - I know the focus that you have, that your foundation has, is largely on what policies to enact.

33:04 MJK – That's correct, yes.

33:05 NR – But there are plenty of people who say, look, you're a scientist, you are not a climate change scientist, they would rather take the view of those people who are, who have overwhelmingly got one view. Why do you allow yourself to operate in a think tank with people who are climate change deniers?

33:22 MJK – They're not deniers. Look, I was in the room when Paul Nurse sent five Fellows of the Royal Society to put Nigel Lawson right and he agreed with them on everything, but when Nigel Lawson turned round and said, "the key word in our organisation is policy, what would YOU do about it?" they stood back and said, "hey, but we're only scientists." All I'm saying now is that the current renewables and the various other things we're doing are not going to deliver the expectations of a zero carbon 2050.

33:54 NR – But we're hearing scepticism, scepticism about the science, scepticism about the measures for dealing with it, I think what many people will not think they're hearing yet is any suggestion what you would do, or are you just hoping for the best?

34:06 MJK – Oh no—well, I AM hoping for the best; there's a long history of doom and gloom. The average size of families in the world has halved, from five children per family to two and a half, it's coming down steeply.

34:17 NR – [speaking over the top of Michael] So the population will fall again and you think that will solve the problem?

34:20 MJK – Exactly. The population in 2100 could be as much as 300 million less than the number that will peak somewhere about 2060, 2070. And that will be enough, by the way, to account for all the people who might have to move if the sea levels, at their very worst, were to rise by a metre.

34:39 NR – But here, just to conclude, is the problem, isn't it, Professor Kelly, which is... in your own words, this is hoping for the best. Who knows, you might be right about population falling, but the world's climate change scientists are telling us that we face a climate emergency, the world's policy makers are telling us we face a climate emergency, they are having described to them the appalling consequences of that for the loss of human life and quality of life and you come along as a professor of engineering and say, well, you know, in the past people have got things wrong, maybe they'll get it wrong in the future? Why would you act on the basis of your hope for the best?

35:12 MJK – Well, I'll tell you what I wouldn't do. I wouldn't do something which I know in advance is futile. So last year the reduction in carbon emissions in this country was undone 80 — that's eighty — times over by the rest of the world. I'd be spending a lot more money on research and development into the next but one generation of nuclear energy. Because the real problem is in mega cities. If you look at how we will power London in the year 2050, we know right now we could do it with a mixture of fossil fuel and nuclear. We know right now the whole of East Anglia, converted to grass or solar and wind, would produce fractions of what London needs by way of electricity, and that's where we get a large fraction of our food from. So I want to make sure that what we do is not futile.

36:03 NR – Professor Michael Kelly, of the Global Warming Policy Foundation, thank you for joining us.

36:06 MJK – Thank you.