



Second Nature 069 (Aug 2026)

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Welcome to new subscriber Chris from Cambridgeshire.

In this issue: UK press coverage of climate issues, extreme weather puts pressure on power systems, climate science and weather attribution, a sand battery, installation of new GB solar at 15-year high, Thurrock Council scraps its climate emergency declaration.

Heat

This is how climate scientist Michael E Mann corrected the front page of The Times, 25 July.



Click on the image to read the Times article *Net-zero race 'risks blackouts and higher bills'*. It's behind a paywall, so I haven't read it myself (I prefer to give my money to a different newspaper). If you are a Times subscriber and would like to

provide a summary I will include it in the next issue (or in the online copy of this one).

Doug Specht wrote this in The Conversation:

The lead news story was on how the UK's net zero policy risks blackouts. It reported a whistleblower's claim that the expansion of wind and solar had left officials struggling to gauge supply and demand. The full story of the fire that displaced more than 110,000 people didn't appear until page five.

This was met with cries of hypocrisy on social media. But exploring how these contradictions can sit on the same front page tells us a lot about how climate change is narrated in the UK, and why climate reporting differs so much from country to country.

From [Wildfires: why media coverage doesn't always make the climate connection](#) I Doug Specht in The Conversation, 28 July (and edited a bit). Recommended.

The National Energy System Operator NESO responded to The Times article with a statement by its Director of System Operations, Craig Dyke:

During the week commencing Monday 22 June, extreme heat affected Great Britain and Europe. The Met Office issued a red weather warning, advising of dangerous conditions with a risk to life and significant disruption to travel and energy supplies.

These conditions placed sustained pressure on power systems and created tight operating margins across Great Britain and Europe.

Despite this, no customer demand was disconnected, frequency remained within statutory limits, the voltage stayed within limits and no lines or cables were overloaded. (Dyke doesn't actually say 'what more do you want?' but it is implied I think.)

A combination of low wind, reduced gas generation availability, high sustained demand, adverse interconnector flows and network constraints created a complex operational challenge. The Electricity National Control Room managed this in real time through market engagement, use of demand flexibility, deployment of reserve, trading with neighbouring system operators and instructions to interconnectors.

At times, frequency moved outside the normal operating range. This is expected under stressed conditions and it remained within statutory limits of 49.5Hz to 50.5Hz at all times.

[Management of frequency during extreme weather \(w/c 22 June\)](#) | NESO

Carbon Brief's editor **Leo Hickman** noted that *The Daily Telegraph*, on a departure from its usual climate-sceptic commentary, published two prominent op-eds calling for conservatives to recognise the dangers of climate change. This included one [piece](#) by columnist Tim Stanley ("the evidence for global warming is stacking up - we only need to look out our windows to see it"), and a [comment article](#), aimed specifically at Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch, by world economy editor Ambrose Evans-Pritchard ("Runaway climate change is hurting the conservative way of life: Kemi must end her net zero purge"). Carbon Brief says a wave of new climate-sceptic comment pieces followed. This included a [piece](#) from its Sunday edition editor calling for people to give up tackling climate change and "embrace the Mediterranean lifestyle" and a [column](#) by an author with ties to a climate-sceptic thinktank claiming that "renewables [the world's [largest source](#) of electricity] are useless". The week ended with a [piece](#) by Kemi Badenoch, defending her anti-net-zero stance.

If you're not happy with the way that your paper covers the climate, write to the editor and say so.

Climate, Weather, and Net Zero

After SN068 a climate group leader emailed me to say *thanks for this compilation of a large number of our woes. We will use the [BBC guide to climate change](#) on our display board over time. U3a will consider it political maybe but actually it's just information.*

Actually it's just science - climate science. Prof Bill McGuire says *climate science ... incorporates aspects of geology, chemistry, physics, oceanography, meteorology, economics, social science and many other fields, so that one source putting the number of climate scientists at 18,000 worldwide is almost certainly an underestimate.* If you believe that all of these scientists are part of one big conspiracy to convince us that climate change is real and so up their research

funding then you should stop reading now and seek help.

[Wildfires are raging – and the world has junked 45 climate pledges](#) | Bill McGuire in the Guardian, 29 July

I won't try and define **weather** - you all know what it is, you recognise it when you walk out of the door. **Climate** is the medium- and long-term average of weather: climate tells you what weather to expect. **Net zero** is a state in which an organisation (or a country, or the world) removes from the atmosphere the same amount of greenhouse gases as it emits, and it is political, at least in the UK. Whenever you hear the phrase "I'm not a climate denier, but" you know that you are about to hear opposition to net zero policies.

In the UK the [Climate Change Act 2008](#) is the act of Parliament which makes it the duty of the Secretary of State to reduce the UK's net greenhouse gas (territorial) emissions. The target was an 80% reduction by 2050; in June 2019 this was upped to a **net zero** target of 100% reduction by 2050. The [Climate Change Committee](#) was created to advise UK and devolved governments on these targets and related policies. It describes itself as "the UK's independent adviser on tackling climate change".

It is a valid criticism of climate science I think that it can't be tested against experiments - it tracks one big experiment, where we increase the amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere by 50% and see what happens. Unfortunately there is no control planet where we haven't done this, so scientists have to use a model. Their science though is published in recognised journals and is peer-reviewed.

Weather attribution uses weather observations and climate models to understand how climate change influences the intensity and likelihood of extreme weather events. Most studies are performed rapidly, just after extreme weather events (or even while they're still happening) to answer the question: 'what was the role of climate change in this event?' Source: [World Weather Attribution](#) (edited). World Weather Attribution has performed more than 100 studies on heatwaves, extreme rainfall, drought, floods, wildfires and cold spells. This is [WWA's report on the recent wildfires in France and Spain](#).

Technology



Image: Polar Night Energy

The Finnish town of Pornainen (pop. 5,000) now uses a sand battery as part of its district heating network. Two thousand tonnes of soapstone stores around 100MWh of heat, enough to meet the heating needs of the town for a month in summer and up to a week in winter.

[The world's largest sand battery](#) | Sam Meredith for CNBC, 27 July

Here the title says it all:

[\[Installation of\] new solar panels in GB at 15-year high](#) | Jillian Ambrose in the Guardian, 31 July

Recycling on its own isn't enough: **circularity begins at the design stage**, argues an opinion piece in Resource.

Imagine a future where every laptop, smartphone and server is designed to be modular, easily repaired, upgraded and modified ... where batteries can be replaced

in minutes rather than requiring specialist intervention. Where memory, storage and key components can be upgraded instead of forcing complete device replacement. Where dismantling products for refurbishment and material recovery is simple rather than complex.

This is the difference between designing products for consumption and designing products for stewardship. For too long, society has accepted a model where technology is treated as disposable despite containing valuable resources including gold, copper, silver and rare earth elements. Every premature replacement represents both wasted embedded carbon and lost economic value.

[Beyond recycling](#) | Andrew Gomarsall in Resource, 28 July

Emergency? What emergency?

Thurrock Council is one of the latest to scrap its climate emergency declaration, following a similar move by Essex County Council. At a meeting Cllr George Monk insisted it was not about rejecting climate change, so presumably Thurrock is accepting climate change. Cllr Monk wants Thurrock to take a 'realistic' approach. I won't tell you what party runs Thurrock Council, but you can probably guess.

[Council becomes latest to scrap net-zero policies](#) | Naomi Greenaway for BBC News, 24 July

Small Actions

Although small actions might not solve the climate crisis, they remind us that we are intrinsic parts of the world and its ecosystems.

- Kimberley R Miner

There is a list of small actions [on the website](#). One nanokelvin at a time folks.

Sources

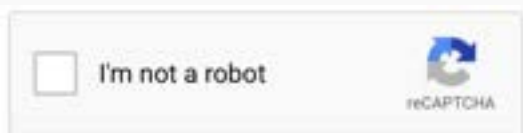
SN068 recycles or links to content from BBC News, Carbon Brief, CNBC, The Conversation, The Daily Telegraph, the Guardian, Michael E Mann, NESO, resourcemedi, The Times, Wikipedia, and World Weather Attribution. All of this material is gratefully acknowledged.

At time of writing 390 people have opened the previous issue of this newsletter. If you are one of them, thank you; if not, you can always find it and other back issues [here](#).

I use click performance as reported by Mailchimp to try and figure out what interests the SN audience. The most popular links in SN068 were [Christian Wolmar's piece about carspeading](#) and the advice from Which? about [using grey water in the garden](#). Each was accessed by 20 subscribers. Only the letter from Myles Allen and others [carbon capture is vital in tackling the climate crisis](#) got no clicks at all.

Feedback

All feedback is welcome, if it is constructive (or instructive). Emails sent to u3asecondnature@gmail.com may be used here or on the website, unless you make it clear when you email that you don't want me to use your content. I may edit the material to save space, but I take care not to change its meaning. I won't share your contact details. I keep your emails in a Gmail folder to which only I have access, and delete them when I don't need them any more.



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Please leave the
planet as you
would expect to
find it !
