



## SEPTEMBER 2025 NEWSLETTER



Our July Newsletter featured HCA participation in the Mass Lobby of Parliament on 9 July. One of the aims of the lobby was to support the [Climate and Nature Private Member's Bill](#). Although the Bill had not progressed after its Second Reading, the UK Government had committed to take forward the substance of the Bill. A few days after the lobby, Energy Secretary Ed Miliband MP delivered the first annual [Climate and Nature Statement](#) in Parliament. It's a start, but also a reminder of how important it is to [keep up the pressure](#) on the UK Government.

## WHAT IS CARBON PRICING?

James Collis is the Chair of Citizens' Climate Europe and a Member of the EU Climate Change Expert Group for ETS2. He explains to us the concept of carbon pricing, outlining how it works and the arguments in its favour. What do you think? HCA supporters may agree or disagree – do get in touch and share your thoughts. Contact us at [climateaction@humanists.uk](mailto:climateaction@humanists.uk).



When we talk about climate change, the conversation often gets tangled in scientific jargon, political disputes, or apocalyptic warnings. But at its heart, the climate crisis is a profoundly human issue: how we value the future, how we share responsibility, and how we care for each other. One of the most practical tools to address it – though often misunderstood – is carbon pricing.

At its simplest, carbon pricing is about putting a cost on pollution. Today, anyone – from individuals, companies, or the public sector – can release greenhouse gases into the atmosphere for free. Those emissions impose very real costs on society – rising sea levels, stronger storms, crop failures, and public health crises. Economists call these ‘externalities,’ effects borne not by the polluter but by everyone else. Carbon pricing is an attempt to correct that imbalance by making emitters pay for the damage they cause.

There are two main approaches. The first is a carbon tax, where governments set a fixed price per tonne of carbon dioxide emitted. Companies can decide whether to pay that tax or find cheaper ways to cut emissions. The second is a cap-and-trade system, where authorities set a limit (or cap) on total emissions, distribute allowances, and let companies buy and sell those allowances in a market. Both approaches aim to send the same signal: polluting is no longer free, and reducing emissions saves money.

What makes carbon pricing especially compelling is its flexibility. Unlike prescriptive regulations that dictate specific technologies, pricing lets businesses and individuals find their own solutions – whether that's switching to renewable energy, improving efficiency, or changing consumer habits. Economists tend to like this approach because it encourages innovation and keeps costs down.

But carbon pricing is not just an economic tool; it is also an ethical one. By assigning a monetary value to the invisible costs of carbon, it challenges us to rethink our moral obligations to future generations and to vulnerable communities already bearing the brunt of climate impacts. It makes explicit the principle that those who profit from pollution should shoulder its costs, rather than shifting the burden onto children, farmers in drought-prone regions, or people living in floodplains.

Of course, the effectiveness of carbon pricing depends on how it is designed. Too low a price, and polluters hardly notice. Too high, without safeguards, and it can hurt low-income households. Many advocates argue for “revenue recycling”—using carbon revenues to fund renewable energy, public transit, or direct rebates to citizens, ensuring fairness and building public trust.

These options are included in the [EU extension to carbon pricing, due in 2027, covering buildings and transport](#). The UK Government needs to assess how to align with this cornerstone of EU climate legislation. Citizens' Climate Europe is advocating a progressive policy approach that enables more ambitious pricing, protecting both households and industry in the energy transition.

For humanists, carbon pricing may be more than an economic instrument. It could embody a values-driven recognition that the atmosphere is a shared inheritance. By putting a price on pollution, we are making a collective decision to treat the future with seriousness, to align incentives with compassion, and to act as stewards rather than exploiters of the Earth.

James Collis

*For more information and further references, [Our World in Data](#) is a readable and reputable source.*

## ECO-PURCHASING – HOW CAN WE DECIDE?



Confused about what's an eco purchase? You are not alone.

Finding reliable information on the impact of the products and services we use is challenging. Many large companies have become very skilful at 'greenwashing' to convince consumers to buy or continue to use their products. So where can you find sources of information that can be trusted to provide accurate assessments and enable informed consumer decisions?

While I'm sure there are other sources of information, there are two places I go if I want to make a large purchase, check services or the impact of the everyday items I am buying. *Ethical Consumer* is a brilliant source and covers an enormous number of products and services. They produce ethical ratings based on research of over 40,000 companies, brands and products. A subscription provides access to all their research and enables you to personalise the shopping guides in a way that accurately reflects the issues that are important to you. So, for example, you can specify that your main interest is the climate emergency, animal testing or the treatment of sweatshop workers. I see this information as the gold standard and like to identify specific companies that are highly rated and support them. While the products are often more expensive I balance that cost against the savings of buying less. Having said that, I sometimes have to compromise when availability or cost is an obstacle.

I'm sure most readers are familiar with *Which?* Magazine. *Which?* identifies Eco Buys and has an increasing number of useful articles dealing with sustainability. The focus is narrower than *Ethical Consumer* in that it does not assess whether the companies making the products are ethical but rather the quality of the products tested.

*Which?* tests for Eco Buys in the same way they do for Best Buys. They buy every product they test and use the same consistent tests for each particular type of product. To earn a *Which?* Eco Buy recommendation, a product must have a lower impact on the environment than alternative models. This can be proved in a number of ways, from being very energy efficient and therefore saving electricity, to being easily repairable. They also consider whether the product is from a brand with a proven reliability record, meaning it's more likely to last a long time.

For most consumers there is a balance between a desired level of performance, the cost and the environmental impact of the products they purchase. Many of us are prepared to compromise on performance and cost where there is a significant environmental impact. Whatever your position on this, having reliable information is the only way to make rational and informed decisions.

While my primary effort is directed at reducing consumption, for me the information from these two sources leaves me confident that I am making better decisions regarding the purchases I do make. Personally, I subscribe to [Which?](#) magazine and [Ethical Consumer](#). Your local library may also stock *Which?* without a subscription.

Pauline Element

## INTERVIEW WITH A HUMANIST



In this *Interview with a humanist* we're delighted to put the questions to our own *Humanist Climate Action* Coordinator, Lori Marriott.

### **Lori, tell us a bit about yourself – how long have you been a humanist?**

I joined Humanists UK 10 years ago but recognised I was a humanist about 20 years ago (aged 16). I grew up in an agnostic household, briefly explored both Baptist Christianity and Wicca, and then decided science was my favourite. I have coordinated the HCA Committee for 4 years.

### **How did you come to be interested in environmental concerns?**

Raised in a nature-loving home, it was a natural evolution of thought to become interested in environmental issues and campaigning when I got to university.

### **How do your humanist values lead you to want to take environmental action?**

The key ones for me are empathy and legacy. Empathy stands against exploitation and destruction and ideally extends out beyond our immediate neighbours to the rest of the world and the other organisms we share this planet with. In my view we have no greater claim to the resources of the planet than any other species or any other generation, and yet, as a species we are largely behaving as if the limits of the earth are infinite. In terms of legacy, with one life to live and enjoy, I want my choices to be ethical and I want to leave behind a pleasant and hospitable planet for future generations.

**Do you think it is important for [Humanist Climate Action](#) to exist as a part of Humanists UK?**

As the Coordinator I should certainly think so! For me HCA makes absolute sense as I can combine my humanist values with my passion for environmental issues. It is always a pleasure to walk into a room of humanists and great to connect with people who share the same concerns. HCA has also enabled us to collaborate with other groups that might not usually be natural allies.

**What's your biggest environmental concern?**

It's very difficult to pick one specific concern, there are unfortunately many to choose from. My biggest fear really is that while we are talking about the issues and tinkering around the edges of problems, we are not actually enacting the changes that are necessary and that we will reach irreversible tipping points in both the climate and in biodiversity loss.

**What one thing would you encourage people to do?**

There is a lot going on in the world at the moment and it can be overwhelming at times. Unfortunately the climate and biodiversity crisis will not stop and wait while we solve conflicts or wait for politicians more amenable to climate policies. While I am not suggesting that other urgent crises are ignored, I am worried that climate concerns have fallen well down the priority list. I would therefore encourage people to reach out to your local councillors or MP to remind them you care about the issue. Happily, HCA [has a template letter](#) to make it nice and easy for you!



# ONE SMALL THING

**Can you count? Then you can help.**



Do you worry about wildlife or plastic use? Do you want to do something positive? Here are a couple of ideas.

The RSPB [Big Garden Birdwatch](#) is an annual activity that in 2025 involved over half a million people across the UK with a staggering 9.1 million birds counted. For 46 years the Birdwatch has provided a snapshot into how our garden birds are faring. It involves spending one hour during a specified few days monitoring and recording the birds that land in your garden or any other outdoor area. Involving children and counting together (and seeing if you get the same results) can be fun. The dates are well publicised for those interested in contributing.

The Greenpeace [Big Plastic Count](#) is an activity where the data collected is used to provide evidence about how much plastic we are using and put pressure on the UK Government and businesses to reduce the amount of plastic produced. A pretty urgent goal given that 1.7 billion items of plastic are thrown away every week. It involves counting all the plastic you use in a week (you will be horrified). In my house this triggered interesting discussions about how to do better!

Pauline Element



## MATERIALS FOR LOCAL GROUPS

HCA has been considering how best to encourage greater engagement on the climate emergency within Humanists UK. With this in mind we have been developing materials that can be used flexibly within [Local Groups and Partner Groups](#). No particular skills are needed to run the sessions, just a willingness to plan a meeting and facilitate the discussion. We had a test run at the Convention in June and had some valuable feedback about what worked and what could be improved. Following that we have been updating the materials and preparing to make them available shortly. More on this in our next newsletter.

## YOUR FEEDBACK

It's always good to get readers' responses to the newsletter. Following Pauline Element's piece in July about the falling costs of renewables, Derek McComiskey got in touch about the wider ethical issues around solar panels, the majority of which are produced in China, and the use of forced labour in the supply chain. Pauline has recommended the advice available from [Ethical Consumer](#) and [Anti-Slavery International](#).

Chris Butterworth contacted us to ask 'How about an article about data centres/server farms and their use of energy?' In view of the vast amounts of energy used by AI data centres, Chris suggests that we can all do our bit. 'Just using the web to satisfy a non-urgent question (e.g. who starred in what film) is not a good use', he says, and he goes on to ask: 'Is there anything being done to capture the warmth from cooling in data centres for housing or industry?' If any readers know of good sources of information on this, or have thoughts to share, do get in touch.

We welcome feedback and responses to HCA newsletters. We aim to exemplify the humanist commitment to rational discussion and debate. You can contact us at [climateaction@humanists.uk](mailto:climateaction@humanists.uk). All newsletters to date can be found on the [Humanist Climate Action website](#). We aim to produce a newsletter every two months.

*As always, all signed contributions to the newsletter represent simply the views of the individual writers and are not necessarily endorsed by either Humanist Climate Action or Humanists UK.*