

Climate change minister Greg Barker obviously knew he would be faced with loud cries of “foul!” when he announced that the Feed-in Tariff (FiT) for solar power would be halved from 12 December, much earlier than anticipated. The change in policy has dominated the environmental news since it was announced on 31 October. Many expected the subsidy to be extended rather than curtailed, and the volte face seemed to fly in the face of the coalition’s (Lib Dem’s, anyway) professed position on renewable energy. Businesses that had installed systems were suddenly faced with an increase in energy prices they hadn’t planned for and companies in the industry were staring at a sudden evaporation of their markets. That industry has seen a leap in employment from 3,000 to 26,000 at a time of employment retraction, according to industry leader [Solar Direct Savings](#) : an increase seen by this website’s Environmental Directory.

What he probably didn’t expect was the ‘holy alliance’ that he is now facing, with the [Church of England](#) , [National Trust](#) and High Court all coming out against the change, for different reasons, in addition to two MPs’ committees publishing a joint report labelling the Government’s handling of the issue “clumsy”. On 21 December the High Court ruled that the decision was “legally flawed”, in that it breached rules on consultation. The 12 December date was 11 days before the Government’s own consultation was due to end.

The Minister responded to the ruling rather huffily. “We disagree with the Court’s decision,” he said. “We will be seeking an appeal and hope to secure a hearing as soon as possible. Regardless of today’s outcome, the current high tariffs for solar PV are not sustainable and changes need to be made in order to protect the budget which is funded by consumers through their energy bills.”

The Government appears to be hell bent on applying the change despite opposition from many quarters. The National Trust criticised the decision on the grounds that many community energy schemes were now threatened with being aborted, and compared the position in the UK unfavourably with that of Germany, which has embraced the principal. The Church of England argued that many churches saw the subsidy as a means of acting as a “...good example to the local community.”

Meanwhile, the solar industry as a unit warned that halving the subsidy could stop the nascent solar industry in its tracks. It seems the argument that green industries are successful industries is just not getting through to our political elite, despite all the environmental news stories pointing to it being a vote winner.

The other side of the coin, the “dash for gas” – reported on in Environment News elsewhere on this site – has seen the prospect of a new Gold Rush in rural Lancashire. Promises of a jobs bonanza were flagged up by local politicians, news reporters and business leaders. Ten-gallon hats joined the less expansive “Kiss Me Quick!” variety on the Fylde coast and the saloon bars swatted up on the latest honky tonk tunes. Oh, and the prospecting probably caused a couple of earthquakes. Never mind; pass the moonshine, pardner!