



Policy briefing note – Daylight saving

Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) is the time set at the Greenwich Meridian Line (0 degrees longitude) and all World time zones are based on it. In the UK we use GMT from October to March. In March we put our clocks forward by one hour to British Summer Time (GMT+1 hour).

From time to time, there are campaigns to change the present arrangements in respect of our clocks. For example, in 1968 to 1971 there was an experiment with British Summer Time in operation all year round. At the end of the 3-year trial period Parliament decided to discontinue the experiment and restored the time settings with which we are all familiar today.

There is a broad-based campaign today for a change to the current arrangements. The proposition is that the UK should move to “Single Double Summer Time” (SDST).

Under SDST, the UK’s clocks would be set at GMT + 1 hour from the last Sunday in October to the last Sunday in March.

Then between the last Sunday in March and the last Sunday in October the clocks would be set at GMT + 2 hours. Everyone would still, under this arrangement, have to put their clocks forward every Spring and back every Autumn.

There has been some Parliamentary support for this change.¹

The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health supports the introduction of SDST for the UK. There are several reasons for this:

1. The purpose of changing the clocks is to match more closely the hours of daylight to the hours of most human activity. However, the arguments for greater alignment of daylight and human activity extend well beyond the world of work.

2. There would be fewer deaths and serious injuries on our roads. According to research and analysis by the Transport Research

Laboratory, the effect that the adoption of SDST in Great Britain, transferring an hour of daylight from the morning, when there are relatively few casualties, to the afternoon and evening when there are more, there would be 80 fewer fatal casualties per year on the roads, and 200 fewer serious casualties.²

3. Other public health benefits include reduced crime and fear of crime, more opportunities for physical recreation and exercise and reduction in the incidence of Seasonal Affective Disorder.

4. Advancing the clock by an hour in winter would lead to energy savings of at least 0.3% of daily demand in Great Britain. Corresponding cost savings would be in the order of 0.6% over the same months.³

5. In terms of environmental impact it is estimated that the saving would be equivalent to 450,000 tonnes of CO₂.⁴

The practical result of SDST is that it would be darker for longer in the mornings and lighter for longer in the evenings.

The strongest opposition has in the past come from Scotland in particular and from the farming sector generally. Scotland has the least daylight and postponing dawn by an hour means that it would stay dark until mid-morning in some parts of Scotland. The farming sector’s opposition has reduced over time and for many farmers darker mornings are no longer an obstacle to them in their work.

The public policy relating to time and clocks is not devolved and so the Westminster Parliament sets the policy for the UK.

1. Rebecca Harris MP (Castle Point) won a place in the ballot for Private Members Bills and introduced the Daylight Saving Bill, which received a Second Reading debate and vote in favour on 3 December 2010.

2. House of Commons Hansard 2 Nov 2010: Column 707W

3. S.I. Hill, F.Desobry, E.W.Garnsey, Y.-F.Chong, (2010), The impact on energy consumption of daylight saving clock changes’, Energy Policy 38/9, 4955-4965.

4. Ibid