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A very stupid idea [1]

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I was interviewed on Sky News yesterday morning, giving my take on the European Parliament's plan to prohibit the sale patio heaters. Unlike the other guest, Friends of the Earth's Tony Juniper, I thought this was a ridiculous idea.

First of all, the only reason so many people are using patio heaters is the smoking ban. Attempting to outlaw patio heaters is a classic example of one ill-conceived and illiberal piece of legislation having to follow another, with little thought for the unintended consequences. In this case, the pub industry thinks it could lose as much as £250 million pounds a year in lost trade if outdoor heaters were banned.

My second point was that no one actually believes banning patio heaters would make the slightest bit of difference to the global climate anyway. Yes, these heaters are inefficient, but their emissions are miniscule in the grand scheme of things. Tony Juniper said we should lead the world by example, but it didn't think our banning patio heaters would really make much difference to the Chinese. They're going to build a coal-fired power station every week for the next ten years anyway.

Patio heaters are just the latest symbolic thing for environmentalists to get worked up about, like food miles or budget airlines. It's not about being practical, or actually improving the environment, it is just another way to tell people that they should stop being so wicked and 'live more simply'.

I suggested that instead of banning outdoor heaters, the EU should focus on reforming its emissions trading scheme so that it actually works, encouraging the development of clean technologies. And since agriculture contributes 17 percent of global emissions, they might like to abolish the common agricultural policy too. The developing world would certainly thank them for it.

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