



PRESS RELEASE: CLIMATE CHANGE ADVISORY COUNCIL

IRELAND WILL NOT MEET ITS 2020 TARGETS AND WILL REQUIRE HUGE EFFORTS TO MEET EXISTING 2030 TARGETS.

In its Annual Review 2020 the Climate Change Advisory Council stresses the **urgency of shifting from planning to action to reduce emissions**, to meet our climate targets and to put Ireland on track to achieve a net-zero emissions economy and society by 2050.

The Review contains strong recommendations for additional policies and measures to ensure Ireland meets its existing targets. The ambition contained in the Programme for Government 2020 and developments at EU level add more urgency to the recommendations of the Council.

Overall national emissions showed no significant change in 2018. There was a 10% reduction in the electricity sector, largely due to reduced operating hours at Moneypoint. Other sectors have not delivered emissions reductions on the scale required, with increases seen in some sectors.

The Review highlights that 2019 was the ninth consecutive year with temperatures above normal in Ireland and the winter of 2018/2019 was the warmest winter on record in 119 years.

“The imperative for climate action remains, despite the understandable immediate focus on COVID-19. Climate change is happening now. Recent extreme events, such as storms Ellen and Francis in August, show that we are vulnerable and that adaptation to climate change is essential”, said Chair of the Council, Professor John FitzGerald.

The Review states that **to better prepare for current and future climate extremes, Ireland must implement already identified priority measures at both national and local level.**

“It is clear that Ireland will not meet its 2020 targets, and that a radical shift in gear is required to meet its 2030 targets. With limited resources, the policy focus must be on delivering cost-effective, socially sustainable and environmentally compatible measures that achieve decarbonisation and climate resilience by 2050.” Professor FitzGerald said.

The Council **recommends that the carbon tax be raised to €35 per tonne of carbon dioxide in Budget 2021, rising to €100 per tonne by 2030.** The carbon tax is an effective tool in delivering long term emissions reductions. The increase in the carbon tax is required to address the effects of the fall in fossil fuel prices over the last year, which would otherwise lead to an increase in emissions.

“Any negative impacts of the carbon tax on the poorest households can and should be offset by effective use of the carbon tax revenue. The Council is clear that the burdens and benefits of policy measures necessary to tackle climate change must be fairly distributed across the population, ensuring that those on lower incomes or with other vulnerabilities are not disadvantaged – in other words, that there is a ‘just transition’,” said Professor FitzGerald.

The Annual Review 2020 gives particular attention to the transport sector, identifying the potential for a substantial reduction in transport emissions through improved spatial planning, public transport investment and widespread deployment of electric vehicles.

The Council is concerned that the current approach relies too heavily on very rapid deployment of electric vehicles, which depends on favourable developments in the private car market. This could impose a relatively high burden on the Exchequer. **Incentives for electric vehicles need to be better targeted towards those with high mileage including commercial and rural drivers. These should be supplemented by disincentives for petrol and diesel vehicles.**

The Council has recommended setting a separate 2050 target for significant reductions in biogenic methane emissions, consistent with the objective of carbon neutrality and the Paris Agreement.

“Ireland should grasp the opportunity to adapt the reformed Common Agricultural Policy as a key instrument for tackling climate change,” said Professor John FitzGerald. The Council recommends that Common Agricultural Policy income support payments should be tailored to encourage farmers to reduce emissions, including through reduced fertiliser use, reduced animal numbers and increased carbon sinks.

The Council advises that government urgently focus on eliminating the most carbon intensive fuels, coal and peat, from space and water heating in homes and other buildings. It is also important to recognise the significant negative health impacts of these fuels. Government supports for retrofitting must be prioritised first to vulnerable households, and then to households and buildings where emissions are highest.

The Council emphasises that without public acceptance, ambitious climate action will fail. Citizen engagement is crucial to support increased ambition. A dialogue of blame for emissions is not useful.

The Council stresses that more innovation and research is needed to ensure that Ireland achieves a net-zero society and economy in 2050.

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions has the potential to bring multiple social, environmental and economic benefits, including opportunities for expanded employment. Zero carbon fuels such as biomethane and green hydrogen may also create economic opportunities for Ireland. **“Done right, climate action can bring resilience, employment opportunities, improved air and water quality, biodiversity, health benefits, and warmer homes.”** Professor FitzGerald said.

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Important Note

In this Annual Review, the Climate Change Advisory Council has reviewed progress towards transition based on analysis of data from 1990 to 2018 and projections from 2019 to 2040 released in July 2020.

The Annual Review 2020 is mandated under Section 12 of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015. The Act outlines that the Council should conduct a review of the most recent national inventory and projections of greenhouse gas emissions prepared by the EPA, of progress made towards achieving greenhouse gas emissions reductions and in furthering the transition to a low-carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy.

Editor Notes

The Climate Change Advisory Council is an independent, statutory body established under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015. Its role includes the provision of advice to Government on national policy relating to climate change. It was formally established in January 2016.

At its meeting on the 19 October 2017, the Climate Change Advisory Council took the decision not to print hard-copies of reports. Therefore, only electronic copies will be available from its website.

Climate Change Advisory Council Members

Prof. John FitzGerald, Chair of the Climate Change Advisory Council

Prof. Alan Barrett (Director, Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI); ex-officio)

Prof. Gerry Boyle, (Director of Teagasc; ex-officio)

Laura Burke (Director General, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); ex-officio)

Prof. Peter Clinch (Jean Monnet Chair of European Economic Integration and Professor of Public Policy at University College Dublin)

Prof. Frank Convery, (Adjunct Professor at University College, Dublin and Senior Fellow, Envecon)

Dr. Joseph Curtin, Director, Power and Climate, The Rockefeller Foundation.

Prof. Anna Davies (Professor of Geography at Trinity College Dublin)

Prof. Dr Ottmar Edenhofer, (Director and Chief Economist of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research and Director of the Mercator Research Institute on Global Commons and Climate Change)

Prof. Alan Matthews (Professor Emeritus of European Agricultural Policy at Trinity College Dublin)

William Walsh, (CEO Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI); ex-officio)

Climate Change Advisory Council Adaptation Committee Members

Prof. John FitzGerald, Chair of the Adaptation Committee



Mark Adamson (Head of Flood Relief and Risk Management Division, Office of Public Works (OPW))

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Laura Burke (Director General, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA))

Prof. Robert Devoy (Professor in Physical Geography and Emeritus Professor in Geography University College Cork (UCC))

Ciarán Hayes (Chair of the County & City Management Association (CCMA) Committee on Climate Change)

Dr. Ina Kelly (Consultant in Public Health Medicine, Health and Wellbeing, Health Service Executive (HSE))

Eoin Moran (Director, Met Éireann)

Prof. Conor Murphy (Lecturer in the Department of Geography at Maynooth University)

Roger Street (Research Associate, Environmental Change Institute, University of Oxford).

William Walsh, (CEO Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI); ex-officio)