



Oireachtas Committee Opening Statement

On the 24th July 2019, the Climate Change Advisory Council published the Annual Review 2019.

Ireland is already experiencing the impacts of climate change. Regardless of the success of national or global mitigation measures, adaptation to climate change is essential because of the effects of historic and continuing global greenhouse gas emissions on temperature.

The impacts of climate change often seem distant from everyday life, but we have experienced several extreme weather events in recent years which have exposed the vulnerabilities of our society and economy. The Council believes that public awareness of the need for adaptation remains low. Adaptation is not only a matter for Government, but it will require an even bigger response and investment by households and the business sector. While sectoral and local adaptation strategies have been developed, gaps remain in relation to coastal areas, housing and planning. These areas are not addressed under the current plans.

Robust carbon pricing is essential to support action by individuals and businesses to eliminate their greenhouse gas emissions. While it will directly encourage households and businesses to reduce emissions, the major effect will come from encouraging investment in low or zero carbon technologies: for example, in heating and cars. The revenue raised should be used to ensure a just transition to a low-carbon, climate-resilient and sustainable economy and society, protecting those on low incomes.

The Council had recommended that the carbon tax increase to €35 per tonne of carbon dioxide equivalent in Budget 2020, increasing to at least €80 per tonne by 2030. Nevertheless, the modest increase in carbon tax announced in the Budget last week is welcome. While the Minister expressed the view that similar increases should continue every year till 2030, it would have been better if that commitment had been enshrined in legislation. The year's Budget began the process of ringfencing the revenue to support a just transition among peat workers in the midlands and to support low income households.

Urgent actions are necessary in the Agriculture, Forestry and Land Use sectors. The Council has given particular attention to the agricultural sector in the Annual Review 2019.



The Council recognises that opportunities exist to reduce emissions, while at the same time safeguarding farm incomes and providing multiple co-benefits to society. Beef and dairy production in Ireland is relatively efficient in terms of greenhouse gas emissions per unit product. However, improvements in efficiency have not been able to keep pace with the observed increase in absolute emissions. In recent years, the expansion of the national dairy herd has been the major contributor to increases in agricultural emissions. Reduction of the suckler herd would make an important and cost-effective contribution to mitigation, could support alternative land uses, such as afforestation, raise farm incomes and reduce exposure of the sector to external market shocks. However, the dairy sector must also play its part through the implementation of technologies and management practices which reduce emissions, including the stabilisation of the size of the dairy herd. The reform of the Common Agriculture Policy is an important opportunity to design appropriate supports within the sector, by restructuring farm payments to reward environmental and climate actions.

The Council is concerned about the low rates of afforestation achieved in recent years. Research and policy innovations are required to overcome the barriers to afforestation. Solutions may include more diversity of plantation type, species and management options.

The Council has recommended that the Government publish the detailed plan to achieve its commitment to end the burning of coal at Moneypoint by 2025. The Council has also recommended the cessation of peat-fired electricity generation in 2020.

The construction and building sector is operating near full capacity. However, there is an urgent need to increase the capacity to deliver the necessary retrofit programme. The Government should lead by example through investment in retrofitting local authority housing. This would provide certainty to construction firms of a long-term commitment to retrofitting Ireland's housing stock, as well as providing multiple benefits to low income households.

The Council welcomes the Climate Action Plan as providing a significant step forward in tackling climate change. The Plan has proposals for a wide range of measures and new governance arrangements which would enable us to achieve our 2030 targets. Implementation in a cost-effective manner, and robust governance of the implementation of the Plan, is critical to realise its ambitions.

The full Annual Review 2019 report is available for download at www.climatecouncil.ie