

Statement issued on behalf of the Chair of the Climate Change Advisory Council, Marie Donnelly

Sectoral emissions targets decision an important milestone

The Government's announcement setting out the targets for reductions by sectors between 2018 and 2030 has been noted. The agreement of these sectoral targets is an important milestone in the process of meeting Ireland's national climate objective.

The sectoral targets announced are problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, and most importantly the quantified emissions reductions only amount to a reduction of 43% excluding the Land Use Sector and are therefore not consistent with the objective in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act.

Secondly, whilst they set down the percentage reductions by 2030 they do not illustrate how these are consistent with the Carbon Budgets.

Finally, they exclude the Land Use Sector which is a source of emissions and needs to be addressed urgently.

As such there remains considerable uncertainty around how the carbon budgets will be delivered. Whilst these targets are a useful starting point the targets will need to be revised upwards and monitored closely in the light of experience. The Climate Action Plan 2023, due later this year, will need to set out the precise actions and steps that will need to be followed in order to align with the ambition of the Carbon Budgets which were adopted by the Oireachtas in April.

The increased ambition in regards the generation of renewable energy including offshore wind, solar PV, green hydrogen and biomethane is a welcome development. As a consequence of the war in Ukraine and geopolitical imbalances, there has been a rapid increase in fossil fuel prices. The crisis has highlighted EU and Irish dependence on imported fossil fuels, the societal and economic exposure to price increases and the implications for energy security. To combat increasing costs and the climate crisis, we need to make every effort to strengthen our energy security. Ensuring security of energy supply through development of our renewable resources, demand reduction and energy efficiency is more important than ever.

It is essential that all measures taken are focused on reducing and ultimately eliminating our reliance on fossil fuels. This is particularly urgent and important for vulnerable households.

The Council has recommended that;

- Policy measures should be better targeted at those in challenging circumstances, in fuel poverty and with low incomes.
- Support for retrofit and zero carbon systems need to be prioritised towards households in receipt of the fuel allowance and towards the worst performing buildings, particularly those heated by coal and peat.

- There should be a focus on investment in and rollout of home energy upgrades which are low cost and straightforward to implement such as attic insulation, which will further support vulnerable households in the short term.
- Lengthy and delayed planning timelines that are currently impeding the development of critical grid infrastructure and renewable projects need to be addressed as a matter of priority.
- Implementation of a Demand Side Management Strategy including demand response by large energy users and demand side flexibility services is crucial.
- Accelerated rollout of smart meters, provisions for access to smart meter usage data and measures to encourage greater uptake of Time-of-Use tariffs must also be progressed as a matter of urgency to incentivise a change in the patterns of electricity usage and move demand away from peak times.

Finally, it is also important that Ag Climatise is reviewed and strengthened in line with the new sectoral target for Agriculture, providing a clear roadmap and supports for family farms and recognising the role that they will play in the generation of renewable energy for Ireland.

Background:

- The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 commits Ireland to a legally binding target of a climate neutral economy no later than 2050 and a 51% reduction in emissions by 2030 (compared to 2018 levels).
- The carbon budgets determine the level of greenhouse gases that may be emitted in Ireland in a given five-year period and are consistent with the achievement of the national climate objective.
- On 25 October 2021, the Council submitted proposed carbon budgets consistent with a 51% reduction in greenhouse gases in 2030 relative to 2018 as provided for in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act to the Minister of Environment, Climate and Communications. The carbon budget programme allows for a maximum of 295 Mt CO₂ eq between 2021 and 2025, and 200 Mt CO₂ eq between 2026 and 2030. These were approved by the Oireachtas in April 2022.
- Sectoral emissions ceilings set out the maximum amount of greenhouse gas emissions that are permitted in different sectors of the economy during a carbon budget period.
- Section 6C(1) of the Act states that '*The Minister shall prepare, **within the limits of the carbon budget**, the maximum amount of greenhouse gas emissions that are permitted in different sectors of the economy during a budget period (in this Act referred to as a "sectoral emissions ceiling") and different ceilings may apply to different sectors.*'