Statement by the Climate Change Advisory Council on Ireland's Greenhouse Gas Emissions

19th February 2024

Following the recent publication of the draft National Climate Action Plan 2024 and with only 2 years left in the first carbon budget, the Climate Change Advisory Council is concerned that despite progress in some sectors, it is unlikely that the first carbon budget will be met. The EPA Projections suggest that cumulative emissions for the first carbon budget are likely to significantly exceed 295 Mt even in the more optimistic 'With Additional Measures' scenario. This means that very significant reductions in emissions for the remainder of the period would be required to avoid a carryover impact into the second carbon budget period.

Commenting, Marie Donnelly, Chairperson of the Advisory Council, said "Households and communities must be supported and enabled to make changes now, however incremental, and be empowered through targeted information to plan for future purchases.

"To build on the progress that has been made, the Council urges Government, and all of society, to redouble its efforts to reduce emissions and grasp the opportunity now, to create a climate neutral and sustainable society."

Looking at the sectors in more detail:

Emissions from **Agriculture** fell by 1.2% in 2022. It is to be welcomed that the 2030 target of sales of less than 300,000 tonnes N-fertilisers per annum was achieved, thereby reducing Nitrous Oxide (N_2O) emissions. Sustaining this early achievement will be essential as there is a high risk of rebound if fertiliser prices fall. In 2023, protected urea fertilizers represented less than 22% of straight nitrogen fertiliser sold against a target of up to 90% by 2025 and 100% by 2030. It is essential and urgent that the Government is very proactive in its communications with both suppliers and farmers to ensure that there are sufficient supplies available and that the benefits of switching are communicated to all farmers. Current levels of methane (CH_4) emissions continue at an elevated level therefore jeopardising the sectoral ceiling.

Emissions from **Electricity** decreased by 2% in 2022 and look very likely to have fallen further in 2023 due to a record low carbon intensity for electricity generation and high levels of imports. Renewables accounted for 43% of electricity in 2023 – against a target of 50% by 2025. Reducing and ultimately eliminating our reliance on expensive, imported fossil fuels will reduce prices to consumers and enhance our security of supply, which is also good for our national climate objectives. However, delays in planning and roll out of on shore wind and solar farms while strengthening the grid are very real challenges that Government must urgently address. Equally, comprehensive preparations are necessary for the achievement of the off-shore wind targets later this decade.

Emissions in the **Built Environment** fell in 2022 by 11%. Whilst the rates of retrofit are continuing to increase, the rate of decarbonising heating systems is too slow. Government should actively communicate the financial and technical opportunities for heat pumps and solar PV in existing homes, public and commercial buildings, and urgently needs to implement policy and roll out of district heating to achieve the 2030 target.

Emissions from **Industry** decreased by 7% in 2022. It is vitally important that our Manufacturing Sector continues to demonstrate progress in decoupling emissions growth from economic growth. The proportion of overall emissions emanating from cement (4.7% of total national emissions)[1] is a concern to the Council, notwithstanding recent decreases of emissions from this sector Building regulations should be urgently updated to facilitate the greater use of timber in construction. Further decreases in emissions from this sector will be required to ensure compliance with the sectoral emissions ceiling as 46% of the allocated amount had already been expended by the end of 2022.

Transport emissions grew by 6% in 2022 and this sector is of major concern to the Council. While some indicators are positive including a welcome increase in public transport journeys and sales of Electric Vehicles, motor petrol and road diesel sales continue to increase, and large conventional petrol and diesel vehicles continue to take up a large percentage of overall sales. Taxation policy needs to address this particular trend at the earliest opportunity. The most recent modal share data for 2021 shows that passenger cars were responsible for 53% of emissions, with Heavy Goods Vehicles and Light Goods Vehicles responsible for 22% and 19% respectively. This indicates the importance of the development and application of Avoid-Shift-Improve measures across commercial and domestic fleets and the upcoming National Demand Management Strategy will be critical with regard to avoid and shift measures. A significant uplift in resources and commitment is also required to ensure that the promised improvements to our public transport systems are delivered in full and on time given the importance of accessible and reliable public transport in

[1] Manufacturing and industry | Environmental Protection Agency (epa.ie)

supporting behavioural change. It is also vital that the new National Planning Framework, fully reflects our climate ambition given the fundamental link between our land use planning and transport systems and the need for appropriate planning decisions to support sustainable transport modes.

Continuing, Ms Donnelly stated: “The impact and disruption of recent extreme weather in Ireland and globally continue to cause distress, uncertainty, and economic challenge. Yet, the evidence shows that the pace of emissions reductions in Ireland and globally is insufficient. While the reductions we are seeing in Ireland are welcome, they must be accelerated and delivered across all sectors and on a sustained basis. A crucial aspect of that delivery is cutting, and ultimately, eliminating our dependence on fossil fuels. The sooner we become independent from fossil fuels, the better it will be for, our health, our security the environment and our pockets. The rationale is clear - we do not have time for any further delays in climate action.”

Ends

Notes to Editor

The Council will publish its recommendations for sectors over the course of 2024 on a staged basis. The first reports, focussing on Electricity and Enterprise will be published in May.

If you have any questions or are seeking further comment, please do not hesitate to contact:

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