



Five Reasons the Climate Emergency Measures Bill must move to Third Stage without delay

February 2019

A year ago, on 7th February 2018, a majority of 78 to 48 in the Dáil voted to support the principle of the Petroleum and Other Minerals Development (Amendment) (Climate Emergency Measures) Bill, a Private Members Bill seeking to prohibit the issuing of licences for exploration of fossil fuels off Ireland's coasts. The Dáil then unanimously agreed to refer the Bill to the relevant Select Committee of TDs for consideration.¹

As is often the case the now, the “detailed scrutiny” that followed was carried out by the Joint Committee of TDs *and* Senators. This is allowed for under Standing Orders (the Dáil's procedural rules).

However, when it came to agreeing their report on the Bill in December 2018 the Joint Committee was deadlocked on whether to recommend the Bill proceed to Third Stage (the vote was a tie).

Since then there has been a procedural dispute over whether the Select Committee (of TDs only), to whom the Bill was originally referred, now has the power to decide to progress the Bill to Third Stage.

TDs and Senators who support the Bill say that the Select Committee is free to decide to proceed. TDs and Senators who support the Government and oppose the Bill say it cannot move forward without the approval of the Joint Committee.

Both sides are citing Standing Orders. Standing Orders were recently amended specifically to facilitate legislative decision-making in an era of minority governments. The Dáil referred the Bill to the Select Committee. It is the Select Committee alone who would deal with Third Stage. And this is currently a Dáil Bill, Senators will have their opportunity to debate and vote on the Bill if the Bill passes all stages in the Lower House. For those reasons, Stop Climate Chaos is firmly of the view that the TDs who comprise the Select Committee must be allowed to decide whether to progress the Bill and that it is unreasonable for the Joint Committee (comprising TDs and Senators) to see seek to prevent the TDs on the Select Committee voting on a Bill specifically referred to them by the Dáil.

The Oireachtas Committee will make another attempt to break the deadlock on Tuesday 19th February.

In case we lose sight of the big picture Stop Climate Chaos – the civil society coalition campaigning for Ireland to do its fair share to tackle climate change² – has produced this briefing outlining five main reasons why the Bill should move to Third stage without delay. We believe this Bill is **necessary, practicable and in the national and global interest.**

¹ This is a Private Members Bill introduced by People Before Profit TD Bríd Smith in November 2017. The Bill proposes to amend the Petroleum and Other Minerals Development Act 1960.

² The Coalitions' 33 members include overseas aid and development, environmental, youth and faithbased organisations: Afri, BirdWatch Ireland, Christian Aid Ireland, Comhlámh, Community Work Ireland, Concern Worldwide, Cultivate, Cyclist.ie, Dublin Friends of the Earth, Eco Congregation Ireland, ECO UNESCO, Feasta, Fossil Free TCD, Friends of the Earth, Good Energies Alliance Ireland, Gorta-Self Help Africa, Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice, Just Forests, Kimmage Development Studies Centre, Latin America Solidarity Centre (LASC), Liberia Solidarity Group, Methodist Church of Ireland – Council of Social Responsibility, Mountmellick Environmental Group, National Youth Council of Ireland, Oxfam Ireland, Peoples Climate Ireland, Presentation Ireland, Tearfund Ireland, Trócaire, An Taisce, VITA, V.O.I.C.E., and Young Friends of the Earth.

1. Warnings from scientists are starker than ever

2018 was the fourth hottest year on record, and long-term forecasts predict that global warming could temporarily hit 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels over the next four years.³ This level of temperature rise is already having devastating impacts on the planet. Global populations of fish, birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles have declined on average by 60% between 1970 and 2014.⁴ The number of climate-related disasters such as extreme heat, drought, floods and storms has doubled between 1990 and 2016, with clearly associated impacts on global food and nutrition indicators⁵, mass migration⁶, and population health.⁷ Additionally, tens of thousands of people in Europe have lost their lives in the last decade due to these extreme events, not counting those who lost their lives over the last year as a result of extreme heat and wildfires across other continents.⁸ The EPA has noted that extreme weather events linked to climate change over recent years have “*severely tested the resilience of Ireland’s infrastructure; economy, healthcare services and people’s wellbeing*,”⁹ while the growing adaptation costs will put added financial pressure on the State.

In October 2018, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s (IPCC) latest landmark report, highlighted that the risks associated with climate change impacts have increased, concluding that the next ten years will be the most important in our history.¹⁰ They strongly emphasised that a rapid, fair and transformative transition to a decarbonised economy is now required over the next decade to prevent the spiralling of catastrophic direct and indirect climate impacts.

2. Opening any new fossil fuel reserves anywhere in the world poses serious risks

“Greenhouse gas concentrations are once again at record levels and if the current trend continues we may see temperature increases 3-5°C by the end of the century. If we exploit all known fossil fuel resources, the temperature rise will be considerably higher”.

World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) Secretary-General Petteri Taalas, November 2018.

Carbon dioxide emissions and atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases remain very high. This is disturbing and a cause for real concern. Yet even more worrying is the continued search for new fossil fuel reserves, whereas the Paris Agreement clearly urged keeping most fossil fuels underground... () ...Civilisation requires energy, but energy use must not destroy civilisation!’

Address by Pope Francis to international Oil and Gas Executives at a Symposium hosted by the Pope at the Vatican, June 2018

Exploitation of fossil fuel reserves already on the books of fossil fuel companies would result in a rise in global temperatures well in excess of the temperature limits agreed to in the Paris Agreement. This conclusion from financial analysts has been endorsed by expert commentators from the Governor of

³ Met Office UK. Forecast suggests Earth’s warmest period on record. 6 February 2019.

<https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/news/releases/2019/forecast-suggests-earths-warmest-period>

⁴ ‘*Living Planet 2018. Aiming Higher*’. WWF (2018).

⁵ ‘State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World: Building Climate Resilience for Food Security and Nutrition’. (2018). FAO, IFAD, WHO, WFP, UNICEF Flagship Report.

⁶ United Nations Human Rights Commissioner for Refugees. Climate Change and Disaster Displacement: An Overview of UNHCR’s role. UNHCR, 2017.

⁷ Kjellstrom, T. and McMichael, A. Climate change threats to population health and well-being: the imperative of protective solutions that will last. Global Health Action. 2014, 7.

⁸ ‘*Heatwave in Northern Europe, Summer 2018*’. World Weather Attribution.

⁹ EPA Director General Laura Burke, October 2018.

¹⁰ ‘*GLOBAL WARMING OF 1.5 °C: An IPCC special report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty*’ Summary for Policymakers. IPCC (2018). P.12.

the Bank of England Dr Mark Carney, to the International Energy Agency (IEA).¹¹ For Irish legislators, sanctioning continued exploration for fossil fuels, when we know that known reserves are enough to more than exceed agreed global limits, is a profound moral hazard, but one in which Ireland is not immune from the financial and socio-economic risks.

As a rich country that has disproportionately contributed to global emissions, equipped with both the security of being a member of the EU Energy Union and abundant as yet unexploited indigenous renewable energy reserves, Ireland has absolutely no economic, political or moral claim on the space for any remaining fossil fuel exploitation.

3. Continued prospecting undermines the transition to a decarbonised economy

Recent research highlights that policies targeting fossil fuel supply are an important complement to measures aimed at reducing demand.¹² While an immediate ban on fossil fuel use is not being advocated for, it is extremely clear that the phase out of fossil fuels and the phase up of renewables must speed up urgently and radically. Ireland's EPA has repeatedly stated that '*we need a stronger incentive to move away from fossil fuel use*'.¹³ Fossil fuel investment carries major financial risks and investment must be directed away from fossil fuels towards sustainable, low carbon alternatives.

Enactment of the CEM Bill will not dictate Ireland's energy policy, however, what it does is remove one option. As currently drafted, the Bill can be interpreted as not removing the option of indigenous reserve exploitation until existing licenses expire. Opposition to the Bill from industry, the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, and the Government suggests an aspiration to retain the option of continued exploration and opening of new fields beyond existing licenses, well into future decades.

One of the conclusions of the 2016 Report on Fossil fuel supplies during consideration of onshore fracking by the Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Climate Action was a clear statement that the continued exploration of fossil fuels is regressive policy: '*The committee also feels that further investment in exploitation of fossil fuels would in all likelihood reduce investment in sustainable sources of energy.*'¹⁴

Minister Bruton has repeatedly acknowledged that delaying action on climate change means the final costs of adjustment are much higher and the potential for opportunities are much lower or completely lost. He has called for discouragement of '*new private or public investments being made now which lock us in to high carbon patterns of living*'.¹⁵

While industry and the Government claim that the Bill will not reduce Ireland's emissions, it is clear that enactment of the Bill will in fact, significantly promote a just transition to a decarbonised economy. By removing the open-ended option to exploit indigenous reserves, the Bill will encourage increased research, policy development and investment in energy efficiency, indigenous renewables

¹¹ '*No more than one-third of proven reserves of fossil fuels can be consumed prior to 2050 if the world is to achieve the 2°C goal*'. Moreover, the IPCC's latest report underscores the need for global efforts to focus firmly on delivery of the more ambitious 1.5°C limit goal in the Paris Agreement given the severe risks at warming of 2°C.

¹² Lazarus, M. and van Asselt, H. Fossil fuel supply and climate policy: exploring the road less taken. *Climate Change*, 2018, Vol. 150, Issue 1-2, pp. 1-13.

¹³ Environmental Protection Agency Press Release, X 2016, X 17, 31st May 2018.

¹⁴ Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Communications, Climate Action and Environment. Report of the Joint Committee on the Detailed Scrutiny of the Prohibition of the Exploration and Extraction of Onshore Petroleum Bill 2016. 2017.

¹⁵ Statement by Minister Bruton at KIC Conference 7th November 2018.

and reduction and diversification of Ireland's imported energy. Passage of the CEM Bill will give investors, the incumbent and start-up private sector, researchers and students, a clear indication of the employment and industries where the State intends to prioritise job creation and economic activity in the decades ahead.

4. Energy security means ending, not prolonging our dependence on fossil fuels

If it is uncertain if known or potential Irish reserves will ever be commercially viable, they cannot be considered a pre-requisite for energy security. If these reserves were to become viable, this may result in a global context in which many marginal fossil fuel reserves could become commercially viable for exploitation, resulting in a global extraction rush. Given the potential social, economic and environmental risks of additional warming resulting from such a rush, this is not a situation any legislator can morally aspire to.

It is important to be clear that ending the State's fossil fuel licencing will not disrupt Ireland's current indigenous supplies. Nor will it dictate the role of fossil fuels during the low carbon transition.¹⁶ What enacting the Bill does is send a signal to the State, industry, investors, the public and the international community, that Ireland will pursue its energy security, jobs and other social and economic goals without the option of new fossil fuel reserve development. This is in recognition of the risks and impacts of overshooting globally agreed limits to global warming, and avoiding the risk of new fossil fuel investments becoming stranded assets.

5. Passing the Bill is good for Ireland, good for jobs, and can send a much-needed signal of hope and change

The expert consensus is that 80% already-known fossil fuel reserves must stay in the ground.¹⁷ This Bill legislates for the scientific reality that Ireland must move away from a carbon-based economy. As the global community shifts towards decarbonisation, there is also much at stake for Ireland's reputation. Over the last two decades, the development of Irish climate policy has been undermined by a significant implementation gap.^{18,19} Ireland is 'completely off course' to achieving its climate and energy obligations²⁰, earning the country the reputation of 'climate laggard' – a label confirmed by the Taoiseach Leo Varadkar in 2018 in an address to the European Parliament.²¹ This poor record on climate action significantly undermines Ireland's reputation as a responsible multilateral actor on the global stage. As acknowledged recently by the Governor of the Central Bank of Ireland, 'if the pace of transition is too slow, a sharper adjustment will be ultimately required, posing macroeconomic and financial stability risks.'²² Implementing the appropriate climate policy framework now

¹⁹ Research commissioned by Stop Climate Chaos showed that (?) a focus on scaling up gas dependence would exacerbate Ireland's energy security¹⁶, contrary to the view others who see an increase in use of gas as essential to Ireland's energy security. This debate can continue and does not prevent passage of the CEM Bill.

¹⁷ McGlade, C. and Ekins, P. The geographical distribution of fossil fuels unused when limiting global warming to 2°C. *Nature*, 2015, 517, 187-190

¹⁸ Little, C. Portrait of a laggard? Environmental politics and the Irish general election of February 2016. *Irish Political Studies*, 2017, Vol. 26, No. 1, 183-188.

¹⁹ Little, C. and Torney, D. The politics of climate change in Ireland: symposium introduction. *Irish Political Studies*, 2017, 32: 2, 1910198

²⁰ Climate Change Advisory Council. Press release: Ireland is completely off course to achieve its 2020 and 2030 climate change targets. Available at: <http://www.climatecouncil.ie/media/Press%20Release%20AR2018%20WEB.pdf>

²¹ Taoiseach tells EU he is not proud of Ireland's role as Europe's climate 'laggard'. Available at: <https://greennews.ie/taoiseach-tells-eu-not-proud-ireland-climate-laggard-role/> (Available at 18th January 2018).

²² Lane, Philip. Climate Change and the Irish Financial System. *Economic Letter*. Vol. 2019, No. 1. Central Bank of Ireland, 2019.

significantly reduces the longer-term financial risks of inaction, and minimises the societal costs of adjustment to a decarbonised economy.

The prohibiting of new licences for the exploration of fossil fuels will boost the transition to a low carbon economy in Ireland. This makes economic sense in terms of shifting investment towards the green economy and the development of green jobs, in addition to being a protective move to guarantee stable planetary integrity, helping to ensure that all other social and economic goals can be achieved for this and future generations. There is already a large body of evidence highlighting the value and potential of the green economy as a source of sustainable job creation.²³ The International Labour Organisation illustrate that 1.2 billion jobs depend on a stable and healthy environment, and achieving the Paris Agreement will result in 18 million more jobs being created.²⁴ Of course, the imperative to decarbonise will inevitably involve job losses. It is critical that legislators begin now to engage with workers directly affected and proactively provide direct support to them and their communities to enable a just transition. This can be achieved through the establishment of a Just Transition Commission, as has been done by the Scottish Executive.

There is already precedent for this form of policy change. For example, in 2017, France passed legislation to end new licences for fossil fuel exploration, and to cease all oil and gas extraction by 2040. History reminds us that there is also significant gain to be had for Ireland's reputation on climate action. In 2018, Ireland made history by becoming the first country in the world to commit to withdrawing public money invested in fossil fuels through the Fossil Fuel Divestment Act (2018) – generating positive global attention and applause.

Moving Ireland towards climate leadership

Following the economic crash in Ireland in 2008, there was much public and political debate concerning whether or not the financial crash could or should have been anticipated, and what measures could have been put in place to minimise or prevent the outcomes. In the case of climate change, the scientific understanding and predictions are clear and the associated social, economic and environmental risks and ramifications are much greater.

Ireland still has time to act before the carbon bubble bursts and before the climate crisis becomes a climate crash. Progressing and enacting this Bill would be a strong signal that Ireland has decided to begin the move from climate laggard to leadership, and will play our part in implementing the Paris Agreement.

Stop Climate Chaos Coalition

February 2019

²³ SEF Alliance (2009). Why Clean Energy Public Investment Makes Sense – The Evidence Base. UNEP: Basel.

²⁴ International Labour Organisation. Greening with jobs. World Employment and Social Outlook 2018. Available at: <https://www.ilo.org/weso-greening>