



The Dáil can make this week an historic turning point in Irish climate policy

Briefing from Stop Climate Chaos Coalition

May 2019

Overview

- On Thursday May 9th, the Dáil will debate a motion to “accept and endorse” the recommendations from *Climate Change: A Cross-Party Consensus on Climate Action*, the recently published cross-party report from the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action. The report is the Committee’s response to the recommendations of the Citizens Assembly on ‘*How the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change*’.¹
- A recap of the origins and significance of the Report to be debated on Thursday: Stop Climate Chaos (SCC) strongly welcomed the Citizens’ Assembly deliberations on climate action and its final recommendations. SCC pushed for the Oireachtas to establish a formal process to consider the recommendations of the Assembly. It welcomed the subsequent establishment of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action (JOCCA) with this mandate, and has engaged with the Committee over the last year. Taking place over eight months, the Joint Committee process, which the Citizens’ Assembly gave rise to, was the most detailed, evidence-based scrutiny of, and debate on climate change policy this State has ever seen. The process was an intense and challenging one, but one from which representatives from across the Parties and groups did not shy away.
- **Stop Climate Chaos has welcomed the landmark report of the Joint Committee, which will be debated on Thursday May 9th, and is calling for its implementation in full and on time.**² That will not be enough on its own, however it will signal a significant shift and lays a robust foundation for further action.
- Ireland’s Citizens’ Assembly model for building consensus around climate action has been lauded internationally over recent months.³ If the Joint Committee recommendations are effectively, expeditiously and comprehensively implemented, Ireland can begin to shed its shameful record as a climate laggard and provide a powerful democratic model to the international community for forging national climate action.

¹ Citizens’ Assembly report on climate change is available at: <https://www.citizensassembly.ie/en/How-the-State-can-make-Ireland-a-leader-in-tackling-climate-change/>

² See the Stop Climate Chaos press release on the publication of the report. ‘Cross-party Oireachtas Committee delivers historic mandate for climate action. Now Government must lead’. Available at: <https://www.stopclimatechaos.ie/news/2019/03/29/crossparty-oireachtas-committee-delivers-historic/>

³ For an example of international focus, see: ‘How Ireland’s Citizens’ Assembly helped climate action’ (Available at: <https://www.resilience.org/stories/2019-04-29/how-irelands-citizens-assembly-helped-climate-action>) and (<https://qz.com/1553567/a-democratic-experiment-in-ireland-could-become-the-model-for-fighting-climate-change/>)



- Let us be clear. **The recommendations of the Joint Committee, even if implemented in full, will not close the gap between Ireland’s current emissions pathway and our obligations under the Paris Agreement. They give us a chance. Our last chance. A chance which must be built on swiftly, consistently, equitably, transparently and resolutely over the short decade ahead in which we have to halve global and Irish emissions in order to keep global warming below 1.5°C.** A stable climate is a prerequisite for all other social, economic and political goals.

In the debate on Thursday May 9th, SCC recommends that:

- All Parties, Groups and TDs demand that the Government **incorporates** the full suite of recommendations of the Joint Committee in the forthcoming All-of-Government Action Plan on Climate Change, and the National Energy and Climate Plan due to be submitted to the European Union at the end of 2019.
- All Parties, Groups and TDs call on the Government to **ensure implementation** of all the recommendations in line with the deadlines set by the Committee. In particular, to ensure the preparation of the first carbon budget within 12 months as proposed, and to bring legislation before the Dáil before the 2019 summer recess to amend the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 to incorporate the new national target and governance arrangements recommended in Chapter 1 of the Joint Committee Report.

Context

In advance of this important debate, Stop Climate Chaos – the civil society coalition campaigning for Ireland to do its fair share to tackle climate change⁴ – has produced this briefing to highlight the significance of the moment that now exists.

Over the last two decades, Irish climate policy has been undermined by a considerable implementation gap, with significant implications for Ireland’s emissions record and reputation on tackling climate change.⁵ Due to the absence of a detailed decarbonisation roadmap, Ireland is far off course to achieve its climate change targets.⁶ Our 2020 energy and climate targets will not be met, and considerable challenges remain to achieving our 2030 and longer-term

⁴ The Coalitions’ 33 members include overseas aid and development, environmental, youth and faith based 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.

⁵ Little, C. and Torney, D. The politics of climate change in Ireland: symposium introduction. Irish Political Studies, 2017, 32: 2, 1910198

⁶ 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>



obligations. This poor record undermines Ireland's reputation as a responsible multilateral actor on the global stage and directly undercuts the important work of our Overseas Development Assistance Programme. The impacts of climate change are already devastating the poorest countries in the world that have done the least harm. Flooding in Southern Africa, following swiftly in the wake of Cyclone Idai, is only one of the numerous unfolding large scale human tragedies of climate change. Ireland, furthermore, is not immune: there are major risks for society, environment, health and economy.

To illustrate the extent and potential scale of these risks, the Director General of the Environmental Protection Agency, Laura Burke, warned that extreme weather events linked to climate change have 'severely tested the resilience of Ireland's infrastructure; economy, healthcare services and people's wellbeing'.⁷ In a similar vein, in late 2018, the Governor of the Central Bank of Ireland cautioned that 'if the pace of transition [to a low carbon economy] is too slow, a sharper adjustment will be ultimately required, posing macroeconomic and financial stability risks.' Failure to implement an economy-wide climate policy framework now will result in a much costlier and sharper transition in years to come, especially as the social and economic costs of inaction are magnified.⁸ As the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change puts it in its [recent report](#), 'rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society' are essential to prevent catastrophic climate change.⁹

As a coalition, Stop Climate Chaos has consistently called for, over the years, a shift in the direction of Irish climate policy. During this time, the public appetite for political response has risen significantly, evidenced by the strong consensus at the Citizens' Assembly and the recent surge in citizen engagement and concern, from school children, teachers and parents to local action groups and others. The role and remit provided to the JOCCA to develop the outcomes of the Citizens' Assembly into practical recommendations for Government has provided an opportunity for the Oireachtas to catch up with the public concern about climate change.

Building on the Cross-Party Consensus on Climate Action

The JOCCA report represents historic cross-party support for fundamental changes, and includes practical recommendations from the Committee to the Government.

Acknowledging the scale and urgency of the challenge, the report recommends the delivery of a suite of recommendations for immediate changes to climate policy governance and accountability, in addition to more specific wide-sweeping recommendations across key sectors of the economy and society. It emphasises the need to align policy with the temperature goals of the Paris Agreement, the latest science, and with the principles of Climate Justice and a Just Transition. Importantly the report acknowledges that it is only a first step and recommends a

⁷ See 'Recent storms have cost billions and severely tested Ireland says EPA', *Irish Times*, October 4th, 2018. (Available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/environment/recent-storms-have-cost-billions-and-severely-tested-ireland-says-epa-1.3651507>)

⁸ Lane, Philip. Climate Change and the Irish Financial System. Economic Letter. Vol. 2019, No. 1. Central Bank of Ireland, 2019.

⁹ Press release: Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C (PDF) (Report). Incheon, Republic of Korea: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). 8 October 2018. Retrieved 7 October 2018. (Available at: https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/11/pr_181008_P48_spm_en.pdf)



sustained cross-party process of continued policy development and accountability through changes to the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, the establishment of permanent Standing Committee dedicated to Climate Action, and a shared and sustained agenda of public engagement.

On long-term ambition, the Report recommends:

- in response to the latest climate science, replacing Ireland’s current self-designated target of 80% reductions in emissions in the non-ETS sector by 2050, with a target of a new net zero emissions by that date.
- that this 2050 target and new, aligned 2030 climate and energy targets be legally enshrined.
- that the Government support an increase in EU policy ambition for 2030 targets. This would mean a change in the Government’s current stance of blocking greater 2030 ambition at the collective European level.

The report also recommends the establishment of a Just Transition Task Force to ensure fairness for communities affected by the transition to a low carbon economy, and that the instruments, policies and regulations implemented by the State alleviate existing social inequalities and protect the vulnerable.

Overall, this landmark document sets a baseline of ambition that can help put Ireland on the right track. If delivered upon in full and on-time, it can provide an important building block for the upcoming All-of-Government Plan, the National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP), which Ireland must submit to the European Commission by the end of 2019, and the Long-Term Strategy, due in early 2020.

Delivering the ‘Revolution in how we live’ in the All-of-Government Plan

The new All-of-Government Plan (expected on May 15th) is a once in a generation opportunity to, quoting the words of Minister Bruton, bring about the “revolution in how we live”.¹⁰ It is crucial that the recommendations of the Joint Oireachtas Committee are endorsed by the Dáil on Thursday May 9th, and integrated into the upcoming All-of-Government Plan. These recommendations can help drive a sustained agenda of policy development and engagement that will begin to align Ireland’s climate action framework with the temperature objectives of the Paris Agreement and with the principles of climate justice.

We have recommended that the Plan must do the following:

- Explicitly accept and fulfil the call to action from the Citizens’ Assembly and the mandate from the Joint Oireachtas Committee;
- Adopt all the recommendations of the Oireachtas Committee’s report, with a commitment to implement them in full and on time. In particular, to ensure that the

¹⁰ ‘Threat of climate change requires ‘revolution in how we live’, says Bruton.’ *Irish Times*, November 7th, 2018. (Available at: www.irishtimes.com/news/environment/threat-of-climate-change-requires-revolution-in-how-we-live-says-bruton-1.3689512)



preparation of the first carbon budget by the upgraded and strengthened Climate Council proceeds with the urgency specified in the report and is presented within 12 months as proposed;

- Commit to bringing legislation before the Dáil before the summer recess to enshrine the enhanced policy governance and accountability framework recommended by the Oireachtas Committee in Chapter 1 of the Report;
- Specify how the progress in the Citizens' Assembly report, the Oireachtas Committee's report and the All-of-Government Plan will be fully reflected in a redrafted National Energy and Climate Plan, a revised National Mitigation Plan and the Long-Term Strategy.

Let's make this the biggest week in Irish climate policy in 20 years

Could this be the biggest week in Irish climate policy in 20 years? Indeed, over the past year, the Government has acknowledged that current policies and measures on climate change are not working. The significance of this acknowledgement is that the need for radically improved action across all Departments of Government is not a contested issue.

The recommendations of the Joint Oireachtas Committee provide the necessary political impetus and robust policy foundation to enable Ireland to finally move beyond a business-as-usual approach to climate change. Failure to endorse and deliver the Committee's recommendations would be an inexcusable missed opportunity to deliver crosscutting and sector-specific measures that can deliver quantifiable reductions in emissions and help shift public policy toward decarbonisation. But these recommendations provide only a step in the right direction. A step that must now be built upon immediately and consistently in the diminishing time frame available to keep global temperature rise below 1.5°C.

We hope that the consensus that now exists for political leadership will be reflected in an overwhelming endorsement of the Recommendations by the Joint Committee, and subsequent commitment by the Government to incorporate and implement these recommendations into the forthcoming All-of-Government Plan and National Energy and Climate Plan. This would make this next week an historic turning point in Irish climate policy.

Stop Climate Chaos Coalition
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Contact: Catherine Devitt
Head of Policy
catherine@stopclimatechaos.ie