

Paper of

Mr. Brian Carroll

Climate Action and Environment

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National Mitigation Plan and Draft National Adaptation Framework

Introduction

The Programme for a Partnership Government commits to charting a course towards achieving a low carbon and climate resilient future by 2050, while also recognising that no one has a monopoly on good ideas about how to get there. The Government does not underestimate the scale of this challenge which will require fundamental societal transformation, underpinned by sustained policy change, the ongoing allocation of resources, and engagement with wider society. The deliberation of the Citizens' Assembly on "How the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change" is a good example of this necessary and important societal engagement.

The phrases "low carbon" and "climate resilient" have particular implications for policy-making. To become a "low carbon" society we have to limit the magnitude of long-term climate change. We can do this by taking actions, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, or to increase the capacity of carbon sinks, for example through afforestation. Such actions constitute climate mitigation. To achieve "climate resilience" we have to reduce our vulnerability to climate change impacts that are already locked in and will continue and evolve for the foreseeable future, for example through building flood defences. These types of actions represent climate adaptation. The objective of this paper is to inform on the National Mitigation Plan, published in July 2017, and the Draft National Adaptation Framework, published in September 2017. The Minister with responsibility for leading the coordination of climate action is Denis Naughten T.D., Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment. The Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment was established following the reconfiguration of a number of Government Departments in May 2016. Its mission is to support economic and social progress and help the country reach its full potential, including by leading the national transition to a sustainable, low-carbon, resource-efficient economy.

Scale of the Challenge

The Paris Agreement commits 195 countries to the goal of limiting global temperature rise to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels. To have a likely chance of achieving this 2°C objective, global emissions must be reduced by 40-70% by 2050 compared to 2010 and be zero or below in 2100. However, current commitments by countries to reduce emissions under the Paris Agreement, even if fully implemented, will still lead to an estimated 2.7°C rise. This means countries will have to commit to doing more under the Paris Agreement. Global emissions will need to peak soon and then decline rapidly for the Paris Agreement goals to be feasible. The Paris Agreement is clear that, if emissions reduction (mitigation)

succeeds in limiting the rise in global temperature, less adaptation (to the expected consequences of climate change) will be needed. In this context, recent studies reveal substantial differences in impacts between 1.5°C and 2°C warming across a number of systems such as extreme events, water availability, agriculture yields, sea level rise and coral reef loss. The case of sea level rise is particularly illustrative: in a 1.5°C scenario, the rate of sea level rise in 2100 would be reduced by about 30% compared to a 2°C scenario.

Under the Paris Agreement, the EU committed its Member States to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40% by 2030. The EU approach to managing emissions splits them into two categories. Emissions from electricity generation and large industry which are dealt with at EU level through an Emissions Trading System (ETS). Emissions from agriculture, transport and the built environment (the non-ETS sector) which are dealt with by Member States through legally binding targets for emissions reductions. In 2009, the EU established individual Member States emissions reductions targets for the non-ETS sector for each year between 2013 and 2020. Ireland's target is to achieve a 20% reduction in non-ETS sector emissions (on 2005 levels) with annual limits set for each year over the period 2013-2020. The latest Environmental Protection Agency projections indicate that Ireland will achieve a reduction of between 4% and 6%. In terms of 2030, negotiations are ongoing at EU level on proposed individual Member State targets for the non-ETS sector.

Ireland is unusual in the EU in having a small ETS sector coupled with a large agriculture sector, increasing the challenge of controlling and reducing our emissions. The ETS covers about 45% of EU emissions, but only 28% of total emissions in Ireland. This reflects the limited heavy industrial base in Ireland relative to the EU 28. Ireland's agriculture is 33% of national emissions whereas agriculture in the EU 28 represents only 10% of EU-28 emissions. As a portion of the non-ETS sector (for which the State is responsible under EU law), agriculture represents some 46% in Ireland, but only 18% of EU-28 non-ETS emissions. Recognition of the unusually large contribution of agriculture to our national emissions is vitally important to Ireland. The EU has already recognised (including in European Council conclusions) the limited mitigation potential within this sector.

Ireland's Response

Ireland has put in place a detailed statutory and policy framework in recent years for addressing both climate mitigation and adaptation. Ireland's National Policy on Climate Change (2014) is based on the National Objective of achieving a transition to a competitive, low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050. In terms of achieving the low carbon transition (i.e. mitigation) the policy is grounded in a long term vision of reducing emissions by at least 80% in the key sectors (electricity generation, the built environment and transport) while pursuing an approach of carbon neutrality in the agriculture and land-use sector.

The 2015 Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act has provided a statutory underpinning for the preparation of the National Mitigation Plan and the National Adaptation Framework. Both must be prepared and updated within defined timeframes under the 2015 Act.

National Mitigation Plan (July 2017)

The National Mitigation Plan includes 61 measures already in place across the four sectors of (i) electricity generation, (ii) the built environment, (iii) transport, and (iv) agriculture, land-use and forestry. A further 17 measures are identified for future decisions on implementation in the years ahead. There are also 106 time-bound actions. Every measure and action is owned by a lead Department and/or Agency.

There is ongoing engagement with the owners of the measures/actions with a view to completing a prioritised work programme of technical and economic evaluation over the next 12 to 18 months. The Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, with technical support from the Technical Research and Modelling Group (TRAM), will co-ordinate this effort. TRAM is a cross-departmental initiative which was agreed by Government in 2015 and which aims to provide a robust evidence base for informing our policy choices across the climate change agenda. The outcome of this evaluation will inform decision-making on the next steps in relation to measures under consideration, and ensure an ongoing flow of additional options for consideration over time.

The National Mitigation Plan acknowledges up-front that it is only a first step and cannot get us all of the way to our likely 2030 target, never mind our 2050 objective. However, it will be developed as a “living” document and it is important that we achieve year-on-year progress, including through ensuring there is an annual package of climate change Budget measures. This approach will require sustained policy development, ongoing resourcing, and societal engagement – through the Citizens’ Assembly and the National Dialogue on Climate Action. Furthermore, the Government is required to report annually to the Oireachtas under the 2015 Act. This year’s Annual Transition Statement will be delivered following Budget 2018. Each relevant Minister (Ministers Naughten, Murphy, Ross and Creed) must deliver a Statement for their own sectors.

In addition, the Climate Change Advisory Council was established under the 2015 Act as an independent body whose key function is to provide advice and recommendations to the Government, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment and to relevant sectoral Ministers in relation to the development of national mitigation plans and national adaptation frameworks. The Advisory Council is also tasked with advising on matters relating to the achievement of Ireland’s objective to transition to a low carbon, climate resilient and sustainable

economy by 2050. To date it has produced a First Report (November 2016) and a Periodic Review Report (July 2017).

Examples of measures under the National Mitigation Plan include support for renewable electricity, retrofitting homes to make them energy efficient, giving grants for electric vehicles, and planting forests to act as carbon sinks.

The National Mitigation Plan can be found at the following link:

<http://www.dccae.gov.ie/documents/National%20Mitigation%20Plan%202017.pdf>

Draft National Adaptation Framework (October 2017)

Moving on from climate mitigation, we must also consider how we are going to adapt to climate change. We know that changes will increase in the coming decades (i.e. climate change that is already locked in by virtue of global emissions to date), and this will result in significant impacts which will require adaptation responses. Climate change will have diverse and wide ranging impacts on Ireland, including managed and natural ecosystems, water resources, agriculture and food security, human health, and coastal infrastructures and zones.

The 2015 Act requires the National Adaptation Framework to set the strategy to reduce the vulnerability of the State to the negative effects of climate change and avail of any positive effects that may occur. The first statutory National Adaptation Framework is to be submitted to Government for approval by 10 December 2017, and a public consultation on a Draft Framework is open until 27 October 2017.

The draft National Adaptation Framework aims to:

- provide the policy context for a strategic adaptation response, at all levels, to climate change;
- integrate adaptation considerations into all relevant policy areas;
- promote dialogue and understanding of adaptation issues;
- identify sectors for adaptation actions and lay out a high level vision for how these sectoral adaptation plans and local/regional adaptation strategies should be prepared and the principles that they should cover; and
- commit to actions to support and coordinate the adaptation process, including research and governance.

The Draft National Adaptation Framework can be found at the following link:

<http://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/climate-action/consultations/Documents/7/consultations/Draft-National-Adaptation-Framework-Planning-for-a-Climate-Resilient-Ireland.pdf>