



**Opening Speech by Chairperson, The Honourable Mary Laffoy,
at the Eighth Meeting of the Citizens' Assembly**

**How the State can make Ireland a Leader in Tackling Climate
Change**

The Grand Hotel, Malahide, 30th September 2017

Good morning everyone and welcome back to the Grand Hotel in Malahide for what is the eighth meeting of the Citizens' Assembly. I would like to welcome all of you joining us online, the observers present with us today and of course the members themselves.

Today we begin our consideration of our third topic- how the State can make Ireland a Leader in Tackling Climate Change.

I want to begin by exploring what our terms of reference mean and how we have interpreted them for the purpose of constructing a work programme for this weekend and the weekend in November.

The wording of the Oireachtas resolution is clear and quite specific. It mandates the Assembly to consider and to make such recommendations as it see fit and report to the House of the Oireachtas on '*how the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change*'.

Implicit in this wording is an acknowledgement that climate change is real and climate change is happening. The wording of the resolution leaves no room for doubt as to how this Assembly should proceed in its deliberations- our starting point must be that climate change is here and that it must be tackled.

This starting point is also exactly where the scientific evidence tells us we should begin. The most recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change makes a careful assessment of the extent to which climate changes can be blamed on human activities. It concludes that “human influence on the climate system is clear” and that “it is extremely likely that human influence has been the dominant cause of the observed warming since the mid-20th century”.

Our deliberations are concerned with how the State can best meet this challenge.

In considering this in the construction of our work programme the crucial phrase from the resolution is how to *make Ireland a leader*.

This phrasing speaks to ambition.

It speaks to taking definite action.

It speaks to making recommendations which would put Ireland in the vanguard in relation to action on climate change.

This is no easy task. The challenge of having a comprehensive and robust discussion on such wide ranging and expansive topic cannot be underestimated.

As always, I fully expect that our members will give the information which they are presented their full attention and will interrogate all of the information they will receive.

The Members' interest in this topic was clearly demonstrated when they decided back at the January meeting to bring forward our consideration of Climate Change; it was originally intended that this would be our final topic. The Members then decided that they wanted to dedicate a second weekend to its consideration.

As if that was not evidence enough, I know there are Members of the Assembly who joined at the very beginning because of their interest in this topic. I am hopeful that their patience will be rewarded with the excellent work programme we have before us this weekend!

Before I briefly run through this weekend's programme, I want to acknowledge the work of the Expert Advisory Group. In advance of this weekend, I have been extremely fortunate to have had the benefit of a new Expert Advisory Group, which I have formed to advise me on this topic in accordance with the Oireachtas Resolution.

John Garry, Professor of Politics from Queens University Belfast remains as our one constant member of the Expert Group, having also been with us on the Eighth Amendment, and on the second topic on an ageing population. He will remain a member for the other areas of the Assembly's work.

He is joined on this occasion by Professor Anna Davies, Professor at the School of Nature Sciences in Trinity College Dublin and Chair of Geography, Environment and Society. Anna is an expert in

environmental governance, specifically focusing on consumption, sustainability transitions and public participation in environmental decision making. She is a member of the Climate Change Advisory Council.

She is joined by Dr. Margaret Desmond, a Senior Research Fellow in climate change impacts and adaptation in UCC. Her research is focused on the themes of climate change impacts, vulnerability and adaptation decision making.

Dr. Áine Ryall also joins the group. She is a qualified barrister and a Senior Lecturer in environmental law at UCC. Her research focuses on environmental assessment, access to justice, climate law and governance, environmental law enforcement and implementation of the Aarhus Convention.

Prof. Peter Thorne also joins the EAG. He is Centre Director of the Irish Climate Analysis and Research Unit and is Professor of Physical Geography (Climate Science) at Maynooth University. He was a Lead Author on 5th Assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the 2014 US National Climate Assessment.

He is joined by Dr. Diarmuid Torney, lecturer in environmental politics in the School of Law and Government at DCU. His research focuses on the comparative and global politics of climate change, particularly in the EU, China, and India, as well as in Ireland and other small European states.

Finally, more recently Pat Gilroy joined the EAG in light of the cross over with the National Dialogue on Climate Change of which he is the Chair. Pat is Managing Director of Designer Group having previously held the position of CEO Dalkia Ireland and UK with Dalkia / Veolia Environment. Some of you may know Pat from his former life as manager of the Dublin Senior Gaelic Football Team.

I am very grateful to the EAG for their assistance to date in the formation of the work programme. We have in fact been meeting since last June to discuss how we can do justice to this topic.

Focus of this weekend's discussions

We will begin this morning by looking at the science of climate change. Conor Murphy, Senior Lecturer in *Geography at the Irish Climate Analysis and Research UnitS (ICARUS)* in Maynooth University will provide us with an overview of the physical science basis for climate change.

Following this we will hear from the Director of the *Environmental Protection Agency; Laura Burke. Laura will take us through Climate Change in a broader Environmental Context* and will explain what is driving Green House Gas emissions in Ireland.

We will then hear from *Joseph Curtin*, Senior Fellow, Climate Change at the Institute of International and European Affairs. Joseph will explain the current efforts in Ireland and Internationally in relation to tackling climate change.

Later this afternoon we will hear from Dr. Peter Stott, Climate Monitoring and Attribution Team, UK Met Office and Dr. Saji Varghese,

Head of Research, Environment and Applications Division, Met Éireann about the impact of Climate Change both here and internationally.

The timing of our deliberations is very opportune. The Minister for Communications Climate Action and Environment Denis Naughton published the National Mitigation Plan in June. The Minister has also recently published the draft National Adaptation Framework. We will hear about both of these strategies later today when Brian Carroll, Assistant Secretary in the Department Communications, Climate Action and Environment addresses the Assembly.

The Government has also recently announced the National Dialogue on Climate Change, which recognises that more effort is required to properly engage the wider public on the issue of climate change.

Later today we will have the opportunity to have the work of the Citizens' Assembly dovetail with that work. I am hopeful that aligning the Assembly's work to support the commencement of the National Dialogue on Climate Change will add to the national discourse on climate change and will ultimately be of benefits to the members as they consider this issue. I am very much looking forward to that session later today with Pat Gilroy.

Tomorrow we will look at energy policy in detail and I will say more about that before we begin in the morning.

Submissions

Finally, before we commence our proceedings this morning, I want to say something about the submissions the Assembly has received on this topic. I want to begin by sincerely thanking all of those who made a

submission to the Assembly. In total, the Assembly received just over 1,200 submissions. I think I am right when I say that this level of engagement on the topic of climate change is quite unprecedented in an Irish context. The quality of the submissions and the range of material provided was very impressive.

The process was open from 9th June until the 11th August. Submissions were invited across the full spectrum of issues in relation to Climate Change, but in particular we sought views on Ireland's energy, transport and agriculture sectors.

In addition, because of our efforts to dovetail the work of the Assembly with work about to be undertaken by the advisory group on the National Dialogue on Climate Change, we also sought submissions addressing this aspect.

Submissions were received from advocacy groups and professionals and academics with experience and expertise on the topic and from individuals with a concern for the environment.

A notable feature of many of the submissions was that many of them were solution focussed, with detailed analysis of existing policy presented and suggestions for alternative ideas presented.

These proposals included suggestions for action at National/International/EU policy level as well as suggestions on how an individual could simply reduce their carbon footprint.

Many submissions directly addressed the core question in the terms of reference of the Assembly 'how the State can make Ireland a leader in

tackling climate change'. In these submissions, many of the points raised were intertwined with comments about current Government policy.

As always the submissions play an integral role in the development of our work programme and some of our speakers tomorrow made submissions to the Assembly.

I am keen that the Assembly would make the best possible use of these submissions. The Secretariat is in the process of preparing a signpost document to give the Members a sense of the main issues and range of perspectives which emerge in the submissions. In the meantime, to aid the citizens in accessing the submissions, the Secretariat has prepared a list of the Submissions received from NGOs, representative groups, advocacy groups, political parties, commercial entities and academics. This list is also available online.

The Secretariat is also engaging with external partners to see how best these submissions can be used both to assist the members of the Assembly in their deliberations and to inform the national conversation on climate change more broadly.

But now we must get started and begin our work. I will now call on Conor Murphy to begin the weekend's proceedings.

ENDS