Consultation on a DAERA Climate Change Act

What is it and why does it matter?
Climate Northern Ireland

Aims to increase understanding of **climate change** impacts and risks within Northern Ireland and promote the **adaptation** actions necessary to address them

- Policy Development
- Increased adaptation awareness
- Increased adaptation action
- Climate NI Steering Group

Climate Northern Ireland was set up and funded to help fulfil NI obligations to address climate change
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Global Temperatures are rising...

Global temperature variations over last 2000 years
(using information derived from tree rings and other ‘proxies’)

Invention of steam engine

Graphic: Ed Hawkins
Date: FAGESN 2010
Flooding/High Rainfall

The consequences of climate change can include flooding, extreme storm surges, heat waves, wildfires and drought. Issues can also arise from moderate events and gradual changes.

Extreme events happen naturally and are already impacting on our society, communities, economy and natural environment.

A changing climate is a risk multiplier and interacts with factors such as development, resilience and health inequalities. It is also affecting wider supply chains, insurance, food security and human welfare in NI and across the world.
What is the Climate Change Committee?

“The Climate Change Committee (CCC) is an independent, statutory body established under the Climate Change Act 2008. Our purpose is to advise the UK and devolved governments on emissions targets and to report to Parliament on progress made in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and preparing for and adapting to the impacts of climate change.”

DAERA Minister Edwin Poots MLA, has sought the advice of the independent expert CCC on what would be an equitable contribution for Northern Ireland to the UK net zero target.
The rationale for introducing a Northern Ireland Climate Change Bill is to:

- demonstrate political and moral leadership;
- meet domestic and international commitments
- create a clear and coherent framework for managing the just transition to a low carbon economy;
- maximise social and economic benefits of new technologies;
- provide greater direction for the private and public sectors to plan for investment; and
- help Northern Ireland to adapt and be better prepared for the impacts of unavoidable climate change.

I firmly believe tackling climate change should be viewed not just as an environmental challenge, but also as an economic opportunity.

- Edwin Poots, DAERA Minister
Key Recommendations from the Local Authorities and the Sixth Carbon Budget report:

• The Sixth Carbon Budget can only be achieved if Government, regional agencies and local authorities work seamlessly together.

• Four key things are needed to achieve this vision of collaborative delivery:
  • **Framework**: An agreed framework for delivery for Net Zero incorporating local and national climate action
  • **Financing**: Appropriate long-term financing to support local authorities in delivering Net Zero
  • **Flexibility**: Local operational flexibility around how local areas address climate change
  • **Facilitation**: Coherent policy and powers for the facilitation of delivery.

Questions 1 - 4
Option 1: Northern Ireland Climate Change Bill setting interim emission reduction targets and a long term target of net zero emissions in Northern Ireland by 2050

Whilst it would make a strong statement of intent, there would be risks and impacts associated with the likelihood of Northern Ireland being unable to meet a legal target which it has set for itself.

Option 2: Northern Ireland Climate Change Bill setting interim emission reduction targets and a long term target for Northern Ireland by 2050, the long term target is an equitable contribution to achieving UK-wide Net Zero by 2050

Likely to be an “at least” 82% reduction of all Greenhouse Gas Emissions by 2050

Tailored to Northern Ireland’s unique economic, environmental and societal circumstances, including:

- greater economic reliance on the agricultural sector;
- more dispersed rural communities leading to impacts with regard to, for example, transport;
- greater reliance on oil for heating;
- a land border with another state.
Both options:
- deliver on the requirements of the NDNA agreement
- UK targets for reducing carbon emissions in line with the ‘Paris Climate Change Accord’.
- deliver a framework to suit our own Northern Ireland specific circumstances, helping to support current policies, as well as driving and shaping future policies.

The rate of change matters:
It is not just the particular level of GHG emissions in a single year which affects climate change, rather it is the total amount emitted over a number of years, which remain in the atmosphere.

Delayed cuts cost more:
The later cuts are made, the greater they must be to achieve the same long-term goal, and so they will be more expensive to implement.
Added Clarity:
As the CCC ‘Advisory Group on the Costs and Benefits of Net Zero’ noted, “One advantage of [a net zero target versus 80%] is that it removes uncertainty and the temptation of sectors to lobby for a larger share of the remaining 20% of emissions. The clarity of a ‘net zero’ goal, coupled with good policy design, could help stimulate innovation across all sectors, and cut the cost of capital, thereby bringing down the overall cost of mitigation.”


Benefits of Net Zero:
There is considerable gain to be made from a net zero target in terms of political clarity, the marketing of NI as a ‘Net Zero region’, opportunities in innovation, and potential co-benefits like protection against flooding, better transport connectivity, healthier lifestyles and greener cities, richer and more vibrant ecosystems.
Either way – NI gets a much needed Climate Bill.

Paris Climate Agreement called for highest possible ambition… in the light of different national circumstances

We have to decide whether Northern Ireland’s regional characteristics are different enough to prevent us aiming for Net Zero given that “there is no purely technical reason why Net Zero is not possible.”
Question 2: Do you have any opinions on what would be the most important criteria to be considered when setting or updating long term and interim emission reduction targets?

Question 3. Do you think flexibility should be built into the Bill, to allow consideration of new emerging evidence and science on climate change (for example on long lived and short-lived pollutants) when setting emission reduction targets?

• Similar to the Scottish Act, this Bill should include safeguards to prevent backsliding,

• It is also important that these targets are backed up by robust evidence from funded strategic climate change research programme for NI, alongside an independent expert advice body to provide guidance to the NI government.

• Both the strategic research programme and the interim targets must consider the link between GHG reduction policies and climate adaptation, to avoid net-zero strategies causing lock-in of climate risks which would cause environmental, economic or social vulnerability.
Question 4. Do you agree that a Northern Ireland Climate Change Bill should include a duty for 5 yearly carbon budgets to set a statutory cap (interim emission reduction targets) on total greenhouse gases that can be emitted in Northern Ireland? (Essentially – how should interim targets be set?)

- **UK Government** – 5 yearly carbon Budgets
- **Scottish Government** – Ministers to set annual targets in secondary legislation in batches for the period 2010 to 2050.

- **Or an amalgamation?**
  Ministers could produce five annual action plans to state how they will deliver the reductions and adapt to climate change within each 5-year carbon budget period. They would have flexibility to miss and amend targets year to year, as long as each carbon budget as a whole is met.
Questions 5 - 9
Even if we stop all our emissions today, we have now locked in some degree of climate change. We must therefore prepare our society, environment and economy for the impacts of climate change (adaptation) at the same time as we cut our greenhouse emissions (mitigation).

It is vital that we pursue both actions in balance, to reduce the scale of climate change, but also to prepare for the impacts we cannot now avoid.

What exactly do we mean by ‘climate change adaptation’?

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**Climate action is approached in two main ways: Mitigation and Adaptation**

**MITIGATION ACTIONS**

AIM TO:
reduce the severity of climate change

HOW?
reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

**ADAPTATION ACTIONS**

AIM TO:
prepare for the impacts of climate change

HOW?
understand how you are at risk and make a plan.
Key Point:
The definition of ‘major players’ should be amended to thresholds that fit the unique characteristics and scale of NI and reporting should account for their capacity.

Support is needed
Alongside legislation, public bodies should be provided with support to undertake adaptation planning and reporting.
1. An independent Northern Ireland Advisory Body on Climate Change is very important.
   - The scale and complexity of the problem requires a multi-disciplinary approach with government working closely with other sectors and other jurisdictions.
   - An NI Climate Change Committee must work closely with both the UK Committee on Climate Change, and the Ireland Climate Change Advisory Council.

2. Government should be restructured to amalgamate relevant departmental units into an executive ‘Climate Office’ to facilitate greater cross-government advice and working in the area of climate change.

3. NI needs a robust climate change research programme to support the committee, departments and the assembly, to provide the necessary evidence base to guide climate change policy-decisions.
Question 8. Do you have any other comments in respect of the issues raised in this discussion document?

1. Capacity of Government Departments
2. Capacity of Public Bodies
3. Sectoral Forums for discussion of certain ‘wicked subjects’ such as SuDS adoption; bringing together government, local authorities and Civil Society.
4. Strategic plan for financing for climate action
5. Research (including a programme of embedded researchers)

Question 9. Are there any important issues you feel have not been adequately covered at this early discussion stage?

• Place-based Climate Action: Incentivise and support
• Nature-Based Solutions
• Citizen Assembly UK report