

Civil Society meeting with Taoiseach Leo Varadkar on Climate Action

Tuesday 10th September, 7pm

Civil Society Delegation

Oisín Coghlan (Friends of the Earth), Caoimhe de Barra of Trócaire (Stop Climate Chaos Coalition), Mindy O'Brien of Voice (Environmental Pillar), Yvonne O'Callaghan of SIPTU (Coalition 2030), and Saoi O'Connor (Fridays for Future).

Outline Agenda

1. **Stakeholder Engagement** - Oisín to start, followed by Saoi
2. **The Climate Action Plan** - Caoimhe to start, followed by Mindy
3. **Just Transition** - Yvonne to start

Summary of asks

Our overarching aim is for Ireland to do its fair share to achieve the temperature goals under the Paris Agreement and to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals. That requires sustained political leadership and policy intervention at a scale and urgency commensurate with the challenge. In short, the Dáil has declared a Climate and Biodiversity Emergency – now the Government must act like it.

1. Stakeholder Engagement

- a. Adopt a new framing of the climate challenge, of Government leading system change in energy, transport, buildings and food, rather than the current framing of the Government “nudging” individuals to change their behaviour;
- b. Immediately establish a new National Stakeholder Forum on Climate Action, modelled on the Brexit Forum;
- c. In consultation with us and other stakeholders urgently develop a new, comprehensive and coherent strategy for stakeholder engagement and social dialogue on climate action.

2. Climate Action

- a. Expedite the new Climate Action Bill to enact the governance changes in the Climate Action Plan and the JOCCA report, with a view to passing the legislation before the General Election.
- b. Join climate champion member states within the EU in calling for an increase to EU ambition on 2030 and 2050 targets. Review and strengthen the currently inadequate national ambition of an annual 2% reduction in emissions between now and 2030, in line with the IPCC and Paris.
- c. In light of the interdependence of the twin climate and biodiversity emergencies, establish without delay the Citizens' Assembly on biodiversity loss and significantly ramp up funding for the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

3. Just Transition

- a. Sign up to the UN Commitment on Just Transition at the UN Summit in New York;
- b. Immediately establish a National Just Transition Taskforce with an experienced independent Chair, as recommended by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action. And with a mandate from the top of Government to bring the ESB, BNM, the unions, community and environmental representatives into a room to negotiate a just transition deal in the midlands for an orderly exit from peat.

1. Stakeholder Engagement

The first, and crucially important, element of public and stakeholder engagement is the framing that Government puts on the climate challenge. The Government's current framing is all about "nudging" individuals, to use the Taoiseach's phrase, to change their behaviour. The emphasis is on individual choices, to retrofit your house, to buy an electric vehicle, even to eat less meat, for example.

We think this is a strategic mistake, from both a communications and an emissions reduction perspective. The climate challenge is an economic and societal transformation on a scale comparable to the industrial revolution, or rebuilding after World War II. Behaviour change at the scale we need can only follow system change. We need to transform our energy system, our transport system, our food system, our building system. This requires sustained political leadership and policy intervention. In the same way, for example, that Brexit does; except that the climate challenge is an order of magnitude (or two) bigger than Brexit.

For example, individuals can't take peat and coal off the electricity system, individuals can't provide public transport, individuals don't set or regulate building standards. But those interventions mean that all individuals have more access to less polluting choices than previously.

The participants in the Citizens' Assembly made it crystal clear that they are ready for action but they wanted the Government to lead. And they did not mean lead by cutting out disposable cups in department canteens, however worthy that may be. As the recommendations made clear they meant lead with policies that are proportionate to the urgency and the scale of the climate emergency.

Until the Government gets that framing and communicates it consistently and strategically from the top down, all efforts at public and stakeholder engagement will be flawed and risk just failing but getting people's backs up.

On the architecture and process of the Government's current stakeholder engagement initiatives, while there are positive elements they do not add up to a strategic or coherent

whole. The FoE and FFF letter of 29 July listed some of the limitations and flaws we see. It's not clear where the outputs of the regional forums under the National Dialogue go, while Minister engages well in the town halls they seem unrelated to other processes, national stakeholders at the NED made clear they need a more sustained forum for engagement on climate policy. Fundamentally, social dialogue, needs to amount to more than opportunities for citizens to ask questions and decision makers to listen. There needs to be a discernible link between dialogue and policy development, as there has been with the Citizens' Assembly process.

The Citizens' Assembly is obviously now the gold standard of a certain kind of stakeholder engagement but there are other examples of good practice across the administrative system. DFA has done very well regarded stakeholder engagement on the development of White Papers over the years. And the Brexit Stakeholder Forum is a good example of sustained high-level engagement.

An effective strategy for stakeholder engagement and social dialogue is within reach. But currently we are not moving towards it. We are happy to work with officials to define and develop that strategy for consideration by the Minister or the Government as appropriate.

2. The Climate Action Plan

2.1. Background

Ireland has an incredibly positive story to tell internationally; a strong record on international solidarity - with an aid programme that is second to none. In the climate space, Ireland's support to the UNFCCC, a focus on LDCs and grant based adaptation in its climate finance contributions, all speak to Ireland's long standing solidarity and multilateral tradition. It's no surprise therefore to see the [themes](#) of empathy, partnership and independence at the centre of Ireland's SECCO campaign.

Climate change rightly features strongly in the campaign, given the fundamental importance of international dialogue and cooperation on this unprecedented global threat which poses a burgeoning threat to human security and to political and financial stability without rapid and far reaching changes over the few short years ahead of us. In choosing to focus on climate change solidarity and dialogue in the campaign, including Ireland's long standing relationship with the Small Island Developing States (SIDS), however, the disconnect with policy and practice is simply too great to go without challenge from domestic climate and justice advocates.

Continuing to grant licenses for oil and gas exploration off the island of Ireland, and blocking legislative efforts that have the support of the majority in the Dail to end the regime, stand in stark contradiction to the calling card of solidarity with SIDS and climate dialogue being championed. If we exploit already existing, proven fossil fuel reserves the SIDS will disappear and young people will face a highly uncertain future. Yet the Government is

hoping to find and exploit new Irish reserves all whilst championing the plight of the SIDS and intergenerational dialogue.

Minister Bruton and his team have done enormous work over the 12 months, delivering more than had been accomplished in the past four years on this agenda. Nonetheless, the science is stark, and is clearly telling us that much more is needed. There are things we need to do, and things we just have to stop doing.

The unprecedented public concern about climate change, the mandate provided by the Citizens' Assembly and the cross-party consensus from the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action collectively provided an historic opportunity to step up climate action here in Ireland to help put us on track to meeting our Paris Agreement obligations.

2.2. Expedite the legislative amendments required by your Climate Action Plan

We welcomed the [robust governance](#) proposals put forward in the Government's recently published Climate Action Plan – proposals which are aimed at strengthening the planning, delivery and oversight of climate measures going forward.

- Locking these governance arrangements into law is essential if we are to drive a sustained action agenda. BREXIT is a disaster none of us asked for, but if it is allowed to delay action we will all pay a much higher price down the line. The legislative process takes time, which is why it is so important to expedite this piece of legislation as soon as possible. That can be one of this Government's signature contributions to the climate challenge. The cross-party support for the thrust of these measures as per the Report of the Joint Committee suggests there should be a constructive debate focused on delivering a swift and substantive legislative outcome.
- We ask that the legislative amendments needed to implement the new governance framework proposed in the Plan is brought forward as soon as possible and on track to be enshrined into law in advance of a general election. We urge the Government to publish the Heads of the Bill as soon as possible so that scrutiny of the full Bill can commence before the end of the year.

2.3. Joining climate champion States within the EU in calling for an increase to EU ambition and increase national ambition

The [science is clear](#). We need to go further, faster and deeper if we are to avert catastrophic climate breakdown. In terms of mitigation ambition, [proposals in the Plan](#) only commit to minimum (2% per annum) decline in domestic emissions between 2021 to 2030, assuming and banking on a steeper annual decline thereafter. We are concerned that this delay in action will drastically escalate the effort that will be required in the future, at a much greater economic and social cost. This approach also leaves little scope for [the reality](#) that ambition around our current targets for 2030 and 2050 will have to be raised if we are to meet the temperature goals of the Paris Agreement. Pursuing a pathway of “least burden” now

displaces the greatest burden onto future generations. This is a morally questionable approach at the very least.

As acknowledged in the Coalition 2030 [Voluntary National Review](#) report, “As a small wealthy country, Ireland should show courage and leadership and push for greater ambition at the EU level, as well implementing much stronger national ambition.” The science and reality of climate change means that we must put in place an ambitious long-term climate action strategy that is compatible with the Paris Agreement.

- In terms of domestic measures, we urge the Government to review and strengthen the currently inadequate national ambition of an annual 2% reduction in emissions between now and 2030, in line with the IPCC and the Paris Agreement. As part of this process, the Government needs to build on its Plan, incorporating the full suite of recommendations from the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action and integrating these and more in order to rapidly bring down emissions over the next decade.
- In terms of the upcoming UN Summit in New York, we note the commitment of the Commission President-elect to present a proposal for a higher EU 2030 climate target of a -55% greenhouse gas reductions. However, to stay on the 1.5°C pathway the EU needs to adopt a 2030 target at least -65% as its fair share. We need to show that we are ready to do our fair share of the joint effort to limit temperature rise to 1.5°C, and therefore, we urge the Government to join climate champion member states within the EU in calling for an increase to EU ambition on 2030 and 2050 targets.

2.4 Protect nature to help us combat and adapt to climate change

Ireland’s unique biodiversity is vanishing, and the situation is extremely worrying not only for our members within the Environmental Pillar, but also for those sectors dependent on the free services that biodiversity provides, services such as soil productivity and pollination, climate regulation, sequestration and flood control, clean water provision and the maintenance of commercial fisheries.

As emphasised in the [latest IPCC report](#) on climate change and land use, protecting and enhancing nature is crucial to limiting global temperature rise. This applies as much to us here in Ireland as it does to the international community. We welcomed the declaration of a climate and biodiversity emergency by the Government in May of this year. We also welcomed the vote for the Citizens’ Assembly to examine how the state can improve its response to the issue of biodiversity loss. Considering Ireland’s biodiversity is quickly vanishing, this work will be essential.

Working with nature here in Ireland – such as by restoring and rehabilitating our degraded peatlands – can play an essential role in absorbing and storing carbon, and in addressing the biodiversity crisis. It is within this context, therefore, that we were disappointed that the Climate Action Plan did not go further in putting forward concrete plans for using nature-

based solutions to help mitigate and adapt to climate change. To protect nature and biodiversity in a time of climate emergency, we urge the Government to:

- Fulfil the mandate of the Dáil and establish without delay, the Citizens' Assembly to examine how the state can improve its response to the issue of biodiversity loss”.
- Urgently and significantly ramp up funding for biodiversity through the budget of the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Increase the current and capital spending for the Service to €100 million in order to allow the State reverse the significant declines in biodiversity, and support large scale conservation and nature-based solutions for climate action.

3. Just Transition

3.1 What is a Just Transition

Developed as a concept by the global labour movement, a [Just Transition](#) aims to secure the future and livelihoods of workers and their communities in the transition to a low-carbon economy. It is based on social dialogue between workers and their unions, employers, government and communities. A plan for Just Transition will seek to provide decent jobs, social protection, more training opportunities and greater security for all workers affected by the transition to low carbon and action on climate change policies. As experience from other countries shows, a well-planned and managed Just Transition provides major opportunities for job creation in both the energy generation and conservation sectors, helping to boost regional and national growth.

3.2 How has a Just Transition been applied in Ireland?

Congress has been to the [fore](#) in promoting the concept nationally. The recent report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee included a specific and clear recommendation to establish a National Just Transition Taskforce involving all stakeholders to deliver security and opportunities for those impacted by the move to a low carbon economy. An immediate focus on the peat workers and the communities of the Midlands was also suggested. Unfortunately, the Climate Action Plan appears to have downgraded this to “the establishment of a Just Transition Review Group”, situated in the NESC. Actions, 160, 162, 168, 170, 172 do relate to the employment implications of the transition to a low carbon economy.

Moreover, the chapter on Just Transition in the Climate Action Plan, while using the language of a Just Transition, does not include a single mention of trade unions or social dialogue and while referencing the [ILO guidelines](#) (agreed by the world's Governments, Employers and Trade Unions) then goes on to ignore them in its approach.

The suggestion that regional fora such as the Midlands Regional Enterprise forum are suitable vehicles for delivering a Just Transition is worrying. It is our strong view that this forum – which has no trade union or climate change expertise represented within it – is utterly unsuited to this task. We need a properly-resourced National Just Transition Task

Force comprised of the relevant stakeholders and appropriate expert input that will drive this process of change.

3.3 What needs to happen?

It is within this context that unions are calling on all governments at the UN Summit to engage with working people and integrate concrete Just Transition measures in their climate action plans. We are asking governments to sign up to the [commitments on Just Transition](#) proposed by the governments of Spain and Peru and supported by the ILO and the ITUC. Congress has written to [Minister Bruton](#) on this matter and is awaiting a response. Minister Bruton's office has indicated that he would be happy to meet with General Secretary Patricia King at some point in September.

- We welcome the Government signing up to the [Silesia Declaration](#) in Katowice. We hope that you will also sign up to the UN Commitment and more importantly return home and seek to implement this in a meaningful manner. The situation facing workers in Bord na Mona and the ESB demands such an urgent response.