

Irish Climate Justice Group Submission to the Department of Agriculture Public Consultation on Harvest 2020¹

Governance and Policy Coherence

The Irish Climate Justice Group welcomes the initiative to conduct an analysis of the environmental impact of the Food Harvest 2020 strategy (FH 2020) and to hold a stakeholder consultation. We believe an adequate Strategic Environmental Assessment would be more appropriate however. We note with regret that this analysis is being carried out two years after the strategy was launched and more than a year after government supported structures set up and an implementation strategy agreed. We were also disappointed to learn of the consultation late and by chance, rather than via outreach to stakeholders. We believe the procedural and outcome inconsistencies with FH2020 underscores once again the importance of establishing effective, transparent and accountable governance mechanisms, a climate change law in particular, that will ensure ex ante assessment of proposed sectoral policies and their likely impact on Ireland's ability to meet its national and international obligations, not least its legally binding international obligations to significantly reduce its greenhouse gas emissions. This would ensure timely consideration of options and allow the adoption of coherent government policy that is consistent with its legal obligations.

Key Points

- Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions are disproportionately high for the country's population size. Irrespective of whether emissions are viewed from a production or consumption perspective, Ireland's ecological footprint is among the very highest per person in the world².
- The direct and indirect impacts of climate change will be global, but the most vulnerable people, particularly people living in poverty in developing countries, are being hit first and most profoundly. The most vulnerable people are paying the highest price for a problem they have not contributed to.
- A human rights approach requires a focus on those whose rights are currently unfulfilled, violated or at risk. The debate in Ireland on global food security and on the challenge for meeting existing emission reduction targets should be seen in this context. This debate should also take explicit account of the fact that existing targets, which are viewed as challenging, are well below what is necessary to remain within what the international community has agreed to as the safe limit on further global warming (see graph 1 above).
- Ireland has had international obligations to address greenhouse gas emissions since 1992, quantified obligations to limit its emissions since 1997, and quantified legal obligations to reduce emissions since 2008. The fact that the government would have to work with all sectors to ensure Ireland's development progresses within its legally allocated and agreed share of emissions has been a clear obligation for more than two decades.
- The current situation in which a sectoral, Government-endorsed strategy appears to be incompatible with Ireland's international obligations underscores the importance of establishing effective, transparent and accountable governance mechanisms, a climate change law in particular, to ensure ex ante assessment of proposed sectoral policies and their likely impact on Ireland's ability to meet its national and international obligations,

¹ The Irish Climate Justice Group is the name under which Oxfam Ireland, Friends of the Earth Ireland, Christianaid Ireland and Trócaire cooperate on climate change policy matters.

² 'Our Sustainable Future; a framework for sustainable development for Ireland'. Page 14 (June 2012).

enable timely consideration of options and allow the adoption of coherent government policy that is consistent with its legal obligations.

- FH 2020 refers to Irish food as being among the most sustainable in the world. This claim lacks credibility when national emissions from agriculture are high and without a legislative mechanism in place to ensure the country is on a low carbon pathway.
- Global food security requires urgent action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, with those countries with high historical and current responsibility for emissions taking the lead, and investment in climate-resilient agriculture in developing countries. It is therefore inappropriate that global food security be used as a factor to validate potential further increases in greenhouse gas emissions in Ireland.

Ireland's Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Agriculture accounts for a significant portion of Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions, estimated at 29% in 2009³. According to the 2012 Environment Review by the Economic and Social Research Institute, there is a significant challenge for the agricultural sector in playing its part to meet Ireland's 2020 emission reduction obligations. The report indicates that implementation of the Food Harvest 2020 strategy would mean an additional 1 million tonnes of emissions⁴, making the challenge for this and all Irish sectors exponentially greater. Based on projections by the Environmental Protection Agency, taking into account the projected additional emissions resulting from implementation of the Harvest 2020 strategy Ireland will overshoot its international emission reduction targets for 2020 by either 2015 or 2017 at best⁵.

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The urgency to act and the need for climate justice

Whilst governments continue to affirm their commitment to limiting a further rise in the earth's average surface temperature to below 2°C, and to consider the possibility of a lower limit, current emission reduction pledges mean the world is on track for a further rise of 3°C or more. Graph 1 depicts how far current pledges are from the trajectory needed to have a reasonable chance of avoiding overshooting the agreed 2°C limit.

³ 'Review of National Climate Policy', Page 7. Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, (2011).

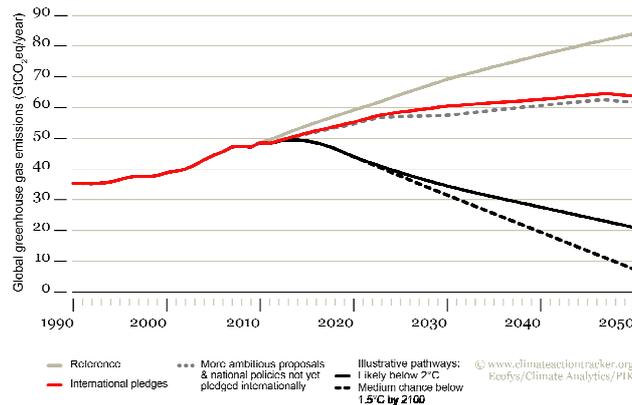
⁴ Curtis J. 'Environment Review 2012', Research Series Number 26. Pages 20-23 (June 2012)

⁵ EPA greenhouse gas emissions projections 2011-2020 (Press release April 16 2012).

<http://www.epa.ie/news/pr/2012/april/name,32732,en.html>

⁶ 'Our Sustainable Future; a framework for sustainable development for Ireland'. Page 14 (June 2012).

Graph 1.



Our agencies are working every day in countries across the world where vulnerable people are experiencing the reality of climate change. In research recently published by Trócaire communities in Bolivia, Honduras, Malawi and Kenya reported experiencing increasingly climate variability including unpredictable and more erratic rainfall, increased storms and flooding and increased drought. Communities described how these changes are affecting their ability to produce food and earn a basic income, undermining their food security⁷. Climate variability and change are already having a corrosive effect on poverty reduction efforts in developing countries.

While the direct and indirect impacts of climate change will be global the most vulnerable people, particularly people living in poverty in developing countries, are being hit first and most profoundly. The UN reports that the number of people affected globally by disasters has been increasing by an estimated 50,000 to 60,000 per decade, since the early 1970s but that ninety-five percent of disaster-related deaths occur in developing countries⁸. It is well documented that current levels of human induced climate variability and change are a result of emissions from what are termed 'developed' or industrialised countries. Seven out of every ten tonnes of carbon in the atmosphere are attributable to these countries⁹. The most vulnerable people are paying the highest price for a problem they have not contributed to.

Climate change is a threat to a whole host of human rights, rights which the Irish Government, through accession to a number of international conventions and covenants, has committed to promote, protect and respect. A human rights approach requires a focus on those whose rights are currently unfulfilled, violated, or at risk. The debate in Ireland on global food security, and the challenge for meeting existing emission reduction targets should be seen in this context. This debate should also take explicit account of the fact that existing targets, which are viewed as particularly challenging, are well below what is necessary to remain within what the international community has agreed to as the safe limit on further global warming (see graph 1 above).

Climate change and food security

In public and political debate around the Harvest 2020 Strategy, the need to meet increased demand for food as a result of a rising global population is often cited as justifying an increase in production and emissions, in Ireland. Indeed, often the very fact that climate change will impinge on agricultural production potential in some regions is sometimes cited as necessitating expanded

⁷ 'Shaping Strategies; factors and actors in adaptation', Trócaire (2012).

⁸ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Special Report 'Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation'. Executive Summary, Page 8 (2012).

⁹ UNDP Human Development Report 'Fighting Climate Change; Human Solidarity in a Divided World' Page 56 (2007/2008).

production in others. These suggestions are problematic from a scientific, practical and moral perspective.

The UN indicates that semi arid and arid areas in Sub-Saharan Africa are projected to increase by between 60 and 90million hectares as a result of climate change, and Southern Africa could see decreases in crop yields of up to 50% in the decades ahead. As pointed out by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, short term gains in increasing production in some regions will be offset by longer term losses if it leads to further degradation of ecosystems and threatens future ability to maintain current levels of production, and the overall impact would be a global decrease in productive capacity in this century¹⁰.

The goal to promote global food security must focus on those who are currently food insecure, and who are projected to be among the food insecure in the future. Hunger in the world today is mostly attributable not to low stocks or insufficient global supply, but to poverty. The Food and Agricultural Organisation of the UN has stated that world agriculture produces around 17 percent more calories per person today than it did 30 years ago, despite a 70 percent population increase¹¹, yet in 2012 it is estimated that around one in seven people still suffer from hunger. Addressing poverty and food insecurity in food insecure countries is most efficiently and effectively done by supporting small scale agriculture in developing countries. This increases the food available and accessible to rural households and communities, increases incomes and enables the emergence of demand for further goods and services, reducing the expansion of urban poverty¹².

Global food security in the context of climate variability and change requires urgent action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, with those countries with high historical and current responsibility for emissions taking the lead, and scaled up investment in climate-resilient agriculture in developing countries. It is therefore inappropriate that global food security be used as a factor to validate potential further increases in greenhouse gas emissions in Ireland.

¹⁰ Report Submitted by the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food to the Human Rights Council, Olivier De Schutter, page 5 (2010).

¹¹ FAO 'Reducing Poverty and Hunger; the Critical Role of Financing for Food, Agriculture and Rural Development', page 9 (2002).

¹² Ibid.