



Mountaineering Ireland response to draft Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Bill 2013 (May 2013)

1. Context

Mountaineering Ireland is the representative body for hillwalkers and climbers on the island of Ireland. Mountaineering Ireland is recognised as the National Governing Body for the sport of mountaineering by both the Irish Sports Council and Sport Northern Ireland. The term mountaineering refers to a spectrum of activities that includes hillwalking, rock and ice-climbing, rambling, bouldering and alpinism. Mountaineering Ireland has 11,400 members comprising 163 clubs and almost 1300 individual members (December 2012).

The work of Mountaineering Ireland includes:

- Representing the interests of hillwalkers and climbers;
- Providing a comprehensive range of services to members;
- Improving and securing access to Ireland's hills and crags;
- Promoting conservation and responsible use of the mountain environment;
- Encouraging safe practice and promoting skills and leadership training.

There is compelling evidence of climate change, with the impact of increased temperatures visible across the world and in Ireland. Climate change is a subject close to the heart of most mountaineers. Many of our members have seen up close how glaciers are shrinking and how climbing routes are changing from one year to another. At a more local level, the impact of climate change was highlighted at a conference hosted by Mountaineering Ireland in 2012 when the National Parks and Wildlife Service's Regional Manager spoke about damage to the path network within Wicklow Mountains National Park from extreme weather events in recent years.

Climate change will exert pressure on Ireland's upland environment, for example, peat that has dried out during a spell of hot weather is more fragile and susceptible to being washed away when heavy rain follows. In addition to the loss of peat soil from upland areas, this has implications for water quality and biodiversity.

Another impact of drier hotter summers will be the increased risk of wildfires in upland areas. We have seen devastating spring fires in each of the last four years, with large tracts of heath and blanket bog destroyed, as well as thousands of acres of forestry. In 2010, Coillte lost almost 2,000

acres of its forestry due to 254 separate fires. This cost €3.5 million in crop damage and related fire-fighting costs.

2. Submission

Mountaineering Ireland was pleased to see the publication of the heads of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Bill 2013, but disappointed that the current draft lacks targets and practical actions to guide Ireland towards lower carbon emissions.

The Government needs to show leadership by setting **specific targets** and making **policy changes** to help Ireland meet its future climate commitments. While Ireland may have met its Kyoto target, this was probably more to do with economic decline than being the result of a planned carbon reduction policy. With the development of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Bill there is an opportunity for Ireland to correct previous shortcomings.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has indicated that developed countries like Ireland must reduce emissions by 80 – 95% by 2050. Mountaineering Ireland requests the Government to fix a target to **reduce carbon emissions by at least 85% by 2050**. To ensure that emissions are stepped down, it is essential that **interim targets** are set for 2020, 2030 and 2040.

Ireland's mountain areas represent our largest areas of relatively wild land, vital for recreation and a host of eco-system services. It is worth noting the important role that mountain areas can play as a **safety valve to protect biodiversity** in times of climate chaos. As temperatures rise or fall, species can move upwards or downwards to avail of more favourable conditions. Mountaineering recommends that the Government initiate a programme, in conjunction with local stakeholders to develop integrated plans for the sustainable management of Ireland's upland areas. An **upland agri-environment programme**, targeted towards farmers who farm in a way that minimises emissions and protects biodiversity, would be a key element within such a programme.

Given the important of agriculture to Ireland's economy, and the high proportion of our emissions that are associated with agriculture, it is vital that the Government invests now in **research on how to reduce methane emissions** from agriculture. As grass-based agriculture is one of Ireland's strengths and this has a lower carbon cost, we should focus on optimising the relationship between agricultural output and carbon emissions.

It is clear that Ireland needs to reduce its dependence on imported oil and gas and Mountaineering Ireland is supportive of the development of renewable sources of energy, however such developments should not go ahead without **due regard to their impact on the landscape, on flora and fauna and on recreational activities** walking and climbing.

Many poorer countries are particularly vulnerable to the impact of climate change, due to their geographical position, agricultural systems and less developed economies. Ireland must accept its responsibility to mitigate global climate change by reducing emissions significantly and quickly. Therefore Mountaineering Ireland recommends that Ireland's future actions in this area are **underpinned by the principles of climate justice**.

The central and most essential point in this submission is that Mountaineering Ireland calls on the Government to take ownership of the climate issue and demonstrate leadership by setting specific targets and making the policy changes necessary to achieve a meaningful reduction in Ireland's carbon emissions without further delay.

3. Further information

Mountaineering Ireland would be happy to elaborate on, or discuss, any of the ideas contained in this submission.

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