

Is the Government keeping its promises on climate and the environment?

Second Annual Report Card 2022

For the last two years, Friends of the Earth has commissioned an annual independent expert assessment of the Government's delivery of the Programme for Government commitments on climate and the environment. The assessment gave the Government marks out of 10 in each of the following nine areas: Climate, Nature & Biodiversity, Water & Marine, Waste and Circular Economy, Air Quality, Transport, Buildings, Energy, and Agriculture & Forestry.

Overall grade: After two years of work, this Government's performance on their environmental commitments achieved a C grade overall, down from a C+ last year.

While their performance in the areas of Nature and Transport improved from last year, there has been a decline in performance in other areas, most notably within the Energy sector and Drinking and Waste Water, which received poor scores. The Agriculture and Forestry sector also received a poor score, the same as last year. At this stage in the Government's tenure, we would expect to see them move from planning to implementation of their commitments. However, in these areas specifically, we observed a concerning lack of progress turning the Government's own ambitions into actions at the required pace.

Overall Grade

C

Moderate Progress

Marks out of ten in each main category

Climate



6/10
Moderate ↓
2021 mark: 7.5

Nature & Biodiversity



6.5/10
Moderate ↑
2021 mark: 4.5

Water & Marine



4.5/10
Poor ↓
2021 mark: 5.5

Waste & Circular Economy



8.5/10
Excellent
2021 mark: 8.5

Air Quality



7/10
Good
2021 mark: 7

Transport



7/10
Good ↑
2021 mark: 6.5

Buildings



6/10
Moderate ↓
2021 mark: 6.5

Energy



4/10
Poor ↓
2021 mark: 6

Agriculture & Forestry



4/10
Poor
2021 mark: 4

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Summary of analysis

Climate: 6/10

Progress continues on climate change, particularly with respect to governance and financing commitments. However, emissions continue to rise and climate change adaptation plans are sorely lacking. Climate engagement with stakeholders has improved significantly compared to 2021.

Unfortunately, it has taken this Government two years to set “the rules of the game” when it comes to climate governance and this pace is at odds with the scale of the climate emergency.

Thus, the Government’s progress on its climate commitments has deteriorated from “Good” in 2021 to “Moderate” this year.

Nature & Biodiversity: 6.5/10

Significant progress has been made since 2021 with this category showing the most improvement, particularly in commencement of the Citizens’ Assembly on Biodiversity Loss; completion of the National Parks and Wildlife Service review; progress on developing new World Heritage sites; and additional funding in several areas as announced at the 2022 National Biodiversity Conference.

Commitments that appear neglected include the commitments for a National Invasive Species Management Plans; Urban Biodiversity plans including pesticide usage; and implementation of the third Biodiversity Action Plan.

While the fourth National Biodiversity Action Plan is in progress, it is delayed waiting for recommendations from the Citizens’ Assembly.

Water & Marine: 4.5/10

Water quality continues to deteriorate, and insufficient progress is being made on the Government’s own commitments in this area.

Commitments in the marine area are progressing better than in areas of drinking and wastewater, but overall, water quality seems to be an area that is largely ignored by this Government.

Waste and Circular Economy: 8.5/10

Significant progress has been made with respect to National Waste and Circular Economy Action Plans; enactment of the Circular Economy and Miscellaneous Provisions Act; Extended Producer Responsibility, single use plastics and plastic packaging.

Nearly all commitments in this area are progressing as anticipated, with the exception of commitments regarding municipal compost and a review of the tax system with respect to the circular economy.

As the planning and legislation surrounding this Government’s commitments are progressing as promised, we expect implementation of these measures to begin by next year.

Air Quality 7/10

In spite of challenging political conditions, regulations on a nationwide Smoky Coal ban and other solid fuels were agreed in July and are under review by the European Commission.

This is a significant achievement which three previous Governments were unsuccessful in delivering.

Some progress has also been made in other commitments related to regional air quality monitoring and high sulfur fuel. However, the more substantial commitments regarding development of a Clean Air Strategy have progressed too slowly.

Thus, the score for this category remains the same as last year in spite of significant success regarding Smoky Coal regulations.

Transport: 7/10

There is good progress in some areas of transport, including a noticeable prioritization of active and sustainable transport infrastructure compared to previous Governments. Progress has been made on electric vehicle infrastructure, electric buses, rural mobility, transport fares, greenways, and e-scooter/e-bike legislation along with maintaining overall commitments to prioritize sustainable transport over roads. Generally, significant funding has been allocated for infrastructure and alternatives with investment in a broad range of measures. Lowering the cost of public transport fares during the energy crisis was a strong and positive political sign.

In contrast, the commitment to address aviation emissions appears ignored and commitments specific to Rail, including the Western Rail Corridor, are not progressing sufficiently. At present, the transport sector appears to be the only sector that may meet its emissions ceiling target and demonstrates progress on most commitments. Therefore, its score has increased from last year.

Buildings: 6/10

All commitments related to the built environment are progressing to various degrees. However, the uptake and implementation of measures remains disappointingly low, and progress is slow, particularly with respect to energy retrofit and heat pump installation.

Some commitments were tried but did not work as planned (e.g., Midlands retrofitting). While such setbacks are understandable, broader issues such as a lack of skills in retrofitting and a lack of 100% grant funding offers are also delaying progress.

Moderate progress this year included the launch of a National Retrofit Plan; a focus on sustainable communities by the newly formed Land Development Agency; and grants being made available for the retrofit of rented properties, in addition to progress in examining district heating as a solution.

Energy: 4/10

Plans to achieve Ireland’s renewable energy targets are delayed, particularly with respect to offshore wind, planning restrictions for solar panels (especially on schools), and addressing the growing energy demands from data centers. There has been progress on Renewable Electricity Support Scheme auctions, smart meters, and commitments to prevent fracked gas importation.

In addition, the long-awaited ability for microgenerators to receive payment for electricity is welcomed.

However, very little renewable energy has been delivered in the last year and the sector is unlikely to stay within its emissions ceiling for the first carbon budget. Given the current energy crisis and growing demand via data centers, it is a serious concern that capacity is not being added and emissions from the electricity sector are increasing, including from a significant increase in the burning of coal.

Agriculture & Forestry: 4/10

The current agri-food strategy is still responsible for growing nutrient pollution and poor water quality. Without policy changes, such trends will be locked in for the remainder of this Government.

There has been little progress in the Government’s agri-environmental commitments this year apart from small agri- environmental schemes and soil monitoring.

There are no significant supports for transformation of agricultural enterprise. While some progress has been made in aspects of forestry, peatland rewetting, and the national land use review, overall, there is poor delivery of commitments.

A lack of clear, viable options for farmers in terms of land use remains with few alternatives to move away from environmentally damaging agricultural intensification.

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Methodology

In July 2022, Friends of the Earth Ireland commissioned three academic experts to independently assess the current Irish Government's performance on environment and climate relative to commitments within the 2020 Programme for Government (PfG). This is the second year such work has been commissioned.

The PfG contains nearly 300 environmental or climate-related commitments. Friends of the Earth divided these commitments into nine categories: Climate; Nature and Biodiversity; Waste and the Circular Economy; Water and Marine; Air Quality; Transport; Buildings; Energy; and Agriculture and Forestry. In consultation with a wide range of civil society organizations, political parties, academic experts, journalists and Government advisors, the progress, process and outcomes of these PfG commitments was compiled into a [compendium](#).

In the second phase of this assessment, three academic experts used the information in this compendium along with their own knowledge of Government policy to score each of the nine categories. Their assessment did not evaluate whether commitments contained in the PfG were adequate, but rather how well this Government is keeping its word on their own climate and environmental promises. The latest assessment acknowledged that the current Government has served for two years while the PfG was developed with a 3-5 year timescale. Thus, performance was evaluated based on the level of policy development and implementation which could reasonably be expected within two years. It is anticipated that this assessment will continue to be conducted annually to measure progress over the entire duration of the PfG.

The experts commissioned for Report Card 2022 were:

- Dr. Cara Augustenborg (Chair), Assistant Professor, Environmental Policy Programme, University College Dublin
- Dr. Diarmuid Torney, Associate Professor, School of Law and Government, Dublin City University.
- Dr. Paul Deane, Senior Research Fellow, MaREI, University College Cork.

The compendium used to inform this Report Card was compiled by:

- Rebecca Bailey
- Peter Stevenson

Quotes from the academic experts

Dr Cara Augustenborg Assistant Professor, Environmental Policy Programme, University College Dublin, said:

"The Government's performance to date on their own environmental commitments is a truly mixed bag. While it was uplifting to see significant progress in the area of nature and biodiversity and a policy shift to more active modes of transport, the lack of effort to address water quality was deeply concerning. In addition, significant delays on commitments in the energy and agricultural sectors leads to the risk of not meeting our climate targets in the future. It's clear that climate change, biodiversity loss, and water quality continue to worsen. While this Government has made progress in some areas, their pace does not align with Ireland's deteriorating environmental conditions."

Dr. Diarmuid Torney, Associate Professor, School of Law and Government, Dublin City University said:

"Two years into a government's term in office, I would expect to see clear progression from vision and ambition to detailed implementation. We have had no shortage of vision and ambition, but not nearly enough implementation overall. There has been good progress in some areas, particularly nature and biodiversity, and transport, but a notable lack of action in other areas, particularly energy, agriculture and water."

Dr Paul Deane, Senior Research Fellow, MaREI, University College Cork, said:

"Of all the options open to the Irish Government, delay wasn't one of them. There is a mismatch between climate ambition and action in Ireland with policy moving at a speed that is both at odds with the existing climate crisis and overlapping fossil fuel energy crisis"

Quote from Friends of the Earth

Reacting to the independent assessment, Oisín Coghlan, CEO of Friends of the Earth, who commissioned the study, said:

"Overall I would sum up this assessment as 'Could do better'. To extend the school report analogy the Government is attentive in class and is quick to put their hand up but that isn't reflected in their actual results. Their homework is often late or not done at all. And there's just too much dawdling in the corridors and loitering by the bike sheds. It's time to put the head down and turn their obvious enthusiasm into results. The continuous assessment deadlines are coming thick and fast now.

"In short, we are in a climate and energy emergency and the Government have to start acting like it. They did it for Covid and Ukraine but they just aren't doing it for climate.

"Over the coming months the key tests include the new Climate Action Plan, the fossil energy price crisis and the Citizens' Assembly on biodiversity. On climate, the Government must immediately turn the new sectoral pollution limits into policies and measures that actually reduce emissions with an updated Action Plan due in November. They must stand up to fossil fuel interests who are pushing them to address the fossil fuel energy price crisis by locking us into more fossil fuels. Instead of embracing this climate-wrecking false solution the Government must proactively help people save energy and money with retrofitting and active travel, prioritising and protecting those in energy poverty."

Category and Subcategory Marks

Category	Marks out of 10
Climate	6
Nature & Biodiversity	6.5
Water & Marine	4.5
Waste & Circular Economy	8.5
Air Quality	7
Transport	7
Buildings	6
Energy	4
Agriculture & Forestry	4

Table 1: Main Category Marks

Table 1 outlines the marks the Government received on each of nine categories, namely Climate, Nature & Biodiversity, Water & Marine, Waste & Circular Economy, Air Quality, Transport, Buildings, Energy, and Agriculture & Forestry.

Climate subcategory	Marks out of 10
Governance	6.5
Emissions	4
Adaptation	4.5
Funding	8
Water & Marine subcategory	Marks out of 10
Drinking & Waste Water	4
Marine	5

Table 2: Climate Subcategory and Water & Marine Subcategory Marks

Table 2 outlines the marks that the Government received within the Climate, and Water & Marine, subcategories.