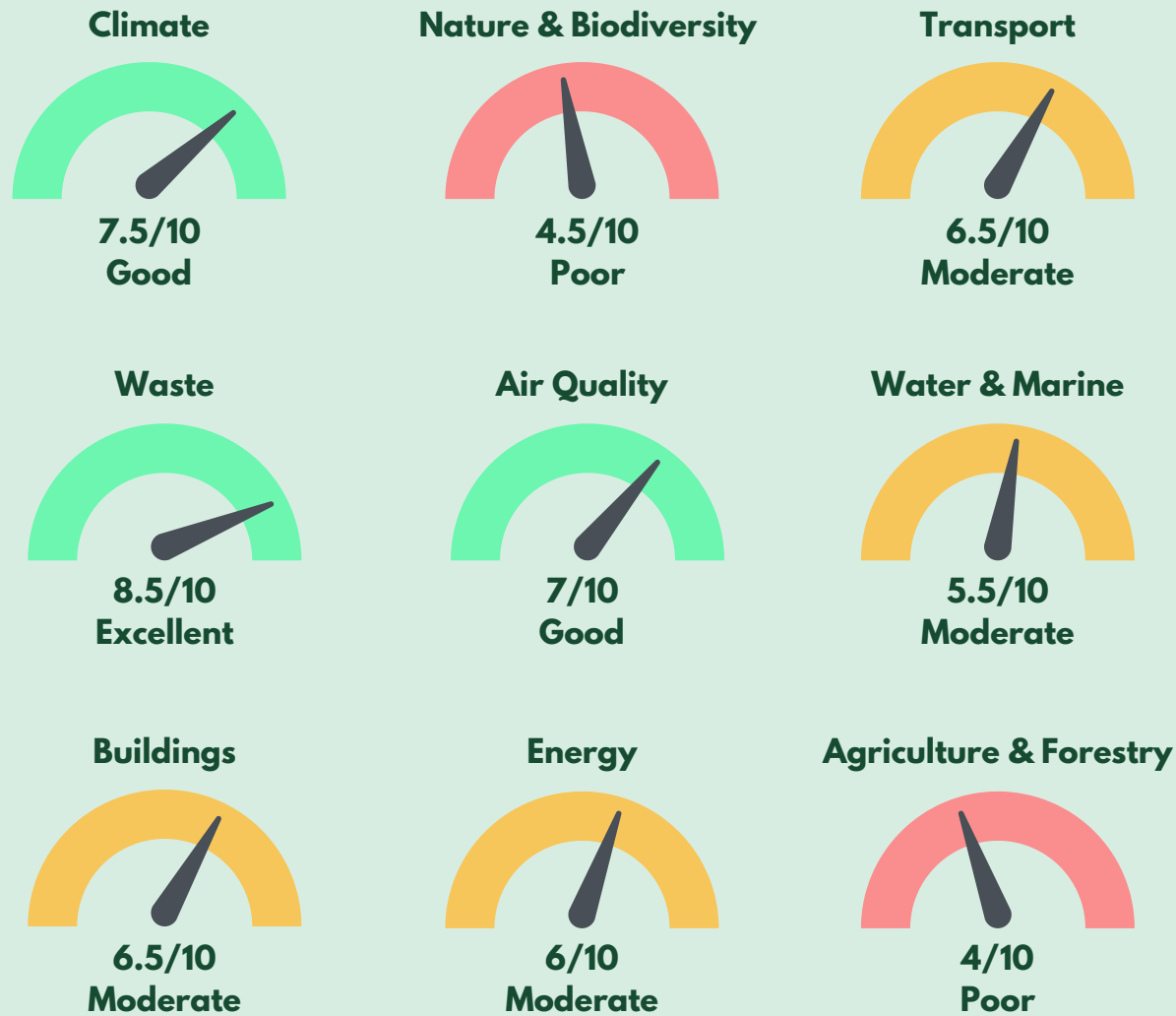


# Is the Government keeping its promises on climate and the environment? First Annual Report Card 2021

Friends of the Earth commissioned an 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, Air Quality, Transport, Buildings, Energy, and Agriculture & Forestry.

## Marks out of ten in each main category



**Overall grade:** The Government's performance on environment and climate achieved a **C+ grade overall**. Significant progress has been achieved on their environmental and climate commitments in a number of areas within their first year. However, the pace of progress is currently too slow to achieve their own targets or sufficiently address Ireland's climate and biodiversity emergency.

## Overall Grade



**Moderate Progress**

## Summary of analysis

### Climate: 7.5/10

There has been significant progress to improve Ireland's response to the climate crisis through climate governance and new legislation. While greenhouse gas emissions have risen in 2021 compared to 2020, these improvements in governance are expected to bend the emissions curve within the next five years. Increased funding will help turn this new legislation into action. However, some level of climate change is now locked in due to past emissions, so the lack of Government attention to climate adaptation is a serious concern. Nonetheless, progress on climate governance and funding were given more weight in this evaluation than adaptation due to their prominent roles in the PFG and within civil society. Implementation of provisions regarding just transition is another area that requires greater focus.

### Waste: 8.5/10

Substantial progress has been made in the Government's commitments on waste, especially in the development of the Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy and of policies to address single use plastic. In addition, Ireland has engaged constructively on EU policy in this area.

### Buildings: 6.5/10

There has been some progress on the funding to improve efficiency for the built environment, such as the National Recovery Fund.

However, the lack of a National Retrofitting Plan and poor progress developing retrofit pay-back mechanisms are weaknesses.

COVID delays further weakened development of pilot projects, such as those in the midlands. In 2020, 3,964 homes were retrofitted to a 'B2' equivalent BER or higher (government data), which was far from the number needed each year to meet the Government's target of 500,000 homes by 2030.

### Nature & Biodiversity: 4.5/10

There were positive developments regarding the budget and staffing of the National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS) announced in Budget 2021 along with funding for Bord na Mona's Bog Rehabilitation scheme.

However, NPWS funding is still far short of what is needed to address the biodiversity crisis. Commitments to review the NPWS mandate and form a Citizens' Assembly on biodiversity are progressing too slowly, and the Government has thus far failed to address their commitments on hedgerows, invasive species and implementation of the National Biodiversity Action Plan.

The new National Pollinator Plan has been resourced by NPWS and DAFM-funded project officers to help with implementation, which is a strength.

### Air Quality: 7.0/10

While the national clean air strategy is long overdue, there have been very positive developments in solid fuel regulations and extension of the smoky coal ban along with a planned expansion of the air quality monitoring network.

### Energy: 6.0/10

Generally, the Irish energy sector has been a leader on emissions reductions and climate action, yet there has been mixed progress on energy commitments in the Programme for Government. Some important positive commitments have been progressed, such as the ban on new oil and gas licences and a policy position on the importation of fracked gas. However, some time-limited commitments that could have reasonably been expected in year one have not been delivered, such as the whole-of-government renewable energy plan. The pace of policy development has been particularly slow for key strategies in the power sector (i.e. onshore and offshore wind, RESS 2).

The slow pace of new energy policy is a particular weakness that needs addressing to meet climate targets, along with follow-through of other elements such as the solar energy strategy. Planning continues to be an obstacle for community solar projects, especially schools. The rise in data centres is also an emerging risk and potential threat to achieving energy commitments within the PFG.

### Transport: 6.5/10

There have been a number of positive actions in transport that will take time to translate in emissions reduction but do pave the way, including significant funding in Budget 2021: funding for staff in local authorities, changes in the Bike to Work scheme, and some investment in safe cycling school routes and greenways.

A number of studies and reports have been commissioned and developed by NTMA to inform policy, and several policy announcements are pending. However, the urgency for local authorities to examine the adequacy of their network has faded, and there is a lack of progress on public transport commitments such as fare structures, Sustainable Rural Mobility, Local Link, and development of an integrated national strategy for greenways. Overall policy development on private and light transport is good but the follow-through in new urban buses remains to be seen.

Reasonable progress has been made in the areas of e-scooter legislation, NOx motor tax, and grant changes for electric vehicles, including significant investment in electric taxis. However, commitments to improve EV charging infrastructure, ban the sale of fossil fuel vehicles in 2030, or address aviation emissions have not progressed sufficiently.

### Water & Marine: 5.5/10

Progress in water and marine commitments has been mixed with some small funding increases and consultations, but nothing yet done that will clearly improve water quality or marine ecosystems.

### Agriculture & Forestry: 4.0/10

Progress on the sustainability of Irish agriculture and forestry has been disappointing. While Food Vision 2030 and AgClimatise were published, they are incompatible with climate goals and emission reduction targets.

The development of a national liming programme, knowledge transfer via Teagasc's Signpost Programme and peatland rewetting, along with increased support of organic farming and horticulture, are all welcome. However, the current agri-food strategy perpetuates an agricultural model which is directly responsible for escalating nutrient pollution and locks Ireland into damaging water quality for the remainder of this Government.

The proposal for a national land use review has not progressed, and many of the commitments on forestry have not been actioned despite being critical to addressing climate targets. Thus far, the Government has failed to effectively address the stalled forestry appeals process and other roadblocks to afforestation.

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## Methodology

In July 2021, Friends of the Earth Ireland commissioned **three academic experts** to **independently assess** the Irish Government's performance on environment and climate relative to commitments within the [2020 Programme for Government](#) (PfG).

The PfG contains nearly 300 environmental or climate-related commitments. Friends of the Earth divided these commitments into nine categories: Climate, Nature & Biodiversity, Waste, Water & Marine, Air Quality, Transport, Buildings, Energy, and Agriculture & Forestry.

In consultation with a range of organisations, we reported on the progress, process and outcomes of these PfG commitments in a [compendium here](#). 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 mark each of the nine categories. Their assessment does not evaluate whether commitments contained in the PfG were adequate, but rather how well the Government is keeping its word on their *own* climate and environmental promises.

The current Government has only served for one year while their PfG was developed with a 3-5 year timescale, so this assessment evaluates performance based on the level of policy development and implementation that could reasonably be expected within one year. It is anticipated this exercise will be conducted annually to track progress over the entire duration of the PfG.

The experts commissioned for Report Card 2021 were:

- Dr. Cara Augustenborg, Environmental Policy Fellow at University College Dublin
- Dr. Diarmuid Torney, Associate Professor, School of Law and Government, Dublin City University
- Dr Paul Deane, Senior Research Fellow, MaREI, the SFI Research Centre for Energy, Climate & Marine, University College Cork.

The compendium of information used for the assessment was compiled by Sean Mc Loughlin.

## Comments from the academic experts

**Dr Cara Augustenborg, Environmental Policy Fellow at University College Dublin, said:**

"While many of the Government's commitments are not yet visible in our everyday lives, environmental issues have clearly moved up the political agenda in the past year. Significant groundwork has been achieved to turn the Government's environment and climate commitments into action over the next 3-4 years, particularly in the areas of climate and waste. However, serious concerns remain regarding the Government's progress in addressing the biodiversity crisis, declining water quality, and the role of agriculture and forestry in these areas."

**Dr Paul Deane, Senior Research Fellow, MaREI, the SFI Research Centre for Energy, Climate and Marine, University College Cork, said:**

"I found this exercise very insightful. The process of reflecting on all environmental commitments from the Programme for Government in one go gives a unique perspective on the state of policy as opposed to piecemeal individual assessments. I found I changed my mind on a number of areas. I was impressed by the breadth of policy and successes in key areas such as the climate action bill, but disappointed with the pace of development that often seemed at odds with the urgency described in the Programme for Government."

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

"Grading is a core part of the job of an academic and I have spent countless hours grading students' work, but this was my first time grading the work of a government. I was reassured to find that there was a high degree of agreement among the three academic experts involved in the process, and that there were only marginal differences in our individual scoring that we completed in advance of meeting to finalise our collective scores. Overall we found there was some good progress in some areas but patchy progress elsewhere, particularly in terms of detailed sectoral implementation of climate and environmental commitments".

## Comment from Friends of the Earth

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

"I would sum up this assessment as 'Some done, a lot more to do'. The Government has laid the foundations for better climate and environmental performance in a number of areas but the pace of change is still too slow.

"For me the report highlights how essential it is that people and communities stay engaged in climate campaigning. Civil society pressure helped to secure the progressive commitments in the Programme for Government and only sustained engagement with our elected representatives will ensure they are delivered.

"As the Government moves from the planning to the implementation phase of climate action there will be ever more desperate calls from vocal lobby groups for special treatment, delays or exemptions. Only people power can counterbalance that and ensure Ireland does its fair share of climate action, that every sector pulls its weight and that the affected workers and communities get the support they need for the transition to a safer, cleaner, healthier future."

## Category and Subcategory Marks

Category	Marks out of 10
Climate	7.5
Nature & Biodiversity	4.5
Transport	6.5
Waste	8.5
Air Quality	7
Water & Marine	5.5
Buildings	6.5
Energy	6
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, Air Quality, Transport, Buildings, Energy, and Agriculture & Forestry.

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

Climate subcategory	Marks out of 10
Governance	8
Emissions	6
Adaptation	4.5
Funding	8
Water & Marine subcategory	Marks out of 10
Drinking & Waste Water	5
Marine	6

**Table 2: Climate Subcategory and Water & Marine Subcategory Marks**