

## Seizing the opportunity that now exists: Delivering on Ireland's commitments to the Paris Agreement



### Briefing by the Stop Climate Chaos coalition<sup>1</sup>

Stop Climate Chaos Coalition has prepared this briefing ahead of the Government's 2019 Annual Transition Statement. The Transition Statement is scheduled to be presented in the Dáil by Minister Bruton at **8pm, Wednesday, 18th December.**

- ❖ The Annual Transition Statement is required annually under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015. This is a key moment of political accountability for Ireland's action on climate change in the past year.
- ❖ Minister Bruton is required to provide information on measures undertaken to reduce polluting emissions, actions taken to adapt to the effects of climate change, the Environmental Protection Agency's latest record of Ireland's polluting emissions, as well as State compliance with relevant national and international law.
- ❖ All relevant Ministers (for energy, transport, agriculture and housing) must provide statements on the measures taken in their sectors, and their effectiveness in reducing emissions.

### As required under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, the Transition Statement must clarify:

- ❖ Ireland's progress towards meeting its current long-term national policy position. The 2014 National Policy Position set the target of 80% reduction in emissions by 2050, based on 1990 levels.<sup>2</sup> In 2019 the Joint Committee on Climate Action endorsed a target of net zero by 2050 and the enshrinement of this target into law in Quarter 1 of 2020. In the Government's Climate Action Plan, the Government indicated an intention to increase the 2050 goal to a net zero target and enshrine the 2050 position into law in early 2020.
- ❖ And include a record of emissions of greenhouse gases set out in the most recent national greenhouse gas emissions inventory, and a projection of future greenhouse gas emissions.

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<sup>1</sup> Stop Climate Chaos is the civil society coalition campaigning for Ireland to do its fair share to tackle climate change. Our [members](#) include Ireland's leading international aid and development, environmental, youth and faith-based organisations. Preventing climate breakdown is the defining global challenge of our age. SCC was launched in 2007 based on a recognition by members that the objectives which our organisations serve are under significant threat from the global advance of catastrophic climate breakdown.

<sup>2</sup> The National Policy Position set out that policy development to 2050 will be based on: an aggregate reduction in carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions of at least 80% (compared to 1990 levels) by 2050 across the electricity generation, built environment and transport sectors; and in parallel, an approach to carbon neutrality in the agriculture and land-use sector, including forestry, which does not compromise capacity for sustainable food production.

During the debate on the Annual Transition Statement, it is crucial that the Government is compelled to explain the reasons for insufficient measures, inadequate implementation, or unavailable data, in order to be meaningfully held to account.

### **1. The science is clear, the message is unequivocal**

From wildfires in the Arctic, in Australia and in the United States, dangerous heat waves setting new temperature records across Europe, and violent hurricane activity in the Caribbean, the signs of worsening climate impacts are becoming more evident year on year. Ireland is not immune – the footprint of increasing climate impacts, in the form of increased flooding and drought are becoming more visible.

- ❖ **A rapid and deep, fair and transformative transition to a decarbonised global economy is now required** over the next decade to prevent the spiralling of catastrophic climate impacts, and to reduce the levels of risks associated with the transition to a zero carbon future.<sup>3</sup> The United Nations Environment Programme published [a report](#) at the opening of COP 25 in Madrid highlighting that **we must cut global emissions by 55% on 2018 levels within ten years if we are to stand a chance of limiting warming to 1.5°C, the temperature goal of the Paris Agreement**. This equates to cuts of 7.6% per annum over the next decade.
- ❖ The IPCC Special Report on 1.5°C (2018) makes it explicitly clear that on ethical, environmental, economic and political bases, **limiting warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels must be the goal underpinning all national targets and policies**, concluding that, at the latest, global average emissions must be net zero by 2050. This means that developed nations like Ireland must reach net zero sooner or else have plans to achieve sufficient negative emissions to be aligned with the Paris temperature target.
- ❖ [Impacts across the world](#) we are witnessing today are a result of 1.1°C of warming. Impacts increase with every fraction of a degree added. **If the current rate of increase in emissions continues, we are on a pathway of global warming of 1.5°C by 2033**, and based on current projections, **we will reach 3-4°C warming before 2100. Ireland's current plans are aligned with unleashing the most catastrophic impacts of climate breakdown, unless there is a radical shift in Government ambition and urgency.**
- ❖ Climate impacts have the potential to [undo the last 50 years of progress](#) in global health, food security, and poverty reduction, and to push an additional 120 million more people into poverty by 2030.

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<sup>3</sup> The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), 2018: Summary for Policymakers. In: Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas.

- ❖ 2019 has witnessed some of the **largest global climate mobilisations** ever to take place across the globe. **Here in Ireland, an estimated 50,000 people, led by School Strikers, took to the streets in September**, to join millions of people around the world demanding leaders to ‘Unite Behind the Science’ and deliver an urgent and dramatic increase in climate action.

## **2. Political and policy debate has increased but Ireland remains a Low Performer and emissions continue to rise**

Government failure to implement an economy-wide climate policy framework over the past decade to tackle rising emissions has earned **Ireland a reputation of being a climate laggard.**

- **Ireland will fail considerably on its 2020 climate and energy targets.** Under the EU’s Effort Sharing Decision, Ireland continues to exceed its binding allocated emissions budget. Ireland had pledged to reduce emissions to 20% below 2005 levels by 2020. Ireland may reduce emissions by only 1% on 2005 levels by 2020.
- **For 2018, Ireland exceeded its annual emissions allocation by over 5 million tonnes.** This follows an exceedance of 3 million tonnes in 2017. A marginal decrease in domestic emissions (of 2%) in 2018 was attributed to the ESB’s coal-powered Moneypoint station being out of action for several months last year, rather than the outcome of any specific climate policy intervention. Any subsequent gains were offset by growth in emissions from households, transport, and agriculture.
- **Ireland is far off track to meeting its current 2030 target and longer term commitments to decarbonise the economy.** The most recent projections show that over the next decade, even with additional policy measures included in the National Development Plan, methane and nitrous oxide emissions from the agri-food sector are projected to increase by 3%. Continued growth in emissions from the transport sector is also projected in the short term, largely due to fuel consumption from diesel cars and diesel freight. Because of the delay in getting off fossil fuels, coal, peat and, increasingly, natural gas will continue to be key contributors to emissions from the power generation sector. Energy consumption is also expected to grow, going in the opposite direction of what is needed collectively by the EU.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In terms of 2030 reduction targets the EU Effort Sharing Regulation (ESR) requires that Ireland reduce its non-ETS emissions by 30% on 2005 levels by 2030. The latest projections indicate that Ireland will exceed the carbon budget over the period 2021-2030 by 52 - 67 Mt CO<sub>2</sub>. (See: [https://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/air/airemissions/ghgprojections2018-2040/Greenhouse\\_Gas\\_Projections.pdf](https://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/air/airemissions/ghgprojections2018-2040/Greenhouse_Gas_Projections.pdf)). As the European Union moves in 2020 to increase its 2030 targets (to an expected 55%), it is inevitable that Ireland’s domestic 2030 target will also increase.

- **These trends are unacceptable.** Climate action requires that CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from energy and cement need to go to net zero well before 2050; nitrous oxide and especially methane emissions need to reduce steadily and permanently, therefore increases in these emissions from agriculture cannot be permitted.
- **[Ireland faces annual financial penalties](#)** in the region of €500 million per annum after 2020 for failing to comply with our EU climate and renewable energy commitments. Non compliance could cost Ireland between €3bn and €6bn by 2030.
- **Ireland’s international reputation as a climate laggard** remains evident. Earlier this month, the international **[Climate Change Performance Index](#)** showed that although Ireland had climbed seven places from its ranking last year, **it remains among the Low Performers globally and is ranked one of the worst performers on climate action in the EU.**

### **[3. Irish climate policy is at a crossroads](#)**

Over the past 18 months the Oireachtas, including the Government, have acknowledged that current policies, measures and accountability systems on climate change are not working. A number of important developments over the past twelve months provide a basis for this to change:

- In March 2019, the **Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action (JOCCA), which the Citizens’ Assembly on climate change gave rise to, completed their intense cross-party scrutiny of Irish climate policy. This process resulted in a landmark report comprising 41 detailed recommendations.** The JOCCA report tasked the Government to take these recommendations into consideration in the context of meeting Ireland’s climate mitigation obligations, and the development of Ireland’s National Energy and Climate Plan (required by the EU Regulation on the Governance of the Energy Union). This process provided clear cross-party support and political impetus for the Government to step-up climate action, in addition to a range of wide-sweeping governance and sectoral recommendations.
- In May 2019, the Dáil voted to declare a “**climate and biodiversity emergency**”, and, **crucially, to “accept and endorse” the recommendations of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action.**
- The **Climate Action Plan was published in June 2019.** It’s positive elements included specific commitment to build on the governance proposals set out in the Committee report for new mechanisms to be put in place to ensure delivery and oversight of climate measures.

Because the correct governance structure is essential for effective climate action, the Stop Climate Chaos welcomed these proposals, which included:

- **legally-binding five-year carbon budgets on greenhouse gas emissions under a new Climate Action (Amendment) Bill 2019,**
- a new **Climate Action Delivery Board chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach,** which will hold individual Departments and public bodies accountable and which will deliver quarterly progress reports,
- an **external and strengthened Climate Action Council** to advise and monitor Government progress,
- a **standing Committee of the Oireachtas to act like a Public Accounts Committee** for carbon and to ensure accountability across Departments, and
- that **all major Government investment decisions will be subject to a carbon impact and mitigation evaluation.**

**Therefore, the Climate Action (Amendment) Bill 2019 needs to enshrine these essential changes into law, with all-Party support, as a matter of the greatest urgency in early 2020.**

#### **4. Increasing short term domestic ambition is now essential**

- The **2019 Climate Action Plan** sets a pathway for a 2% decline in emissions per annum from 2021 to 2030 to meet our EU targets. Such a shallow pathway was never in line with Ireland's fair share of a Paris Agreement carbon budget. [Ireland has a very limited remaining Paris-aligned carbon budget](#), and will need to reduce emissions by more than 7% per annum every year in order to achieve net zero emissions by mid-century at the latest.
- In addition, steady and permanent reductions in methane emissions (primarily from agriculture) of about 2% to 3% per year will be essential to achieving net zero and limiting warming-equivalent overshoot of a Paris-aligned cumulative emissions budget.<sup>5</sup>
- At COP 25 in Madrid earlier this month, Minister Bruton stated that Ireland will join the Carbon Neutrality Coalition – a Coalition of countries committed to achieving net zero emissions by 2050. However, it needs to be emphasised that **achieving net zero by 2050 is not the same as limiting warming to 1.5°C. Delivering on the 1.5°C limit demands steep, permanent near-term cuts in emissions**, frontloading action over the next decade rather than hoping for technological miracles after 2030.
- Ireland's continuing delay in increasing action and ambition will drastically escalate the **governmental and political effort that will be required in the future**, with an overall

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<sup>5</sup> Cain (2019) showing methane warming reduction: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41612-019-0086-4>

negative impact on society, biodiversity, and the economy. The emissions reductions now required need to be achieved equitably and will be difficult, but every year of insufficient action only increases the required decarbonisation rate.

- **With the EU now set to increase its 2030 target over the coming year to at least 55%, this is the time for Ireland to develop a 2030 pathway based on 5 year carbon budgets that is aligned with the science and Ireland’s fair share. As a rich nation with high per capita emissions, Ireland will have to do much more by 2030 and reach net zero emissions before the target date of 2050.**

#### **5. We have a chance to finally get the governance right – expedite it!**

**The ability to bring about the legislative changes with the urgency that they require will necessitate strong and consistent political leadership, as well as the necessary capacity and resources within Departments.**

The Minister, in his 2019 Annual Transition Statement, published on December 10<sup>th</sup>, outlines that the General Scheme of the Climate Action (Amendment) Bill is currently being prepared on the basis of the provisions outlined above (Section 3) with a view to seeking Government approval for the scheme before the end of 2019. It is essential that this allows for the timely publication of the Bill in Quarter 1, 2020, as committed to under the Plan.

**In the Climate Action Plan, the Government stopped short of formally endorsing the JOCCA recommendation of adopting a net zero target for 2050, a target it has endorsed for EU level action. It is time for the State to endorse and enshrine in law a domestic net zero target by 2050 at the very latest, and enshrine in the Act, a higher medium-term target of halving emissions by at least 50% no later than 2030.**

#### **6. Grasp the potential of the EU mandated statutory policy development.**

This month, under the **EU Governance of the Energy Union Regulation**, the Government has an unprecedented opportunity to ratchet up its response to averting climate breakdown, close Ireland’s glaring emissions gap, and ensure that the long-term goal is operationalised into near-term climate action.

- On the **31st of December 2019**, Ireland is required to submit to the European Commission a plan which outlines climate and energy objectives, targets, policies and measures for the

next ten years (called the **National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP), for the period 2021 to 2030.**<sup>6</sup> Member states will have to update their plans in 2023.

- On **1st January 2020**, the Government is required to submit to the European Commission, the pathway Ireland intends to follow over the next thirty years to deliver on its long-term contribution to achieving the objectives of the Paris Agreement. This is called **the Long-term Strategy (LTS).**<sup>7</sup> The LTS aims to set out how to scale up transformational climate action across all sectors of society, and as required under the **EU Governance of the Energy Union Regulation**, must contribute to the Paris Agreement.<sup>8</sup>
- Both the **NECP and the LTS are the main tools for delivering on the EU’s climate and energy targets in accordance with the Paris Agreement. The NECP is required under EU legislation, and the development of Long-term strategies is a legal obligation for all member states. All Parties to the Paris Agreement are obliged to submit mid-century strategies by 2020.**
- Since its publication in June 2019, the Government has repeatedly extolled the Climate Action Plan as enabling Ireland to achieve its 2030 targets, and aligning Ireland with a net zero pathway for 2050. But the Climate Action Plan does not have a statutory footing. **The NECP, unlike the JOCCA Report and Government’s Climate Action Plan, is a statutory requirement. It is in the interest of all political parties and political groupings who engaged in the JOCCA process, to ensure all the recommendations they put forward, including those not reflected in the Climate Action Plan, are now included in the Government’s NECP.**
- Importantly, these requirements will dictate much of Ireland’s climate and energy policy over the next ten years and beyond to 2050, making it essential that the Government now seizes the opportunity to propose and deliver the policies and measures that reflect the scale of political leadership and societal transformation now urgently needed. **Achieving the long**

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<sup>6</sup> This follows two public consultations (as required) in late 2018 and early 2019, and an iterative process between Member States and the European Commission to ensure NECPs meet the EU’s 2030 targets for greenhouse gas emission reductions, renewable energy, and energy efficiency. NECPs will have to include the extent to which they have implemented the [European Commission’s recommendations issued this year](#) on draft NECPs, reasons for non-implementation, and whether the Member States propose to go beyond those recommendations.

<sup>7</sup> The 2015 Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) sets the goal to contain the rise in average global temperatures to well below 2°C (above pre-industrial levels) and to pursue efforts to limit it to 1.5°C. All Parties to the Paris Agreement are required to submit mid-century strategies by 2020.

<sup>8</sup> The LTS must also outline:

sector-specific emission reductions and sink enhancements, incl. electricity, industry, transport, heating and cooling/buildings (residential and tertiary), agriculture, waste, and LULUCF (grasslands, wetlands and forestry).

Expected progress on transition to a low greenhouse gas emission economy (incl. GHG intensity, CO<sub>2</sub> intensity of GDP, related estimates of long-term investment, and strategies for related research, development and innovation).

Impact assessment, including macro-economic and social development, health risks and benefits and environmental protection.

**term goal of net zero emissions as soon as possible will not come about by chance: dedicated focus and planning, and consistent political leadership will be essential.**

**Proposed questions to the Minister:**

**1. Will the Government publish the draft Terms of Reference for the proposed Energy Security and Sustainability review and allow for stakeholder feedback?**

The NECP and LTS compile together climate and energy targets, policies and measures, allowing for policy coherence. To show genuine credibility in efforts to pursue science-based climate mitigation, it is of highest importance that policy coherence across sectors is achieved. **It is crucial that Ireland's energy security going forward is in accordance with the achievement of Ireland's obligations under the Paris Agreement**, and that long-term security of energy supply is not simplistically aligned with natural gas sources and infrastructure. The Government's recent initiative to [commission a review of Ireland's Energy Security and Sustainability](#) is welcomed. In light of the direction this review is likely to give to climate and energy policy, **it is essential that a draft of the Terms of Reference for this review be made public, with a reasonable period of time allowed for interested stakeholders to provide feedback, which must be taken into account in their finalisation.**

**2. Will the Government formally adopt a whole economy net zero target by 2050, at the very latest, for its Long-Term Strategy and within this target, will it set out sectoral emissions reduction pathways to 2050?**

Alignment with the science and its fair share of the global effort will require Ireland to adopt in its Long-Term Strategy, a net zero target as soon as possible and by 2050, at the very latest. This is a much needed long-term goal to ensure Ireland meets the Paris Agreement goal and keeping temperature rise to 1.5°C, but it is essential that the target is reflected in the imminent decisions and actions needed to get us on track to deliver the Paris Agreement.

**3. Will the Government make clear how the Long-Term Strategy will be operationalized in near-term policy processes and measures, including the NECP?**

To limit warming to 1.5°C in line with science and equity, already requires Ireland sustaining CO<sub>2</sub> cuts from energy, cement and land use of above 7% emissions reductions per year, steady and permanent cuts in methane and nitrous oxide, and reducing emissions by over 50% by 2030.<sup>9</sup> Any plan with a 2030 horizon must be developed with a clear picture of the long-term decarbonisation objective. Otherwise, short-term policy measures risk locking-in high carbon energy and infrastructure choices, creating stranded assets and ultimately requiring more

<sup>9</sup> McMullin et al. (2019) says prudent, minimally equitable rate from 2015 would have been 11% per year for IE fair share quota of "well below 2°C". (McMullin et al. 2019 Assessing Negative Carbon Dioxide Emissions from the Perspective of a National 'Fair Share' of the Remaining Global Carbon Budget <http://www.eeng.dcu.ie/~mcmullin/etc/MASGC-McMullin-2019-AAM/MASGC-McMullin-2019-AAM.pdf>)

stringent, faster and costly action at a later stage when the impacts of worsening climate change will be more apparent. **Proper climate policy development therefore needs a clear long-term vision as a first step, followed by ‘back-casting’ from these targets, to ensure that measures and action over the next decade are aligned with the long-term goal.**

The Government must provide a robust process and additional policies for how ambition will be scaled up over the next decade in accordance with the Paris Agreement, including a much higher per annum emissions reduction of at least 7% and a readiness and willingness to accept a higher 2030 target of halving emissions by at least 55%.

**4. Will the Government ensure that the NECP closes the substantial gap between the Climate Action Plan and the recommendations of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action?**

In their report, the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action acknowledged that the measures currently in place in addition to those recommended in their report were not sufficient to meet Ireland’s climate obligations. The Committee emphasised that considerable further work is needed to ensure that Ireland’s ten year and long-term climate strategy is sufficiently adequate to put Ireland on a Paris-aligned decarbonisation pathway. Stop Climate Chaos has consistently argued that if the recommendations of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action were effectively, expeditiously and comprehensively implemented, this would allow a shift in Irish climate policy that would help align Ireland’s climate action framework with the Paris Agreement goals. **See Annex 1 for a number of key policy measures the NECP should include.**

**5. Will the Government commit to a compelling vision for a decarbonised Ireland that ensures fairness, equity and a safe and sustainable future for all?**

Support for long-term climate action in Ireland risks being undermined by a political narrative and response that focuses on notional costs to delay action, potential burden for Irish society, and undermining national development plans. The scale of climate action needed requires a sea-change in thinking and practice, a paradigm-shift in ambition and a commitment to honour the entitlement of coming generations to enjoy a safe and viable future. Government response and the broader framing proposed within the NECP and LTS must be built on a transformative, compelling vision for a low carbon Ireland that is inclusive, fair and socially progressive.

## Annex 1: Closing the Gap between the JOCCA and the NECP

**To accelerate Ireland’s decarbonisation efforts, the NECP needs to, at the very least, incorporate the remaining JOCCA recommendations on climate action not included in the 2019 Climate Action Plan, and include a time-bound pathway for implementation of all policy measures, with actions and accountability for specific recommendations assigned to Departments.** Key policy areas highlighted by the European Commission’s recommendations<sup>10</sup> on Ireland’s draft NECP, addressed by the JOCCA yet absent in the Climate Action Plan include<sup>11</sup>:

- **A coordinated approach to ensure a socially just transition to a climate neutral economy** that goes beyond the development of skills to consider the full range of social and employment impacts (e.g., shifts in sectors/industries and skills impacts, distributional effects and revenue recycling, especially in relation to the transition for carbon-intensive regions). This is essential to facilitating an earlier move away from the burning of peat and coal for electricity generation.
- **Greater investment in retrofitting buildings**, and the inclusion in the NECP of an **updated energy poverty national plan** which includes concrete objectives, as required by the Governance Regulation
- **Immediate engagement between all stakeholders** on developing a plan to align Ireland’s agricultural sector with commitments under the Paris Agreement, and the need for a detailed list of the **main concrete mitigation actions considered for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the agriculture sector**, in addition to an explanation of how the significant projected increase in biomass use for energy will be balanced with land-use policy and justified on environmental grounds.
- **Consideration of the circular economy and biodiversity**, referring to national strategies and action plans, and identifying the benefits and potential trade-offs in terms of climate mitigation and adaptation.
- Measures that address **the energy efficiency of transport**, including incentives for modal shift and sufficient investment in public transport infrastructure.
- The provision for a **national programme of rewetting and restoration of Ireland’s peatlands**.

<sup>10</sup> See: [https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/documents/ie\\_sw\\_d\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/documents/ie_sw_d_en.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> See Stop Climate Chaos’ assessment of the Climate Action Plan, which identified gaps between the JOCCA recommendations and proposals included in the Action Plan: [https://www.stopclimatechaos.ie/assets/files/pdf/will\\_the\\_new\\_climate\\_action\\_plan\\_deliver\\_the\\_revolution\\_the\\_minister\\_promised\\_report\\_july\\_2019.pdf](https://www.stopclimatechaos.ie/assets/files/pdf/will_the_new_climate_action_plan_deliver_the_revolution_the_minister_promised_report_july_2019.pdf)