Opening Statement,
An Taisce,
09-04-19

To:The Clerk of the Joint Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Committee Secretariat, Houses of the Oireachtas Service, Kildare Street, Dublin 2, D02 XR20

Submission on 9th April 2019 to session on the future of the Irish Beef Sector

Sent by email to: afm@oireachtas.ie 5 April 2019

OPENING STATEMENT FROM AN TAISCE

An Taisce welcome the opportunity to address this Joint Oireachtas Committee and thanks the chair and its members for the opportunity to make the following address.

In addressing the converging impact of global warming and the collapse of the natural systems which sustain us, public policy should not be dictated by any sectoral or vested interest. As has been shown by the fossil fuel car industry, it is too often regrettably in the nature of any business lobby to put its own short-term considerations over the public interest. This applies to food production as much as energy, where either denial of climate science or *"greenwashing*" of continued greenhouse gas emissions impact is widely prevalent, including in Ireland.

It should be an overarching consideration that the future of the Irish beef sector needs to address the industry globally whether in Brazil, USA, or Australia, as much as in Ireland. This requires action in meeting the converging challenges of:

1. **a rising global population, with the injustice of 820 million people having inadequate food and facing the worst and most immediate climate impact risk. Meanwhile obesity, food waste and the diseases of affluence rise in the developed world, which the 2015 UN SDGs seek to resolve**
2. **Ensuring that all sectors meet the Paris Agreement target of stabilizing global temperature as near as possible to 1.5 degrees celsius over pre-industrial levels, which includes methane and nitrous oxide emissions. This requires a carbon budget to achieve immediate, deep and accelerating emission cuts;**
3. **A "Just Transition" for those areas economically dependent on high climate impact food or energy production to a sustainable alternative.**

It is our position that, in its stated consideration of the future of the beef sector, the overriding concern of the Joint Oireachtas Committee should be to reconsider Food Wise 2025 to address:

The extent to which the SWOT analysis undertaken in at the time of the report's preparation must be revisited, in light of emerging challenges in 2019 and anticipated challenges in the future.

This of course should seek to meet the aims of this Joint Oireachtas Committee session on the future of the beef sector, the parameters of which are set out below for completeness:

"• The measures that are/should be in place to support the strengths of the beef sector.

• The remedies that are/should be in place to address the weaknesses of the beef sector.

• The strategies that are/should be in place to exploit the opportunities associated with the beef sector.

• The measures that are/should be in place to ensure that the threats associated with the beef sector are mitigated.

• Market development

• Environmental sustainability

• Competitiveness

• Human Capital

• Innovation"

Ultimately this would require a total review of Food Wise 2025 to address the changed circumstances which have arisen since its adoption, namely:

• The 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate and the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2015;

• The recommendation of the Irish Citizens' Assembly in 2017 on climate and the recent Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Change;

• Ireland's exceedance of EU atmospheric air pollution ammonia threshold limits from 2016 for which agriculture is 98% responsible;

• The impact of agriculture on Ireland's continued failure to meet EU Water Framework Directive river and lake water quality targets;

• The 2018 drought which demonstrated the increased exposure of Irish bovine agriculture to climate variability risk, and requirement for fodder import;

• The publication of the EAT-Lancet report on global food sustainability in January 2019;

• The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation Global Livestock Environmental Assessment Model (GLEAM) Report February 2019 assessing livestock emissions.

• The increasing level of legal actions internationally and in Ireland against states, state bodies and corporations failing to take climate action.

Nature loss, water pollution, ammonia pollution and health impacts

In addition to the increasing impact of Irish agriculture on climate, there is also impact on water quality and the natural world. There is a particular issue with regard to Ammonia and its associated adverse air pollution and human health impact as well as being highly damaging to ecosystems in the local receiving environment. Agriculture accounts for 98% of Ireland's atmospheric ammonia emissions. The EPA reported that "Emissions of ammonia have been increasing since 2011 and were above the specified EU emission limit in 2016 for the first time". There are no measures in place to take the necessary corrective measures. Under current policies in Food Wise 2025, emissions will worsen.

UN policy leadership and global science on climate and food

A major 2010 UN report "*Assessing the Environmental Impact of Consumption and Production*" stated that western tastes for diets rich in meat and dairy products are unsustainable and called for a global shift towards a more plant based diet as vital to save the world from hunger, fuel poverty and the worst impacts of climate change

http://www.unep.fr/shared/publications/pdf/dtix1262xpa-priorityproductsandmaterials_report.pdf

This report stated: *"Impacts from agriculture are expected to increase substantially due to population growth increasing consumption of animal products. Unlike fossil fuels, it is difficult to look for alternatives: people have to eat. A substantial reduction of impacts would only be possible with a substantial worldwide diet change, away from animal products."*

Professor Edgar Hertwich, the lead author of the report, said: *"Animal products cause more damage than [producing] construction minerals such as sand or cement, plastics or metals. Biomass and crops for animals are as damaging as [burning] fossil fuels*."

The UN continues to advance this message including most recently in a November 2018 report.

https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/whats-your-burger-more-you-think

There is a major convergence of global scientific research on the impact of animal *agriculture.* A study published by the international journal Nature last year concludes:

> *"Huge reductions in meat-eating are essential to avoid dangerous climate change, according to the most comprehensive analysis yet of the food system's impact on the environment. In western countries, beef consumption needs to fall by 90% and be replaced by five times more beans and pulses".*

https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-018-0594-0

The EAT-Lancet Report 2019

In January this year the Lancet Commission published the EAT-Lancet Report, a global oversight of future food production to reconcile equitable nutrition and healthy diet for a rising population.

The Commission quantitatively describes a universal healthy reference diet: "*based on an increase in consumption of healthy foods (such as vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, and nuts), and a decrease in consumption of unhealthy foods (such as red meat, sugar, and refined grains) that would provide major health benefits, and also increase the likelihood of attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. This is set against the backdrop of defined scientific boundaries that would ensure a safe operating space within six Earth systems, towards sustaining a healthy planet*." The key findings are that:

> "*The dietary shift that is needed requires a dramatic reduction of consumption of unhealthy foods, such as red meat, by at least 50%, with a recommended daily combined intake of 14 g (in a range that suggests total meat consumption of no more than 28 g/day), with variations in the change required according to region. At the same time, an overall increase in consumption of more than 100% is needed for legumes, nuts, fruit, and vegetables, with the changes needed again varying according to region".*

The Commission's considerations was based on meeting the six environmental systems on which food systems and the way we eat have the greatest impact: climate change, biodiversity loss, land-system use, freshwater use, and nitrogen and phosphorus flows. For each of these, the Commission outlines a safe operating system and upper-limit boundaries within which food systems must remain to avoid potential ecological catastrophe.

> "*The human cost of our flawed food systems is that almost 1 billion people are hungry, and almost 2 billion people are eating too much of the wrong food.*

The Global Burden of Disease Study indicates dietary factors as a major contributor to levels of malnutrition, obesity, and overweight—all of which have become more prevalent since the SDGs were adopted—the burden of non-communicable diseases is increasing, and unhealthy diets account for up to 11 million avoidable premature deaths per year."

I would remind committee members that the findings of this report provided for a reference diet. It was NOT prescriptive in nature and only set out a basis for discussion. Despite this, there have been many efforts at home and abroad to discredit the report in its totality.

UN Food and Agriculture Organisation Global Livestock Environmental Assessment Model Report GLEAM

The case is often made Irish agricultural lobbyists that Ireland is a world leader in carbon efficiency, or at least has a production system that it is lower in carbon impact than many other countries.

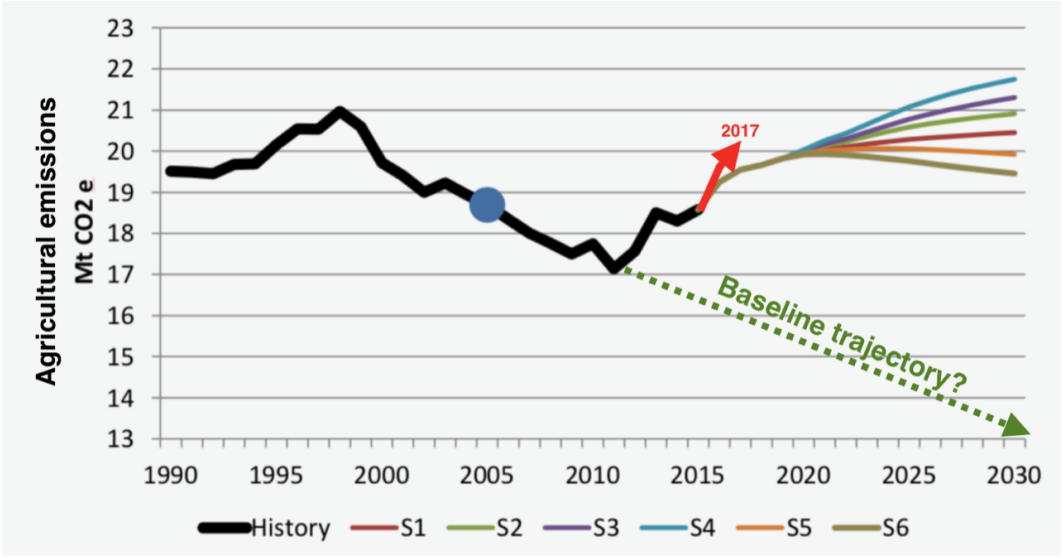
This case was debuked by the publication of the UN FAO GLEAM Report in February of this year. The report, which adopted a methodology examining the full life cycle impact of food production, revealed that Ireland is the most carbon-intensive beef producer in Europe, and ranks as Europe's third highest on emissions from its dairy sector. Commercial interests in these industries continue to rely on older research, which had a much narrower scope, to express their 'green' credentials.

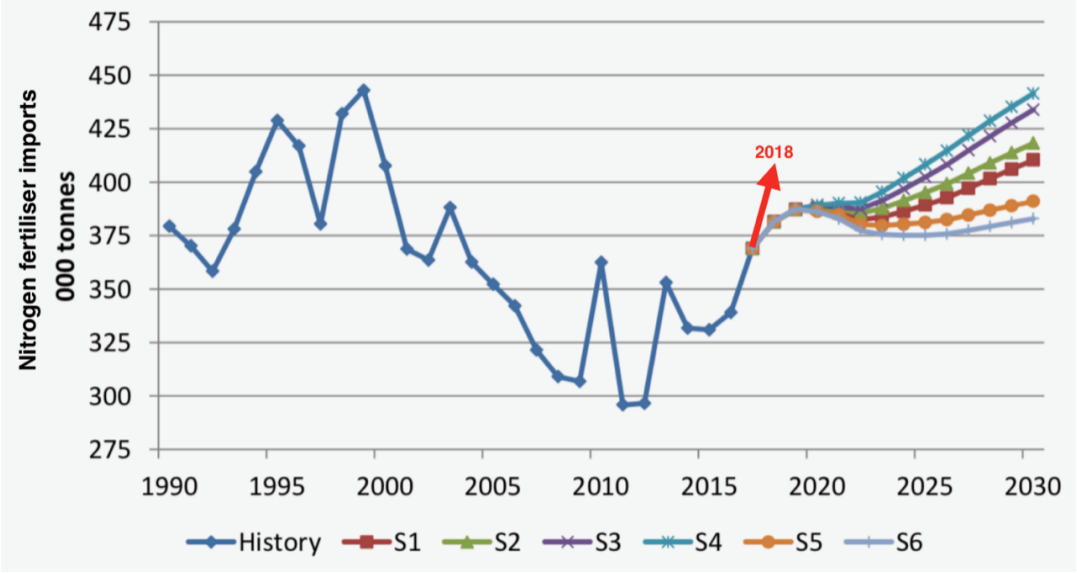
The 2017 Citizens' Assembly on Climate

In 2017, the Citizens' Assembly concluded its consideration of the topic 'How the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling Climate Change'.

There were a total of 13 climate-related recommendations, each voted on separately. Relevant to beef production, 89% of the Members recommended that there should be a tax on greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture. There should be rewards for the farmer for land management that sequesters carbon. And any resulting revenue should be reinvested to support climate friendly agricultural practices. The Irish public is not afraid of forward thinking proposals. Indeed, 80% of the members said they would be willing to pay higher taxes on carbon intensive activities.

Data from Teagasc and concerns raised on Bord Bia Marketing in April 2019





The top graph is 2019 Teagasc supplied modelling of climate emission increase.

Bottom is the base chart from Teagasc showing past and projected Irish imports of nitrogen fertiliser. As with the greenhouse gas emissions reductions which occurred during the 2000 to 2010 period, the reductions in fertiliser use which occurred in fertilizer imports during the 2000s have now been reversed.

As recently as last Thursday 4 April, Teagasc set out a warning on the sustainability claims made for Irish food export promotion" *Greenwashing could backfire on Irish farming* ";

> *"Irish agriculture needs to back up its 'green' image with credible evidence rather than "glamour stories", Teagasc has warned.*

"We've seen problems in other countries where they resort to glamour stories and greenwashing on biodiversity performance - that has major repercussions and backfires very quickly," Teagasc researcher and ecologist John Finn told the Farming Independent.

"In (Bord Bia's) Origin Green we are making very strong claims about sustainable performance and environmental performance that is creating a need for credible demonstration of sustainability - the industry needs credible evidence rather than glamour stories.

"If we are to continue with the sustainability claims that we are a clean, green food producing nation, we need to prove it. Other organizations outside of Ireland will be very quick to pounce on claims that we make."

https://www.independent.ie/business/farming/agri-business/greenwashing-could-backfire-on-farming-37971831.html

The March 2019 Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action report

The JOCCA report acknowledges that Ireland will miss its 2020 emissions reductions targets by a very wide margin, so we have a huge amount of catch-up to achieve our 2030 targets given our starting point. The JOCCA statement: '*The State must ensure that emissions rapidly decrease in line with a national target of net zero emissions by 2050, in line with the IPCC's recent analysis'* is to be strongly welcomed as a reality-based assessment of the challenges ahead.

The report also provides for 5-yearly Carbon Budgets '*consistent with the emissions reductions pathway to 2030 and 2050 targets'.* This too is to be welcomed broadly, as it places emissions reductions beyond the whim of day-to-day politics and instead bakes in measurable rolling targets.

On agriculture, which accounts for a third of Ireland's entire national emissions, and whose emissions are continuing to rise, An Taisce welcomed the JOCCA statement that: '*is a need for a more diversified, resilient, sustainable and equitable model for Irish agriculture'*. The Committee recognises that Irish agriculture has become over-reliant on emissions-intensive beef and dairy production.

The Committee observed that: ***'Ireland cannot meet its international emissions targets without tackling agricultural sector emissions'.*** This, contrary to the views emanating from elsewhere, will not occur as a result of trivial savings made via 'smart farming' initiatives, but will require a root-and-branch review of our agricultural system and focus.

Obviously this in turn will mean that those we elect to protect the national interest must stand up to the powerful agricultural industrial lobbyists, which do not represent the interests of ordinary farm families, many of whom are only surviving due to CAP payments. Despite the proposals from Teagasc last year on theoretical emission

abatement options, the only a reduction in the national herd to a sustainable level will achieve the agricultural emissions reductions necessary that Ireland has committed to by full implementation of the Paris agreement.

No doubt facile economic arguments will have been made in submissions to this Joint Committee. I have no doubt that this plays on rural TDs minds given how often this case is made. It is worth noting however, that a Parliamentary Budget Office briefing paper from last year, titled An Overview of the Common Agricultural Policy, highlighted the unsustainable nature of beef farming in Ireland. Income dependency on CAP payments ran at between 96% and 114% of family farm incomes. Think about that for a moment. Family farms are having to use the CAP payments to subsidise the running costs on non-dairy cattle farms.

Change is coming, and An Taisce hopes that influential bodies, such as this committee, can help lead on the change that is needed in the sectors most vulnerable to such changes.

PLANNING FOR ALTERNATIVES

The primary drivers for Ireland's increasing agriculture emissions are the rapidly increasing use of fossil-fuel derived nitrogen fertiliser which boosts grass growth,, increasing numbers of cattle and ever more concentrate feed per head. Climate action requires limits on production or on total fertiliser and feed usage; otherwise efficiency gains, if any, will have no effect. The Teagasc Abatement report last year made this clear: 'any reductions attributable to improved emissions intensity of produce would be partly or fully negated due to increases in total animal numbers and could even result in an increase of national GHGs.

The shocking findings published in March 2019 in the journal 'Biological Conservation' underscore that global insect populations are collapsing, with intensive agriculture and the heavy use of pesticides being among the main drivers of this ecological calamity. Plant-based agriculture needs to address this as much as animal-based.

The Food Wise 2025 strategy to increase beef and dairy exports is based on sustaining consumption levels in the EU and USA and seeking new markets for a western diet for a target market of the more affluent population of developing countries. The effect of this is to sustain and increase global dependency chains which are incompatible with climate action. Furthermore the needs of the global poor are not being met.

The alternative strategy required whether it be for the USA, South America or Ireland is for diverting subsidies away from ruminant farming and production to plant-based food compatible with global climate, biodiversity loss and other planetary boundaries.

The focus on the future of the Irish family farm should now be on the JOCCA recommendation on the need for a ”*more diversified, resilient, sustainable and equitable model for Irish agriculture.’*

The basis of this is a transition toward low-input land-use including tillage, horticulture, agroforestry, permanent woodland as well as energy. This option would offer farmers a positive and genuinely “climate-smart” future, and would likely increase rural employment.

Ireland is already facing increasing impacts from a warming world as the 2018 drought and resulting animal fodder crisis has shown. Vegetable crops were also seriously affected.

The EAT-Lancet report sets out the diversified range of plant-based food crops for which rapid acceleration of cultivation is required in Ireland. It is equally necessary to ensure that food crops be adaptable and suitable for the Irish climate and protect natural systems. Ireland has particular climate suitable potential for cob or hazel nuts, green and root vegetables, high vitamin content berries and oat milk production. Acceleration of growing of vegetables, beans and pulses and vegetable and plant oils should be a national priority integrated with appropriate farm research and support measures. These need to be the basis of the current renegotiation of the CAP at EU level and in national implementation. Apart from food production there is also potential for crops to sequester carbon in building insulation and construction materials.

We need to prioritise national food security and it is scarcely believable that Ireland, in the 21st century, could be a net food energy importer. But that is the reality of the agricultural system that has developed at the behest of big commercial interests. It may shock committee members to know that in 2017 Ireland imported 72,000 tonnes of potatoes, 47,000 tonnes of onions, 29,000 tonnes of tomatoes, 23,000 tonnes of cabbage and 15,000 tonnes of lettuce in 2017. Surely self sufficiency in these basic foodstuffs should be a goal worth setting? The committee should also note that we imported 3 million tonnes of animal feed in 2017, and a further 4 million tonnes last year. Clearly what we are doing now is anything but sustainable. We need to grow more food and much less grass.

An Taisce would be pleased to be part of the engagement and action needed across all levels of our society and economy in meeting the challenges of the century ahead. A rural economy transitioning to the food and energy production needed to maintain a climatically stable and living planet is the foundation of this. The opportunity lies with Ireland as a developed country to take global leadership in climate action and sustainable food production, and for the Irish family farm to be at the heart of that through co-operative action.

NOTE *: References for the documents referred to in this statement are contained in the main consultation submission made to the Committee. Where additional documents are cited relevant internet accessible references are given.*