

Opening Speech for Chair of Citizens' Assembly for Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action

Wednesday, 05 September, 2018 at 11 am

Introduction

Good morning everyone.

May I begin by expressing my gratitude to the Chair of the Committee, Deputy Hildegard Naughten, and the members of the Committee for your invitation to address you here today as you embark on your important work. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank the Clerk of the Committee, Mr Ted McEnery, for his assistance in making the necessary preparations for today's meeting.

I am joined here this morning by the (now former) deputy secretary of the Assembly, Ms Gráinne Hynes.

In July 2016 the Citizens' Assembly was established and received its mandate from a resolution of the Houses of the Oireachtas and, just as it was with the topic of the Eighth Amendment, it is very appropriate that I appear before you to discuss the Assembly's deliberations on '*How the State Can Make Ireland a leader in Tackling Climate Change*'.

In these introductory remarks I aim to provide the members of the Committee with a clear account of the processes underpinning the work of the Assembly, how we approached this topic, structured our work programme and formulated the recommendations contained in the Report submitted to the Houses of the Oireachtas on 18 April 2018 (the Report), and which you have been tasked with considering how they might be progressed.

In appearing before you today I am anxious to provide you with any assistance you need as you commence your role.

Background to work of the Citizens' Assembly

I was appointed Chair of the Assembly on 29 July 2016 and work began on the set-up of the Assembly in August 2016.

Following public tendering processes, suppliers were selected to provide the necessary services required to carry out the logistical arrangements for an exercise such as the Assembly.

The Oireachtas Resolution stipulated that the membership of the Assembly would be made up of a chairperson appointment by the Government and 99 citizens entitled to vote at a referendum, randomly selected so as to be broadly representative of Irish society. The Members were chosen at random to represent the views of the people of Ireland, and to be broadly representative of society as reflected in the Census, including age, gender, social class, regional spread and such like. Red C Research and Marketing Ltd (Red C) was contracted to provide this representative sample of 99 Members and substitute Members.

A representative sample frame was developed by Red C. Detailed demographic quotas were set to ensure the sample was representative of all adults based on both Census 2011 and the Quarterly National Household Survey population estimates. This is the standard methodology used for establishing a geographical spread in a national sample.

This process yielded a varied cohort of citizens, young and old, who travelled from all corners of the country to attend each meeting. I am satisfied that the method used delivered a representative sample of modern Irish society, within the confines of what is possible with a sample size of 99 as stipulated by the Oireachtas Resolution and that the Members who participated in the deliberations on this topic were properly selected.

Overview of the Assembly's Consideration of the Topic

It was originally intended that climate change would be the final topic that the Assembly would consider, as it was listed last in the resolution approving the Assembly's establishment. The Members' interest in the topic was, however, clearly demonstrated when, during a private session at the January 2017 meeting, it was suggested and, in turn, agreed by a majority vote of the full membership to bring forward its consideration and examine it as the Assembly's third topic.

We originally expected that consideration of this topic would be done over a single weekend. It quickly became apparent that this was not feasible if the Members were to become sufficiently informed on the subject matter in order to make meaningful

recommendations. Taking account of proposals from the Members, the challenges faced in attempting to cover the topic adequately in one weekend and the advice of a newly appointed Expert Advisory Group, it was agreed that two weekends would, in fact, be required.

Development of the Work Programme

It was implicit in the mandate which the Assembly received in the Oireachtas Resolution, that climate change was real, happening and must be tackled. The deliberations of the Assembly, therefore, focussed on how the State could best meet that challenge.

In constructing the work programme on this topic over the two weekends in September/October 2017 and the beginning of November 2017, I regarded it as crucial that we consider how Ireland could be made a leader in this area and indeed, as I said at that time, “put Ireland in the vanguard in relation to action on climate change”.

As with the other topics the Assembly has already considered, this topic was incredibly broad, wide-ranging and it affects us all in one way or another. It has previously been the subject of a number of Government policy documents, strategies and reviews.

Given the relatively recent establishment of the National Dialogue on Climate Action by Government, and the publication of the National Mitigation Plan and then [draft] National Adaption Framework by the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, Mr Denis Naughton, T.D., I believe that the timing of the Citizen’s Assembly deliberations on this topic was particularly opportune. In fact, as an example of public service collaboration, it was possible for the Assembly to dovetail with the work simultaneously being carried out by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment in the form of providing feedback on how the National Dialogue on Climate Action can best engage with a wider reach of citizens on this very important topic.

During the final weekend on the previous topic, *How we best respond to the Challenges and Opportunities of an Ageing Population*, in July 2017, the Members were asked what they wanted to see included on the work programme of the Assembly’s discussions on climate change. As such, the views of the Members were an important part of the work programme development.

I was assisted in devising a comprehensive and coherent work programme by the Secretariat and the Expert Advisory Group which was established pursuant to the Oireachtas Resolution and the membership of which is set out in paragraph 180 of the Report. The Expert Advisory Group had an integral role in advising me on the formation of a work programme and the selection of potential speakers and I am very grateful for the invaluable assistance which I and the Secretariat received from it.

A key part of our work was also submissions from the public – and we received just over 1,200 on this topic. 1,185 of these were published. The agenda and work programme was to a large extent informed by the submissions received. The Secretariat also produced a ‘Signpost Document’ which identified, in order of frequency, the key issues/topics/themes which had been presented in the submissions.

Taking account of the consultations with the Members, the issues which arose through the submissions process, and discussions and advice from the Expert Advisory Group, it was agreed that the focus of the first weekend on this topic would be climate science, the impacts of climate change and energy policy. On the second weekend it was agreed that the focus would be on the areas of transport and agriculture policy. These were the areas that came through most frequently in the submissions received.

On the first weekend at the end of September, the Assembly heard presentations on the science of climate change, current efforts being made nationally and internationally to tackle climate change, the impact of climate change and the status of the climate in Ireland. Members also heard about the National Mitigation Plan and the National Dialogue on Climate Action. This was followed up with an examination of the energy sector – specifically heat and power. Members heard what Ireland would look like as a leader in climate change in these areas and also listened to first hand examples of leadership in communities and workplaces in Ireland.

On the second weekend, in November, the Members focused their attention on the transport and agriculture sectors and examined climate change under current policy for each. This was followed in both cases by an examination of what policy might look like if Ireland was a leader in tackling climate change. The Members also heard international perspectives on the issue, including both the Danish and Scottish experiences. On Saturday afternoon, 4 November, the Members heard first hand

examples of leadership in agriculture, food and land use, which was then followed by a panel discussion and a questions and answers session.

Particularly throughout this second weekend, guidance was given on how to surmount what is within our control, on both a national and individual level, and could make Ireland a global exemplar. I feel this material really resonated with the Members and focused their minds to feasible ways of addressing this issue that would be likely to have the support of the public and, in turn, would allow us to not only meet our existing international and European obligations but make Ireland a leader for other nations in doing so.

As with previous topics, in considering the topic of climate change, the Members of the Assembly once again had the benefit of an array of expertise and perspectives. A total of 15 experts and 6 individuals who shared their personal experience were heard from and in total the Assembly conducted over 26 hours of listening, discussion and deliberation. All of the public proceedings were live-streamed and the recordings are available to view back on the Assembly's YouTube channel. Also, all of the papers and presentations made to Members were uploaded on the website as they were delivered.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognise the impact the speakers made to our consideration of the topic. The speakers were chosen because of their expertise in their respective fields. Many travelled to join us and I am most grateful to them for making the effort to be with us and assist with our deliberations. The quality and high standard of the material put before the Assembly is self-evident. All of that material is available in Appendix F of the Report and is available on the Assembly website. Without the speakers imparting this scientific, and often complicated, information in a manner which was accessible and easily understood, the Members would not have been in a position to make meaningful contributions to the Ballot Paper and, in turn, to produce such insightful recommendations as they did.

Ballot Paper

The Citizens' Assembly was an exercise in deliberative democracy whereby the reach of the Members' involvement encompassed, not only the development of the work programme, but also the construction of a Ballot Paper and the formulation of the recommendations. I was at all times very conscious of the Members' role here and we

took the necessary steps to ensure the Ballot Paper development and design was very much Member-led.

The manner in which recommendations should be made was provided in the resolution approving establishment of the Assembly, which stated that all matters before the Assembly would be determined by a majority of the Members present and voting, other than the Chairperson who would have a casting vote in the case of an equality of votes.

The activity on the Sunday of the second weekend (5 November, 2017) comprised the important steps that would eventually lead to the recommendations of the Assembly, namely:

- agreeing on the issues to be included in a ballot;
- agreeing on the precise wording; and
- voting.

As you will have seen in the Report, independent oversight of the voting process took place by the retired returning officer for County Dublin, Mr John Fitzpatrick, and his team.

At the end of the weekend of our first meeting on the topic, Members were invited to make comments and suggestions on what they might like to see on a draft Ballot Paper. All this information was collated by the Secretariat and preparation of a draft Ballot Paper was led by me, as Chair, along with the Secretariat and Expert Advisory Group. The Members took ownership of the ballot and the preliminary draft was first presented to the Steering Group on 19 October 2017. This led to a revision and a second preliminary ballot presented to them on 26 October. It was then presented to the full membership of the Assembly in advance of the November meeting and again feedback was obtained from Members and at the roundtable discussions at the November meeting.

Following the Assembly meeting on Saturday, 4 November, a revised Ballot Paper was prepared and there was further discussion and refinement of the Ballot Paper on Sunday, 5 November, before a final Ballot Paper was prepared and agreed.

Voted Recommendations

The final Ballot Paper had four sections, namely:

- A. Putting climate change consideration at the centre of policy-making (questions 1-4)
- B. Energy policy (questions 5-7)
- C. Transport policy (questions 8-10)
- D. Agriculture and land use policy (questions 11-13)

And as you will see from the Report, the Assembly made 13 recommendations, all by majority vote. In particular, it is worth noting the level of support for each of the recommendations from the Members – the vast majority had unanimous or near unanimous support.

In the interest of time and brevity, I do not propose to re-state each of the 13 voted recommendations here today, as the Committee has been tasked with dealing with the recommendations as set out in the Report. For the record of the Committee and for the ease of the members of the Committee and the media covering these proceedings, I have attached the list of recommendations to the end of my address here today (Appendix 1).

Ancillary Recommendations

However, I do think it is worth drawing the attention of the Committee to the ancillary recommendations of the Assembly. As was the case with the Eighth Amendment, the Members indicated that they wished to express other views and recommendations on the topic beyond what they were able to explicitly express on the Ballot Paper.

These four ancillary recommendations, although not voted on, represent the greatest consensus after the Members completed a written reflective exercise. Again these ancillary recommendations are listed at the end of my address (Appendix 1), but, in summary, they emphasise: providing a positive information campaign to the public on the benefits of acting on climate change, rather than the negatives of failing to act; taking steps to reduce the levels of packaging and, particularly plastic packaging, including a deposit scheme on plastic bottles; acknowledgement that the agriculture sector will require ongoing support to transition to lower greenhouse gas emissions; and that all new buildings should have a zero or low carbon footprint.

In the interests of transparency, the Report provides the full verbatim text of these comments from the Members in the reflective exercises and this text is included as Appendix B of the Report.

Conclusion

I believe that the Assembly's recommendations on this, and the other four topics it considered, were built upon the robust process applied to consideration of the topic.

As I said earlier, it was implicit in the mandate in the Oireachtas resolution that climate change was real, happening and must be tackled. As with other topics considered by the Assembly, some of the recommendations and results on this topic caused surprise in some sections of Irish society – but all I can say on the matter is that each Member of the Assembly had engaged in a thorough and rational thought process before they stepped up to the ballot box.

I would also like to make the point that, at all times, the Members were aware that innovation and progress in one area can have consequences in other areas, such as competitiveness. In making their recommendations, the Members were cognisant of the need for balance to be struck between these competing interests.

The voted recommendations are underpinned by expert evidence and evidence of personal experiences and by deliberations across over 26 hours of active participation by the Members, each of whom had also engaged in countless hours of preparatory work, reading papers and submissions, not to mention the weeks of work preparing for the Assembly deliberations.

All of that contributed to why we are here today.

As I said in the Report, I very much hope that the work of, and recommendations made by the Citizens' Assembly, can continue to contribute to the wider public engagement and national discourse on the issue. Our citizen Members have shown that, when given the opportunity to reflect on and consider an issue that requires societal change, they can produce clear recommendations. It is now a matter for you as a Committee, to consider the merits of each of the 17 recommendations, 13 voted and four ancillary, and how they can be implemented and form part of the policy response on climate action. I note that as part of the Committee's terms of reference you will specifically consider how the Assembly's recommendations might inform further implementation of the National Mitigation Plan and the development of Ireland's draft Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan. I believe that in some ways the Assembly's role of formulating recommendations was less difficult than the one that awaits the

Committee, as the real challenge in respect of climate change has always been implementation in the pursuit of achieving real and tangible results.

I would encourage each member of the Committee, the wider Oireachtas membership and the public with an interest in this topic to review the footage of the two weekends we spent on this topic, which is available on the Assembly's YouTube channel. There you will see the diligence of our Members, the engagement they had on this topic, the probing questions they asked of experts, and the deliberative way they came to their conclusions. And I wish to take this opportunity today to thank them for their work – the commitment that they gave to this and the other topics considered by the Assembly is not always understood or sufficiently acknowledged.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish the Committee well with your work ahead and to say that, in so far as is practical given that the Citizens' Assembly has now been wound down, both I and the (former) Secretariat will endeavour to be of any assistance required as you continue your work.

Finally, I look forward to engaging with you during this session on the work carried out by the Assembly on this topic.

///ENDS

APPENDIX 1:

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON 'HOW THE STATE CAN MAKE IRELAND A LEADER IN TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE':

The Assembly made the following 13 recommendations (R1 to R13) in each case by a majority, as set out, of the Members who voted in a valid poll:

R1: 97% of the Members recommended that to ensure climate change is at the centre of policy-making in Ireland, as a matter of urgency a new or existing independent body should be resourced appropriately, operate in an open and transparent manner, and be given a broad range of new functions and powers in legislation to urgently address climate change, the question voted on outlining that such functions and powers should include, but not be limited to, those outlined below:

- To examine any legislative proposals, it considers relevant to its functions and to report publicly its views on any implications in relation to climate change; the relevant Minister must respond publicly to the views expressed in a report prior to the progress of the legislative proposal;
- To propose ambitious 5 year national and sectoral targets for emissions reductions to be implemented by the State, with regular review and reporting cycles;
- To pursue the State in legal proceedings to ensure that the State lives up to its legal obligations relating to climate change.

R2: 100% of the Members recommended that the State should take a leadership role in addressing climate change through mitigation measures, including, for example, retrofitting public buildings, having low carbon public vehicles, renewable generation on public buildings and through adaptation measures including, for example, increasing the resilience of public land and infrastructure.

R3: 80% of the Members said they would be willing to pay higher taxes on carbon intensive activities, subject to the following qualifications outlined in the question voted on:

- Any increase in revenue would be only spent on measures that directly aid the transition to a low carbon and climate resilient Ireland: including, for example, making solar panels more cheaply and easily available, retrofitting homes and businesses, flood defences, developing infrastructure for electric vehicles;
- An increase in the taxation does not have to be paid by the poorest households (the 400,000 households currently in receipt of fuel allowance).
- It is envisaged that these taxes build year-on-year.

R4: 96% of the Members recommended that the State should undertake a comprehensive assessment of the vulnerability of all critical infrastructure (including energy, transport, built environment, water and communications) with a view to building resilience to ongoing climate change and extreme weather events. The outcome of this assessment should be implemented. Recognising the significant costs that the State would bear in the event of failure of critical infrastructure, spending on infrastructure should be prioritised to take account of this.

R5: 99% of the Members recommended that the State should enable, through legislation, the selling back into the grid of electricity from micro-generation by private citizens (for example energy from solar panels or wind turbines on people's homes or land) at a price which is at least equivalent to the wholesale price.

R6: 100% of the Members recommended that the State should act to ensure the greatest possible levels of community ownership in all future renewable energy projects by encouraging communities to develop their own projects and by requiring that developer-led projects make share offers to communities to encourage greater local involvement and ownership.

R7: 97% of the Members recommended that the State should end all subsidies for peat extraction and instead spend that money on peat bog restoration and making proper provision for the protection of the rights of the workers impacted [R7(a)], with the majority of the valid poll (61%) recommending that the State should end all subsidies on a phased basis over 5 years, rather than immediately [R7(b)].

R8: 93% of the Members recommended that the number of bus lanes, cycling lanes and park and ride facilities should be greatly increased in the next five years, and much greater priority should be given to these modes over private car use.

R9: 96% of the Members recommended that the State should immediately take the following steps to support the transition to electric vehicles:

- Develop an expanded national network of charging points;
- Introduce a range of additional incentives, particularly aimed at rural communities, to encourage motorists towards electric vehicle ownership in the short term. Such measures should include, but not be limited to, targeted help-to-buy schemes, reductions in motor tax for electric vehicles and lower or free motorway tolls.
- Measures should then be introduced to progressively disincentivise the purchase of new carbon intensive vehicles such as year-on-year increases in taxes on petrol and diesel, motor tax and purchase taxes for petrol and diesel vehicles.

R10: 92% of the Members recommended that the State should prioritise the expansion of public transport spending over new road infrastructure spending at a ratio of no less than 2-to-1 to facilitate the broader availability and uptake of public transport options with attention to rural areas.

R11: 89% of the Members recommended that there should be a tax on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from agriculture. There should be rewards for the farmer for land management that sequesters carbon. Any resulting revenue should be reinvested to support climate friendly agricultural practices.

R12: 93% of the Members recommended the State should introduce a standard form of mandatory measurement and reporting of food waste at every level of the food distribution and supply chain, with the objective of reducing food waste in the future.

R13: 99 % of the Members recommended that the State should review, and revise supports for land use diversification with attention to supports for planting forests and encouraging organic farming.

ANCILLARY RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE GREATEST CONSENSUS FOLLOWING THE MEMBERS VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION IN A REFLECTIVE EXERCISE

The following four ancillary recommendations (AR1-AR4) were made:

AR1: Greater emphasis should be placed on providing positive information to the public which encourages people to make changes to the aspects of their behaviour which impacts on climate change. Such information should be targeted at all age groups using a wide variety of formats. The information provided should be focussed on highlighting the economic, social, health and other benefits of taking action rather than focussing on the negatives associated with a failure to act.

AR2: Steps should be taken to reduce packaging, particularly plastic packaging, and resulting waste. Suggestions for such steps include the eradication of single use plastics particularly in supermarkets and the imposition of penalties for failure to comply and the introduction of a deposit scheme on plastic bottles.

AR3: The agriculture sector in Ireland requires ongoing support to make a transition towards models of production which emit lower Green House Gases. Cognisance must be taken of the impact which the sector has on the economy, particularly the rural economy.

AR4: All new buildings should have a zero or low carbon footprint and planning permission should only be provided for new builds which comply with these requirements. The government should provide incentives to retrofit homes to achieve better energy efficiency ratings.