

## **Joint Committee on Climate Action**

**Secretary General, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine**

**Wednesday 7 November 2018**

### **Opening Address**

I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to address members, and to highlight the ongoing work on climate action in the agri-food sector.

The sector is a critically important part of the Irish economy. It accounted for 174,000 jobs, or almost 8% of employment in 2017. Many of these jobs are in rural areas. In Food Wise 2025, the sector outlined a vision for its development that involved the creation of 23,000 jobs and an increase in the value of exports to €19 billion by 2025.

That vision recognised the critical importance of environmental sustainability, giving it equal billing with its developmental objectives, and recommended a range of environmental actions. Against that background, the department and its agencies have been engaged in environmental action for some considerable time, for example through the Afforestation and Rural Development Programmes. We have also recognised that positive environmental credentials can be an important element in our international marketing strategy.

Under the Paris Agreement, Europe has proposed an ambitious reduction of 40% in emissions by 2030. Every Member State and every sector will need to play its part. Agriculture contributes 32.3% of Ireland's overall emissions. This is not surprising given the profile of Ireland's economy and the importance of agriculture.

Even in a successfully de-carbonised Ireland, agriculture emissions as a percentage of the total will still be significant. It must also be recorded that in Ireland, our food production systems provide for some of the lowest carbon footprint profiles across the EU on a per unit basis, as reported by the EU Joint Research Centre (JRC) . The lowest emissions per KG of livestock product are created by extensive temperate grassland systems like Ireland's.

Unlike some other sectors, there are no one-off technological fixes that can be applied to the agriculture sector. Mitigation requires the sustained application of improved management practices over time by farmers.

Bearing all of this in mind, the National Mitigation Plan refers to a long term vision for the agriculture, forestry and land use sectors. This is based on :

*"an approach to carbon neutrality in the agriculture and land use sector, including forestry, that does not compromise capacity for sustainable food production".*

This is entirely consistent with the principles laid down by the EU Council conclusions of October 2014. These provide as follows:

*"the multiple objectives of the agriculture and land use sector , with their lower mitigation potential, should be acknowledged, as well as the need to ensure coherence between the EU's food security policy and climate change objectives".*

While Agriculture is contributing to emissions, it is also part of the solution. There are three strands to the Department's approach to this:

- **Abatement** : reducing emissions of methane, nitrous oxide and carbon dioxide from the agriculture sector in so far as it is possible;

- **Sequestration:** increasing carbon sequestration through forests and land use;
- **Displacement and substitution:** displacing fossil fuel and energy intensive materials with renewable energy sources.

From a Departmental point of view we are working with stakeholders and state agencies on all three strands of this approach. I will be happy to brief the Committee on what we are doing under each of these headings, including our investment in efficiency through actions such as BDGP and the new BEEP scheme, TAMS investments in areas such as low emission slurry technology and work by both Teagasc and Bord Bia, through research, advisory services and carbon audits.

The Committee has been briefed previously on current compliance with the 2030 targets. From that analysis, and based on a no policy change scenario, the gap to target in the 2021-2030 period for the non-ETS sector is in the region of 90 plus mega tonnes. Based on flexibilities afforded Ireland in the Effort Sharing Regulation, the agriculture and land use sector, including afforestation, will contribute approximately 26.8 mega tonnes (28%) towards closing that gap. This flexibility was provided to Ireland specifically in recognition of its large agriculture sector and its relatively low mitigation potential.

In addition to that contribution, the latest research from Teagasc has identified significant additional abatement potential from the agriculture sector. Agriculture can also make contribute to meeting renewable energy targets. These are potentially major contributions.

This mitigation effort comes at a cost. If we are to achieve the ambition the sector it is important that we continue to incentivise positive climate action, through our afforestation programme and through a well funded and

appropriately configured Common Agricultural Policy. The Department is at present engaged in a negotiation on Commission proposals for the post 2020 CAP. These require 40% of the budget to be directed at climate change and environmental measures. This approach aligns well with the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly, which recommended that farmers be rewarded for good environmental practices.

The Department and its Agencies recognise the important contribution that stakeholders have to make, and not just farmers, but farm bodies, the education and advisory services and industry too.

We will only make real progress if bring all the various actors along with us. This will require us to configure public policy to assist farmers in their efforts, but also to recognise the strong synergies between those efforts and economic efficiency, and our positioning in the international market place as a source of high quality and sustainable food.

The Department held a Sustainability Dialogue during the summer which was attended by a broad group of stakeholders where we had good engagement and positivity around what the future requirements will be. There was a real sense of collaboration on the day. We will continue to work at building this consensus around the need for agriculture sector to make a positive contribution to the climate change debate.

I am happy to take any questions the members of the Committee may have.