

Joint Committee on Climate Action – Opening statement by the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine.

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 Department would also like to welcome the Special report on land published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on the 8th August 2019. This report confirms that our strategies to reduce emissions from our agri-food sector are on the correct path. This is the second in a series of Special Reports to be produced by the IPCC in this 6th assessment cycle, following last year's release of the Special Report on *Global Warming of 1.5°C*, which adds detailed information on land related issues and a third related to *the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate* was published on 25th September 2019.

This report highlighted that the global food system contributes about 21-37% of human generated GHG emissions while on the other hand, the land biosphere acts as a sink for 30% of human generated CO₂ emissions through vegetation and soils. The problem is that this land sink is vulnerable to climate change impacts as well as other environmental and human pressures. Furthermore, the report stressed that food production systems are increasingly vulnerable to climate change. Risks related to food security are greater in pathways with lower income, increased food demand, increased food prices resulting from competition for land, more limited trade, and other challenges to adaptation.

The Special Report on Climate Change and Land enforces the call for urgent adoption of mitigation and adaptation actions globally, including sustainable land-related strategies. The report demonstrates the impacts, vulnerabilities and risks of further global warming to our societies and natural systems. The report also highlights that balanced diets, featuring plant-based foods, such as those based on coarse grains, legumes, fruits and vegetables, nuts and seeds, and animal-sourced food produced in resilient, sustainable and low-GHG emission systems, present major opportunities for adaptation and mitigation while generating significant co-benefits in terms of human health. The message is clear, with food production causing major global environmental risks, sustainable food production should; use no additional land, safeguard biodiversity, protect water quality, reduce fertiliser pollutants, produce zero carbon dioxide emissions and cause no further increase in methane and nitrous oxide emissions.

Climate change is impacting food security all over the world with food systems already coming under different pressures while having adverse effects on associated populations. We have seen this in Ireland with recent weather extremes showing our own food system's vulnerabilities.

This conclusion by the IPCC poses a major challenge for the sector but simultaneously, an opportunity for Irish agri-food sector as our production system is recognised by international independent analysis as having one of the lowest carbon-footprints in the EU.

- The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) has recognised the efficiency of our temperate grassland-based production system.
- Evidence of this is further reflected in the EU Joint Research Centre Report (2010) which illustrated that while intensive dairy systems create less methane and nitrous oxide emissions than extensive ones, this is countered by higher emissions from land use and land use change. This report found that Ireland is the most carbon efficient producer in the EU per unit of dairy production, and the 5th most carbon efficient producer of beef per kg.

We are therefore in a good starting place, having highly efficient farmers coupled with a well developed research and advisory capacity and global recognition of Origin Green objectives. However it is equally clear that we need to do more to address these significant challenges. In this, the requirement is not alone regulatory but importantly, the market demands it of us. The consumer of tomorrow is clearly asking for verifiable sustainability credentials.

In June this year, the All-of-Government Climate Action Plan was published which sets out over 180 actions to meet Ireland's EU targets for 2030, namely, a 30% reduction on GHG emissions based on 2005 levels. This all of Government Plan for Climate Action has set an agricultural sectoral target to reduce emissions from 20.2 Mt CO₂eq in 2017 to between 17.5 and 19 Mt CO₂eq by 2030, a reduction of approximately 10-15%. Furthermore, this plan requires agriculture to enhance CO₂ removals from the landscape by at least 26.8 Mt CO₂eq whilst also contributing to the development of sustainable decarbonised energy systems. The combination of both of these commitments sets our ambitions in line with the climate footprint of the sector. This will require full implementation of the actions set out in the Teagasc report 'An Analysis of Abatement Potential of Greenhouse Gas Emissions in Irish Agriculture 2021-2030'¹ (also known as the 'MACC curve') coupled with increased afforestation rates and the appropriate management of a significant area of farmed peatland.

These actions are ambitious and challenging for the sector and require early and extensive adoption of mitigation measures particularly focussing on nitrogen use efficiency and animal breeding technologies. DAFM will shortly launch a 'roadmap' consultation process as to how the sector will transition and achieve its CO₂eq reduction targets over the next decade.

¹ <https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/publications/2018/An-Analysis-of-Abatement-Potential-of-Greenhouse-Gas-Emissions-in-Irish-Agriculture-2021-2030.pdf>

The IPPC report outlines that an overall focus on sustainability coupled with early action offers the best chance to tackle climate change. This underlines the importance of the work of the Climate Action plan and Ireland's next Agri-Food Strategy to 2030. As we speak to you today, the Department is conducting a public engagement with over 400 attendees on developing its next Strategic strategy to 2030 with economically viable, sustainable production at the heart of this process. This strategy will be instrumental in providing a framework for the sustainable growth of the sector, and as with all strategic plans, it must evolve and respond to rapidly changing circumstances.

In addition, the Department has commenced the process of developing its Strategic Plan for the next Common Agricultural Policy and climate delivery will be a key component in this. However, the Common Agriculture Policy and strengthened regulation won't be enough to do everything so industry will need to step up and collaborate to drive innovation and adoption of best practice to ensure that agriculture is playing its part.

We have commenced this journey already with the Nitrates Derogation Review 2019 which recommended tighter measures aimed at further strengthening the protection of water and attaining optimum soil fertility that is consistent with both efficient agricultural production and effective water and air quality and delivery of climate ambitions. The greater focus on improving nitrogen-use efficiencies on intensive farms will provide additional protection of the environment.

While acknowledging that the agriculture sector produces emissions, the sector should also be seen as part of the solution to our transition to a low-carbon, climate-resilient economy and society. Considerable opportunities exist within the Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use sector to address climate change while providing many co-benefits to society. Unlike other sectors there are no one-off technological fixes that can be applied. Mitigation requires the sustained application of improved management practices over time by farmers. Some land-use mitigation responses such as the conservation of peatlands, wetlands and forests have relatively immediate impacts. Others such as afforestation and restoration of high-carbon soils will take more time to deliver.

As part of a special allocation of €3 million to fund additional pilot projects aimed specifically at climate measures in agriculture, a call for a new pilot European Innovation Partnership project on reduced management of farmed peat-land will be announced in due course. This is designed to increase carbon sequestration and contribute to meeting our commitments as part of the Government Climate Action Plan. It will also enhance the protection of bio-diversity and water quality and provide a template for action in advance of Ireland's next Common Agriculture Policy.

The latest research from Teagasc has identified significant additional abatement potential from the agriculture sector. Agriculture can potentially make major contributions to meeting renewable energy

targets, although this mitigation effort comes at a cost. If we are to achieve the ambitions of 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.

We have already been doing a lot with the current CAP supporting farmers to deliver environmental dividends through Agri-environment schemes and support for efficient capital investment. Currently we are operating several schemes incorporating standards which ensure the sustainable use of land, the maintenance of natural resources and limiting climate change, for example, schemes such as Green Low Carbon Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS) have supported 4,500 farmers transition to using low emission slurry equipment (LESS), helped plant 1,200 km of new hedgerows² and supported maintenance of 270,000 Ha of low input pasture land. The Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) is directly targeted at the climate emissions of 30,000 beef farmers. The Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Schemes (TAMS) supports a number of targeted areas which will promote, among other things, sustainability e.g. low emissions slurry spreading equipment, farm nutrient storage and renewable energy and energy efficiency. Capital investment has been approved on more than an additional 2,000 farms in respect of low emission slurry spreading equipment through TAMS 2. Monitoring and implementation of these standards is carried out through cross-compliance inspections there by ensuring that agricultural land is maintained in good agricultural and environmental condition.

Regarding CAP post-2020, Ireland welcomes the proposal that 40% of the budget will contribute to climate action. This approach aligns well with the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly, which recommended that farmers be rewarded for good environmental practices. These provisions will enable us to continue our path towards carbon neutrality by promoting sustainable intensification of food production and GHG mitigation while maintaining a vibrant rural economy. This will require collaborative action right along the value chain from farm to fork.

There are challenges around food waste, the EU has a requirement to reduce food waste per capita by 50% right throughout the food chain from harvest to consumer by 2030. Ireland will have to play its part in this global challenge in order to contribute to feeding an ever-growing planet, and 9bn consumers by 2050.

In conclusion, it is important to remember that Irish agricultural production is recognised by international independent analysis as having one of the lowest carbon-footprints internationally and is also recognised for the efficiency of Ireland's temperate grassland-based production systems. We

² This brings the total hedge planted across various environmental schemes to approx. 6,500km

will continue to work at building this consensus around the need for agriculture sector to make a positive contribution to the climate change debate. It is about getting better not just bigger and focussing on productivity and efficiencies rather than just numbers. DAFM agrees with the IPCC special report that land is under growing human pressure, land has a lot to contribute to ensure the goals of Paris agreement are met but land can't do everything.