

Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action

Wednesday 14th October 2020

Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill 2020

Opening Statement

Opening

- I want to thank the Chair and Committee Members for scheduling today's meeting to discuss the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill 2020.
- The Programme for Government commits to an average 7% per annum reduction in overall greenhouse gas emissions from 2021 to 2030 (that equates to a 51% reduction over the decade); and to achieving net zero emissions by 2050. The 2050 target is to be set in law by the Climate Action Bill, which is a priority on the Government's legislative programme.
- The Bill will update the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, and is informed by the 2018 Citizens' Assembly Report; the 2019 Joint Oireachtas Committee Report on Climate Action; the 2019 Climate Action Plan; and the Programme for Government.
- The Bill provides for a significantly strengthened statutory framework for governance of the climate challenge.
- I will now highlight five key elements of the Bill:
 - National 2050 Climate Objective;
 - Climate Action Plans and Strategies;
 - Carbon Budgets;
 - Changes to the role and composition of the Climate Change Advisory Council; and
 - Stronger Oireachtas Oversight of Climate Policy.

Key Elements of the Bill

National 2050 Climate Objective

- The Bill puts into law a national 2050 climate objective for the State to pursue the transition to a climate resilient and climate neutral economy by 2050. A 'climate neutral economy' means a sustainable economy, where greenhouse gas emissions are balanced, or exceeded, by the removal of greenhouse gases.

Climate Action Plans and Strategies

- To enable the State to pursue the 2050 objective, the Bill provides for the making of new plans and strategies. The National Mitigation Plan will be replaced by the preparation of a series of annually updated Climate Action Plans, and a series of National Long-Term Climate Action Strategies.
- Starting in 2021, the Climate Action Plan will be updated annually, and will provide a roadmap of actions, including sectoral actions aligned to the period of the approved carbon budgets. The 2021 Plan will set out how we will achieve 7% emission reduction per annum over the decade to 2030, allowing for the fact that it will not yet be possible to identify all the emerging technologies, changing scientific consensus or policies to meet the full ambition, as recognised in the Programme for Government.
- The National Long-Term Climate Action Strategy will be prepared every 10 years, with an option to update it every 5 years if necessary, and will specify the manner in which it proposed to achieve the 2050 objective, including an assessment of potential opportunities in relevant sectors.
- All Local Authorities will be required to prepare a Local Authority Climate Action Plan, covering both climate mitigation and climate adaptation.

Carbon Budgets

- Carbon budgets will be proposed by the Climate Change Advisory Council, finalised by the Minister, and approved by Government. Each budget will set out the total amount of greenhouse gases allowed in the State within a period of five years. The budgets will include all greenhouse gases and cover all sectors of the economy.
- Carbon budgets will be made for three sequential, five-year, budget periods, the grouping of the three being called the ‘carbon budget programme’.
- Each five-year budget will include ‘sectoral decarbonisation target ranges’ for each sector.

Climate Change Advisory Council

- As already mentioned, the Climate Change Advisory Council will have a new function to propose carbon budgets.
- The future composition of the Council will also change. It will have three ex officio members - the Director General of the EPA; the Director of Teagasc; and the Director of Met Éireann, and future appointments to the Council will be made having regard the range of qualifications, experience and competence set out in the Bill; and to ensure gender balance.

Stronger Oireachtas Oversight of Climate Policy

- The Oireachtas will have a new role on the development and adoption of carbon budgets, and oversight of the Government’s climate performance, including against carbon budgets and sectoral decarbonisation target ranges.
- All relevant Ministers will be required to give account annually to a Joint Oireachtas Committee, and the reporting will be informed by the Climate Change Advisory Council’s annual review report; the Environmental Protection Agency’s annual GHG emissions inventories and projections reports; and progress reports on the Climate Action Plan.

- Following Ministers reporting, the Committee may make a series of recommendations, which will have to be responded to in writing within three months.

Closing

- I am very happy to expand on any of these or any other elements of the Bill, and to take whatever questions the Committee may have.

- Thank you.