



NESC Presentation to the Joint Committee on Environment and Climate Action

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1.1 Introduction

We would like to thank the Chairperson and members of the Committee for this invitation.

The National Economic and Social Council is a government body which advises the Taoiseach on strategic policy issues. Council members are appointed by the Taoiseach and represent business and employers, trade unions, agricultural and farming organisations, community and voluntary organisations, and environmental organisations; as well as heads of Government departments and independent experts. Given this composition, the Council plays an important and unique role in bringing different perspectives from civil society together with Government. Jeanne Moore and I are attending here today as members of the Secretariat.

Our statement will focus on areas where NESC has recently engaged in research and has published reports, notably in relation to a just transition approach. These are relevant for the Committee's request to explore *'whether there is a need for special measures to help those less well placed to make the transition and the type of policy tools needed to deliver on the ambition.'*

1.2 Increasing focus on a just transition approach to climate action

NESC has undertaken significant work in the area of just transition in recent years.¹ Under the Climate Action Plan, NESC has been requested to continue to provide strategic advice, research and analytical support for a just transition.

¹ In November, 2020 NESC outlined its work on just transition to the [Joint Oireachtas Climate Action Committee](#), including the NESC report No. 149, *Addressing Employment Vulnerability as Part of a Just*



The Council believes that a just transition approach in climate action is essential. As cited in the Climate Action Plan 2021, NESC defines “a just transition as one which seeks to ensure transition is fair, equitable, and inclusive in terms of processes and outcomes.” A just transition refers both to the broader policy framework of climate action and supports and the process of ensuring that individuals and communities have a voice and a role in informing and shaping these supports.²

The Council’s research reveals that we can expect the transitions in Ireland to be complex and time consuming. There is no one blueprint, but two key elements are highlighted here:

First, identify both the risks and opportunities to employment from transition.

There are vulnerable sectors and vulnerable job roles, but these are coupled with new job and enterprise opportunities. Further work is required to scope out the outcomes and processes appropriate for impacted individuals and communities; and key sectors such as agriculture and food, transport and parts of industry. Ireland is not alone in needing further research on the social and employment implications of climate policies (Pai et al. 2020 cited in Pinker, 2020).³

Second, adopt a proactive, managed and participative approach to transition at national, regional and local levels. NESC’s work in relation to wind energy identifies the importance of an intentional, problem-solving State-led process to underpin transition.⁴ Collaborative top-down and bottom-up action are required as transition initiatives rely on a wide range of actors to be delivered (Pinker, 2020; Mercier, 2020). As part of this, participative social dialogue is effective for fostering trust and adopting a collaborative approach.

Current NESC research is exploring transitions facing rural areas in Ireland using a place-based approach to enhancing sustainable rural development and identify achievable and acceptable pathways. Dr Niamh Moore Cherry and colleagues argue that collaborative engagement and support for community-led initiatives can aid

Transition in Ireland. NESC just transition work can be found here <https://www.nesc.ie/work-programme/transition-teams/>

² Government of Ireland (2021) Climate Action Plan 2021: Securing Our Future. Work on urban and rural contexts includes Creamer et al (2021) [Building Long Term Resilient and Sustainable Cities](#), NESC Research Series, Report No. 22; and McCabe, S. (2021) [Economic Resilience in Sustainable Communities: Innovative Approaches in Public Spending to Maximise Local Benefits](#), NESC Research Series, Report No. 19.

³ Pai, S; Harrison, K; Zerriffi, H. 2020. A Systematic Review of the Key Elements of a Just Transition for Fossil Fuel Workers. Clean Economy Working Paper Series. Smart Prosperity Institute. In Pinker, A. (2020) *ibid*

⁴ NESC (2014) [Wind Energy in Ireland: Building Community Engagement and Social Support](#), NESC Council Report No. 139.



successful transition.⁵ Other NESC work on the Covid-19 pandemic has noted the importance of co-design evident in Ireland's community call response. The capacities of communities to harness local resources and use them in new ways helped to foster innovation and entrepreneurship.⁶

Just transition forms a substantive part of the Climate Action Plan and new structures and processes are under development to develop just transition policy and practices, such as the Just transition Commission and a research and policy working group. Other policy areas also focus on just transition, including the rural development policy *Our Rural Future*,⁷ and there is merit in considering how this approach can be applied to other sectors and policy areas.

1.3 Just transition in agriculture and rural resilience

NESC report No. 149, *Addressing Employment Vulnerability as Part of a Just Transition in Ireland* identified the agri-food sector as one of the most impacted sectors in terms of employment from the low carbon transition.

NESC has been requested by Government to undertake research on climate and agriculture in 2022. A new project will explore how climate targets, and the transition that they imply for Irish agriculture, can be achieved in a manner that considers social equity and inclusion, environmental resilience and economic well-being. It will focus on:

- Understanding how climate action and transition is understood within the sector, with a focus on both opportunities as well as concerns, including from an economic, environmental and social perspective.
- Examining the options, alternatives and costs in supporting ambitious climate action, mapping existing innovative approaches and situating action within a broader rural development perspective. For example, climate action resources, such as retrofit or renewable energy supports, can be a catalyst for rural communities.⁸

⁵ Moore-Cherry, N., Clavin, A. Krawchenko, T. and Tomaney, J. (Forthcoming 2022) Exploring Place-based Opportunities for Policy and Practice in Transition, NESC Research Series.

⁶ McGauran, A. (2021) [Community Call: Learning for the Future](https://www.nesc.ie/publications/community-call-learning-for-the-future/), NESC Secretariat Paper no. 22, <https://www.nesc.ie/publications/community-call-learning-for-the-future/>

⁷ Government of Ireland (2021) *Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025*

⁸ McCabe, S. (2021) [Ibid](#)



- Assessing the strengths and weaknesses of possible policy levers to support climate action and transition, including for example advisory services, market requirements and economic instruments.

The project will be overseen by a NES working group and will engage collaboratively with a wide variety of stakeholders. It is due to be completed in March 2023.

1.4 Conclusion

Carbon budgets require reductions in emissions. This will inevitably mean that certain activities and sectors will be impacted more than others. The focus of work in just transition, is how to ensure that those individuals, communities or areas, more disproportionately impacted by such policy decisions can be identified earlier and better supported such that nobody is left behind.

While just transition is in the early stages of policy and practice in Ireland, there is a firm commitment to develop it.

There is no single policy instrument or measure that can be applied, and the specific context for each sector, their workers and communities will be important to consider.

NESC work points to the value of early, inclusive engagement with those potentially impacted by decarbonisation. The Council's latest project will seek to engage widely to further understand what a just transition approach can bring to agriculture.