

Opening Statement from RTÉ to Joint Committee on Environment and Climate Action 12 December 2022

We would like to thank the Committee for having us here today and for the opportunity to articulate RTÉ's role during this time of climate crisis.

As reflected in the most recent Reuters report, RTÉ remains the most trusted news provider in the country. Over 92% of the Irish public use one or more of RTÉ's services each week. With this large audience also comes a keen sense of responsibility.

Our role in climate change coverage starts with a commitment to making a meaningful contribution to increasing understanding around the issues, providing a platform for discussion and debate on the requirements and options for action across society. It also includes empowering citizens to feel they can be a part of the solution.

Accurate and impartial coverage of the climate crisis

Broadly speaking, the role of RTÉ is based on three pillars – two of these are journalistic in nature, and the third more educational, engaging, and empowering.

We are fortunate that climate misinformation is a lesser problem in Ireland, at this time, than in some other countries, and that is likely due, in part, to the fact that audiences in Ireland watch, listen, and read trusted news and current affairs coverage at a significant level.

This also offers a real opportunity to ensure that Irish citizens are kept comprehensively informed of the implications and developments within the climate crisis, at a local, national, and global level. RTÉ can play a hugely valuable role on this issue.

RTÉ is the only broadcaster in Ireland with a dedicated Environment Correspondent. This wide-ranging brief incorporates scientific findings, policy developments, innovation and climate impacts, in addition to climate-related topics such as biodiversity. The Environment Correspondent provides content across all platforms and for all ages including for young people's news on News2Day. In addition, climate topics are reflected across our specialist briefs including agriculture, business, technology, regional and international reporting. George Lee's recent, prolific reporting from COP27, as well as his online analysis, are strong examples of the kind of in-depth reporting that we are committed to.

Climate change analysis and debate

While there is an overwhelming scientific consensus on the causes of climate change there is rigorous debate on the policies to mitigate the crisis.

Given the enormity of the challenge, these and a whole host of other issues related to climate change will become increasingly important in public and political discourse.

RTÉ is central to facilitating and hosting this debate. We have a duty, and mandate from the public, to ask the key questions, interrogate vested interests and viewpoints and to question policy positions.

We are committed to rigorous debate, we also need to stand firm on the science of climate change such as linking cause and effect – in the example of ‘extreme weather events’ are not seen as one-offs, but rather, connected by the perspective of global warming.

Reporting and programming on extreme weather events and connections to global warming are made with the backing of science, and in cooperate with important partnerships, such as with climate science researchers, Met Eireann and Science Foundation Ireland. To give you an example of that science partnership, the Brainstorm feature articles each week from Irish academics around topics related to climate change.

Climate change is now an embedded part of our programming. Over the past year *Prime Time* produced several ‘climate specials’ on issues such as energy use, the decarbonization of transport and the biodiversity crisis. Climate topics are also mainstay issues on radio current affairs programmes like *The Claire Byrne Show* and *Drivetime*.

Flagship documentaries such as ‘Hot Air’ and ‘Will Ireland Survive 2050?’ as well as nature and lifestyle documentaries and the podcast series “Hot Mess,” all look at topics in depth, with an Irish angle, reflecting a breadth of perspectives.

RTÉ’s relationship with Science Foundation Ireland & the BAI (Broadcasting Authority of Ireland) is creating new collaborations for specific science and natural history output. This output is played prominently in the schedules to large, cross-demographic audiences.

Climate Literacy and Citizen Empowerment

We recognize that the existential threat posed by climate change can be overwhelming for the average person. A critical role for RTÉ is in making people feel informed, engaged, and feel they have a sense of agency.

“*Eco Eye*” has been Ireland’s longest-running environmental awareness programme, which highlights local and topical climate change developments, as well as solutions.

Programmes such as ‘What Planet Are You On?’ offer expert-led practical ideas to everyday life choices and help demonstrate how individuals can have impact. Using data from Eirgrid, the RTÉ website offers real time information on the sources of daily energy use and shows Ireland’s renewable energy transition over time.

“Climate Heroes” is a new series of short digital-first films that shine a light on individuals and communities who are stepping up to protect the environment and tackle climate change. These videos often produce above-average engagement on social media where younger audiences reside.

Young people will carry the greatest burden of climate change. New programmes and events were created for young people as part of RTÉ's climate week in 2019. This included the RTÉ Youth Assembly on Climate, a unique collaboration between RTÉ and the Houses of the Oireachtas which brought young people into the climate debate and into contributing to climate solutions.

RTÉjr Radio developed a podcast series called *Ecolution* which investigates and explains the issues in an informative and age-appropriate way for young people. A recent special episode included former President Mary Robinson answering questions from the children on Climate Justice.

On one level, climate change is an easy story to tell, given the dramatic nature of some of the events it unleashes. But it is also one of the most difficult, because it requires a long-term perspective and patient engagement around potential solutions. Climate change presents a challenge to journalism where the immediate can crowd out the important. We believe that it is the definition of public service broadcasting that we continue to find ways to engage audiences in arguably the most important challenge of our times.