

# DÁIL ÉIREANN

## AN COMHCHOISTE UM THALMHAÍOCHT AGUS MUIR

## JOINT COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND THE MARINE

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*Dé Máirt, 4 Bealtaine 2021*

*Tuesday, 4 May 2021*

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Tháinig an Comhchoiste le chéile ag 3.30 p.m.

The Joint Committee met at 3.30 p.m.

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Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair / Members present:

Teachtaí Dála / Deputies	Seanadóirí / Senators
Martin Browne,	Victor Boyhan,
Matt Carthy,	Lynn Boylan,
Michael Collins,	Paul Daly,
Michael Fitzmaurice,	Tim Lombard,
Paul Kehoe,	Denis O'Donovan.
Brian Leddin.	

Teachta / Deputy Jackie Cahill sa Chathaoir / in the Chair.

## **Business of Joint Committee**

**Chairman:** I would like to remind members that in the context of the current Covid-19 restrictions, only the Chairman and staff are present in the committee room. All members must join the meeting remotely from elsewhere within the parliamentary precincts. The secretariat can issue invitations to join the meeting on Microsoft Teams. Members may not participate in the meeting from outside the parliamentary precincts. I ask members to mute their microphones until they are making a contribution and to use the raised hand function to indicate that they wish to contribute. I ask members to note that messages sent to the meeting chat are visible to all participants. Speaking slots will be prioritised for members of the committee.

### **Climate Action Plan and its Implications for the Agriculture Sector: Discussion (Resumed)**

**Chairman:** Today, we are engaging with representatives from An Taisce regarding the climate action plan 2021 and its implications for the agriculture sector. The joint committee intends to draft a submission to the public consultation on the plan. I would like to welcome to the meeting the following representatives from An Taisce: Mr. Ruaidhrí O’Boyle, honorary secretary of An Taisce climate committee; and Mr. Ian Lumley, member of An Taisce climate committee, who are joining us from a witness room in Kildare House. They are both most welcome to the meeting.

We have received the witnesses’ opening statement and briefing material, which has already been circulated to members. As we are limited in our time due to the Covid-19 safety restrictions, the committee has agreed that the opening statement will be taken as read so that we can use the full session for questions and answers. All opening statements are published on the Oireachtas website and are publicly available.

Before we begin, I will read an important notice in relation to parliamentary privilege. Witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of the evidence they are to give to the committee. However, if they are directed by the committee to cease giving evidence in relation to a particular matter and they continue to do so, they are entitled thereafter only to qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given. They are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against any person, persons or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable.

I now invite questions from the members. I call on Senator Paul Daly.

**Senator Paul Daly:** I welcome the witnesses to our meeting today. I will kick off with some elaboration on what was a most comprehensive submission. Indeed, I do not need to ask for any elaboration on it because it is one of the most comprehensive submissions that I have seen. I compliment the witnesses on that.

Submissions aside, I read the An Taisce mission statement. I will quote one line from the fourth paragraph. It reads: “We know that this cannot be achieved by local or national actions alone.” I would like the witnesses to elaborate more on their involvement on a European and worldwide basis. Specifically, I am interested in the actions that we might take here to fulfil our environmental requirements, needs or aspirations, which can and will possibly in turn lead

to carbon leakage, and how the witnesses buy into the whole global scene. We are discussing the plan from an agricultural perspective today. The most recent and high-profile case in which An Taisce was involved in concerned its objection to the plans for the Glanbia cheese factory. Using that case as an example, if An Taisce had been successful and blocked that project, the market that that factory was going to supply would be supplied by some other market. For the purposes of the discussion today, let us say, for example, that it would be supplied by the south American market, where the cows are being grazed on land that has been generated from the removal of rainforest.

The actions of An Taisce in that case were well-intentioned and I am not criticising them. However, I would like to hear how that one particular example of An Taisce's actions possibly could have had a knock-on effect to create serious carbon leakage, and how the witnesses see that fitting into the overall global context outside of just the Irish situation.

The first line of the mission statement reads: "An Taisce is a charity that works to promote environmental awareness ...". If I am honest, I only know of An Taisce through the green flags that are flown in the schools. The name of An Taisce comes up in association with objections to planning applications. How does the organisation justify objections to such applications and going as far as objecting to proposals of An Bord Pleanála, as a good method of promoting environmental awareness, when each time this drastic action is taken it turns individuals, companies, industries and in many instances communities, against the organisation, which in turn has a negative effect on what it is trying to promote, namely, environmental awareness? Is there not a process whereby An Taisce can engage earlier with those people involved and collectively collaborate and work together and hopefully end up promoting environmental awareness, rather than in many instances leaving a sour taste in people's mouths in that regard?

**Mr. Ian Lumley:** I am pleased to be here. Before I respond to the Senator's questions, I should explain briefly that the document submitted consists of a civic response to what the committee requested, particularly in respect of carbon sequestration and leakage. Some press reports are attached to the document concerning greenwashing and the warning that former EU Agriculture Commissioner, Mr. Phil Hogan, delivered to Ireland and in respect of the situation in the Netherlands. There is also a comprehensive document that was produced by a coalition of 72 civil society organisations, including faith and justice groups and the leading global development organisations involved in Ireland that have endorsed the document.

Quite rightly, the Senator said that when approaching the issue of agriculture and food sustainability, we must take a global overview. To start with, An Taisce does that as an organisation. Our president is Fr. Sean McDonagh, who is a Columban missionary and has written extensively on ethics in a number of books and was part of the advisory group to Pope Francis on the *Laudato Si'* encyclical letter on climate, the future of the planet and caring for the earth. An Taisce, as an NGO, is affiliated to 70 international trusts across the world, as well as to coalitions of environmental organisations across Europe.

Environmental NGOs are mandated under the UN Aarhus Convention to work in all areas of environmental advocacy. That extends from being involved in education and public awareness to also being involved in the public participation and consultation process, whatever the planning and appeal processes may be in the individual country concerned. There is also a specific legal mandate under the Aarhus Convention, which has been converted into European law, to give status to environmental organisations, and indeed to concerned citizens in general, to participate in the planning decision and strategic policymaking, whether it is at national, regional or local level and in individual decision making. That includes making submissions to local

authorities, appeal bodies and taking judicial actions. All of these are fully commensurate with the role of environmental organisations and have been recognised by the EU.

I should point out that it is often said that when An Taisce makes a submission in a planning application process, which is a legal entitlement to all citizens, that we do so in the form of objections. The word “objections” will not appear in a submission. We will make a submission that will be informed by the sustainable development goals, policies to which the Irish Government has signed up, the Paris Agreement and European directives on the protection of public health, water, air quality and nature, on which we all depend for a living planet. When we make submissions on an individual planning application relating to agriculture - I note concerns were raised in this regard by one of the farming organisations recently - we often find that something gets reported in the media and then gets circulated with an inaccurate phrase used. Other people then hear and repeat this word, “objections”. That is not the case at all. We are raising legitimate concerns that any individual or environmental organisation would be expected to do, particularly focused on public and human health. The strategic environmental assessment directive includes a series of considerations. One overarching element, which has been transcribed into Irish law and regulations, is consideration of human health. It is also an overarching consideration in the UN’s sustainable development goals, SDGs.

When we make a planning submission, especially on an agriculture matter, we will raise the issue of how the application will address and mitigate ammonia air pollution issues. As Ireland has exceeded the EU mandatory threshold for ammonia since 2016, we clearly have not had a regulatory regime in place that has addressed that issue. If that had been done, this would not have happened. When we are examining further applications for agricultural intensification, which is 99% caused by ammonia, we will be looking at what management and mitigation measures are in place in that regard, because ammonia is a public health issue. As it has an immediate impact on the area around an intensive agricultural facility, it is an immediate public health concern to people in the area who are directly affected and to neighbours. It is also a wider public health concern in respect of the general receiving environment. Ammonia interacts with other forms of pollution, such as traffic and chimney pollution and that is increasingly showing up in the data and this would be a public health concern.

We also will raise the issue of how an application was addressing water quality and nitrate management to ensure that application was in everybody’s interest, including the applicant. The application might be for a small-scale dairy production unit or a larger processing facility. We simply raise issues and make recommendations as to how public health and other legal protection obligations can be met. We have a major catch-up to do now, as shown by data from the Environmental Protection Agency, EPA. In our written submission, we have quoted what the director of the EPA said about the state of Irish agriculture, namely, that even if we did not have a climate problem, we would still have a greenhouse gas, GHG, emission problem and these ammonia and water issues to deal with.

It is correct to say that we would welcome the opportunity to engage earlier in the process. Over many years we have sought to engage at a strategic level with the farming organisations. I will not mention any of them in particular but it was disappointing that instead of constructive engagement, we have had greenwashing. I put the details into appendix 1 of our submission. That greenwashing was instead of seeking to engage with independent scientists in Ireland who have internationally-recognised knowledge regarding greenhouse gas abatement, carbon soil management and the issue of carbon sequestration in land. I hope we will be able to talk about those aspects in detail, as well as carbon losses. We would, therefore, have very much

welcomed the opportunity to engage with the sector over the years, but that never happened.

Instead, the agricultural sector has been importing so-called experts from the United States - I will not identify any of them - to make dubious claims on carbon sequestration. The sector has also been using this common argument that if we do not continue producing, then somebody else will. First, that is an ethically unsound argument. As a developed country, we should be setting the global lead in reducing greenhouse gas emissions at all levels for heating, for energy, for buildings, for transport and just as much for agriculture. No sector should be let off the hook. There is the issue of carbon leakage as well. The European farm to fork strategy, referred to in our written submission, specifically addressed that issue by stating, "It is also clear that we cannot make a change unless we take the rest of the world with us" and "efforts to tighten sustainability requirements in the EU food system should be accompanied by policies that help raise standards globally".

Senator Paul Daly has quite rightly raised the issue of South America. That is why he will be pleased to hear that the environmental and international development sector is very much at one with the farming bodies in having concerns about the proposed Mercosur trade deal and the potential effect it would have in facilitating the increased export of produce from South America that would not be meeting EU production standards and would be contributing to adverse climate and biodiversity loss and affecting native peoples. I have been attending the international UN climate conferences for the past five years - I have been able to do that by travelling by boat and train - and that provides an extraordinary global overview, including hearing about the plight of people in the Amazon.

Senator Paul Daly will also be very pleased that his colleague in the Dáil, Deputy Jim O'Callaghan, has recently produced and circulated an impressive video, a piece of social media communication, on why, collectively and globally, we must do something about the Amazon rainforest and must campaign for Brazil to sign up fully to the Paris Agreement, to the UN biodiversity convention and to human rights protections for indigenous peoples. The video also called for any future trade agreement with Brazil, or countries in South America in general, to be linked to those obligations. For those who may not have had an opportunity to see that video - I am non-political and not promoting anyone from a political party - Deputy Jim O'Callaghan has produced an excellent communication on this issue. In addition, just today, there was an interview with Frans Timmermans, Vice-President of the European Commission, advocating for and promoting the European Green Deal.

What is so important about the European Green Deal is that it is focused on Europe taking global leadership and acting co-operatively. No one country is going to be able to do what is required, and *quid pro quos* will be needed. Some countries will have particular challenges. For example, Poland must face up to its dependence on coal burning, while German and other major automobile manufacturers which have lobbied against emission standards for years and been involved in emissions cheating must face up to the electrification of transport. Equally, however, Ireland and other major agricultural producers need to address the issues of sustainable food production and climate action and ensure that is linked to a global agreement. Commissioner Timmermans made that very clear in his interview.

His message converged with that of Pope Francis. My background is in the history of politics and ethics. We have an ethical responsibility, as individuals, as Irish people, as Europeans and as global citizens, to protect our living planet for the generation ahead and this is the ethical and social message that was communicated by Commissioner Timmermans. It means direct action in energy efficiency, in the electrification of transport and, in something particularly

challenging not just for the Irish agricultural sector but globally, reducing meat consumption. That is clearly outlined in the farm to fork strategy and United Nations environment programme documents have been advancing this perspective for the past 20 years as a way of mitigating the climate and global footprint impact of ruminant animal agriculture in particular. I hope that has given Senator Daly some clarification as to the global perspective with which we are approaching this.

I appreciate that there was no facility to give an introductory statement. The document that has been circulated is a positive vision for the future, setting out ten points on the Paris Agreement alignment and restoration of nature, woodlands and peatlands, but also that agriculture must take its fair share in dealing with the climate emergency and reducing emissions.

The air quality and ammonia issue must be dealt with because potential legal action is shaping up. There is already a legal infringement complaint on Irish ammonia air pollution before the European Commission. That affects people living in rural areas and farm families most. I mention water quality decline, which is a matter for everybody, and then the positive response to that, namely, farm diversification.

There is much in Irish history and heritage showing the range of crops we can grow, particularly in the organic sector, for which there is growing demand and which has more diversified production. In addition, there is the need to meet public health and healthy diet requirements, food security and nutrition.

While we are a major beef and dairy exporter, we are importing animal feed, which is very problematic because of its sourcing. I want to be non-political here, as I have already said. I always make a favourable comment when one is made, regardless of the political source from which it is made, as I was pleased to hear in the case of Deputy Jim O'Callaghan. The European Commissioner, Ms Mairead McGuinness, just a few months ago, expressed very serious concern about the extent of Ireland's dependence on its animal agricultural sector, which is not only cattle but also pig and poultry, and also on imported animal feed. We need to produce more sustainable indigenous feed and diversify with more tillage in general, as we had historically.

I come from the south east. Like many Irish people, I am two feet removed from the farm in terms of grandparents and large extended networks of family members. I spend weekends and summers on farms and I am familiar with all that. What I hope to do over the course of this discussion, apart from talking about these very technical issues, is to advance positive recommendations on how Ireland can take global leadership and enhance food security and sustainability.

**Chairman:** A number of other members wish to ask questions. If witnesses could keep their answers brief, we will try to get through as many questions as possible.

**Deputy Paul Kehoe:** I have a number of questions for Mr. Lumley, for which "Yes" or "No" answers will suffice. Has Mr. Lumley visited a productive dairy farm in the last number of years?

**Mr. Ian Lumley:** Not only have I visited dairy farms, I have spent Christmases and summer holidays on them. I have a wide extended family network in the south east, whom I regularly visit. I am also old enough to remember-----

**Deputy Paul Kehoe:** I do not want to go back. In the last number of years, has Mr. Lumley visited a production dairy farm that milks up to 200 cows?



**Mr. Ian Lumley:** Very much so. I have also had an opportunity to see robotic farms in operation.

**Deputy Paul Kehoe:** Would Mr. Lumley say that Irish farmers are very environmentally efficient in doing their work?

**Mr. Ian Lumley:** We look at results. We look, therefore, at what the Environmental Protection Agency is saying. Remember, the EPA is-----

**Deputy Paul Kehoe:** I do not want a long, rambling answer. Mr. Lumley should be able to say “Yes” or “No” to my question on whether farms here are environmentally friendly or climate efficient.

**Mr. Ian Lumley:** If one looks at the result in greenhouse gas emissions, ammonia air pollution and deteriorating water quality impact, while individual farmers may be making their best efforts, they are not getting sufficient support or the system is driving them into accelerating these multiple adverse impacts, all of which are negative.

Ms Laura Burke, head of the EPA, spoke about reputational risk to Ireland. The sector as a whole is being developed at the expense of the environment, as witnessed by trends in water quality, emissions and biodiversity all going in the wrong direction. Businesses will usually not reverse these trends and the expansion of the dairy herd will be difficult to sustain. If, therefore, a farmer is expanding a dairy herd, no matter how clean the farm may be-----

**Deputy Paul Kehoe:** I have another couple of questions to ask Mr. Lumley. Mr. Lumley dismisses other people who might have a contrary opinion. According to a piece in today’s *Farming Independent*, “Cutting Ireland’s cattle herd to reduce the sector’s carbon footprint would ‘likely lead’ to a rise in global greenhouse gas emissions, a US scientist has told a conference”. Professor Frank Mitloehner from the University of California told the Alltech Ireland Environmental Forum that carbon leakage would occur if such actions were taken as export demands for Irish dairy and food were transferred to other countries that are simply less efficient.

Ireland has 5 million people but produces food for 50 million people. Everybody has to eat. I hope Mr. Lumley understands that. I have the height of respect for Members of this House. I specifically refer to the Green Party whose Members show a little common sense. I believe, however, that Mr. Lumley’s organisation does not show much common sense. Like Senator Paul Daly said, apart from the green flag initiative, on which I commend An Taisce, the only time I ever encounter the organisation is when it is objecting. An Taisce would close down rural Ireland if it had its way. I would even describe An Taisce as a serial objector. We should consider the negativity of Mr. Lumley’s organisation. As a representative of rural Ireland, I only ever hear negative comments about An Taisce.

We often hear about the need to bring people with us. Bringing people with us involves education and so on, not objecting. I have absolutely no problem with veganism but drilling it down people’s necks will not get An Taisce’s message across. Senator Daly used the example of the Glanbia plant, with which I am very familiar. Mr. Lumley is from the south east. He knows it is a dairy intensive part of the country. I often think that if An Taisce wants to bring people with it, there are different ways in which it could do its business.

**Mr. Ian Lumley:** I thank Deputy Kehoe. I addressed the issue of objecting in response to Senator Paul Daly. I am sure the Deputy will agree that it is important to protect water and air quality and public health and address the ammonia issue, which has such an immediate impact

for people in the immediate receiving area, as well as the issue of exposure to air pollutants, whether from ammonia or traffic in a city, which exacerbate asthmatic conditions. More research is needed as to the ammonia impact in rural areas.

With regard to Professor Mitloehner, we are very familiar with his papers and visits to Ireland. I appreciate we are not meant to comment adversely to people outside the Oireachtas committee structure but the arguments that are being advanced have been subject to very significant critique. If we are to address this issue of carbon leakage, we must do so at a global level.

The report that has been tabled to the committee, Towards a New Agricultural and Food Policy for Ireland, is a consensus document that has been done with great deliberation and with the back-up of independent scientists who are not compromised by industry research. It sets out a positive vision for rural Ireland. Far from being in any way negative towards rural Ireland, we have a large rural membership. Our organisation was formed very much with a concern to advance and enhance rural Ireland. We have taken into protection important properties of heritage and ecological amenity value. We promote ecotourism. We have become directly involved in ecological farming through a property on the Border between counties Tyrone and Monaghan that was bequeathed to us last year. There was a write-up of this in the *Irish Farmers' Journal* this week in the context of using extensive grazing to control fire-risk vegetation in a peatland area.

We would like to move away from the polarisation which has been happening over many years whereby the farming-processing sectors, beef, dairy or other areas of agriculture, have, instead of seeking to engage with these real issues, become involved in greenwashing and making spurious arguments that are either unethical or do not stand up to scientific scrutiny. There are claims being advanced that methane is somehow less significant as a greenhouse gas and should be discounted. We have signed up to the methane accounting system under the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and which is monitored by the EPA.

Unless there is serious engagement with the reality of the threat that rural Ireland is now facing with the continued direction of dairy intensification in particular, an enormous risk is posed. We want to see that averted. We already saw what happened with the midlands peat plants. We warned 20 years ago that building new generation peat plants in the midlands was ill-advised-----

**Chairman:** Okay Mr. Lumley.

**Mr. Ian Lumley:** -----but that went ahead. Those plants are now rusting, redundant hulks on the River Shannon. It was not just An Taisce that warned about this but all the other organisations involved in stopping climate change.

**Chairman:** Mr. Lumley, please.

**Mr. Ian Lumley:** They were equally concerned about the risk. We can raise the risk issue in other responses.

**Chairman:** Mr. Lumley, will you respect the Chair when I try to intervene? For all members, the focus today is the climate action plan and its implications for agriculture. Will members and witnesses stick to it? The committee is preparing a submission and I would like if we could stick to the climate action plan.

**Deputy Matt Carthy:** Can Mr. Lumley name the countries that enforce higher agricultural



standards than Ireland?

**Mr. Ian Lumley:** Yes. I can refer to the report of the European Court of Auditors published in May 2020 which took an overview of Europe. It was not good news. It shows a number of countries, including Poland, Germany and Ireland-----

**Deputy Matt Carthy:** We take it that the standards Irish farmers are expected to adhere to are set at EU level. What countries have higher agricultural standards for their farmers than Ireland?

**Mr. Ian Lumley:** When we look at standards, we need to look at outcomes. Overall, Europe is really not doing well on outcomes. One must look at different outcomes in different countries. Some countries will be doing better on climate and others on biodiversity.

**Deputy Matt Carthy:** Can Mr. Lumley name countries that have higher standards in terms of environmental obligations for their farmers than Ireland?

**Mr. Ian Lumley:** Europe has standards. The difficulty is that Europe has set an ammonia emissions ceiling threshold but that has been breached in Ireland since 2016.

**Deputy Matt Carthy:** Can Mr. Lumley name the countries that have higher agricultural standards for their farmers than Ireland?

**Mr. Ian Lumley:** Could I ask my colleague to come in on this?

**Mr. Ruaidhrí O'Boyle:** I just do not want to be a mute attendee at the meeting. I am not as experienced or as articulate as my colleague but, hopefully, I will be able to give some sort of answer. A few years ago, the Dutch Government insisted that there would be a reduction in its bovine number because of the fact it was exceeding its emissions targets at that point.

**Deputy Matt Carthy:** I am sorry for interrupting. There may be different levels of production. However, the question I am asking is about the standards to which farmers are expected to adhere. In what countries are those standards higher than in Ireland?

**Mr. Ruaidhrí O'Boyle:** I do not understand. What does the Deputy mean by standards?

**Deputy Matt Carthy:** The rules under which they are obliged to farm.

**Mr. Ruaidhrí O'Boyle:** We are all obliged under European law because we have the same targets. The difference in Ireland is that we have not insisted that those targets be met.

**Deputy Matt Carthy:** That is a debatable point. I take it that the highest standards in place anywhere internationally for farmers to adhere to are in Ireland. The enforcement of those standards may be a separate point.

I want to go back to the point on carbon leakage. In the opening statement, it was argued that if we reduce beef and dairy production in Ireland, it would be met somewhere else. An Taisce said that this is being rebuffed by the farm to fork strategy, which states that we cannot make a change unless we take the rest of the world with us. In its response to the climate Bill, An Taisce stated that references to carbon leakage should be removed entirely because such leakage would need to be resolved at EU level. Am I to take it that An Taisce's argument is that we need to reduce our suckler herd because we are going to take the rest of the world with us when it comes to environmental standards but we cannot address carbon leakage because that

would require action at EU level?

**Mr. Ruaidhrí O'Boyle:** Taking the world with us is us taking a lead and setting an example for the world. In terms of carbon leakage, the principle is that we should not cut our agricultural emissions because to do so would cause increased emissions somewhere else. If that is an accepted idea, it will be for the Oireachtas to decide what other sectors should increase their emissions reductions this decade in order to meet the targets in the climate Bill. Polluting Irish waterways on the basis that someone else might do it if we do not do it is not a road we should go down.

**Deputy Matt Carthy:** The committee is agreed that we should protect our waterways and go to significant lengths in order to do so.

Many in the beef sector will have been concerned by what happened with the horticultural peat sector. From Mr. Lumley's stated position, is it the case that An Taisce thinks it is okay to import horticultural peat in order to facilitate the likes of the mushroom sector and others? Is An Taisce suggesting that those sectors should essentially be wound up and that we should just lose the mushroom sector because we cannot produce horticultural peat?

**Mr. Ian Lumley:** Ten years ago, the EPA published an important report, Bogland, on the need to ensure that the continued loss of biodiversity and carbon from the peatlands through power generation, domestic burning and horticulture needed an exit strategy. Bord na Móna adopted one for 2030 that was subject to legal actions. Now Bord na Móna has adopted a more immediate exit strategy which is supported under the just transition initiative. The horticultural peat industry, over the past decade, has deliberately resisted regulation and legal enforcement of-----

**Deputy Matt Carthy:** I want to bring our guests back to the original question. What is the solution, in the here and now, for the mushroom sector, for example? As I see it, if we cannot extract horticultural peat in Ireland, the two options that are available to us are to import peat or export the mushroom sector. Which one of these options should we choose?

**Mr. Ian Lumley:** The Deputy will be pleased to hear about what is happening today. The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage has set up a working group, which is mainly composed of industry representatives, including representatives of the mushroom industry and the IFA. The working group has a chair with a background in public research. As we speak, it is preparing a report to the Minister on dealing with the immediate issue, as recognised, that we need to protect Irish horticulture.

**Deputy Matt Carthy:** I asked for An Taisce's position. I take from Mr. Lumley's answer that he will not set out its position. I have one final question and I will be as brief as possible.

**Mr. Ian Lumley:** We have endorsed that document. We need to take action.

**Deputy Matt Carthy:** As Senator Paul Daly said, An Taisce's opening statement is comprehensive. I note that the concept of a just transition is mentioned once on the second last page. I have seen a number of An Taisce's other submissions in which just transition is not mentioned at all. For An Taisce, the National Trust for Ireland, where does the maintenance and development of rural communities fit into its objectives? Where should they feature in the objectives of this committee as we prepare a response to the climate action Bill? In its submissions to various Departments, what documents has An Taisce produced aimed at promoting development and enhancing rural communities as they exist in Ireland?

**Mr. Ian Lumley:** I am pleased to say that this is something on which we are at one with Deputy Carthy and other rural public representatives. That is a major part of the consensus document produced by 72 coalition organisations that was published last week and circulated to the committee. That document, in its second half in particular, sets out constructive recommendations on public health, sustainable contribution, meaningful food and nutrition security, and the need for a dialogue and participation structure. We have a good precedent with the Citizens' Assembly and the major input that had to advancing consideration of climate action in Ireland. We welcome the potential for similar dialogue.

If Deputy Carthy closely reads a number of sections of this document, which we have endorsed and circulated to the committee, he will see constructive recommendations for the future of rural Ireland, including recommendations that are applicable to his area. We had a much more complex and diversified food and land use system in the past. Across the Border, we produced apples in Armagh and there was a great flax growing area in Ulster, as well as around Dublin. We produced grain and more fruit and vegetables than we do now. We have an opportunity to diversify and that has the potential to be of enormous benefit to rural communities. The farm to fork strategy, the European biodiversity targets and consumer trends such as the increasing interest in organic goods offer enormous potential for areas such as the Border countries. We are already actively involved, through the landholding which we have been bequeathed, in advancing high-nature value farming with local communities. Outside of this committee, I would welcome the opportunity to engage with the Deputy on issues to do with his local area.

**Chairman:** As further elaboration and for the information of witnesses, we had a detailed meeting with an official from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage a couple of months ago at which we were assured that the working group report would be available in mid-April and would allow for peat extraction for the horticulture and nursery industries. I hope some progress will be made on that on foot of today's meeting. An Taisce's report states that we still have not developed an alternative to peat for the horticulture and nursery industries. To the man in the street, it is environmental and economic madness to import peat from eastern Europe for those industries. As Deputy Carthy said, we will either import peat or export our mushroom industry. The sector is a vital employer in and a core part of rural Ireland, especially in certain areas. The mushroom and horticulture industries are extremely important. Hopefully common sense will prevail until we have a viable alternative to peat.

**Senator Tim Lombard:** I welcome the witnesses and acknowledge their contributions and statements, the majority of which I have read over the last three hours.

I will not refer to carbon leakage or methane as other Deputies have raised the issue. I will ask about the ammonia issue, however, to which our guests from An Taisce referred. The climate action Bill includes proposals in this area. What are An Taisce's views on the use of trailing shoe technology, which will be a part of the solution going forward? Since April, farmers with a derogation, who are mainly dairy and beef farmers, have been obliged by law to spread 100% of slurry using trailing shoe technology. What impact will that requirement have on the ammonia issue on which An Taisce went into so much detail? From what I have read, Teagasc is saying the reduction will be up to 60%. Would such a reduction have a major impact?

**Mr. Ruaidhrí O'Boyle:** On the Senator's second point around derogations, when the farming lobby groups appeared before the committee recently they stated they did not agree with derogations for land types. An Taisce is probably at one with them on that. Derogations do not really work. We have had a derogation from the nitrates directive for some time but we do not seem to be able to get our emissions down. I am not familiar with the calculations on the impact

of the trailing shoe or reduced spreading but that is one part of the emissions profile. Without the numbers in front of me, I cannot say how much that would reduce emissions. I presume the EPA or Teagasc will have looked into the matter

**Senator Tim Lombard:** That is a disappointing answer given the information that is available and the amount of work and research that are being done on this issue. This has been one of the major investment projects that the Irish agricultural industry has been driving for the past five, six or seven years. When this technology first became part of the targeted agriculture modernisation schemes, TAMS, six years ago, we thought it would take off. The uptake by the agricultural community has been amazing. We have seen the trailing shoe adopted by many communities and it has resulted in a significant reduction in ammonia.

The witnesses spoke at length about ammonia this afternoon. I am disappointed with the quality of the answer to my question. I expected a lot more in this debate. We need to have a genuine debate. It has been put to me that An Taisce is anti-dairy and has a bias against the dairy industry. When I hear the quality of the response, I have to question how we will get the meaningful engagement that is so important.

The EPA regularly issues reports on water quality and local authorities. This is a major bone of contention for the farming community, which has invested hundreds of millions of euro in water quality. Of the 200 settlements in County Cork, 170 do not have water treatment plants. What are the witnesses' views on the failure by the local authority and Irish Water regarding the water quality issue?

**Mr. Ruaidhrí O'Boyle:** To clarify my answer, the question was on what we thought about the amount of the emissions reduction in ammonia. An Taisce is not tasked or resourced to do that sort of work. I presume it would have come up with Teagasc a couple of weeks ago when it was before the committee and it would have been able to give a clarification on how much the ammonia emissions will reduce.

As far as I am aware, Teagasc projects that agricultural emissions will rise in the coming years, so we cannot say whether the type of slurry spreading, which, as I said, is a small part of the overall emissions profile, will have a material impact on that rising emissions trajectory. But does not sound as though it will, based on that.

**Senator Tim Lombard:** The witnesses have given no real acknowledgement of the major changes in agricultural systems and networks as to how raw manure is spread by drilling into the ground instead of blowing up into the air. It was the biggest game changer we have seen in the past five years and the public and communities have commented on it continuously. They have seen a real change in air quality, particularly in the past three years. I am not being argumentative. I find it disappointing that the witnesses have not said what needed to be done or outlined a way forward with what needed to be promoted.

**Mr. Ruaidhrí O'Boyle:** In that case, I can say we have come out repeatedly to say that the marginal abatement options that Teagasc has suggested will not contribute the type of emissions reductions that we need. They are marginal and dependent on a number of factors, including not increasing the gross emissions before these options are taken into account. Our emissions from agriculture went up last year. They went down the previous year but that was on the basis of a high figure in 2018, on the back of the drought that year.

The calculations of the emissions are done by the Environmental Protection Agency, EPA,

and work is done by Teagasc and they are funded for that. The advocacy side of An Taisce is not funded by the Government to do any of that work. Consequently, while it might be a disappointing answer, given that bodies are already being funded to do that sort of work, we do not want to fund somebody to duplicate that work.

**Senator Tim Lombard:** As much as that is an answer to the issue, the witnesses have made such a big deal about the ammonia issue all the way through this meeting and have not acknowledged there has been much investment and change, whether through targeted agriculture modernisation schemes, TAMS, investment in the past five years or changes in the nitrates directive to make sure that 100% of slurry is being drilled into the ground instead of being splash plated. My key point is there was no acknowledgement of the major changes in the agricultural system.

Can I ask about the water quality issue? This is a bone of contention in rural Ireland. It really is, because we have villages and towns all over us. I will give the example of Belgooly which is 2.5 miles outside of Kinsale, where there is a direct pipe straight into the river. This is the sin of sins. This is what we have in rural Ireland. Cork County Council makes sure farmers stick to a nitrates regime, which they do, and on the other side, local authorities and Irish Water are doing what they want to do. The biggest frustration I see in rural Ireland is not over-intensification of agriculture, it is the lack of investment in wastewater. That is the sin of the entire issue.

**Chairman:** Any comment on the lack of wastewater with treatment infrastructure in rural Ireland?

**Mr. Ian Lumley:** On the wastewater issue, we are as concerned about urban and village wastewater as about any other form of water or air pollution in terms of environmental and public health impact but this, as Senator Lombard has quite rightly pointed out, is an investment failure going back decades in a country that has experienced a rapid increase in population, which is positive. We have not matched that development with the infrastructure, not just in wastewater, but in public transport, local services and other requirements for sustainable communities and a healthy environment.

In 1974, there was a report by Mr. Justice Kenny on the issue of how urban expansion, in particular, would fund improvement in infrastructure. As that fundamental issue was never grappled with, there is land which is being rezoned for urban development and expansion and which is not representing a major capital gain on the part of the landowner, but the investment that is needed to put into wastewater improvement is not happening.

Senator Lombard has mentioned Belgooly. It is an issue for our entire coast, whether it is a small-scale discharge on somewhere such as Rosscarbery beach in County Cork, which is a case we were dealing with recently, or the huge problem we have in Counties Galway and Dublin in which the expansion of those cities means the existing system is overloaded. They also carry surface drainage, so when there is heavy rainfall, there is overloading into Galway Bay or Dublin Bay and one gets notices that one is not meant to swim and concerns arise, so we must face up to meeting the deficiency we have in water infrastructure. We are *ad idem* on that. That is a major task for all parties to work together on and we will play a constructive role in advancing this.

However, there is this huge overarching issue with the farming sector. I turn to section 1.5 of our submission, on page 14, where we reference Environmental Protection Agency, EPA, data from the water quality indicator's report which highlighted that agricultural activities are



the most significant source of pollution in Irish waters, with a direct impact on 53% of the 1,460 water bodies monitored. The report also outlined that:

... nitrate is increasing in nearly half of our river sites. Phosphate levels are also on the rise in a quarter of river sites. This is in sharp contrast to the picture prior to 2015 when only a small proportion of sites had increasing nitrate and phosphate concentrations.

That is directly linked to the agricultural intensification. Look at what happened in the Netherlands when legal actions on nitrates and phosphates in 2018 forced the Government of the Netherlands to intervene in reducing dairy herd and production. We have attached that as an appendix to the document.

In 2019, there were reports in the *Irish Examiner* and the *The Echo* about major water pollution incidences in County Cork. The water supply in Macroom was affected and it was not by urban wastewater faecal discharge, it was by the use of chemicals to spray rushes for agricultural land reclamation. That is an issue and one which relates to the issue of carbon sequestration in soil. While there is much talk and hyping up of the potential of sequestration in soil, we are continuing to see continuing carbon loss through land drainage and reclamation. Certainly, in these two cases that were reported in County Cork in 2019, it was the chemicals that were used in that land reclamation process that caused a water contamination issue.

Similarly, last year, when the lockdown was lifted during the summer and people wanted to get outdoors to the sea in County Clare, they found that there was a bathing safety notice because of nitrate impact from agricultural sources on bathing beaches. The agricultural sector needs to face up to its responsibility when dealing with the water issue, as much as the major issue we have with urban wastewater, whether it is large cities or smaller scale problems we have around the country. All of this needs decided action and it is in breach of public health, water framework and SDG obligations for clean water.

**Chairman:** When we go around some of the towns and villages in Tipperary, we see that the lack of wastewater infrastructure is a very serious issue and one I do not believe should be underestimated.

**Deputy Martin Browne:** I welcome the witnesses. They have stated that the Common Agricultural Policy subsidy regime needs to be urgently reviewed to ensure it protects biodiversity and soil carbon. Are they aware that the wording of good agricultural and environmental condition, GAEC, 2 has given rise to concerns about the agricultural status of the lands in question? What are their views on the role they see-----

**Chairman:** Sorry Deputy Browne-----

**Deputy Martin Browne:** -----and carbon-rich soil will play in future? Also, on pages 13 and 14 of the statement-----

**Chairman:** Deputy Browne-----

**Deputy Martin Browne:** -----An Taisce questions how Teagasc's climate mitigation projections could be credible in light of the evident failure, since 2012, of measures to offset the output of growth. The witnesses also stated that they have repeatedly attempted to engage with the State agency on a scientific basis without substantive reply. What is the working relationship between the two organisations? There is a difference between the two organisations in respect of measures to offset the policies of continued dairy expansion. It is down to their looking at climate action from different viewpoints. Will the witnesses expand on the working

relationship between the two organisations, given what both bring to the table to chart a way forward for small farmers and rural communities?

The witnesses mentioned that the 15-year-old ESB and Bord na Móna peat power plants in Offaly and Longford should represent a warning to the Irish agricultural sector on the consequences of misdirected investment and ill-advised subsidy use. Will they give us examples of what they class as misdirected investment and ill-advised subsidies?

**Chairman:** The sound quality was not great. Did the witnesses catch all of the Deputy's questions?

**Mr. Ruaidhrí O'Boyle:** I am happy to cover engagement with Teagasc and misdirected investment. We can come back on whatever the Chairman or Deputy think has not been covered.

**Chairman:** Okay.

**Mr. Ruaidhrí O'Boyle:** In 2017, in a one-sided bilateral conversation, the climate committee of An Taisce sent a series of letters to Teagasc on concerns we had about its environmental pronouncements. People have been addressing the marginal abatement cost curve as a roadmap for agriculture. It was first published in 2011 or 2012 and looked at the Food Harvest 2020 plan. It was on the basis that emissions would increase by 7% from 2011 to 2020 and that the measures published could offset almost all of the increase in emissions. As of the end of 2020, based on the provisional 2020 numbers, instead of increasing by 7%, emissions increased by 15%. These abatement measures have been spoken about for eight or nine years but they are clearly not having the impact that was expected. We have been in touch with Teagasc. We have written to it but received no response. In 2019, we published the letters but we have not had engagement.

On misdirected investment, the example given is investing in peat-burning power stations when we already knew what was needed to be done with the peat because we speak about sequestration and the biggest carbon storage in the soil in Ireland by a large margin is in our peatlands. We knew, and we have known for decades, that we need to address our mining of the peat out of the ground. We have not done so. We now have Bord na Móna scrambling to do something. Environmental organisations are being blamed for stopping Bord na Móna from doing its work whereas, in reality, environmental organisations have been calling this out for years and nothing was done to plan for it. With regard to misdirected investments, we have to question anything invested in increasing the emission profile of any sector on the basis we are planning to reduce our emissions by 7% on average in this decade. People cannot say why anyone would be led to believe they should invest in such a thing but civil society does not see it as a worthwhile investment at this point given that we have to cut our emissions.

**Mr. Ian Lumley:** I will come in on the hill farming issue, which the Deputy raised. I know Tipperary very well. I have cycled all over it. The county has hilly areas in addition to the well-known Golden Vale. As explained in our submission, the European Court of Auditors report is very clear that billions of European taxpayer subsidies in environmental schemes, which in Ireland are REPS and GLAS, have been effectively wasted because they have not delivered their intended results. There is now an opportunity under the European green deal and the integration of the farm to fork strategy with the biodiversity strategy, which will be of particular benefit to those hill farming areas. Extensive consideration and positive recommendations are set out in section 2 of the new policy document, which comes from at least 70 organisations and which is endorsed by ourselves.

It has not been so much an issue in Tipperary but certainly in other parts of the country there has been a major problem with land burning. The Irish Wildlife Trust, which is one of our fellow members of the Irish Environmental Network, has very much highlighted that the single farm payment system under the Common Agricultural Policy forces people in these hilly scrubland areas to maintain their land to an agricultural grazing standard, which forces the owners to burn land. It can be difficult to control a fire. I can give an example affecting our property a couple of weeks ago. A landowner in Tyrone was burning land and did not notify the adjoining property owners. Our nature reserve area would have been affected but, fortunately, another landowner, who is a game warden, was able to intervene. He discovered that the fire was jumping across a public road from the landholding where the burning was taking place. It was only by bringing up a gang to put out the fire with shovels - those involved were forced to breathe in smoke - that a serious incident was averted.

Major action is needed to curtail the fire problem and to come up with a better support system and better management of these hilly areas for the members of the Irish Nature and Hill Farmers Association. An extensive section of Towards A New Agricultural and Food Policy for Ireland deals with this. In the context of our direct involvement in County Monaghan, I will be involved in a conference call tomorrow on how we can advance the concept of agroforestry. We are a practical organisation and we do not just talk. We want to see everything we see here translated into action and to work with farmers and communities on this.

**Deputy Martin Browne:** To come back to the difference between the two organisations and the measures both are taking to offset continued dairy expansion, is it the case that both are coming at the matter from a different point of view? An Taisce is coming at it from a conservation point of view and Teagasc is coming at it from a farming perspective. Is there a middle ground that both organisations can reach to implement these policies?

**Mr. Ian Lumley:** The common agreement must be in alignment with the Paris Agreement, the European Green Deal and the European biodiversity strategy. Perhaps we can deal with this in later questions, as this is covered extensively in both An Taisce's submission and the coalition's submission from all the organisations. Teagasc published the Ag Climatise document, which provided for continued herd increase but it was projected the greenhouse gas emissions impact of that would be mitigated by a number of means, including carbon sequestration, all of which was untested and not properly quantified. We find it strange and odd that people in the agricultural sector are constantly saying we can continue the current model but there is an enormous opportunity to offset that carbon through sequestration or different grassland management of hedgerows or forestry. The people advancing that argument are not talking about the carbon loss that is happening through land burning, soil erosion or the drainage of high peaty soil land. People think of bogs in terms of peatland but 20% of the land area beyond that has peaty soils. I do not want to bamboozle the members with statistics but a good statistic is that 20% of the land area has 75% of the organic soil carbon. That is not only bogs and peatlands but the midlands and the upland areas have very rich peaty soils and we should be protecting those. We need an exit to peat extraction. It has been very disappointing. We met representatives of Bord Bia ten years ago and pointed out that they were giving the Origin Green logo to compost that was coming from peat and asked them why were they not promoting and supporting alternatives? I note Senator Boylan is at the meeting and she was promoting community composting in the Ballymun area. The EPA published a report a decade ago on how the Ballymun community composting model should be rolled out nationally but support was never given to that. The research and resources were simply not put into developing peat alternatives or putting Monaghan mushrooms as an alternative. I also find----

**Chairman:** I apologise for interrupting Mr. Lumley but a number of members have questions. I call Deputy Collins.

**Deputy Michael Collins:** I thank the witnesses for attending. I have a few questions on the climate action Bill but I would like to comment on some of the discussion from An Taisce's side. The witnesses said they have engaged in constructive engagement. I have never seen any such constructive engagement during my time as a public representative. I am deeply disturbed about the High Court challenge An Taisce took against Glanbia recently, which could have cost many jobs and much difficulty for agriculture. Our Rural Independent Group did some analysis on An Taisce recently. I stand to be corrected on this but from our analysis, An Taisce got taxpayer funding of more than €3.5 million in 2018 alone and more than €25 million during the past decade. That is a great deal of taxpayers' money. It is mainly a Dublin-based organisation. It has current assets of €2.25 million and had a cash equivalent of €1.5 million in the same period while it paid out a whopping annual staffing bill of €2.4 million. Can Mr. Lumley indicate where that money is being spent? I would appreciate that.

The big issue is climate action plan and I respect that is what we need to focus on.

**Chairman:** I was going to make that point to Deputy Collins. He should work away.

**Deputy Michael Collins:** The climate action Bill will be highly destructive to every facet of the Irish economy, including the agrifood sector, which alone employs 164,400 people. This Bill aims to cut carbon emissions by 51% by 2030 and meet net zero emissions by 2050 but makes no exception for agrifood. Am I correct in saying that? Also, as a result of this, the national cattle herd faces a 51% cut by 2030. That is our concern. According to independent research, that will mean culling 3.4 million cattle. Am I correct in saying that? It appears Europe will agree the Mercosur trade deal, which will allow 99,000 tonnes of beef per year to come into the EU from countries such as Brazil. New research by Oxford University highlights this would be more environmentally destructive than home-grown beef, thus underlining the stupidity of this carbon bill in the first instance. I would appreciate if the witnesses could answer those questions.

**Chairman:** I thank the Deputy.

**Deputy Michael Collins:** Those are all my questions.

**Mr. Ian Lumley:** In response to Deputy Michael Collins, in the coalition's submission on the climate action Bill, extensive consideration is set out on doing our fair share and all sectors needing to play their part in climate mitigation. If agriculture is somehow to get off the hook, which is the argument that seems to be advocated, that means other sectors such as the energy and transport sectors will need to have a much greater level of emissions reduction to meet the targets. The viability and feasibility of that within the time period simply has not been demonstrated and neither has it been demonstrated by those advocating that agriculture is a special case. Also, the arguments being made that the herd numbers could not merely be maintained at the current level but could actually increase are based on offsetting models that are simply not realistic and do not address carbon losses through continued land reclamation and drainage, extensive consideration of which is set out in our submission.

I am a completely unpaid volunteer for An Taisce, as is Mr. O'Boyle. Our committee structure is voluntary. We are the advocacy part of the organisation. We do not get any direct State funding for our advocacy work in making public interest or public health based submis-

sions on planning applications or larger projects, whereas environmental organisations in other European countries are funded to provide that public interest service. The funding allocated to An Taisce goes through a separately administrative unit under a reporting structure to the board of An Taisce but in which the advocacy side has no involvement. The organisation is the complete opposite to being Dublin-based. We are in fact quite disappointed that compared to rural schools and communities, Dublin and the larger cities have been behind in embracing the green flag movement. The majority of An Taisce's staff members, relative to their qualifications, are not spectacularly well paid, certainly when compared to private consultants or even people in the public sector.

Those in An Taisce work around the country, which is difficult now due to Covid because they are no longer able to have direct visits and interaction with schools. That is a difficulty we all face. It would be much easier to interact if we were all in a committee room together. The Deputy can be assured An Taisce's education programmes are based on international accredited standards under the European Foundation for Environmental Education. We see the green flag flying and it carries the logo of the European Foundation for Environmental Education. Green flag award programmes operating in different European countries all receive government support. All of their work packages and dissemination of information are approved by relevant Departments. In terms of promotion of environmental awareness, auditing over the years has found that grant funding to be very good value for money regarding the wider societal benefit it brings.

**Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice:** I welcome the witnesses. My first question is for Mr. Lumley. I have a few quick, short questions for him. He talked about reclamation and draining soils. Some 44,000 farmers in Ireland make their living, be it sheep or suckler farming with some of them dairy farming in the likes of Listowel and places like that, from peaty soils that have been drained, for which the EU actually gave them grants years ago. That is how they make their living. It was said that should not be allowed. How are they going to make a living if they go on the system the witnesses are talking about?

**Mr. Ian Lumley:** That is a part of the country I know very well; those midland counties with peaty soils and other more upland areas. The European farm to fork and biodiversity strategies set out clear recommendations and benefits which those areas can gain in ecological schemes and more extensive grazing.

**Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice:** Hold on. If the land into which farmers put shores - that is how reclamation is done - is where the cattle and sheep are farmed and if Mr. Lumley is saying that should not be allowed but that it should be let go wild, then how are they going to farm? This is a very simple question.

**Mr. Ruaidhrí O'Boyle:** I ask the committee members to consult the national farm surveys that Teagasc complete every year. The clear evidence from that is that the living is not made from the farming of the uplands. The living is made from the subvention through direct payments.

**Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice:** I am not just talking about uplands. I am talking about lowlands. There was raised bog that was cut away in Listowel, Galway, Tipperary, in any county in Ireland, and the farmers are now farming the land. They have shored the land whereby one puts in chips and does work on it. If An Taisce is saying to them now that they cannot farm that land - they may be struggling at the moment but they will be totally unviable on a family farm - what is their alternative?



**Mr. Ruaidhrí O'Boyle:** According to the national farm survey from Teagasc-----

**Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice:** No, I want your solution to how they can live.

**Mr. Ruaidhrí O'Boyle:** We can only base it on the data that are available to us. The national farm survey shows that one third of farms are viable. Ten years ago, one third of farms were viable.

**Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice:** Hold on. Let us go back over this issue. This is a thing that is being thrown out at the moment. The reality is that a farm of 40, 50 or 60 acres is not viable but a person might have an off-farm job, as well as the farm, that keeps him or her viable. No more than when Bord na Móna workers who worked in Bord na Móna and had a bit of farming were viable. When one is gone, however, then they are basically gone as a family in a community. What is the answer to the question I have I asked?

**Mr. Ruaidhrí O'Boyle:** The ending of the *status quo*. Nothing could be worse than the current situation for farmers in cattle and sheep farming where their total income from the farming side is from direct payments. The direct payment has to subsidise the operation of the farm because the farm is not making any money for the farmer. What they are currently doing, while guided by the bodies that have an influence over farmers, is not delivering for them. The idea that we keep going with what we are doing because we have done it for some time now just does not make any economic sense for the farmer.

**Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice:** I have a second question. On my way to Dublin, I was thinking about the likes of An Taisce. We have seen An Taisce object to quarries. We need quarries for building houses, be it in Dublin or other areas. The witnesses would know property in Dublin fairly well. We need it for building sheds for farmers. On the issue of water quality, people deserve water. An Taisce objected to Lough Talt and it had to go through the imperative reasons of overriding public interest, IROPI, process with 9,000 people being two years on a boil-water notice. It objects to forestry, objects to the peat harvesting, objects to turf cutting but the witnesses would not give an answer to Deputy Carthy earlier on whether they would rather see the mushroom industry collapse or keep getting the peat in from another country, which is totally off the wall in my opinion. One-off housing is being objected to. All of these objections go into parts of rural Ireland. What I am trying to get my head around is - and I do not want this word "sustainable" used because this word sustainable is constantly thrown out - in the witnesses' opinion, in the dairy sector how many cows will we have? In the witnesses' opinion, in the beef sector how many cattle will we have? What other types of farming will we do? Can the witnesses give me their opinions on GAEC 2?

**Chairman:** Who is going to take Deputy Fitzmaurice's questions?

**Mr. Ian Lumley:** On the overarching questions raised by Deputy Fitzmaurice from quarries onwards and on other land-use activities and water extraction, there is a unifying principle that should be applied to all land-use activity and land-use change, large and small, namely, going through a public consultation and assessment process in the interests of public health to ensure the protection of water quality, of nature, of air quality and to ensure regulation.

On the issue of quarries, we have been tolerating appalling levels of unregulated quarries, which is unfair to legitimate operators who go through the planning system and have proper water protection. There was a situation in County Roscommon where an oil spillage in a quarry contaminated the water supply in the Strokestown area. This is what happens when a quarry is

not managed or regulated properly or is not properly compliant.

The peat issue is self-inflicted because we have failed to put the research into alternatives.

**Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice:** Will the witnesses answer the question Deputy Carthy asked earlier? We are now bringing in peat for the mushroom industry from another country. We are bringing in peat briquettes. Do they agree with that or do they believe the mushroom industry should be wiped out? Which is it? One cannot have both sides of this.

**Mr. Ruaidhrí O'Boyle:** Exactly, but it is not a binary choice.

**Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice:** It is at the moment.

**Mr. Ruaidhrí O'Boyle:** If you frame the question like that-----

**Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice:** Tell me which do the witnesses agree with?

**Mr. Ruaidhrí O'Boyle:** I do not agree with either.

**Chairman:** Give him a chance to answer.

**Mr. Ruaidhrí O'Boyle:** There is no A or B. There is a lot more to it.

**Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice:** There is at the moment.

**Chairman:** Deputy Fitzmaurice, give him a chance to answer.

**Mr. Ruaidhrí O'Boyle:** Civil society has pointed out for years, or decades, that we cannot continue to mine peat out of the ground for whatever purpose. We are now talking about carbon sequestration in terms of agriculture and yet we are still not talking about the single biggest carbon storage in the country, which is our peatlands. Until we start protecting and restoring our peatland, sequestration is just dancing around the margins.

**Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice:** The problem is for the farmer who is farming on marginal land who got a contractor to drain that land 20, 30 or 40 years ago. He is trying to make a living on that land with sheep. It is generally sheep because it would not be strong enough for cattle. I ask the witnesses to give it to me in the bread and butter terms. What sort of an Ireland do they think it should be, in terms of the numbers of cows, sheep, beef cattle and the amount of tillage? Give it to me in numbers. Do they think there should be a cull on it? I want to see what their vision for it is. They talked about organic farming. If they want to go organic, we have the lowest number of organic farmers in Europe, I think. To be honest, however, you would not feed a quarter of the planet if everyone tried to go organic because you would not produce enough per year from it. That is the bottom line. I am asking the witnesses today to tell me their vision.

In talking about objections, we were trying to get a sewage treatment plant where water quality was affected in a designated area. In fairness to Irish Water, and as bad as it is, it put in a new sewage treatment plant and damn An Taisce, because it objected to the outflow of it because it was 98% made perfect, when it had been 100% raw sewage going in at one time. I want to know the vision An Taisce has for rural Ireland. When I look at An Taisce, I see objection after objection. I want to know its vision for the number of dairy farmers there should be. Do the witnesses think there should be a cull of dairy farmers or a reduction in the number of beef farmers? What is the story on suckler cows and sheep farmers? What other kinds of farms will keep a family in a local area, in all parts of this country, not just one part?

**Chairman:** Deputy Fitzmaurice should give the witnesses a chance to answer.

**Mr. Ian Lumley:** If Deputy Fitzmaurice looks at the coalition document he will see that it is a vision for rural Ireland, an Ireland that embraces its land and the quality of its environment and plays its part in the challenge ahead globally in climate and reversing the loss of nature. There is an enormous opportunity now with the European Green Deal and the redirection of the CAP subsidy regime which, as the European Court of Auditors so clearly indicated last year, has failed to reverse the loss of nature not just in Ireland but across Europe. Advancing schemes for lower impact grazing that would apply to some of those drained peatland areas in the midlands the Deputy referred to, will meet organic standards and advance the 25% organic target for 2030 which is a rising consumer demand. I invite the Deputy to look at the positive recommendations set out in the document. Perhaps the Chair could consider that at a future date the committee might be interested in engaging in more detail with the coalition group. An Taisce was only one of 70 members involved in the production of this document. The committee should look at some of the positive recommendations it is advancing for the future of rural Ireland to sustain employment and communities.

When An Taisce makes a submission in the planning arena, which is a legal entitlement of any citizen and is mandated not just under the European consultation process but under the UN Aarhus Convention, it is always phrased in a positive way. It is aimed at achieving a better outcome in more sustainable, walkable communities that are less car dependent, where we can produce more mixed agriculture and food production and can advance ecotourism, which brings better rural employment and enhances the nature and cultural heritage of the area. All of our submissions are informed, not by a negative, but by a positive of advancing the better Ireland that we all want to see.

Sometimes that means going against an individual interest. If somebody is operating an illegal quarry and wants to circumvent the law by getting a retention application in by a back door, then that will end up in court. That is where we run into conflict issues, which is unavoidable because of the nature of the planning system. When one looks at our submissions and inputs into national policy documents and county development plans, such as the Deputy's own area of Longford-Roscommon, it will be found that while these do not get publicity we are always advancing at local level, to the council, the cause of rural Ireland as much as urban Ireland, informed by our local rural members and our experience of applying best practice based on what is going on in other countries.

Urban Ireland has problems as great as rural Ireland in terms of greenhouse gases, the level of car dependence and air pollution from traffic emissions. We have massive challenges and transformational change is needed in urban Ireland as much as rural Ireland. That was very much communicated by European Commission Vice President, Frans Timmermans, in his interview today, in which he said that all of us need to think about the next generation and people across the world in the change that is needed in our energy, transport and food systems and in reconnecting with nature.

**Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice:** Can I just finish Mr. Lumley? If I want to think of the next generation and my young son or daughter, I have to clean the drain on the margin of land we have been given to live and work on. I cannot make the Golden Vale out of it. We have to work that land to keep the next generation there and to hand on that torch. That generation will not be kept there by not cleaning the drain and letting it flood. That will definitely make youngsters emigrate or cause flight from the land, as everyone on the committee who is trying to get them back into farming knows. When Mr. Lumley talks about the European Green Deal, he should

look at the environmental scheme that is out at the moment. The top figure is €300 less than the green low carbon agri-environment scheme, GLAS, which was no great scheme, and on average it will work out less than that.

I urge An Taisce as an organisation to be more positive to people in rural Ireland. Mr. Lumley talks about An Taisce members in rural Ireland, but I would say not many of them ever put in a stone shore in average ground right around this country. An Taisce might have members living in rural Ireland but I do not think they are from a farming background.

**Chairman:** That was more a comment from Deputy Fitzmaurice. I will move to the next member because I want to allow everyone who wants to ask questions to do so.

**Deputy Brian Leddin:** I welcome our guests today and I thank them for sending in their opening statement, which is quite extensive. We are here to discuss this committee's submission to the consultation process on the climate action plan which is open until 18 May. It is not a discussion, more generally, about quarries, sewage treatment plants and importing horticultural peat from Germany. None of these is relevant to our submission on the climate action plan. That is what we should focus our efforts on.

I thank the guests from An Taisce for sending in that quite extensive statement. We have not discussed it in any great detail and it behoves us to go and look at it. If I am correct, the statement consists of An Taisce's contribution plus that of the coalition of 70 organisations which put it together. Is that correct?

**Mr. Ian Lumley:** That is correct. The coalition also includes international development and faith organisations.

**Deputy Brian Leddin:** I thank Mr. Lumley. I very much value the work An Taisce does. It should be commended on what it does, such as green schools on the education side, which is very important, but most especially on the advocacy side, where An Taisce runs the operation of membership fees and donations from private individuals around Ireland who are concerned about environmental protection and Ireland's roles and responsibilities. As an organisation, An Taisce has played a very significant role in Ireland facing up to both its moral and legal duties when it comes to improving our environment locally and, indeed, globally.

Specifically in order to aid our work in developing a submission on the climate action plan, I ask the witnesses about the recalculation of methane and nitrous oxide emissions by the Environmental Protection Agency, EPA, in November 2020. In the opening statement, the witnesses concluded that we have significantly underestimated our emissions over the last few years. Perhaps they could speak more about this.

On the issue of carbon leakage, which was raised, we import approximately 4 million tonnes of animal feed. Some years half of that has been imported, including soy from countries like Brazil. EU imports of soya bean feed have been directly linked to illegal deforestation in the Amazon rainforest. Some 20% of EU feed imports come from Brazil, according to a 2020 article in *Science* magazine.

What impact might climate change have on the need for us to import animal feed into Ireland? What effect would that have on causing further carbon leakage from Ireland and what can we do to reduce the effects of Irish and EU agriculture on Amazonian deforestation?

**Mr. Ian Lumley:** I thank Deputy Leddin for his welcome focus on the climate action plan,

particularly as it relates to agriculture. It is the obvious interest of this committee. Both the An Taisce and the coalition submissions outline very clear recommendations on fair share on all sectors, including agriculture, and equally a just transition. We have already seen how the just transition action support has been advanced in the Bord na Móna case. Bord na Móna was initially proposing to drag out peat cutting until 2030. That was subject to major criticism from all the coalition organisations in Ireland and it would also have subjected Ireland to much international reputational damage. Bord na Móna has now taken a very dramatic new policy direction and sent a very clear statement we are moving from brown to green. The example set by Bord na Móna should now be followed by the agricultural sector and that is entirely incompatible with the current continued dairy intensification model. This model is based on carbon offsetting projections on grassland, forestry and hedgerows that simply do not stand up to scientific scrutiny.

As we move into the second half of the coming decade, under the international emissions system we will have to account for land use change and forestry, LULUCF. It means we must face up to addressing land drainage, soil erosion and clear-fell forestry, which causes carbon soil losses, and peat extraction must be accounted for. I also find it very odd that people now saying it is outrageous that Ireland is now importing peat have no concern whatsoever that we have been devastating the bogs of our midlands as we do not even have accurate figures but much of the peat extracted has been exported.

The answer is put forward at the end of the coalition submission. We must face up to reality and delusional greenwashing rather than thinking there is a magic solution to evaporate methane. The Environmental Protection Agency is a Government agency and has expert knowledge and research capabilities. The agency is linked with the international research network and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change carbon accounting system. It follows that methodology, so when the EPA publishes data it must be taken seriously. It is why we put it at the very top of our submission.

There is reputational risk for the agrifood sector in Ireland, which very much relies on this green image. We and the likes of Teagasc have criticised the greenwashing associated with the marketing of Irish agriculture compared with the reality. The EPA director has said that any plans for further intensification or expansion of the dairy herd would be difficult to sustain. Instead of looking at this as a negative, let us come up with a positive and address the risks of the dairy herd expansion, including stranded assets, whether at farm level or in plant investments. Let us consider diversification to produce the range of food we are capable of producing in Irish soil and climate conditions. We did this in the past and we are now importing them unsustainably. Despite its huge agricultural and export sector, Ireland has very poor food security. For multiple reasons, and not just climate concerns, air pollution and ammonia, we should act. We must do it for diversity reasons and to reduce dependence on a single sector subject to global price volatility.

Animal disease risks have also been indicated in the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, SWOT, analysis for the CAP process. There is a danger in investing all our food production in a single animal-dependent sector. What happens if anything goes wrong with that? That is an issue not just for the animal sector and other countries face major crop risks both with climate change and from new pests and diseases. This is a global test and Covid-19 is part of that, with a disease passing from the animal to the human population as we interact more with the natural environment. The answer is diversification and restoration of the natural environment.



It is positive that we should be doing all these things anyway. There is a well-known cartoon where people say it would be great if we could have a cleaner environment, better air quality etc. but we should be doing this anyway. Let us start thinking that way and of the multiple benefits of a country that would have a stronger and more diversified rural economy and which can go back to some of its traditions in the sort of food and crops produced in the past and that are suitable for our soil conditions. We should embrace the growing trend for organics and the supports that will clearly be provided under the European Green Deal for that, not just through CAP but through other means. Let us look at a positive future we can play a part in advancing.

We need meaningful dialogue but that has not been happening and we are very disappointed about that. It is one of the key messages we are trying to communicate in the coalition document. We need constructive dialogue, which is best achieved by sitting around a table where there are no media or audiences and where we can speak frankly between ourselves. That is what we would like to see happening.

**Chairman:** I call Senator Boyhan.

**Deputy Brian Leddin:** There were two questions and I am very mindful of the time we have. If the witnesses are open to responding in writing, I would appreciate answers to those questions.

**Mr. Ian Lumley:** If the Deputy wants to fire a quick question, I can give him an answer.

**Deputy Brian Leddin:** I went through them already and I am very conscious that other members are looking to come in. Perhaps the witnesses will revert to the committee in writing and I am sure the Chairman will facilitate that.

**Mr. Ian Lumley:** We would be pleased to provide a response on carbon leakage and animal feed. They were covered in previous questions also.

**Senator Victor Boyhan:** I welcome the witnesses from An Taisce. Many of us have diverging views but I respect that our guests have come to robustly make their case.

I will not repeat the comments of others but we all agree we must move towards a just transition for our farmers. We also need to achieve strong legal compliance and climate mitigation. That is not really at issue. Just transition comes with climate justice. I have great time for An Taisce and as somebody living in an urban space along the coast, I can see at first hand the work it does. We are not talking about built heritage today or marine heritage in particular.

One of the problems for An Taisce is it relies on many volunteers and there is a bit of a communication deficit. That is the challenge for the organisation, and I say that respectfully. I agree with many of its core principles, its objectives and what it attempts to do. There is nonetheless a real need to communicate with urban, suburban and rural people. People are hearing different things. There are many mixed messages. I have seen the benefits of the work done by An Taisce in my community but it needs to take on board this challenge.

I know time is tight so I ask the witnesses to send the committee some background information on An Taisce's environmental education unit. The green schools and green flag initiatives, which were mentioned, are positive things An Taisce does. Perhaps it will provide more details on its environmental education unit.

I have worked in the Irish horticultural industry for many years. Having visited many peat

and mushroom establishments, both North and South, I have seen the jobs and economic potential they provide in rural communities. Members referred to Teagasc and Professor Gerry O'Boyle appeared before the committee recently. There is no real alternative to this plan. We have an amazing industry that sustains rural communities and growers export a large volume of mushrooms throughout Europe.

I draw attention to page 26 of An Taisce's submission where Bord Bia's Origin Green brand is criticised. Origin Green is a particularly strong brand in the food sector and one that Irish people, growers and the agricultural sector are very proud of. I am concerned that An Taisce has called into question the use of the Origin Green label on mushrooms. It undermines the brand, Irish agriculture and Irish food. That is a little unfair given all the circumstances and I ask the witnesses to tease it out a little. I thank them for engaging and wish An Taisce well in its work.

**Mr. Ruaidhrí O'Boyle:** Origin Green has been critiqued far and wide. The primary motivation for that is that Origin Green suggests that what we are already doing is sustainable. In other words, if one were to translate that into environmental pressures, the emissions that we are creating in our systems are sustainable because we are green. All the funding in the world cannot change the science of our emissions profile. If we are damaging our waterways and land, having a nice brand to circulate around the world about it is a busted flush and does not cover the domestic ecological damage that is done. The brand has a lot of money behind it and many commercial supporters but that does not get away from the fact that at home we are not sustainably using our land. That is Origin Green.

**Mr. Ian Lumley:** One of the major messages of the coalition document is that we need to see a lot more horticulture and import substitution at commercial level, and right down to domestic and individual garden level. I am very pleased that a major initiative we have for the months ahead, as we come out of Covid, is a community awareness scheme to get people outdoors, preferably walking and cycling, to appreciate nature and bring nature home. Ireland has a very high proportion of people with gardens, both in urban and rural areas, and balconies, where there is also potential to grow more food crops. That is a major initiative we will promote in the summer.

The peat issue is hugely complex. I am one of the non-governmental organisation representatives on the working group on this matter that was set up by the Department with the industry. We have had four half-day intensive sessions and a document is going to the Minister today with recommendations. Interestingly, mushroom compost or substrate is only part of the much larger picture of peat. A major use of peat is in garden plants and compost, rather than the food side. This presents an enormous opportunity. Senator Lynn Boylan would have experience of that in the promotion of Ballymun composting scheme to substitute the current use of peat compost, whether it is in potted plants or bags in garden centres, for other composting sources. Cré, the representative body for organic composting, has advanced a submission on this issue. I read it this morning and it will go to the Minister. We very much want to play our part in the solution in moving away from peat horticulture. It is a recognition of a transition. In certain categories, a lot more research will be needed before an alternative can be found, whereas in other categories of peat use, substitution is much more easily achieved, particularly at the domestic garden level. We are working very actively in that area, which Senator Boylan will be pleased to hear.

On the education unit, one of the things that is being promoted is school gardens but they are only possible in some locations. We are really interested in moving way beyond schools into wider community engagement. This will involve community gardens and promoting more in-

teraction and engagement at community level. We did a pilot project in west Limerick through the Living Limerick initiative in which we engaged with Tidy Towns groups and community associations on issues such as enhancing towns and villages by being more nature-friendly. That means having less mown grass and more areas devoted to wildflower meadows that would attract pollinators, which are so important for sustaining natural systems.

I agree with Senator Boyhan that An Taisce is associated with legal cases and complaints. That is because, in our advocacy role, we need to look in both directions. There is public engagement but we have national and European legal obligations that are not being met or enforced in Ireland. We do not want to be involved but, inevitably, in cases where greenhouse gases, ammonia or water quality have not been properly addressed, we get involved in submissions or legal actions. It is not just us, however. There has just been a major judgment of the Federal Constitutional Court in Germany, following one in the Netherlands, which will have major implications for the agricultural sector in Germany, both on climate and water. There are growing legal actions across Europe, including potentially in Ireland, on air quality and citizens' rights to clean air and clean water. All sectors - agriculture, transport and everybody else - need to face up to the fact that we have signed up to international commitments. If they are not enforced and if the sectors do not co-operate in achieving those ambitions, there will be legal actions. We would prefer if that were not the case.

**Chairman:** Deputy Carthy wishes to make a point of clarification. We are reaching the finishing time for this session.

**Deputy Matt Carthy:** For the record, Mr. Lumley commented on his perception that nobody who has questioned the logic of importing horticultural peat has raised objections in the past to the export of horticultural peat from Ireland. That is not, in fact, the case. I am on the record of both this committee and in the House as questioning the logic of exporting large amounts of Irish horticultural peat at a time when there is a shortage in indigenous sectors.

**Chairman:** I thank the witnesses for their interpretation of the climate action plan. Having stayed quiet during the meeting, I will now make a few comments. As most people will be aware, I am a farmer and I want the next generation to farm my land. While we have to be acutely aware of climate sustainability, economic sustainability for farmers and rural Ireland cannot be dismissed either. I was very disappointed this week to see comments in the media that we do not, as a country, have a responsibility to feed the world. That is a very self-indulgent comment from a person who was recently given the responsibility to produce a programme to tackle the challenges of climate change. We are a wealthy country. I spent much time on the Irish Dairy Board and many African countries depend on the dairy produce we produce to prevent them from starvation. While we are very comfortable here in our own country, and thankfully, our population is very well fed and looked after, that is not the case in all countries around the world. I am in favour and have said on the record continuously that we must recognise and face up to the challenges of climate change. The people of the world have to be fed as well, however we do it. Our dairy is the most sustainable in the world and our beef is the most sustainable in Europe. Those things cannot be forgotten. As Chairman of this committee, it would be remiss of me not to put my views on the record.

I thank An Taisce very much for its engagement, which was extremely informative. As some members said, there were definitely others here with a different point of view. That is what makes for the formation of good policy, however. I very much appreciate the witnesses' views today, which will go into the mix of reforming our submission for the climate action plan.

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I propose that we suspend the meeting for 15 minutes and resume in private session on Microsoft Teams at 5.45 p.m. Is that agreed? Agreed. Please note that members will have to leave this Microsoft Teams meeting and join the separate private meeting call. I thank the witnesses and members.

The joint committee adjourned at 5.31 p.m. until 3.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 11 May 2021.