

# DÁIL ÉIREANN

## AN COMHCHOISTE UM CHOMHSHAOL AGUS GHNÍOMHÚ AR SON NA HAERÁIDE

### JOINT COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE ACTION

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*Dé Máirt, 18 Eanáir 2022*

*Tuesday, 18 January 2022*

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Tháinig an Comhchoiste le chéile ag 11.00 a.m.

The Joint Committee met at 11.00 a.m.

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Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair / Members present:

Teachtaí Dála / Deputies	Seanadóirí / Senators
Richard Bruton,	Lynn Boylan,
Réada Cronin,	Alice-Mary Higgins,
Cormac Devlin,	Pauline O'Reilly.
Alan Farrell,	
Darren O'Rourke,	
Brid Smith,	
Jennifer Whitmore.	

Teachta / Deputy Brian Leddin sa Chathaoir / in the Chair.

**Carbon Budgets: Discussion (Resumed)**

**Chairman:** I welcome Mr. Conor Ó Raghallaigh, head of climate action at the Department of the Taoiseach. From the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, we are joined by: Mr. Brian Carroll, assistant secretary; Mr. Robert Deegan, principal officer; and Mr. Philip Newsome, principal officer. From the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, we are joined by Mr. Bill Callanan, Ms Deirdre Fay, Mr. Fergus Moore and Mr. Dale Crammond. From the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, we are joined by: Mr. Paul Lemass, assistant secretary; Mr. Sean Armstrong, principal officer; and Mr. Michael MacDonagh and Ms Suzanne Nally from the heritage division. From the Department of Transport, we are joined by: Mr. Caoimhin O’Ciaruain, principal officer; Dr. Aoife O’Grady, principal officer; and Ms Andrea Lennon, principal officer. From the Local Government Management Agency, LGMA, we are joined by: Mr. Paddy Mahon, chief executive of Longford County Council and chair of the City and County Management Association, CCMA, climate action, transport and networks committee of the LGMA; and Mr. David Mellett, co-ordinator of the Atlantic Seaboard North climate action regional office, CARO, of the LGMA.

I welcome the witnesses. The purpose of this series of meetings is to consider the carbon budgets. This is the final meeting in this series. We had three meetings last week. Following this meeting, the committee will report back to the Dáil in writing with recommendations by 7 February 2022.

I remind those present of the long-standing parliamentary practice that they should not criticise or make charges against any person or entity outside the Houses by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable or otherwise engage in speech that might be regarded as damaging to the good name of the person or entity. If witnesses’ statements are potentially defamatory regarding an identifiable person or entity, he or she will be directed to discontinue his or her remarks and it is imperative that he or she complies with any such direction. There are limitations to parliamentary privilege for witnesses attending remotely from outside the Leinster House campus and as such, they may not benefit from the same level of immunity from legal proceedings as a witness who is physically present does.

Members are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment, criticise or make charges against a person outside the Houses or an official either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable. I remind members that they are only allowed to participate in this meeting if they are physically located on the Leinster House complex. I ask that prior to making their contribution, members confirm that they are on the grounds of the Leinster House campus.

I invite witnesses to make their opening statements. I request that they adhere to the five-minute timeline due to the number of them attending this morning. I will indicate when they each have one minute left. I invite Mr. Ó Raghallaigh to make his opening statement.

**Mr. Conor Ó Raghallaigh:** In September, I was appointed as head of the climate action unit at the Department of the Taoiseach. Immediately prior to that, I had been serving as deputy Secretary General to President Higgins. In my previous career, I had some relevant experience relating to my current job. I spent six years as a director of the National Parks and Wildlife Service dealing with biodiversity protection and the implementation of relevant EU law in Ireland. I was also directly involved with climate policy for a number of years in the Department of the Environment representing Ireland at EU meetings and also representing the EU in negotiations

at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

The climate action unit at the Department of the Taoiseach was established in 2019 in recognition of the need to ensure a whole-of-government response to the climate crisis and specifically to strengthen governance and oversight of the implementation of climate policy. The unit concerns itself with the broad scope of issues relevant to the climate challenge as well as with wider environmental issues, including biodiversity, water and air quality. Our purpose is to support the Taoiseach and the Government in their leadership of Ireland's transition to a climate-resilient, biodiversity-rich, environmentally-sustainable and climate-neutral economy, as mandated in the passing of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act last summer. The legislation is just one part of the Government's comprehensive approach to climate action. A wide range of practical commitments are included in the programme for Government and now also contained in the Climate Action Plan 2021. Following publication of the climate action plan in December, the Government published an annexe of actions to the climate action plan that contains details of more than 1,000 individual measures that have been agreed to complete the actions committed to in the plan.

The climate action unit plays a role in co-ordinating climate action across the Government, which is essential in such a complex policy space, and also in making sure that each Department and sector can play its full part in moving us quickly and coherently towards the changes that are required. The work of the unit is, as members would expect, cross-cutting, supporting climate action through the provision of systemic supports and seeking to identify and remove barriers to our transition to the climate-neutral future envisaged by the Government. Our principal purpose is to support the Cabinet committee on the environment and climate change in its work as well as that of the associated senior officials group.

The unit also supports the work of the climate action delivery board, which has been tasked with holding each Department and public body accountable for the delivery of actions set out in the climate action plan. The delivery board is chaired by the Secretary General to the Government and the Secretary General of the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications.

A key aspect of monitoring the implementation by Departments of agreed climate action measures, which are set out in the climate action plan and its annexe, is the preparation of quarterly progress reports. This work is also undertaken by the climate action unit that I lead. Under the climate action plan, and its annexe, Departments have been assigned lead responsibility in respect of each measure and a timeline for completion is provided. Departments that have responsibility for actions report progress to our Department in each quarter.

**Chairman:** Mr. Ó Raghallaigh has one minute left.

**Mr. Conor Ó Raghallaigh:** We prepare detailed progress reports, which document each of the measures completed, as well as those that have been delayed and the reasons for any such delay. This process is essential to maintain accountability in the system. These reports are brought to the Government for its information and are published on the Department's website. To date, we have had nine progress reports, the most recent covering quarter 3 of 2021.

From Roinn an Taoisigh's perspective, we now have to increase our focus on implementation and delivery of climate action. A number of actions have been committed to in the climate action plan for this year to better identify and address barriers to timely implementation within Departments and across the public sector and also to ensure that necessary systemic supports

are in place for Departments to fulfil the climate leadership role that is expected of them. I thank the committee for inviting me to attend. I am happy to answer any questions.

**Chairman:** I thank Mr. Ó Raghallaigh. I had to speed him up and he did not get to read one paragraph of his submission into the record. I want to come back to that later. I invite Mr. Callanan from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to make his opening statement.

**Mr. Bill Callanan:** I thank the committee for the opportunity to address it to inform its considerations of the carbon budgets. I am joined by my colleagues, Ms Deirdre Fay and Dale Crammond from the climate change division, and by Mr. Fergus Moore, who is head of forest sector development.

The 51% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions on an economy-wide basis is an extremely ambitious but also challenging target for all sectors, including both agriculture and the land use, land-use change and forestry, LULUCF, sectors. The agriculture sector, due to its biological nature, coupled with the high level of methane in the emissions profile results in unique challenges in particular when compared to other EU member states. In the absence of new technological innovations and as long as the sector produces food, feed or fibre there will always be residual emissions.

The recently published Climate Action Plan 2021 sets out what is needed from each sector with the plan committing the agriculture sector to reducing its emissions by between 22% and 30% to bring the emissions for agriculture into the range of 16-18 Mt and for LULUCF, a contribution of 2 Mt from land use and land use change and forestry. We are not starting from a point of inaction and the commitments in the Climate Action Plan 2021 build on progress to date. Food Vision 2030, the stakeholder-led strategy for the development of the sector, sets an ambitious agenda, addressing sustainability in all its dimensions and identifying that Ireland will aim to become a world leader in sustainable food systems. Food Vision 2030 is about targeting increases in value growth rather than volume growth and evolving and adjusting to a more sustainable way of farming that uses fewer inputs and relies instead on new technologies and new practices. The publication of the Climate Action Plan 2021 goes hand in hand with Food Vision, thereby ensuring Ireland can continue to produce high quality food in a manner that protects the environment and mitigates climate change. It is important that we drive this momentum forward.

Driving environmental ambition and change at farm level will require a combination of policy instruments, such as financial incentives, for example through the Common Agricultural Policy strategic plan, through market-driven support for farmers by food processors and food companies or regulation with an initial focus on reducing nitrogen use, or through the roll-out of new emerging technological solutions and innovations. Early action and high levels of take-up will be required across our 135,000 farms to drive momentum towards achieving the required ambition in the context of managing emissions from our dairy herd and transforming our model of beef production.

As noted earlier, food production is a biological system and the climate Act makes it clear that the social and economic role that Irish agriculture plays in society must be considered at all stages of the carbon budgetary process. To ensure early action in the first five-year carbon budget, there will be a significant focus on reducing nitrous oxide emissions in agriculture, mainly associated with the use of chemical nitrogen fertiliser. A national fertiliser register of compliance will be developed and reductions in chemical nitrogen allowances will help to achieve our objectives, as will supports such as training and advisory services to underpin this transition.

Reductions in methane are more challenging as the technological advances are not available in the marketplace. Progress on methane is expected to accelerate in the second five-year carbon budget as methane-reducing feed additives become commercially available. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine continues to significantly fund and participate in international research to address the methane challenge from pasture-based livestock production systems. The importance of cutting methane to achieve the Paris Agreement temperature goals is widely recognised but it must be acknowledged that in the short term the global focus is on cutting fossil methane, something for which the EU Commission will legislate in 2022. The challenge to reduce methane levels in Ireland is very clear, as 95% of total methane emissions arise in the agriculture sector where abatement potential is limited.

New technologies, such as the development of feed additives, will be needed to complement existing technologies to bring the sector into the climate action plan target range of a reduction of 22% to 30% for agriculture. Long lead-in times will be essential to allow for the scale-up and deployment of commercial technologies. Importantly, given the international research focus and findings to date, the commercialisation potential of this technological advancement and innovation is extremely promising. Through the national soil carbon observatory we support increasing afforestation rates, a focus on reducing emissions associated with the management of peat-based soils in agricultural use and the development of our knowledge about carbon flows in our soils. This will be critical also in respect of land-based emissions and opportunities for removals.

Agriculture globally impacts on our climate but it is also very much impacted by climate change. As set out in Food Vision 2030, there is a critical need to consider the three pillars of social, economic and environmental sustainability as we move forward. The targets as set out in the 2021 plan are ambitious but challenging for the sector as part of the economy-wide target of 51% reduction in emissions. In particular, there are significant challenges around the reduction of methane in our pasture-based livestock production system. We welcome the fact that the second five-year carbon budget is aligned with the current technology constraints in this regard. I and my colleagues are happy to answer any questions committee members may have.

**Chairman:** I now invite Mr. Carroll from the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications to make his opening statement.

**Mr. Brian Carroll:** I will use my opening remarks to address the three issues the committee has indicated that it would like to discuss. The first relates to how Departments intend to deliver the carbon budgets. The Climate Action Plan 2021 builds on the Climate Action Plan 2019, recognising that a larger range of measures are now required to achieve the significant increase in ambition set out in the 2020 programme for Government. The focus of the 2021 plan is on delivering a 51% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2030 and a pathway consistent with climate neutrality by no later than 2050.

To support these two objectives, the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 provides for the adoption of a programme of three sequential, five-year, economy-wide carbon budgets, namely, 2021 to 2025; 2026 to 2030; and 2031 to 2035, the latter being provisional. It is these budgets the committee is currently considering with a view to providing a report to the Oireachtas. Once the carbon budgets are adopted, Government must then approve sectoral emissions ceilings within the limits of the respective economy-wide carbon budgets. The 2021 climate Act also provides that Government approve an annual update to the climate action plan that is consistent with the carbon budget programme. Once the carbon budget programme and associated sectoral emissions ceilings have been adopted, the Climate

Action Plan 2022 will update the 2021 plan to ensure such consistency.

While I have set out key elements of the legal and policy framework to support Departments delivering the carbon budgets, this is not to say it will be easy. The challenge of doing so is very significant and will require transformational change across all sectors of society and the economy. The current climate action plan sets out ambitious targets, measures and actions for all sectors while also recognising we cannot yet identify all the emerging science, technologies or policies to meet our full ambition, but it points to further measures that could close the gap. A programme of work will be undertaken to refine the potential of these measures and to set relevant targets and pathways. These will be reflected in future climate action plans.

The second issue signalled by the committee is whether the carbon budgets meet the requirements under the 2021 climate Act. While the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications is currently considering the carbon budgets in accordance with the provisions of the legislation, including consulting with the committee, other Ministers and the public, the carbon budget technical report of the Climate Change Advisory Council clearly sets out that the proposed budgets have been calculated to allow compliance with 51% emissions reduction by 2030 and to set Ireland on a pathway to achieving climate neutrality by 2050.

The proposed carbon budgets have been calculated in line with SI 531 of 2021, Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 (Greenhouse Gas Emissions) Regulations 2021. They use the most recent Environmental Protection Agency, EPA, inventories and projections, they are built on the latest science, and they are consistent with international best practice on reporting.

With regard to the need to maximise employment and ensure a just transition in Ireland, appropriately designed climate policies, measures and actions have significant potential to open up new employment and enterprise opportunities, including targeted supports to help particularly impacted groups, regions and communities adapt to the new economy, as committed to in the Climate Action Plan 2021. In terms of consistency with Article 2 of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, UNFCCC, and having regard to international climate justice, Ireland is required to make an appropriate contribution via the European Union's nationally determined contribution to the Paris Agreement. The proposed carbon budgets will enable this.

The third and final issue the committee highlighted for discussion is how the carbon budgets intersect with the climate action plan. I have already outlined this in my statement. It is clear that a relentless focus on delivery and intense policy evaluation over future iterations of the climate action plan will be essential to achieve the greenhouse gas emissions reductions necessary for compliance with the carbon budget programme to be adopted by Government this spring.

I thank the committee for inviting me and my colleagues. I am happy to answer any questions.

**Mr. Paul Lemass:** I thank the Chairman and members for the opportunity to address the joint committee on this topic of carbon budgets. I am joined by my colleagues, Mr. Seán Armstrong, Ms Alma Walsh, Mr. Michael MacDonagh and Ms Suzanne Nally.

Housing for All sets a target of an average of 33,000 dwellings per annum. The State plans to invest €20 billion in the next five years, which is the largest investment in housing in the history of the State. Over its lifetime, Housing for All seeks to eradicate homelessness and promote social inclusion. It takes account of our climate action targets though the follow-

ing policies. One is the implementation of nearly zero energy buildings through the building regulations, which will ensure that while we achieve more energy-efficient buildings we also build healthy, sustainable and durable buildings suitable for the Irish climate both today and in the future. In addition, the Department's retrofitting programme for local authority housing is an essential measure to target climate justice. The Department plans to retrofit approximately 40% of local authority dwellings not currently performing to a building energy rating, BER, of B2 up to B2 or cost optimal equivalent by 2030. There is also the national planning framework objective to promote compact urban growth and town centres first.

As set out in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021, the Climate Change Advisory Council, CCAC, published proposed carbon budgets in October 2021. These proposed budgets are planned to be presented to the Oireachtas and approved by the Government in the coming months. The Government will then set sectoral emissions ceilings determining how each sector of the economy will contribute to the achievement of the budgets. The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage is implementing a range of ambitious decarbonisation actions for housing, planning, marine and natural heritage protection and analysis of Ireland's climate. In 2021, we worked with the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications and a range of other Departments and agencies to publish the Climate Action Plan 2021.

I will give the committee an overview of the many areas this Department is working on to achieve our shared goals of achieving net zero emissions no later than 2050 and a 51% reduction in emissions by the end of this decade. The statutory national marine planning framework, established in 2021, sets out objectives and policies, including in respect of climate change adaptation and mitigation, which must be considered with regard to all programmes, plans or policies and consenting, approvals or regulations in Ireland's maritime area. Management of Ireland's maritime area is being reformed through the Maritime Area Planning Act, which was signed by President Higgins on 23 December last. The emerging plan-led system will provide a foundation for climate measures, such as meeting renewable energy targets through offshore renewable energy installations, and identify ways that all activities in the maritime area can contribute to carbon reduction and adaptation measures.

I am pleased to advise that the Climate Action Plan 2021 aligns closely with the Housing for All strategy in areas such as compact growth, nearly zero energy buildings and retrofit of social housing. While the retrofitting of the existing buildings is the responsibility of the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, this Department is showing public sector leadership in our ambitious programme of retrofitting social housing. The Department has made a submission to the national development plan that 36,500 local authority-owned houses will be retrofitted to a BER of B2 by 2030, at an estimated cost of €1.2 billion. In 2022, the energy efficiency retrofitting programme will see a significant increase in funding support to local authorities to €85 million, allowing 2,400 homes nationally to be upgraded to a B2 or equivalent standard.

The national planning framework, NPF, puts climate action and the national objective to transition to a low-carbon and climate-resilient society by 2050 as a central outcome. In addition, it promotes compact growth. The overall NPF strategy is for a better balance of development between the regions and a greater focus on Ireland's cities, where 50% of development overall is targeted, with 50% of that growth to be supported to take place in the four cities other than Dublin. The introduction of nearly zero energy buildings, NZEB, and major renovations performance requirements in building regulations by my Department in 2019 is already making

a significant contribution to these targets. Central Statistics Office analysis shows that 97% of new dwellings have an A rated building energy rating and the BER database shows that 80% of new dwellings built to these 2019 regulations have installed heat pumps.

Measures to protect biodiversity are also a welcome inclusion in the plan, as are measures to restore and rehabilitate Ireland's peatlands. The restoration and protection of raised bogs is an action for this Department in Ireland's climate action plan. Returning peatlands to more natural conditions will deliver a range of climate benefits through reduced carbon emissions, long-term carbon storage, increased carbon sequestration and enhanced resilience to the locked-in impacts of climate change. The Department has accelerated significantly its programme of restoration for raised bog special areas of conservation and natural heritage areas in recent years with assistance from the carbon tax fund and Exchequer funding for the Department. The programme has allowed the creation and sustainment of a number of jobs in the midlands region in particular. The Department is currently drafting the fourth national biodiversity action plan, with a review of the third plan also planned.

As the Department with responsibility for water quality, including good agricultural practices for the protection of water regulations, the inclusion of measures in the climate action plan to address inputs from agriculture, such as reducing the usage of chemical fertiliser, will bring benefits to the quality of our rivers and lakes and for climate change. A key commitment in the programme for Government is to publish a strengthened river basin management plan in 2022 to advance Ireland's commitment to ensuring a robust and effective policy for water services and water quality through the implementation of the EU water framework directive. In developing the final plan and its programme of measures, the Department will seek to identify those measures that will deliver multiple benefits for water, biodiversity and climate change. Met Éireann has also provided significant actions which will deliver climate services as enablers of climate action in areas such as water, transport, energy and biodiversity.

In addition to these major actions, which will make significant impacts on carbon emissions, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage has a number of supporting actions, which are critical to the reductions. These include wind energy guidelines, measures to support the reduction of embodied carbon in construction materials and implementation of requirements for electric vehicle recharging infrastructure. The sectoral contributions of these actions will be captured in other sectors. Specific actions under all these policy areas are outlined in the climate action plan, which the Department is working to implement.

We have ambitious targets in terms of the quantity, type and location of homes to be delivered and we are also ambitious for climate action, including energy efficient housing. Through our building regulations we are ensuring the quality of the homes we are building for future generations continues to achieve the high standards we are setting for decarbonisation of our built environment. We are happy to address any questions the members of the committee may have.

**Chairman:** I thank Mr. Lemass for his opening statement. I invite Mr. Ó Ciaruáin from the Department of Transport to make his opening statement.

**Mr. Caoimhín Ó Ciaruáin:** I thank the Cathaoirleach and committee members for this opportunity. The Ó Ciaruáin following Caoimhín always trips people up. As of today, I head up the climate action division in the Department. I am joined today by Dr. Aoife O'Grady, who heads up the climate delivery division, which looks after electrical and demand management policies, and by Ms Andrea Lennon, who heads up our energy, air and adaptation division,

which includes policies relating to renewables and biofuels for transport.

As members will know, the transport sector, at the last count, accounts for approximately 18% of Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions. Covid-19 had a temporary suppressing effect on emissions from transport but that does not lessen the need for fundamental changes to the transport system. Transport behaviour is deeply embedded in how and where we work and live. This makes the challenge in delivering the required reduction in transport a systemic and challenging one. However, the prize is worth it. There are many significant co-benefits for all of us from more sustainable travel in terms of quality of life and health benefits. It will result in quieter streets and neighbourhoods, free from noisy traffic and fumes, and more livable towns and cities with better air quality and less urban congestion.

In transport, the Climate Action Plan 2021, CAP21, sets out a roadmap to deliver a range of between 42% and 50% in carbon reduction by 2030. The pathway for decarbonizing transport is multilayered, combining significant behavioural change and technology adoption. It is premised on the avoid-shift-improve approach to achieve the level of transformation required over the longer term. It still requires individual choices and action on a daily basis and no less than a significant mindset shift in terms of how we travel. The pathway for the next decade focuses on the following measures: first, a significant modal shift to sustainable transport modes, away from fossil-fuelled cars to public transport and active travel modes; second, accelerating the electrification of road transport, particularly the private car but also public transport; and, third, increased use of biofuels within existing technologies.

Modal shift to sustainable mobility will be achieved through a significant increase in public transport and active travel infrastructure and services, allied with the introduction of measures to disincentivise the use of the traditional fossil-fuelled vehicle, so-called demand management measures. This category of sustainable mobility and demand management measures will deliver the greatest impact over the longer term. These measures will require significant buy-in across the system, working closely with stakeholders, including other Departments, local authorities, the enterprise sector, the political system and, particularly, and most of all, the citizen.

The electrification of the passenger car fleet is ambitious and necessary. The climate action plan envisages a future where Ireland's roads are ultimately free from fossil fuel cars. In this regard, we are leading the way with public sector fleets and providing supports for private car users to make that switch. There are acknowledged challenges on this journey but the destination is clear.

Increased use of biofuels in existing technologies will continue to make a significant contribution to decarbonising transport in the medium term while we transition to lower and zero-emission transport modes.

There are more than 70 actions set out in the transport chapter of CAP21, many of which fall within the policy remit of the Department of Transport and its agencies. There are also actions across CAP21 that will support and facilitate the decarbonization of transport, particularly in terms of planning, energy, enterprise and taxation. The national development plan ring-fences a significant level of Exchequer investment for transport, focusing in particular on public transport, active travel and electric vehicle, EV, infrastructure, that will be mobilised to support our carbon reductions targets. The pathway here will be very challenging for the sector. The Department will ensure that delivery is accelerated where possible in order to maximise the overall carbon reduction impacts in a manner that is timely, fair and equitable.

The climate action plan identifies a gap to target of 0.9 Mt CO<sub>2</sub> eq in respect of anticipated growth in travel demand during the intervening period. We are engaging in a review to refine measures to see what can be done to make up that gap in a fair and equitable manner over the course of the coming months. This recognises that the decarbonisation of transport will impact in different ways on different cohorts of the population and sectors of the economy. Optimising the wider economic and societal benefits as we move forward is critical.

The Department will continue to focus resources on cross-Government and cross-sectoral collaboration in modelling and research. It is clear that the assumptions we make now on the pathways to the decarbonisation of transport may not hold and will need to evolve as technology and behaviours change over time.

As I said, my colleagues and I are more than happy to take any questions.

**Mr. Paddy Mahon:** On behalf of the CCMA, I welcome the opportunity to appear before the Joint Committee on Environment and Climate Action and help inform its consideration of the carbon budgets. I am joined by David Mellett from the, Atlantic Seaboard North CARO.

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act frames Ireland’s legally binding climate ambition in delivering a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions of 51% by 2030. More recently, the climate action plan has set specific objectives for the public sector, which includes local government, regarding energy efficiencies and emission reduction, that include: improving the energy efficiency from the 33% target in 2020 to 50% by 2030; delivering a 51% reduction in carbon emissions by 2030 from local government operations; upgrading local authority housing stock to B2 or better; retrofitting national public lighting stock; reducing emissions from the local authority fleet and taking a leadership role in low-emission transport options; delivering a decarbonisation zone within its administrative area that will become the focus for a range of climate mitigation, adaptation and biodiversity measures; and preparing a local authority climate action plan at least once every five years, containing both mitigation and adaptation measures.

Under the system of carbon budgeting established by the Act, the Climate Change Advisory Council has proposed three five-year economy-wide carbon budgets, covering the periods 2021 to 2025, 2026 to 2030 and 2031 to 2035, to assist the State in achieving its national climate objectives and greenhouse gas emissions targets agreed by the European Union. The CCMA recognises and agrees with the approach to: “balance the urgency for era-defining change and practical feasibility while also providing a 51% reduction in the total amount of greenhouse gas emissions from 2018 by 2030.” These carbon budget proposals look to align with the specific objectives and targets set out for the local government sector in the climate action plan 2021.

We are not starting from a standing start. By 2019, local authorities had saved 28% over the 2009 baseline, which is equivalent to 123,000 tonnes of avoided CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Local authorities are building on these successes and working towards the new national 50% energy efficiency and 51% emission reduction targets for the sector.

We are committed to adhering to our carbon budgets through improvement works to our public lighting, offices, housing stock, leisure centres, infrastructure and transport fleet, and by prioritising green procurement, the circular economy and investing in decarbonisation projects. We are also committed to providing appropriate climate action training, with the support of the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications to all our 29,000 employees and our 942 elected members.

Operationally, it is important to note that while local authorities are generally responsible for less than 5% of our administrative areas' emissions, we are well positioned in our communities with already established engagement in climate action to also take on a broader role of influencing and facilitating others to meet their targets.

Local authorities are committed to engage with and empower local communities and enterprises to embrace climate action by using existing and enhanced local authority structures, operations and networks. The local authority climate action charter, which was signed by every one of the 31 local authorities in October 2019, confirms the sector's commitment to scale up efforts and to play a key leadership role locally and nationally in delivering effective climate action. It is increasingly clear that responsibility for climate action extends across several Departments and organisations. As a sector, however, local government can act as a conduit to lead a just transition locally in order to ensure a co-ordinated local response to climate change, bringing our communities, businesses and staff along with us.

Set against the backdrop of an evolving and increasing ambition of national climate policy in recent years, the local authority sector has developed Delivering Effective Climate Action 2030, a strategy for the sector to deliver on the commitments of the climate action charter and to maximise the 31 local authorities' collective impact on Ireland's national climate action targets. In Delivering Effective Climate Action 2030, an overarching commitment on leadership is highlighted to ensure a coherent approach to climate action across the administrative and political structures of all 31 local authorities. The sectoral vision identified in this strategy is to leverage the capability, reach and resources of local authorities to effectively lead and co-ordinate climate action across Ireland. Our mission is to deliver transformative change and measurable climate action across our cities and counties and within our organisations through leadership, example and mobilising action at local level.

We have identified six key goals: to foster governance, leadership and partnerships for climate action; to achieve our carbon emissions and energy efficiency targets for 2030 and 2050; to deliver on climate adaptation and climate resilience; to mobilise climate action in local communities; to mobilise climate action in enterprise and to support the transition to a net-zero and circular economy; and to achieve a just transition. Delivering Effective Climate Action 2030 has identified a number of additional resources required within the sector to deliver on our climate action ambitions and to work with our stakeholders to ensure that actions for emissions reductions, building climate resilience and behavioural change are designed to be inclusive and to make this a transition for all.

I thank the committee. I am happy, along with my colleague, Mr. Mellett, to take any questions members may have.

**Chairman:** I thank Mr. Mahon for his opening statement. That is all the opening statements, so I invite members to raise their hands to ask questions. I ask for agreement from members that we stick to the two-minute rule in asking questions because we have limited time, as members will know, just three hours, in the committee room. Is that agreed? Agreed.

**Deputy Richard Bruton:** I wish this leadership team well in steering what is a massive transformation of their sectors. In many cases they will have to lean heavily against established practices. They are taking on a really important national endeavour, and I wish them well.

My questions are directed to the two framework Departments, namely, the Departments of the Environment, Climate and Communications and the Taoiseach. First, has the fact that we

now have legally binding targets changed the nature of the Departments' approach, which up to now has been best endeavour, and many would say poor endeavour? Will there be sanctions, trade-offs, rations and big bets driven from the central Departments?

My second question is whether the Departments plan to have a central think tank to develop policy tools. From where I am sitting, there do not seem to be proper policy tools for forestry, rewetting, methane management, SUV reduction or the retrofitting wave. I could probably go on. We do not even have education Departments investing to match housing developments in a timely manner. Is there an approach beyond co-ordination and sitting at senior officials' group meetings to have a central brain that will drive the new policy tools?

Third, what are the criteria for weighing the essential trade-offs between the sectors? We have seen in the past things like marginal abatement costs but, clearly, those leave out the social disruption that policies could carry. How will that be done? Is it a matter of horse-trading between the central Departments and the line Departments or is a metric being applied?

Finally, the issue of social consensus came up. How do the Departments intend getting community buy-in and social consensus on both the change and the policy tools? We already see a lot of resistance to policy tools such as carbon pricing, road pricing, planning acceleration, etc.

**Chairman:** I thank Deputy Bruton. Those are questions for the Department of the Taoiseach and for the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications. Mr. Ó Raghallaigh may go first on behalf of the Department of the Taoiseach.

**Mr. Conor Ó Raghallaigh:** I thank the Deputy. We are building on a lot of the foundations he put in place during his time as Minister. I have only been in this sphere for a few months but, having come back to it after having worked in climate policy a decade earlier, my own view is that there has been significant change with regard to the framework in which we are now operating. The legislative scheme that has been put in place brings a degree of concrete reality to the situation. There are now very concrete ceilings under the carbon budget process. Sectoral emissions ceilings will follow. For policymakers, Ministers and civil servants, this provides a definite set of parameters in which we and the sectors we are responsible for regulating will have to operate. The thinking has changed. We have to move from the "best endeavours" approach the Deputy mentioned to an approach based on set tonnes of emissions and sequestrations. It is largely a zero-sum game in that we have to come in within the legally mandated budgetary ceilings. That will involve many trade-offs. We will have to decide where those trade-offs will take place and in what sectors is it most cost-efficient and socially acceptable to make these cuts in emissions.

I will pass over to Mr. Carroll to add to my response to the Deputy's other question as he may be over the detail a bit more than I am. We have the benefit of being able to work with a number of models that try to plot the various scenarios with regards to emissions, but also abatements. There are marginal abatement cost curves such as the Deputy mentioned. One was undertaken for the 2019 climate action plan. It formed the backbone of that plan. McKinsey did some work that fed into the updated plan in 2021. There are also other models throughout the system which look at issues in respect of energy and agriculture. They do not completely talk to one another, that is, they are not completely comparable. As part of my remit, I chair a research and modelling group. We are currently looking at all of those models and at the other layer of analysis that may need to be undertaken to join them up and layer them over one another in order to consider issues regarding the macroeconomic implications of the plan and

the distributional effects the Deputy spoke about in respect of what the implications will be throughout-----

**Chairman:** We seem to have lost the connection with Mr. Ó Raghallaigh. I will call on Mr. Carroll to answer those questions. I ask witnesses to be as brief as possible in their answers because, although members are restricted to two minutes, they can still get quite a few questions in and those questions may be directed to quite a few witnesses. We do not have a great amount of time.

**Mr. Brian Carroll:** I will be brief. Deputy Bruton's first question was on whether we have changed our approach now that we have legally binding targets. While we now have legally binding targets for 2030 and 2050, by the time the spring comes these will have been refined further to provide legally binding economy-wide carbon budgets, which will be followed by sectoral emissions ceilings. That implicitly changes the approach because, for the first time, it will place legal obligations on the Ministers responsible for specific sectors. That leads on to the second question about whether we have a central think tank. I will not repeat what Mr. Ó Raghallaigh said about the modelling capacities and so on that we have in place but, given those new legal accountabilities, there will be an onus on each of the line Departments to start bringing forward policies to ensure they remain within their sectoral ceilings. There will be accountability to the committee and the Oireachtas in respect of that achievement. There is then a role for the climate Minister under the legislation, who will have to build his or her capacity to comment on policy efforts, with the support of the Departments of Public Expenditure and Reform, Taoiseach and Finance, and other Departments, because there is now a legal requirement on the Minister to make recommendations, potentially, to other Ministers, if they are off course.

The first thing to be said about the criteria for waiting is that the 2019 plan, as we know, was based on a marginal abatement cost curve. That was fully incorporated into the 2021 plan, but the step up in ambition was such that all the known and settled technologies we could identify, and the pace at which we could ramp them up, did not even get us the full way to the ambition. We have had to identify further areas that will need to be explored very intensively over the coming years to ensure we realise the full ambition over the decade. When we get the least-cost options and so on, other criteria will have to be brought to bear regarding social acceptability, fairness and practical issues around how quickly we can ramp up supply chains and get infrastructure delivered on the ground.

The final issue Deputy Bruton raised was on social consensus. That will be very challenging. The recent work by the EPA on measuring sentiment towards climate action indicated people believe climate change is taking place and want something to be done, but that is not actually translating into the actions or decisions that need to be taken necessarily being taken. There is a challenge for policy design and for engaging and communicating with people. Enduring structures for a national dialogue have been set out in the climate action plan 2021 with three elements - one is around local engagement and activation, where the local authorities will be very important, the second is a national convening a number of times a year, where key stakeholders feed in to policymaking and the third is around strategic communications, which will be led by the Department of the Taoiseach.

**Chairman:** I thank Mr. Carroll. We lost the connection to Mr. Ó Raghallaigh when he was speaking. Does he want to add to his earlier comments?

**Mr. Conor Ó Raghallaigh:** No. Mr. Carroll captured most of what I would have said.

**Deputy Darren O'Rourke:** I thank all the witnesses. I have a number of questions. The officials from the Department of Transport mentioned research in the context of the focus on achievability of targets. As part of that research, are they looking at why, when cost is not a barrier to access to electric vehicles, EVs, there is not a greater uptake? I noted the figures from last year. Many people are still opting for SUVs, in particular, and other vehicles, when EVs would be an option.

We have heard significant criticism of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in recent days regarding the level of preparedness and the alternatives being provided for farming communities and farmers in respect of alternative, sustainable models. Do the officials believe that criticism is fair? Much of it is levelled at their Department. What measures will they take to address that, if they do? I noticed many caveats in their contribution. What emissions reductions do they envisage for the agricultural sector in the term of the first carbon budget? The CCAC was critical of what it saw as a lack of an overarching, whole-of-government approach to climate action. How does the Department of the Taoiseach intend to address that and the significant implementation deficit?

Do the Departments of the Taoiseach and the Environment, Climate and Communications see an opportunity, in terms of increased participation, for the sustainable energy communities to have an improved and enhanced role and, as we heard from previous contributors, for the public participation networks to increase community-led climate action and bring about a understanding of and connection with these issues? How do they intend to co-ordinate and deliver that, if they believe such an opportunity exists?

**Chairman:** The first question is for the Department of Transport.

**Mr. Caoimhín Ó Ciaruáin:** I will make an opening comment and then hand over to Dr. O'Grady who looks after the electrification piece. The cost of that switch remains a barrier, certainly in the consumer perception. The big challenge here is to get beyond that in terms of the total cost of ownership piece. In the next couple of months, we will look to establish the office of low-emitting vehicles which will address much of the consumer challenge with regard to that switch. I will pass over to Dr. O'Grady, who will give a bit more detail on that.

**Dr. Aoife O'Grady:** I have responsibility for the climate delivery division of which electric vehicle, EV, delivery is a part. I interpret the Deputy's question as being about research we might be conducting or work we are doing into the non-financial barriers to EV uptake. As Mr Ó Ciaruáin has said, there is still a cost differential. I think the Deputy suggested in his comment that people are still buying very expensive vehicles, when clearly they could afford to purchase an EV if they chose to do so. We are doing some research at the moment, which will inform our infrastructure strategy, on the perceptions of barriers to uptake for people who may be thinking about purchasing an EV. That research will report shortly. Our anticipation is that the perception of the need to charge and the reliability of EVs in terms of recharging distance might be an issue.

In the past six months since I took up my role in July 2021, the number of new vehicles that have come on the market has been astonishing. All of them will do 400 km to 500 km on a single charge and in some cases they will do up to 500 km or 600 km. What is happening now within the EV market is that many of those potentially higher-cost vehicles are becoming available as high-range EVs. I anticipate that over the coming years we will see a further shift within the market when many of the more expensive internal combustion engine vehicles will come on to the market as EV options and people will start to purchase them.

What is also happening this year in terms of consumer engagement and advice, as Mr. Ó Ciaruáin mentioned, is that we will establish the office for low-emitting vehicles. Part of its function will be to provide a price comparison and an objective one-stop shop of information for people who are interested in purchasing a new car. The provision of information on the differential between EV and non-EV, what one can get from an EV, the range one will be able to get and further information about the charging network we will deliver should tip that further in order that we see an increased EV uptake again.

**Chairman:** The second and third questions are for the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

**Mr. Bill Callanan:** I am unsure about the question on the alternative models in terms of land. What I am trying to articulate in the conversations is that this is around the whole issue of diversification. If one looks at diversification, one will see that there are two different issues. One is diversification of income and the other is diversification of land use. From an income point of view, clearly Teagasc is mandated in terms of having an options programme, at which it is actively looking to see where the opportunity for added value is. Focusing on that is a critical component of Food Vision 2030. That is improving the return in terms of products we produce.

In terms of diversification committed in the climate action plan, similarly, a substantial increase is identified for organic farming within the plan, going from 2% to 7.5%. There is a clear ambition articulated by the farming sector, as well as contributing to the energy sector. That is clearly understood internally and it is sought by both industry and agriculture. Agriculture is seeking opportunities to contribute under that.

On land use, there are areas such as afforestation. Colleagues can comment on that but the opportunities for forestry use or land, including for anaerobic digestion, will all have to get focus as we progress through the decade.

On splitting, I do not have absolute figures on the split between the first and second. What we highlighted in the opening statement is that when one looks at methane as a clear element of the package of agricultural emissions, it is a fairly challenging one in that we will be looking new technology and the improvement of reading. The EU methane strategy identifies three pillar areas around feeding, breeding and anaerobic digestion. We are developing and investigating all of those. There is a challenge in getting those translated right through into inventory in the early part. However, we are focusing strongly on nitrous oxide, which will be in the early budgetary period, as something that can be changed. This will be done by reducing fertiliser usage, changing fertiliser type etc. Those will all contribute to that. If we were to take a *pro rata* expectation, in terms of delivery on what is the proposed CCAC budget, we would have to be delivering something close to 2 megatonnes - something in that sort of range - in the first budgetary period to contribute to the overall economy-wide commitment of 51%.

**Deputy Darren O'Rourke:** That is what Mr. Callanan envisages happening.

**Mr. Bill Callanan:** We have to aim towards that sort of reduction. On foot of the 2019 plan, we engaged immediately with the sectors on what were the actions we needed to take to try to build the momentum. In agriculture, because we deal with 135,000 farmers, clearly we have to move early with respect to implementation because there is always going to be early adoption by some and slower adoption by others. When we are dealing with a broad population like that we need to ensure everybody comes along with us but it will be at different levels and speeds.

**Chairman:** I thank Mr. Callanan. I think the Deputy's fourth and fifth questions were primarily for the Department of the Taoiseach but the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications might take the fifth one as well.

**Mr. Conor Ó Raghallaigh:** On the overarching Government approach, when you stand back and look at it, the enactment of the Bill last year and the climate plan process does give that overarching approach with the structures in place to try to co-ordinate this. We have a very active Cabinet subcommittee on the climate that met, I think, eight times in 2021 and a senior officials group meeting under that. That is all trying to give such a coherent overarching approach to climate action. The extent of the challenge has been brought together in the climate action plans that are going to be further developed over this year and will need to reflect the sectoral emissions ceilings and the overall economy-wide carbon budget that is put in place. Deputy Bruton alluded to it but this is a huge challenge for the system and for Departments and the public sector generally, as well as broader society. There are going to be issues and there are going to be things we need to explore further. In the climate action plan for this year, we have a number of actions trying to look at impediments to delivery around the system and looking at capacity constraints in various Departments and the broader public sector. All that work will feed into a closer a co-ordination of effort by Government but the structures are in place to provide that.

**Chairman:** I think the fifth question was addressed to Mr. Ó Raghallaigh as well. It was on the opportunity for increased participation through sustainable energy communities and public participation networks, PPNs. Have you any comment to make on that?

**Mr. Conor Ó Raghallaigh:** From the Department of the Taoiseach's point of view, there is a whole issue on communications and engagement that our Department will be leading on, and this year there are actions set down in the climate action plan for that. There is a centralised need to co-ordinate that communications and engagement piece. Most of the work on this has been done elsewhere in the system. Mr. Carroll might be better placed to reflect on that.

**Mr. Brian Carroll:** To answer the question asked about the role for PPNs and sustainable communities, the answer is absolutely yes. There is a very important role for them to play in terms of that engagement and activation at local level. As I mentioned earlier, we have three pillars to the approach. The local one, PPNs working through the local authorities and harnessing those existing structures like sustainable communities, will be central to that. The focus there is not just about engaging people and talking about climate, which is obviously very important to do, but that it quickly leads to action at local level and the types of changes that need to happen very quickly starting to happen. Yes, we see a role for PPNs and sustainable communities.

**Chairman:** The last question is quite interesting and, if Deputy O'Rourke will allow me to follow on, that probably applies to the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage as well because it is over local government. Does someone wish to come in on the question about the PPNs?

**Mr. Paul Lemass:** On the PPNs, we certainly see them making contribution to the statutory land use process through the community development plans that are currently being reviewed at the moment with a view to ensuring climate action responses are appropriately signalled in there. In addition, we would like to draw attention to the peatlands community engagement scheme, which is supported by the Department, and the Community Foundation for Ireland, which funds biodiversity links between ecologists and local communities.

If the chief executive of Longford County Council, Mr. Mahon, was available to come in, maybe he could speak about the county development plan review process and the inputs from PPNs and others on that. I will also call on my colleague, Ms Nally, to speak a bit more about the community engagement scheme for peatlands, which is in place.

**Mr. Paddy Mahon:** The PPNs are very much linked to community representation and community involvement in local authorities, and there has been positive engagement already in the conversation on climate change and climate action in 2021 via the PPNs and, indeed, Comhairle na nÓg. The PPNs are very important. They reach into all the communities across the country through the local authority networks, and it has proved to the Department to be very beneficial in terms of the conversation leading into the climate action Bill and the climate action plan and the Act.

In the area of the reviewing of county development plans, we are all at various stages in the review and updating of our county development plans. Climate action very much governs the determination of the new county and city development plans that are either in place or being put in place by us in Longford and our colleagues throughout the country. Climate action is becoming an overarching element of how we plan for our future. Where I am, in the midlands, the impact of climate action on the closure of the power stations in Longford and Offaly has a fundamental impact right now on how we plan for our future. As I mentioned earlier, one of our key objectives as a sector is the area of just transition. We are experiencing the full impact of what is a just transition and the territorial plan that is being consulted on at present in the midlands as we speak.

**Chairman:** Does Ms Nally want to come in on peatland restoration consultation?

**Ms Suzanne Nally:** Yes, of course. The National Parks and Wildlife Service strongly encourages locally led and community-led conservation efforts. It has done so through the variety of projects and schemes it operates. The peatlands community engagement scheme, one such scheme, was launched recently by the Minister of State, Deputy Noonan. It intends to encourage local communities to restore, revitalise, conserve or put in place local amenities or undertake feasibility studies, a range of ecological reviews or any projects that would contribute to positive action for peatlands, as such. That is in addition to other programmes the National Parks and Wildlife Service supports, such as the Community Foundation for Ireland, to which Mr. Lemass referred. We also provide funding for a network officer for the all-island climate and biodiversity research network. We also provide funding directly to local authorities for biodiversity action. There are a range of supports and initiatives already in place to support community-led conservation and actions that contribute to national conservation plans and the national climate action plan.

**Deputy Jennifer Whitmore:** I thank our guests for attending the meeting. My first question is for Mr. Ó Raghallaigh and it relates to the annual review of the climate action committee. That review mentions that the national climate action delivery board, the role of which is to hold Departments and public bodies accountable for the delivery of their actions, did not meet at all in 2020, despite a commitment to meet quarterly. Is that board still in existence? Did it meet in 2021? Is it the intention that the board will continue to meet to hold entities to account for the climate action commitments made under the 2021 plan?

I will address my next question, which is about local government, to Mr. Dunne. I was a councillor in Wicklow County Council for a number of years. One of the issues councils encounter is a lack of funding when it comes to meeting the national commitments that have been

set for them. That is the case, for example, for electric vehicle, EV, infrastructure. Councils only receive 75% of the funding necessary to install EV charging points. The implementation and delivery of those by local government has been very poor in recent years. Funding could have played a part in that. Are local authorities receiving sufficient funding to enable them to meet their many commitments, including new commitments that are being set down for them under the current plans?

My final set of questions, which relate to housing, is for Mr. Lemass. Today's residential building report specified that more than 90,000 houses are vacant at the moment. It is clear the most sustainable building is an existing building. Refurbishment involves the equivalent of 15 tonnes of carbon compared with 50 tonnes of carbon for a new building. Does the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage have a target number of vacant premises it would like to see refurbished? What are the mechanisms to do that?

There was a target to retrofit 2,400 social homes that were due for upgrade in 2021. When I asked the question in November, only 199 properties had been retrofitted. Does the Department have an update on that figure for 2021? What were the barriers to getting those properties retrofitted and how will they be resolved, going forward?

**Chairman:** The Deputy addressed her second question to Mr. Dunne.

**Deputy Jennifer Whitmore:** I meant to address it to Mr. Mahon.

**Chairman:** Okay. The Deputy's first question was for Mr. Ó Raghallaigh.

**Mr. Conor Ó Raghallaigh:** I thank the Deputy. The climate action delivery board has met on four occasions altogether. Three of those meetings occurred in 2019. It was due to meet again in March 2020 when Covid-19 struck. My understanding is the Covid situation prevented the board from meeting for some time. It did meet again towards the end of 2021 on the back of the updated climate action plan for 2021. The board is likely to meet in the coming weeks and it is envisaged it will meet quarterly, as per the commitment in the climate action plan.

**Deputy Jennifer Whitmore:** The board only met once in 2020 and 2021. Is that correct?

**Mr. Conor Ó Raghallaigh:** Yes.

**Deputy Jennifer Whitmore:** Did that have anything to do with the failure to meet our targets under the 2019 action plan? Quite a number of targets were missed.

**Mr. Conor Ó Raghallaigh:** The delivery rate under the Climate Action Plan 2019 was relatively good. I think it was about 77%. This means actions that were delivered in the intended timeframe. It does not mean the actions were not undertaken. They could have been brought forward to the next period. Our reporting structures allow for that. If a target is missed, it moves into the following quarter. There have been difficulties and the delivery rates have been sporadic in terms of the results. They dropped a little bit throughout 2021. There are a few reasons for that. Part of the issue has been that the officials involved in climate action policy around the system were quite engaged on the Bill which came through in the first half of 2021, and then on the review of the climate action plan. There were interim climate actions in place for 2021. I think there has been a bandwidth issue in terms of the same officials being responsible for planning as well as implementation. That is one of the capacity issues we are going to have to face on this.

**Mr. Paddy Mahon:** On the funding issue for local authorities, it is an issue in some areas and maybe not so much in others. In the roll-out of electric vehicle charging points, there is definitely a gap between the grants that are currently available and the cost of putting in chargers. Most city and county councils will have put in chargers in their towns and public areas but there is a significant gap. The grant available is up to €5,000. Our costs, just based on a survey we did as a sector last year, are anything up to €15,000 or €16,000 for the low-range charging points. There is a challenge there, no doubt. However, as local authorities we are committed to showing the way and putting in chargers where feasible and where we can afford it. There is a significant role for the energy companies and others in this space to meet the expected demand.

The sector has embarked on a major public lighting retrofit across the whole country. That is fundamentally funded by the sector with support from Europe under the ELENA funding stream. It is a significant challenge for the sector but we have embarked on that process and the first contracts were signed just before Christmas for the southern region. Retrofitting of our housing stock is funded from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. Local authorities are beginning to upgrade and decarbonise our fleet. That is generally funded by ourselves. We need our fleet to do what we do. We need to fund it appropriately. There is no doubt that there are and will be significant challenges as we invest in decarbonisation projects in the future. It is not a one-size-fits-all process. Definitely in the area of electric vehicle charging there is a challenge at present.

**Mr. Caoimhin O’Ciaruain:** One of the actions we have this year and in the coming months will be to deliver an EV structure strategy which will look to some of the issues the Deputy has pointed out and to which Mr. Mahon from the LGMA was referring. There is an increase in funding profile this year. I will pass over to Dr. O’Grady to give a bit more detail on that.

**Dr. Aoife O’Grady:** We were aware in our own engagements with local authorities that the funding provided through the public points scheme was not meeting their requirements. We have undertaken to review that scheme in consultation with local authorities this year. When we launch the infrastructure strategy later in this quarter, the plan is that it would be very shortly followed by a couple of funding streams to help with delivery of the strategy, one of which would be a revised public points scheme. We are aware that the cost of the works connected with putting in the chargers and the capital works connected to that can go well above the cost of installing and running a charger. Finding funds to cover that is where, we understand, the local authorities have had difficulty.

**Mr. Paul Lemass:** On derelict houses, Housing for All sets out a range of areas where we are trying to look at vacancy. Among them, we will launch this year a Croí Cónaithe towns fund to support individuals who want to refurbish vacant properties in towns. That will be complemented by better homes energy grants from the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications. There is also a statement in Housing for All that we will buy, through compulsorily purchase orders, CPOs, via local authorities, 2,500 vacant properties.

In addition, we will launch the town centre first policy shortly. It will complement the vacancy in this area. It will also pick up on urban regeneration and development fund, URDF, and rural regeneration and development fund, RRDF, moneys where we will be drawing up specific criteria to address vacancy as part of future funding proposals under both of those funds.

On the actual number of retrofits, the target was 2,400 in 2021. We achieved 1,730 at the end of the year. Frankly, the biggest barrier was Covid, which restricted our ability to go into people’s houses. Mr. Mahon might want to contribute on the reaction on the ground when ret-

rofitting has been done in the midlands. The midlands has not hit the numbers it would have hoped to for those practical reasons, but I understand that the response has been extremely positive.

I will refer to a few other points. We are in the process of reforming the fair deal scheme, which means that a person will be able to sell a property which might currently be lying vacant without any additional penalty. There are proposals from the Department of Health to reform it further in order that a property can be made available for rental while the applicant is in a fair deal nursing home. We are supporting vacant homes officers in local authorities with a fund of €50,000 per authority. We have also called out the need for a Government portfolio of properties to be examined in order that any vacant properties in a town can be made available and put on the market. Those are the measures we are taking.

**Deputy Jennifer Whitmore:** On the 90,000 vacant houses, has Mr. Lemass a target for the number he would like to see retrofitted?

**Chairman:** I must be fair to other members. Deputy Whitmore has had quite a significant opportunity to ask questions.

**Deputy Jennifer Whitmore:** That was the question. Is there a target for the number of vacant homes to be retrofitted?

**Mr. Paul Lemass:** There is not a specific target in respect of those 90,000 homes. What we found from the CSO analysis of vacancy that was taken at a particular point was that when local authorities followed through and examined individual streets where vacancy was alleged to have been an issue, the actual levels of vacancy were not as high as were signalled in the CSO report. We are trying to build a bottom-up approach to this. We do not have a target for the 90,000 homes.

**Deputy Jennifer Whitmore:** I thank Ms O'Grady and Mr. Lemass.

**Chairman:** Mr. Lemass gave a number in respect of retrofitting social homes. Is it the case that they all are being retrofitted to B2 level?

**Mr. Paul Lemass:** B2. If it is not possible to get to B2, then the cost-optimal equivalent.

**Chairman:** Did Mr. Mahon want to contribute on these questions?

**Mr. Paddy Mahon:** Moneys were made available to local authorities in the midlands from the just transition Fund more than two years ago. I am not sure if these are included in Mr. Lemass' numbers, but there are approximately 750 houses in the pilot programme in this regard. A number of those are complete, a significant number are on site and approximately 300 are at tender stage.

The feedback we are getting from residents in the houses that are complete has been generally very positive. The shift from traditional fuels to the retrofit-type energy solutions to our social housing stock anecdotally has been surprisingly positive. We anticipated, particularly in my county of Longford, a degree of reluctance or, indeed, opposition to the changeover. Thankfully, the response has been generally positive thus far.

**Deputy Jennifer Whitmore:** I thank Mr. Mahon.

**Deputy Brid Smith:** I thank all of our guests for attending and for their submissions. I

want to ask a number of questions, first of all, of the Department of Transport. Would the officials agree that the public service obligation, PSO, levy in this country compares poorly to those in other European states? It is a key mechanism for reducing fares and moving towards more frequent and cheaper public transport, which would attract people away from private cars. However, the only concrete figure in the climate action plan seems to be of a further 1,500 low-emission buses as against 1 million EVs. This does not inspire confidence in the ability to increase our public transport journeys. The estimate is quite low, that is, a 2.9% increase in public transport journeys by 2042. I would have viewed this as very unambitious for one of the key sectors that must see a reduction in emissions. In terms of the amount of money being ploughed into State subsidies for EVs versus subsidies for public transport, we would be far better off investing more in public transport, which is more sustainable than the purchasing of EVs, the production of which can be bad for the environment.

I wish to ask a question of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. There is a target to upgrade 36,500 local authority houses, with 2,400 to be done this year. A spokesperson has said that the greatest barrier to doing the work to date has been Covid. If we come out of Covid, do the officials believe that we will reach the target? Given that the average cost per house is between €56,000 and €75,000 and that a small number of workers are available, is it achievable? The State's commitment is very small.

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine's submission is littered with the word "sustainability", yet it clearly says that the Department refuses to even countenance cutting the national herd or dealing with the question of the growth in the number of animals. Instead, the Department says that the growth will continue and it will rely on future as-yet-unproven technologies to deal with agricultural emissions. The officials will see from the ongoing concerns of and protests by ordinary farmers that those farmers feel they are being put upon and have to pick up the tab for the big agricultural production companies. Will the officials comment on this point, please?

**Mr. Caoimhín Ó Ciaruáin:** The commitment around public transport under the Climate Action Plan is backed up by a commitment in the national development plan to capital funding in particular. The Deputy's specific question related to the PSO levy. It is under review constantly. One of the key issues there has to do with some of the proposals in the climate action plan, which will be supplemented through the sustainable mobility policy that will be forthcoming in the next couple of months. The policy will set out the framework for delivering much greater investment, including infrastructural investment across public transport and active travel. It involves more than just the conversion of the fleet to low-emission vehicles. There is a much wider strategy around the big projects, for example, BusConnects, and delivering a more reliable and attractive service from within the PSO provision. The latter will require investment on the service side. As such, both capital and current expenditure will make those projects deliver the level of modal shift that we are seeking.

The Deputy referenced a figure of 2.9% in respect of 2042. That is probably the greater Dublin area, GDA, strategy. The climate action plan sets out a significant modal shift through BusConnects and a number of other projects of 500,000 daily public transport and active travel journeys by 2030. This represents a 12% move away from fossil fuel cars to public transport journeys and active travel.

**Chairman:** There was a question on the PSO levy and where Ireland stands in that regard compared with the rest of Europe. If I am correct, that was Deputy Smith's question.

**Deputy Bríd Smith:** The question relates to how the PSO levy will be improved and whether the Department of Transport sees that as key to being able to deliver future sustainable public transport that, in itself, is the key to getting cars off the road.

**Mr. Caoimhín Ó Ciaruáin:** Absolutely. In terms of delivering the level of modal shift we are requiring here, we will be looking at both the capital investment side and the PSO subvention. It has to be made attractive in terms of the fares etc. That all has to be looked at in the coming years. That is on the table or will be a consideration in respect of all of this.

**Mr. Paul Lemass:** The target is 36,500 by 2030, inclusive of that year. The Deputy referred to the 2,400 units. That was actually the target for 2021 but it was impacted by Covid. We ended up doing 1,730 but I am confident we would have done the 2,400, were it not for the Covid restrictions. That backlog will be made up in 2022. I know from local authorities that although works were not always progressing as we would have liked, background work such as putting tenders in place has advanced quite a lot. Many tenders are in place to enable work to now commence. The Deputy referenced a cost of between €65,000 and €70,000 per house. Our evidence suggests the range is approximately €20,000 to €50,000 per house and the funding is provided at a level of €33,000 per house. The cost varies from one house to another. That is the nature of retrofit.

**Chairman:** I thank Mr. Lemass. That number relates to the social housing cost.

**Mr. Paul Lemass:** That is correct.

**Chairman:** Okay. We now move to the representatives from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

**Mr. Bill Callanan:** There are two elements to the Deputy's question. On the issue of sustainability and our submission being littered with that word, it is very much at the centre of the agriculture sector going forward. That is recognised in the Food Vision 2030 report. However, it is sustainability in its three manifest elements, that is, environmental, economic and socially sustainable production models, that is very much clearly at the centre.

As regards an increase in the national herd, that has not been policy for several years in the context of potential for growth. Indeed, action 2 on page 57 of the Food Vision 2030 report requires us to produce detailed plans by quarter 2 of 2022 to manage the sustainable environmental footprint of the dairy and beef sectors. That includes reducing total methane, nitrous oxide and ammonia emissions. It is not policy in the context of growth and has not been for several years. The focus in Food Vision 2030 is on value over growth in numbers. Even in the context of the 2019 action plan, we were the first sector to come out with a roadmap of actions for farmers to do because it is very important that people understand how we implement the ambition. At that time, we identified that methane levels could not grow if we were to achieve the overall commitments made under the 2019 plan.

**Deputy Bríd Smith:** For how many years has it been policy under the national food strategy not to grow the national herd? As the national herd increased in the five years from 2015 to 2020 by something like 20%, when did it become policy not to encourage growth of the national herd, or even to curtail or stop such growth? When did that happen? Where was that in the strategy?

**Mr. Bill Callanan:** To be clear, it was not policy in terms of growing the herd. There was a situation post the removal of dairy quotas in 2014 whereby there was an increase, given that

the sector had been constrained for approximately 30 years. I do not have exact figures but it was in approximately 2017 or 2018 that the herd number stabilised in terms of the total number of animals in the country in the past couple of years. Food Vision 2030 is the current strategy. We update every five years. Food Vision 2030 in particular identified at that time that the issue was around the development of value added. It was in 2017 or 2018 that the total number of livestock in the country stabilised. There undeniably been continued growth in dairying but there has been reduction in other areas of the livestock sector.

**Deputy Bríd Smith:** Could we get those exact figures because those figures would counter what the Environmental Protection Agency, EPA, has reported recently?

**Chairman:** Can Mr. Callanan revert with those numbers?

**Mr. Bill Callanan:** Yes, we can certainly give the herd profile over the past number of years.

**Senator Alice-Mary Higgins:** I thank the guests. Could the officials comment on the concerns that the budgets, as proposed, do not seem to align with the 7% per annum commitment to the programme of Government? We have been told that it would be a budget of 468 Mt for 7% per annum, whereas the proposed budgets are at 495 Mt, so an additional 27 Mt might be required.

I will put those questions to the Department of the Taoiseach, and of course the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications can answer this as well. I welcome the identification that this is ultimately about tonnes. It is a very hard and real measure. The witness mentioned risk analysis. Something we heard a lot about was the precautionary principle. What risk analysis has been done on the dangers of backloading, in terms of both variables? Scientifically, we know that there are risks, but, if targets are not met early, there are financial risks as well. We have access to finance now. Within the Department of the Taoiseach, is there the understanding that we have more flexibility in terms of access to finance at the moment than compared to the carbon budgets? Again, the risk context, what emergency measures are being considered in terms of the next 18 months to three years, if it looks like we are not on track? It is clear there is no scope for going any lower than the top of the sectoral targets. In fact, it seems that it would be prudent to have “reach targets” in each sector. Could Mr. Ó Raghallaigh comment on that? We almost have to aim higher so we do not fall lower.

I have a question for the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine on emergency measures. Forestry will only come in after 2030. Could Mr. Callanan comment on measures such as limiting artificial insemination in the short term? We know that the scientific measures are unproven and will only conflict.

Similarly, on housing, why are we looking at only retrofitting 40% by 2030 and not 80%? I know it cannot happen immediately, but certainly it would seem that by 2025 we should have that capacity. Lastly, on demolition, reference was made to putting embodied energy into new building. Would we look to a temporary stay or a higher bar for demolition, given that it also front-loads emissions in the period where we are most vulnerable, which is the next five years?

**Chairman:** There were quite a few questions. I ask witnesses to be as brief as they can be and also invite witnesses to respond in writing with supplementary evidence. If they could do so, we would certainly appreciate that. We will first call on the officials of the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications.

**Mr. Brian Carroll:** The analysis of the Climate Change Advisory Council, CCAC, pro-

posals, is ongoing. The Minister is awaiting input from the committee once its deliberations are complete and is also consulting with other Ministers and the public. We will be in a better position to comment on numbers once that analysis is complete and we have received all of the input. All I can say is the overarching objective as set out in the legislation is 51% by 2030 and an average of 7% per annum over the decade, which is based on all emissions - land and non-land - from 2018. I am very happy to revert to the Senator with a written note, if helpful, and to receive any calculations the Senator might have as input into that analysis.

**Senator Alice-Mary Higgins:** Thank you. I will follow up in writing.

**Chairman:** We will move on to the Department of the Taoiseach and the risk analysis and emergency measures questions.

**Mr. Conor Ó Raghallaigh:** I thank the Senator for the question. The financial analysis underpinning all these things was, to some extent, undertaken in the modelling and research that was done to feed into the 2021 climate action plan. We are now looking at the increased ambition that has been put in place through the Act and there is a requirement on the system now to look much more closely at the financial and economic implications of all this. Risk analysis is something at which we are looking quite closely at the moment. When looking at the climate action plan, we need to look at whether the measures that are set out in the plan are achieving what they said they would. The Senator alluded to the risk analysis of back-loading issues. In a way, we will be waiting to see what the Oireachtas recommends in that regard and what the ultimate budgets will be. There will be an annual economy-wide reduction requirement. The scheme envisaged allows for flexibility for overshoots and undershoots, and savings between budget periods, so that is a possibility. It is work that we need to do more of and it is something we will take forward through the research and modelling group. It is something in which the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, and the Department of Finance are particularly interested. It is an ongoing piece of work that we will be undertaking in the coming year in advance of the 2022 climate action plan.

**Chairman:** On the emergency measures side of it, is the Department doing any research or work on what, if any, emergency measures might be required if there is slippage?

**Mr. Conor Ó Raghallaigh:** There are mechanisms within the scheme of the Act to allow for that. We are charged with monitoring its implementation and this committee will also have a role in that if it looks like the measures set down in the various climate action plans, as well as sectoral measures, are failing to deliver the types of emissions reductions that are required. That is within the scheme that the Oireachtas has agreed. Within the various Departments and sectors we will try to pre-empt any of that and start work on it but at the moment we are not planning for emergency measures or the action plans not to be delivered. That is our position at the moment.

**Chairman:** There was a similar question for the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

**Mr. Bill Callanan:** On emergency measures and AI, I am not sure how it contributes to the overall situation, from a breeding perspective. Methane is clearly one of the big issues for agriculture and is a big proportion of our overall profile. The EU methane strategy for agriculture identifies three opportunities: feeding, including feed additives; breeding strategies; and anaerobic digestion. Within breeding, what we are trying to do is, basically, breed an animal that has greater longevity and better delivery of economic traits such as milk production,

milk solids, etc. The evidence is irrefutable that there is quite a substantial difference between animals of superior breeding versus those of lower breeding when it comes to environmental efficiency. To put some numbers on that, the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation has the largest data processor in Ireland and brings together all the data points relating to animals' performance and translates that into an economic breeding index that is understandable for farmers. That is on the dairy side and on the beef side with the use of stars. How does one make that simple? There is a €50 identified difference between high and low breeding values, which translates into approximately €100 of economic benefit. In simple terms, a better bred animal is generally a smaller cow. It has greater longevity, which is about living longer with very good production profile. AI is the greatest opportunity for success in this area.

**Senator Alice-Mary Higgins:** I am asking about the next five years. So many of the plans in agriculture deliver longer-term results, but for the next five years, what measures will be important? We might need to stop doing certain things. Some things will take a while to start, but there are other things we need to stop.

**Mr. Bill Callanan:** I understand. The big focus, particularly in the early stages, is around nitrous oxide in terms of reducing the dependence on nitrogen in the system artificially and also reducing crude protein in the animal feed diet, which is another source of nitrogen. We have set out objectives in terms of reducing nitrogen usage overall by 20%. It may have to be reduced further. It is important we do not replace nitrogen with feed imported from abroad. That is critical. It is about working with farmers in terms of education and about the technologies being rolled out. By way of example, clover, multi-species swards, are less dependent on artificial nitrogen than on prairie and rye grass. We have seen a significant growth in terms of the opportunity and the development of those technologies. Simply put, the Minister announced a scheme in the budget under which support will be provided for the introduction of multi-species grassland, which we will be rolling out this year.

The big focus, in particular in the early stage, has to be around reducing nitrous oxide associated with fertiliser, but doing so in a way that does not really result in unintended consequences. Internationally, particularly within the EU, a huge amount of dairy and beef is now indoors. It is not a system we want to see in Ireland. A pastoral-based, rain-fed, grass-based diet is environmentally much more acceptable.

**Senator Alice-Mary Higgins:** The 30% is the key goal. I would be interested in some follow-up from Mr. Callanan on how he believes the 30% can be achieved through the measures he mentioned in the next five years.

**Chairman:** If I may, I would like to take the question a little bit further. Is the Department doing any contingency planning to prepare for a possible eventuality that it does not meet the targets that are set out?

**Mr. Bill Callanan:** In what way?

**Chairman:** How would the Department get back on track if it was not achieving the cuts that we need to see?

**Mr. Bill Callanan:** I will set out my understanding of the process, on which Mr. Carroll might also like to comment. We have the economy-wide budgets. They will flow through the Oireachtas and through Government in terms of developing into sectoral targets. There is a requirement for an annual revision in terms of the climate action plan. That will, by necessity,

require us to continually review and assess our overall performance. Similarly, the food vision structure, which is the strategy drawn up by stakeholders under the chairmanship of Tom Arnold, flows back to a high level implementation committee, which is chaired by the Minister and will meet six times per annum. In terms of openness and transparency, we have set up an environmental sustainability committee to report on our overall performance and on whether we are on track in terms of the objectives set out in regard to climate, biodiversity and water. We are very much committed to reporting regularly in terms of our overall performance in the agriculture sector and, by necessity, that will lead to a continuous review of achievement of the commitments.

As I said, on foot of the 2019 plan, the sector was very much to the fore in terms of developing a roadmap. It was one of the first sectors to do so. We have had significant engagement within industry in terms of these objectives. Sustainability was mentioned. It is driven not just by regulatory compliance, but also by market demand. The market is expecting that we can back up our ambitions environmentally with clear, undeniable evidence that we are on that trajectory.

**Chairman:** I thank Mr. Callanan. I ask the witness from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to respond to the remaining two questions. The first question was around the retrofitting target being set at 42% and not 80%. The second was in regard to regulations around demolition and embodied energy.

**Senator Alice-Mary Higgins:** In particular in the next five years.

**Mr. Paul Lemass:** On the retrofitting, the target for housing across the whole country is 500,000 out to 2030. Within that, local authority housing equates to approximately 7% of that housing stock and it was a *pro rata* allocation to the sector to say that local authorities would shoulder their equivalent proportion. As that proportion has been front-loaded, the overall proportion of retrofitting is greater in social housing than in the broader housing stable in the early years. We are something of a pathfinder and a capacity development enabler by virtue of taking on a greater proportion in the early years. Between 2013 and now there have been 73,000 shallow retrofits completed at a cost of €161 million. It is not that the remainder of the stock has been untouched. There is the potential to do further work post 2030, but the target to 2030 is 36,500. Incidentally, that is based on 100% Exchequer funding.

On the question of a temporary stay on demolition, we are looking through the national planning framework and in Housing for All to achieve compact urban growth. That requires us to work with brownfield and infill sites and that, in turn, requires demolition from time to time. In Housing for All, housing policy objective 23, namely, “Drive economic sustainability and reduce Construction Costs”, relates specifically to construction and demolition waste reduction and the change in the designation for end of waste, which speaks to the circular economy and the reuse and segregation of demolition waste so it is no longer waste for landfill but is reused as part of the construction process. That is the direction of travel we are working in.

**Senator Pauline O’Reilly:** I thank everyone. It is fair to say the 255 pages of the annex of actions will define whether we and the Government are successful or not. Those actions come down to the witnesses and their Departments. No pressure but we are relying on them to get it right.

I have a couple of specifics for two of the Departments. The first is in relation to Mr. Callanan’s Department. How many farms fall under the Common Agricultural Policy, CAP? Is it

fair to say some of the higher income and more intensive farming may not be involved in CAP? We are reliant on CAP to be greener and fairer next time around and this could drive some of the change but how does the Department aim to drive change in other farms? It is quite a specific number there. Also, how many of the farms use nitrogen fertiliser at present?

Second, for Mr. Lemass's Department, there are independent bodies that define many of the actions around the country. I am thinking in particular of An Bord Pleanála. Mr. Lemass's Department appoints the board but the body is independent. Is the board looking at the 51% currently and applying that in its decisions?

County and city development plans cover every inch of this country and what happens in those plans will decide what kind of planning occurs, where our roads and cycle lanes are and how much parking goes into our cities. Those decisions all fall under those development plans. They are being looked at, proposed by executives like Mr. Mahon and specific elements are being voted on by councillors. I think of a case in Galway where all councillors bar one voted against moving the setback distance at a council area in Galway further from the sea. That is not mitigation but it still applies when we think of all the actions now being made and decided.

**Chairman:** The first question is for the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

**Mr. Bill Callanan:** On falling under CAP, that is the assumption. This may allude, in particular, to whether certain regulations apply to a farmer who is not applying under the Common Agricultural Policy. That would be something like the nitrates regulation, for example. I want to be clear with everybody.

A measure like the nitrates regulations is national legislation. It is policed generally through compliance with the Common Agricultural Policy and local authority inspections. All farmers, however, are subject to it irrespective of whether they apply under the Common Agricultural Policy. The nitrates action programme is the principle control mechanism for the use of nitrogens etc. and sets limits, storage requirements and the stock carrying capacity on land.

I do not have a figure for how many farmers work outside the Common Agricultural Policy but I would suggest that it is quite small. In terms of the suggestion that there are large farmers who have deliberately avoided the requirements of the Common Agricultural Policy and the additional conditionality that accompanies, I think that there is a handful at most. I have heard of one case but I want to make clear that they are still subject to the rules and regulations of the nitrates action programme.

**Senator Pauline O'Reilly:** My question is not just about the nitrates action programme. It is about all of the measures that may now be set down in the Common Agricultural Policy that may help to move farmers to a different type of farming, other than regulating them. That is the challenge the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine will face.

**Mr. Bill Callanan:** There are 135,000 farmers. A certain number of farmers are very small. I think there is only a handful of very large farmers who may be avoiding a situation of applying for the Common Agricultural Policy. In general, the vast majority of all farmers are applicants under the Common Agricultural Policy.

As for how many farmers use nitrogen, there is quite a different spread across the farming population of those using it. Approximately half of the fertilisers used in the country are used by dairy farmers. Tillage farmers also use it. The spread then across beef is quite varied in terms of their dependence on nitrogen fertilisers. Under the organic requirements, just around

2% of the land area is organic so they are certified as not using it. We also have significant areas of what is called high nature value, HNV, land, which is identified as approximately 1 million ha and that includes the likes of a lot of commonage, Natura land, etc. That would receive either no or very little fertiliser in the main in terms of overall usage. I do not have absolute figures.

The way that we track overall operations at farm level is through the national farm survey, which is operated and implemented by Teagasc. We report the metrics associated with that survey to the European Farm Accountancy Data Network, FADN, which gives an oversight on the available storage on farms and income from different farm types. As it is structured to cover quite a wide variety, we can get the results for the Senator. The initiative has been expanded to look at issues, including biodiversity, or it is expanding in that way to get metrics on biodiversity at individual farm level as well, and how we can report and improve on that.

**Chairman:** We will turn to the officials from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to respond to the question about An Bord Pleanála.

**Mr. Paul Lemass:** I thank the Senator for her question. I will bring in colleagues from the planning side in a moment but first I will signal that the main instrument we use to regulate emissions from buildings is the energy performance of buildings directive. The directive has been transposed into Irish law and it is a feature of building standards in Ireland. As the enforcement authority for buildings standards is a local authority, each local authority is responsible for buildings standards in its area.

**Senator Pauline O'Reilly:** My question was on planning and not on the building regulations side. I have very little time so I ask the witnesses to stick to discussing planning, if they do not mind.

**Mr. Paul Lemass:** I will bring in my colleagues on the planning side. Ultimately, any building that is to be built has to be nearly zero energy building, NZEB, in Ireland. It has to be zero emissions for housing buildings and that is a requirement of building standards. My colleague, Ms Alma Walsh, will speak on the planning-related matters.

**Ms Alma Walsh:** I ask the Senator to repeat her question on An Bord Pleanála.

**Senator Pauline O'Reilly:** The decisions made on planning will decide whether we hit our targets, to a large degree. I am talking about roads, cycle lanes and where we build houses. One example is whether we have town centres first or one-off housing. What obligation is there on An Bord Pleanála and indeed on local authorities to ensure that county development plans and decisions are hitting that 51%? That seems to me a determining factor as to whether or not we hit our targets.

**Ms Alma Walsh:** I might deal with the policy in regard to the local authorities in the first instance. Statutory land use plans prepared by a local authority are not prepared in a vacuum. There is a hierarchy of policy from the national planning frameworks through to the regional spatial and economic strategies that inform each of our county and city development plans. Then there is a wider policy influence and consistency that is sought through the legislation. In other words, policies included within development plans and local area plans are required to be consistent with national policy and objectives, so there is already a decided or a settled policy piece at a national and regional level ahead of a development plan review being undertaken. Separate to that, as part of the process there is an opportunity for Departments and other agencies to engage with a plan-making review process. Many of our Departments are designated as

prescribed bodies as part of that and would therefore be notified at pre-draft, draft and material amendment stage of any plan process. The opportunity is there to input and provide observations and submissions on policies as they are developed by the local authority. There is a good level of engagement and an established process where these issues do not necessarily always come to the end of the process on adoption of the plan.

The second point is that on completion of a plan review, the Office of the Planning Regulator has the role of evaluating and assessing that particular development plan and has the duty and the power to make a recommendation to the Minister to issue a section 31 direction. There are structures in place that track and follow policies and objectives included in development plans to ensure that they are consistent. That is well established, but ultimately it is the elected Members who make the decision in a council chamber in regard to the plan, as they are entitled to do and for which the legislation allows. Where the process kicks in after that is the role of the Office of the Planning Regulator.

In regard to the question on An Bord Pleanála as the appeals board in the planning system, it is obliged to have regard to the policies, guidelines and objectives set out at a national and regional level, and also the development plan that is in force. Its point of reference in examining any planning appeal that comes before it will be the established and agreed policy that is already in force, and to track that and ensure it is implemented at development application stage.

**Chairman:** I thank Ms Walsh. Can I query it further? Under the Act, State bodies have to act in a way consistent with the 51% objective. I wonder how that is cross checked. As Senator O'Reilly pointed out, with the development plans and other strategy and statutory documents that local authorities and other State agencies would adopt, what is the checking mechanism to ensure they are aligned with the 51% as per their legal obligation? Is it the OPR in the case of the development plans?

**Ms Alma Walsh:** What is actually set out is the opportunity to engage each of the relevant Departments throughout the plan review process. The 51% is an important consideration at pre-draft, draft and material amendment stage in a plan and one imagines would be picked up on and accounted for. What we see, as many of the development plans are being reviewed throughout the country, is the reliance on data and the importance of the evidence base to support any of the policies that are included in the plan-making system. We are seeing a new wave of development plans that are climate conscious, and climate proofing on that front. I cannot speak to the other non-statutory pieces that sit outside of the planning process but there is a very strong, established way. I believe the climate action plan and the legislative frameworks that are in place will give rise to, if we like, a new wave of stronger, more robust and climate-proofed development plans. The system is in transition at the moment, and it is important to say that. We are four years post the publication of the national planning framework. In moving towards a more compact growth approach, particularly in our towns and villages, some of which are derelict and require levels of regeneration, we are on a pathway to bring a transition piece on that front, and climate is very important in that regard.

I hope I have answered the question. If there is anything supplementary I can add, I will do that.

**Senator Pauline O'Reilly:** Ms Walsh has answered the question but it is clear there are some holes. I am not saying it is Ms Walsh's fault but I would urge a review of the development plans that are under way at the moment because they last for five years, as she knows, and I know there are holes in those. I have concerns and I hope the Department will take them on

board. I look forward to any of the responses that I did not get coming through. While I do not mean to be abrupt, time is limited. I value Ms Walsh's time.

**Ms Alma Walsh:** I appreciate that. It is probably opportune to advise that the section 28 development plan guidelines which are due to be published shortly provide guidance to all of our 31 local authorities in regard to preparing their own development plans. They are currently being finalised with a view to publication so there is certainly an opportunity there to build in or strengthen, where we need to, on this particular front. While they have been drafted with regard to the climate agenda in order to increase that and to bring that to bear on development plan policy, there certainly is an opportunity on foot of CAP being published to further bring that to the fore. We will certainly take that on board and build that into the finalised set of guidelines.

**Chairman:** I thank Ms Walsh. I might put the same question to the Department of Transport. I was reading the draft greater Dublin area, GDA, strategy last week and I put in a submission before the consultation closed last Monday. In that, it is said that emissions in the GDA under the draft strategy would reduce by 37% by 2042. The GDA is responsible for about one quarter of all of our transport emissions so if we are only aiming for 37% in a period that is twice as long as the timeframe that the first two carbon budgets take us to, are we missing a trick? Are these documents at all aligned with the 51% objective?

**Mr. Caoimhín Ó Ciaruáin:** There could be a misunderstanding here. As the NTA strategy is drafted, it states that full implementation of all the measures would be delivered by 2042 with a 69% reduction in emissions. They set that out quite clearly in the draft strategy. Obviously, it is still a consultation piece and they will be reviewing any considerations that have come in as part of that. In terms of delivery to 2030, they have acknowledged there is a gap of 0.4 megatonnes to deliver the full 51% by 2030. That is down to issues in regard to demand management and how a demand management scheme that they propose to put in place over the next year to 18 months would deliver that gap to target up to 2030 in terms of the 51%.

**Chairman:** To broaden the question away from the GDA, it is very good if they are aiming for 69% by 2030, and I will check that. What is the checking mechanism for the transport strategies, documents and policies produced by the various agencies, such as the NTA, TII or the local authorities? Is the Department overseeing alignment with the 51% objective by 2030?

**Mr. Caoimhín Ó Ciaruáin:** Yes. To be clear, though, it is 69% by 2042.

**Chairman:** Okay.

**Mr. Caoimhín Ó Ciaruáin:** That is the timeframe for the NTA's GDA transport strategy. We made that point clear, and the NTA is working towards it. It was clear from the outset that the ambition in this regard was to deliver 51% by 2030, but the NTA has acknowledged there are issues with the delivery of the last 0.4 Mt CO<sub>2</sub> eq in the context of demand management measures that must be elaborated, socialised and mapped out clearly. Therefore, the material comes to the Minister, there is internal checking and then it is opened for wider submissions and public consultation. That is the checking mechanism.

**Chairman:** I thank Mr. Ó Ciaruáin. I call Senator Boylan.

**Senator Lynn Boylan:** I thank our guests. Going straight to my questions, and starting with the witnesses from the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, the annual transition statement is 13 months overdue. Is there any indication of when we are going to see it? In addition, section 17 of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development

(Amendment) Act 2021 refers to “relevant bodies” and how they “perform ... [their] functions in a manner consistent with” the climate action plan and the long-term strategy. Does the Department have a definitive list of the relevant bodies? Commercial semi-State bodies, such as Bord na Móna and Coillte, will play a significant role in enabling us to achieve our climate targets. Those organisations, however, are not covered under the definition of “relevant body” in the context of the Freedom of Information Act 2014. In that regard, then, does the Department have a list of relevant bodies? If it does, will it share the list with the committee? In addition, when will the provisions of section 17 commence and how does the Department anticipate that the relevant bodies will implement those provisions?

My next question is for the witnesses from the Department of Transport. We have heard several times at this committee that, even with the incentives that exist to encourage the purchasing of electric vehicles, there is still a preference among people who have the money to buy SUVs. In France, a tax has now been implemented regarding the weight of a car. Once it exceeds 1,800 kg, a €10 levy is applied on each additional kg. Is that something the Department would consider in the context of disincentivising the purchase of SUVs and steering people towards buying electric vehicles instead?

My final question is posed to the witnesses from the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine. The opening statement referred to exploring the potential to reduce methane emissions using feed additives in pasture-based livestock farming. Does the requisite technology exist? I ask because my understanding is that providing feed means moving away from pasture-based livestock and towards feedlot-type farming. One risk in that context from an agricultural perspective in Ireland, therefore, concerns whether the required technology exists in this regard. If it does, how far are we away from it being applied? Is there a real risk we will move to feedlot-type farming to make use of feed additives?

**Chairman:** I thank the Senator. The first few questions are for the witnesses from the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications.

**Mr. Brian Carroll:** Regarding the annual transition statement, we will complete and submit it in quarter 1 of this year. It is the final statement due under the 2015 Act. It will not be a requirement in future under the new legislation, because new accountability requirements are set out.

On the question of relevant bodies, we can supply the Senator with a list of them. I think her key concern, however, is that some of the commercial semi-State organisations may not fall within the ambit of that term. The chapter in the climate action plan referring to the public sector leading by example sets out a climate mandate for the public sector. We are also bringing forward a mandate which we have worked on with NewERA and input from other Departments for the commercial semi-States. In effect, there will be a mandate for both commercial and non-commercial and Departments.

The Act has commenced. It was commenced last September. These mandates are for Departments to start implementing and moving forward. The one for the commercial semi-States has still to be approved by the Government but it will happen by the end of March.

**Chairman:** The next question was to the Department of Transport on electric vehicles and taxing SUVs.

**Mr. Caoimhin O’Ciaruain:** I will pass that question to Dr. O’Grady.

**Dr. Aoife O’Grady:** An incremental approach has been taken in budget 2022. For example, one change that was introduced is that the VRT rate for zero-emitting vehicles did not increase but an incremental increase was brought up based on vehicle weight. The 20-band table was introduced last year, going from the lowest to highest emitting. From this year there is a 1% increase in VRT for vehicles in bands 9 to 12, a 2% increase for vehicles in bands 13 to 15 and a 4% increase in bands 16 to 20. That is not specifically targeted at SUVs as a vehicle in terms of weight but it does introduce an increased rate of taxation being paid on the more heavily emitting vehicles in the fleet.

The electric vehicle policy pathway report was published in September last year. That was produced by a working group across Departments. One of its key recommendations is that the Government continues to assess the taxation and regulations that might be introduced to incentivise electric vehicles across the fleet. That group will reconvene this month. One of its key actions will be to consider what further taxation or regulations might be introduced in future budgets over the rest of the decade.

As I said earlier, the range of EVs coming on the market is quite significant now. The larger range vehicles of 500 km to 600 km will attract over a lot of people who might have been interested in purchasing the larger, heavier SUVs. I would point out that our EV sales are where we need them to be now. We did very well in 2021. Although the pathway to 1 million electric vehicles is significant and highly ambitious, we are not expecting to do a straight line trajectory from where we are now at a low base of about 43,000 vehicles up to 1 million. We expect a slower start to increase in the next few years and that by the end of the decade we will reach a point where we expect 100% of the vehicles in the fleet will be electric. The Department is comfortable that the sales of EVs are where they need to be. We were very happy with the uptick in sales last year. There was a very significant increase, 127%, in grant applications to the SEAI on the previous year. While we understand that there may be a slight slow down in all vehicle sales next year because of global supply chain issues we envisage that the increased sales of EVs will continue year-on-year up to the end of the decade.

**Senator Lynn Boylan:** Does the Department have a breakdown of the size of the EVs and what people are choosing? There is a problem even within the electric vehicle sector where some of the cars are so heavy that they are doing away with the benefits of electric vehicles because the car is so heavy and takes so much power to charge.

**Dr. Aoife O’Grady:** We do not have a breakdown. Vehicles are not coded by weight in the national vehicle and driver file. We know whether a vehicle is battery operated or plug-in hybrid. Within the traditional internal combustion engine, ICE, vehicles there is a breakdown of vehicle types but in electric it just comes to us defined as battery or plug-in hybrid. I understand the points about vehicle weight and size but a large EV is still far more climate effective, even if powering off a traditional energy supply, than the equivalent large size vehicle would be in an ICE.

**Chairman:** I will jump in on that point. While a large EV might be more climate friendly than a fossil fuel car, a lighter and smaller EV is even more climate friendly again and it seems there is a gap in how the vehicles are classified in the tax code.

**Dr. Aoife O’Grady:** There could well be. On Government supports, I should point out that in the past year we have kept the maximum EV grant at €5,000 for vehicles that cost up to €60,000 but we have taken it away from the higher value EVs. If one looks at the large range of EVs on the market, those higher priced large EVs that are coming in above €60,000 are not sup-

ported by Government anymore. On the VRT rate, one gets a maximum relief of up to €40,000 on a battery electric vehicle, BEV. We are not incentivising the large and expensive EVs but we are fully incentivising EVs that cost up to €40,000 on VRT and grant relief. We are still offering the grant relief and some VRT relief for vehicles of up to €60,000 but the Government supports are specifically targeted at those smaller EVs.

**Chairman:** Is there evidence that this is working?

**Dr. Aoife O’Grady:** The past year has been difficult to judge and we will learn more this year. In recent months we have seen a high proportion of BEVs to plug-in hybrid electric vehicles, PHEVs being sold. We also removed the PHEV grant from last July and those tend to be the larger vehicles. We announced this ahead of time to give the market and the public time to react but that led to an imbalance in sales for last year. The announcement of that led to a rush on PHEVs being purchased prior to the end of June and we will see a more stable profile throughout this year. Last year we saw that from July to the end of the year there was a shift across to BEVs rather than PHEVs with a breakdown of 60% BEVs to 40% PHEVs, which is where we need to be.

**Chairman:** I will move to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine for the final question.

**Mr. Bill Callanan:** The Senator has picked up on the nuance in the language around pasture-based methane, which is somewhat different. I will ask my colleague, Mr. Crammond, to go into more detail on that. Looking at the overall picture, the unique selling point of Irish agriculture is that it is a grass-fed and rain-based system and we always have to be careful that we do not suggest any move away from that. A lot of international systems are based around animals being permanently housed and that is not a model that we would support or envisage for here.

There are technical issues around the use of methane reduction feed additives. I have responsibility for research so I would draw attention to two projects that are ongoing for some time, including the GreenBreed project. We are seeing that there is quite a difference between individual animals in the amount of methane they produce due simply to their basic characteristics. As a scientist, when one sees that variability then it is possible to breed for that trait and good work is ongoing in that section. Second, there is Meth-Abate, the project being run by Teagasc, which is looking at multiple different varieties of feed additives, including olives, oils, seaweed and commercial products. In the long term there will be lots of claims about this and we need to make sure they are valid and authenticated. The research in Meth-Abate is looking at a number of different products but there are specific challenges around the use of a feed additive. I might ask Mr. Crammond to explain the additional information that is required about the effectiveness of feed additives in a pasture system.

**Mr. Dale Crammond:** I thank the Senator for the question. As Mr. Callanan has outlined, the area of methane reducing feed additives is incredibly important for the sector in the achievement of its targets. Given what we are seeing at the moment, with the first feed additive, which contains the 3-NOP chemical, 3-nitrooxypropanoal, having gone through the European Food Safety Authority, we expect this feed additive to be commercially available in Ireland later this year. This will be targeted over the winter housing period initially. When the animals are indoors we would be able to feed that continually to our animals. The challenge then is to take that 3-NOP product and develop a slow-release bolus for it that we can deliver to animals when they are put out to pasture over the grazing period throughout the year. One of the ways we can

target this is when the animals come in for milking in the morning. We would be able to feed this to the animal through a slow-release bolus, and then continually do that over the grazing period. The expectation is that this product is still a couple of years away from market. We probably do not envisage this before 2024 or 2025. It is coming, but in the short term the focus will be on the housed animals over the winter. It was identified in the climate action plan that this would be expected to make a contribution.

**Senator Lynn Boylan:** On seaweed and the likes of olives being used as an additive, has any research been done? Exactly what volume of seaweed would be required? I am aware that people involved in the seaweed sector would say that it is just not practical to be talking about harvesting seaweed to feed livestock.

**Mr. Dale Crammond:** That is a very valid point. It is something we must watch very carefully. With regard to seaweed, the results that are coming through globally for the reductions in methane are very high, but it must be balanced against that issue, as the Senator has rightly raised, around the ability to produce large quantities of seaweed along our coastline to feed to our animals that would make a material difference. That work will need to be done. We are very conscious about that, and from our point of view it is certainly the case that 3-NOP will be the feed additive that comes to the marketplace in the first instance.

**Chairman:** I thank Mr. Crammond, and I thank Senator Boylan for her questions.

**Deputy Cormac Devlin:** I thank the witnesses for their engagement thus far. My questions would come under some main headings relating to the witnesses' contributions, namely: Mr. Ó Raghallaigh's consideration of the resources to deliver, which I will touch upon shortly; Mr. Mahon's contribution on the local authority's role in all of that; and Mr. Carroll's points about retrofitting.

My first question is for Mr. Ó Raghallaigh. On the overall targets that need to be achieved across Departments, what kinds of physical and human resources would be required? What changes are being made currently across Departments to ensure that those are targets are met?

In the context of the 31 local authorities, Mr. Mahon spoke of fostering and achieving those targets and engaging with various stakeholders. Colleagues on the committee have mentioned the public participation networks and other local organisations with which to engage. I did not hear much about youth in this context. Young people have really driven this agenda. One of the reasons we are all talking about climate targets in different sectors is, arguably, because young people have for many years been ahead of the curve on this and have demanded change. This is commendable, but the local authorities are at the coalface of responding to this challenge and I am not hearing a lot about that engagement. Yes, there are those plans that must be reviewed every five years, but I wonder how the local authorities will engage with young people and those organisations such as Comhairle na nÓg, and others we have spoken about before.

From what I heard, there has been very little reference to the engagement with, and the onus on, the regional authorities. There are some challenges, which we have spoken about before, such as car sharing, bike sharing, scooter schemes and other types of schemes where local authorities will need to act together. The regional authorities play a pivotal role in that regard. Perhaps Mr. Mahon will comment on this matter.

On retrofitting, Mr. Carroll mentioned a target of 36,000 by 2030. With regard to his plans for local authority housing, he mentioned a 40% target in connection with local authority dwell-

ings not performing to the level required for a B2 rating. Has the review started? How advanced is it in determining how many dwellings do not hit the target or will require retrofitting? If it has not started, when will it be completed?

Mr. Mahon mentioned in his opening statement the retrofitting of the national public lighting stock and the local authority fleet. What are the percentages for each? What is the percentage for the success regarding national public lighting? How many vehicles do the local authorities have that are of renewable stock?

**Chairman:** The first question, on the resources that might be required, is for Mr. Ó Raha-laigh.

**Mr. Conor Ó Raghallaigh:** I thank the Deputy for those questions. It is not lost on any of us that the deployment of resources to achieve what needs to be achieved will be significant. I am referring not only to financial resources but also to human resources, within Departments and the bodies under the aegis of each Department.

To date, several initiatives have been taken. Climate action units have been set up in almost all Departments. They will add capacity to them to focus in on the most immediate demands that the climate action plan places on them. Broader than that, there is a recognised need for the system to reorient itself towards climate action. This will have implications for all Departments and sectors, and nearly all civil and public servants, in one way or another. We need to factor the climate challenge into operations and policy actions. One way of doing so is to increase capacity and climate literacy throughout the system. We have measures in the climate action plan to that end.

I Roinn an Taoisigh, we have been considering how climate considerations are hardwired into policy formulation. In the first instance, we will be demanding to know the climate implications of Government memorandums as they are submitted. That is a good way of ensuring they will have been considered. In the longer term, however, we have to get much farther back in the chain of policy formulation and ensure climate considerations are hardwired at the very start.

**Deputy Cormac Devlin:** In a nutshell, are we talking about additional staff or redeploying staff to the climate action units?

**Mr. Conor Ó Raghallaigh:** In a way, it is partly a question of reorientation. Each Department's requirements will be different. Sometimes it will be about redeployment, possibly, and sometimes it will be about the retraining of staff to ensure they can focus on the climate implications of the work they are already doing. In other cases, however, specific skills needed to meet the climate challenge but that are not currently in the Departments or bodies may have to be identified. All those things will have to be done. There is a series of measures in the climate action plan to address this.

**Chairman:** There were two questions for Mr. Mahon - one on engagement, including with youth, and another on public lighting and the percentage of the local authority fleet that has been converted to a more sustainable form.

**Mr. Paddy Mahon:** I might ask my colleague Mr. David Mellett, from the Climate Action Regional Office, to respond also.

On resources, as I stated in my opening remarks, we have identified in our strategic plan for

the sector additional resources that we believe are needed in every local authority. We give a good and firm sort of understanding of what resources we would need in addition to those we have. I will not get into great detail now because of time but we envisage additional resources will be required to deliver on our ambition.

On the area of the role of youth, I will ask Mr. Mellett to speak to that because the climate action regional offices have had engagement on this and we have worked with Comhairle na nÓg in partnership with the Department in having a conversation on climate earlier in 2021.

On public lighting, I am kind of afraid to mention a figure but every public light in the country will be retrofitted if it has not been already as part of a major programme by local authorities to reintroduce energy-efficient bulbs to the core public lighting stock. It is a significant number and the process is regional. The southern region signed the contract just before Christmas to replace the public lights in the south of the country. We divided the country into three regions for the purpose, and of the others, the midlands and east will I hope go to contract in the first half of this year. The other region, comprising the west and north west, will do that we hope later in the year. A number of local authorities are not participating in this but delivering their own public lighting programme individually.

Our committee has commissioned a working group to work with representatives from our sector, the SEAI and the Department of Transport to look at reimagining our fleet. A major survey is under way to identify the number of vehicles that each city and county council has and the number that are electric. A significant number are not but we are trying to get an understanding of what we have and the challenges we will have in “reimagining” our fleet to reduce our emissions of carbon from fuel as quickly as possible.

**Deputy Cormac Devlin:** I thank Mr. Mahon. Perhaps he will send us a note on the public lighting. It would be nice for the committee to have a baseline of how many lights are converted and how many are to be.

**Mr. Paddy Mahon:** That is absolutely no problem.

**Mr. David Mellett:** On the question of renewables use in the fleet, the fleet accounts for our second-largest use of energy, after public lighting. As has been outlined, we are looking at improving efficiencies by more than 50% on the public lighting, which is supported through the climate action fund. As Mr. Mahon mentioned, we have a working group with various stakeholders looking at how we can improve the fleet. The results of that survey will be forthcoming in the next few months. The objectives there will be very much along the line of what the Department of Transport strategy is around avoiding, shifting and improving. We will look at how we do things to see if we can change those operations and avoid having to use transport. On the shifting to EVs, a number of local authorities are leading on this and we hope to learn from that through the working group. There is also the matter of improving the fuel we are using and our driver behaviour to try to reduce emissions in that way.

On engagement with youth, each local authority works with Comhairle na nÓg and there are various initiatives across the 31 local authorities specifically on the matter of climate action. Much of that discussion is coming back to the strategic policy committees and feeding into local authority strategies. There are also strong relationships across local authorities with green schools and they are partnering with them on various initiatives to both create awareness around climate action and develop appropriate actions that can be delivered at that local level.

**Chairman:** There were some questions directed to the Department of Climate, Environment and Communications on retrofitting.

**Mr. Brian Carroll:** It might be worth clarifying that the retrofitting of social housing stock is handled by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, with private housing stock dealt with by the Department of Climate, Environment and Communications. The questions were following up some of the comments from my colleague, Mr. Paul Lemass, so I will let him take those.

**Mr. Paul Lemass:** On the social housing retrofit, which is 36,500 units to 2030, the basis is that effectively any house built since 2007 will already be to a B1 BER standard. Anything built since 2011 will be an A3 standard and from 2019 the standard is A2. Effectively, we can take those out of the equation because they are already at that level. It is 40% of the remainder, which is around 36,000 units, that will be focused on for the retrofit. That is how those numbers were arrived at. There is not a review as such. It is simply that we have the data to know which ones have already hit the B2.

**Deputy Cormac Devlin:** I thank Mr. Lemass for that. If I can, Chair, very briefly address a point to Mr. Carroll about the private stock, there is a huge demand for that, particularly under the better energy warmer homes scheme. We all need to do our best to achieve the target. There is a willingness from the public. We just need to ensure the resources are in place.

**Deputy Alan Farrell:** I am in Leinster House. I thank the witnesses for the interesting discussion. My camera has been off for most of the time, but I have been here listening to them all. On the point Deputy Devlin raised on retrofit, the advancement of the proposed one-stop shop for information for people right across the board, whether it is on EVs or retrofitting schemes, is something on which we need to put significant focus in the coming months. We need to see this operational in 2022 to try to assist us all in getting to where we need to be.

Notwithstanding everything that has been discussed, I want to focus on public lighting for a moment. Mr. Mahon talked about the energy efficiency improvements that are being done. One aspect to an area of personal interest, which is electric vehicles, alternatives to cars such as electric scooters, and the infrastructure associated with cycling routes throughout the country, is one of things they are doing in Fingal at the moment and which is operating quite effectively, which is a trial use of lamp standards for charging EVs. This is in partnership, I think, with a private firm. It seems to be operating quite well. With this energy efficiency upgrade of our lighting equipment throughout the country, there are great opportunities to broaden the delivery of electric vehicle charging infrastructure. Coupled with that is the fact it would dramatically reduce the costs. I believe one of our witnesses estimated them at somewhere between €10,000 and €15,000, with the costs being per hour and with funding being provided to local authorities at around, I think, €5,000 per unit. Clearly, if the infrastructure is there and it can be adapted, as it has been in Fingal, then it occurs to me there are opportunities to reduce the overall costs.

The point I wanted to raise is that it is quite alarming to find at this stage in our discussions on climate action and reducing our carbon emissions as a country that we did not or do not have a national strategy for EV infrastructure. If I am not mistaken, I think it was mentioned that we do not have one and it is about to be published. The only question I would ask is why the delay. The climate action plan was published in 2019. It has been dramatically improved, in both its reach and its targets, by both the Government and this committee in the significant work we put into the process. Therefore, to hear that the national strategy for EVs has not even been published is a bit alarming. When will it come about? Will there be an opportunity for

this committee, or indeed the transport committee or housing committee, to review it before it is published? Will the witnesses comment on that?

My final question relates to local government. It is very important our local government bodies throughout the country lead on climate change in local communities. They have the networks. They have the outreach on the ground in education and in improvements within each and every local authority in the country. My only question to the LGMA representatives is whether we have sufficient budgets and expertise within the local authorities to deliver upon what has been set in front of them, especially in staffing. Are there any barriers to their body in attempting to reach those targets at a local authority level?

**Chairman:** Was the first question on the charging points and lamp standards for Mr. Mahon?

**Deputy Alan Farrell:** Mr. Mahon referenced it in relation to the energy efficiency changes to lighting, as in the bulbs. There might be a link with the infrastructure within the pole itself, as well as how it might be adapted for EV charging purposes, as has been the case in Fingal.

**Chairman:** Mr. Carroll might come in on that one as well. Does Mr. Mahon want to go first?

**Mr. Paddy Mahon:** I thank the Chairman and the Deputy for his questions. As a sector, we have developed our own guidance for local authorities on the whole area of electric vehicle charging points. We have identified through our committee the best possible guidance that we can give to colleagues around the country because there is a need for electric vehicle charging. I am aware that the Dublin local authorities and in particular Fingal are probably more advanced in this space. The concept of getting access to a charging point via public charging ports is definitely one that is being pursued in Fingal and is being considered in other places. I note that Dr. Aoife O'Grady has her hand up and that the Department of Transport is in the process of preparing an overall strategy for this, which will be welcome when it is in place. We have issued guidance to our own colleagues with support from many agencies, including the Department of Transport, for the roll-out of charging points as best placed to provide some degree of local charging points at this time.

I can move on to on the last question and the significant role for local government to provide leadership and, indeed, be the conduit from a national level to local communities and local enterprises. That is stated in our strategy, which I mentioned earlier. We see that as a pivotal role for ourselves in this space. We have received significant resources in some of these places already. For instance, in the area of active travel, in partnership with the Department of Transport and the NTA, every local authority has been given approval to approve additional people to make sure the modal shift is put in place and that the active travel programme for each county council is delivered upon. Those resources are, therefore, either in place or being put in place at the moment. It was agreed to just over a year ago and there are significant developments there.

Indeed, through the retrofitting programme, there is scope for local authorities to put resources in place at a local level to provide them with technical support for the roll-out of the social housing programme. They are very welcome. In our strategy, we have identified other resources that we believe are needed in the area of co-ordination, such as the role of a climate action officer. Some local authorities have them in place in the areas of energy co-ordination, delivering on our energy and emissions targets, green solutions and climate community officers but many do not. There are opportunities there for additional resources to be identified and put

in place to co-ordinate the full and effective role of local authorities in dealing with climate action.

We have good engagement, in particular with the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, in identifying how those resources can be put in place and we are moving forward as quickly as we can to identify the appropriate funding in order that those resources can be put in place for all the city and county councils across the country.

**Chairman:** I thank Mr. Mahon. Dr. O’Grady is indicating to come in on this one.

**Dr. Aoife O’Grady:** The question about the EV infrastructure and the lamp post pilot is proper to us. I will mention a couple of things on that. We are very interested in what is happening in Fingal. We have been funding the public points scheme in local authorities over the year; we would like to see a pilot for lamp posts funded through that this year. It is something we are hoping to encourage. There are a couple of challenges with it, however. I always feel the job of the public servant in these situations is to say that it is a bit more complicated but it is a bit more complicated. This is just to flag these issues.

At the moment, my understanding is that the energy to lamp posts across local authorities across Ireland is unmetered. The Fingal pilot and a similar one in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown are being run from a couple of lamp posts and the local authority is absorbing the cost of the energy that is being provided to EVs. Installing meters on a lamp post is obviously a bigger infrastructural challenge than just being able to install a charger so there is that challenge.

One of the things we are looking at is trying to see if a solution is possible for this. In Germany and in the UK, a person can purchase a certified self-charging cable for his or her vehicle that actually runs a meter on the cable itself. A person can plug it in and that is then metered. We are trying to see if we can get a certification of that. That also involves interaction with the energy companies in provision and supply of that. The last thing on that is with the upgrade of street lighting across the country, it does become a possibility. However, in many of the older lampposts, the wiring would be insufficient to support an EV, multiple EVs on the street, as well as providing the lamppost charging. However, I would hope that there would be - horrible word - “synergy” across these issues. At the same time as doing a lighting upgrade, we could look at using the same facility for EV charging. Another-----

**Deputy Alan Farrell:** It occurs to me, given the work that has been done to upgrade the energy efficiency of lighting, that there is opportunity there. I have raised it because I feel that while there are complications with the provision of charging at lampposts, which will not work everywhere, if we press ahead with the upgrade and with the energy efficiency upgrades of all of these lampposts across the country over the coming decade, we will miss an opportunity. I would hate to see that opportunity pass. However, they are all over it, so I will not-----

**Dr. Aoife O’Grady:** We are on it. This is one of my hopeful, easier solutions to EV infrastructure challenges. I hope that it will work out. We are engaging heavily with local authorities. We are eager to see a pilot up and running to understand how this might work across, maybe, one town, one village, or one urban or suburban area. We would like to see how it works in practice.

**Chairman:** Can I sound a significant note of caution on this topic? The first objective in avoid-shift-improve is to reduce the need for driving. That is to enhance the capacity of the population to walk as much as possible and to cycle. Where there is currently on-street parking,

which is pretty much where the public lighting is, we will have to make our footpaths much wider. We will have to take over public space for cycle lanes and cycle networks. That will complicate the idea of using the lamp standards, or probably most of the lamp standards, for EV charging.

**Dr. Aoife O’Grady:** In some cases, that would be the case. However, one of the things we are doing is research.

I will come back on the EV infrastructure strategy. I would just say there is not a delay on that. It was a programme for Government commitment in the establishment of this Government. It is being prepared at the moment. We would expect to publish it in the next few months. Deputy Alan Farrell asked about engagement on it. We would publish it for consultation. The purpose of the publication would be to engage with stakeholder groups, including this committee, to get feedback to refine and improve upon it. Part of the work we have been doing on that is to look at what other cities across Europe are doing. We are keen about this. Part of the climate action plan is to massively increase the proportion of sustainable transport trips in our towns and cities across Ireland. Looking at cities like Amsterdam, where they have been able to put in on-street EV charging, they have walking and cycling modal shares that we would grab with both hands if we could. They are able to deliver that alongside street, curb-side and EV charging in Amsterdam suburbs. There will be many streets where this is not suitable, where we are looking to install segregated cycle paths and wider footpaths, as the Chair mentioned. However, in some of the quieter suburban streets, where there is not the availability of front gardens for people who want to purchase an EV and charge it, this would be a nice solution for those areas.

**Chairman:** Can I come in on the discussion on avoid-shift-improve? Mr. Mellett mentioned that the “shift” referred to shift to EVs. It absolutely does not. The electric vehicles fall under “improve”. As well as this, avoid-shift-improve are in order of priority. “Avoid” is the first priority, “shift” refers to shift to active travel modes and sustainable transport, then “improve” is to improve efficiency. That is where EVs come in. Would Dr. O’Grady agree with that?

**Dr. Aoife O’Grady:** Yes, that is the definition of avoid-shift-improve. It is to reduce the need for travel, to shift to public transport and then improve the technology if all else fails.

**Chairman:** It is important to say that it is in order of priority and that it is not a choice. The “avoid” and the “shift” are a higher priority than the “improve”, which is where the EVs are. I interjected a few times during the questioning by other members, but I still have my own to ask. Starting with the witnesses from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, I notice that the number of farms, or perhaps the portion of land, for organic farming is to increase from 2% to 7.5%. Is that the plan? I refer to an increase to 350,000 ha. It has also been stated, however, that the herd numbers can remain stable. If there is a large increase in organic farming does that not imply a much lower stocking rate and, ultimately, a lower herd number? It might not be the policy to reduce herd numbers, but will that be the effective outcome of increasing the share of organic farming? Can we go further in that regard? What are the obstacles to going beyond the target of 7.5%? I think that is the current EU target, but we are trying to catch up and go further in this context. Why, therefore, can we not go beyond 7.5%? Other European countries are way beyond it. I would have thought that we could follow and catch up in that regard.

In addition, does the Department have a diversification strategy? The vast majority of emis-

sions are coming from the dairy herd and, as I understand it, the beef herd to a lesser extent. We want to make farming a viable choice for people and to sustain jobs in rural Ireland. Unless there is a diversification strategy, however, and perhaps there is one and I have just not seen it, I do not think we are going to reduce emissions as much as we need to.

Moving to transport, we could achieve our targets regarding private electric vehicle penetration increasing to approximately 850,000 vehicles by 2030. Unless we are displacing fossil fuel cars, however, it would still be possible for us to face an emissions' challenge in the transport sector. It was pointed out that we are more or less on target with the sales of electric vehicle and a pathway document is being followed in this regard. Are we seeing an equal reduction in the sales of fossil fuel vehicles? If we are not, then we are going down the path of having more vehicles on the roads. We might end up having 1 million electric vehicles, but we could also have 2 million vehicles using fossil fuels. If we were to have so many vehicles on our roads in 2030, then that is going to militate against our efforts to make it attractive to live in our villages, towns and cities. There is simply not enough road capacity in urban settlements to accommodate so many vehicles. Therefore, is there a target to reduce the overall number of vehicles and the number of fossil fuel vehicles? I direct my questions first to the witnesses from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

**Mr. Bill Callanan:** On the question concerning organics, the commitment in that regard is to increase from 74,000 ha to 350,000 ha by 2030. That will account for a contribution of 0.3 Mt CO<sub>2</sub> eq. To explain why the change to an increased level of organic farming is not as big a factor as perhaps it might be thought, it involves the removal of fertiliser. Every reduction of 10,000 tonnes of fertiliser used decreases the climate impact by 0.07 Mt CO<sub>2</sub> eq, which is a relatively modest amount. Our overall footprint in this context is approximately 85% driven by emissions from livestock. The rest comes from fertiliser use. Some fertiliser emissions will be removed because of the increase in organic farming, but the major element of emissions comes from animals.

The Chair is correct concerning our best estimate of the impact. The stocking rate is generally lower. Given, however, that many of the farms likely to embrace an increase in the percentage of land devoted to organic farming are also more likely to be operating extensively in this area already, our estimates suggest a reduction of about 10% in the stocking rates on those farms. It does not, therefore, translate into as big an impact as might be thought. Organic farming will see the development of organic horticulture. Equally, in terms of area, organic livestock production is a core activity. The increase in area is like any change. It is significant at farm level. We have to work with people on developing their expertise in the area and developing their openness and willingness to move towards organics. We also have to work on the market development and make sure there is a market out there that is willing to support the addition of organic production. That all needs to be developed in tandem. Naturally, that influences what your ambition is. Organic demand is growing but it is coming from a relatively modest base and we just need to reflect on that.

In terms of diversification, there is a commitment between the Departments of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and of Environment, Climate and Communications to work on a land use strategy. As part of that process, and consequent to that, is looking at diversification opportunities as well. As I mentioned, there is the Teagasc options programme, which looks at the overall capacity for diversification. There is alternative land usage, but, equally, much income diversification is around adding value. Again, it is the same as organics when the basic livestock units are there. For example, when somebody is moving to cheese production or direct sales to

consumers as diversification, the emissions associated with the animals that were at the core of that farming enterprise still have to be counted.

**Chairman:** The other questions are probably for Dr. O’Grady.

**Mr. Caoimhin O’Ciaruain:** I will come in here. To support the Chair’s earlier point, all of what we are about in the transport area is that avoid-shift- improve piece. It is about the avoiding and reduction of demand insofar as we can. The avoid piece happens around planning and at the town and city level, and the engagement that we are having with local authorities, other levels and the planning department around compact growth. The improve element is around biofuels and electrification of the car fleet. The electrification piece gets many of the headlines and much attention, but it is not where we are focusing for the longer term. Clearly, demand management and reduction in kilometres of fossil fuel cars is where the first order of action needs to happen. I will hand over to Dr. O’Grady because there is a bit of research being done around this and she can add to this.

**Dr. Aoife O’Grady:** To follow up on the Chair’s questions on EV sales and whether they will displace ICE vehicles, they will, of course. At the moment, approximately 12% of new registrations on the road this year are EVs. The modelling we have done is not based on a target of cars in the fleet; the modelling is based on what we think is reasonable in terms of projecting future demand for car purchase and then how many of those will convert to an EV rather than an ICE vehicle. When the modellers did that analysis, they projected an increase in the car fleet over the next decade. They project that increase is likely to be smaller than the increase in the car fleet over the previous decade of 2011- 2020, but there will be an increase of approximately 1% year-on-year out to 2030. That is based on both demographic and economic growth, which are trajectories set out by the CSO.

In terms of EVs displacing ICEs, we expect that by 2028 or 2029 almost 100% of car sales to be EV. At that stage, we do not see any ICE passenger car sales. There may still be some vans and heavy goods vehicles, but we would expect the passenger car fleet to be 100% new EVs at that point. The market will completely switch.

**Chairman:** It is not just about sales; it is about the number of vehicles in the system. What policies and strategies are there reduce the number of fossil fuel vehicles in the system? An SUV bought today will be around-----

**Dr. Aoife O’Grady:** Yes. It will be on the road for a number of years.

**Chairman:** -----until 2035, if not beyond.

**Dr. Aoife O’Grady:** That was considered by the EV policy pathway group last year and was part of the report it published in September. The group found that a general scrappage scheme was not necessarily recommended at that point, but we have introduced a scrappage scheme for targeted groups. The scheme we are running at present is for electric taxis. There is an incentive, in the form of a capital grant, for electric taxis and a scrappage scheme to further incentivise the owners of older taxis with internal combustion engines. The finding of the group, however, was that a general scrappage scheme across the car fleet would incur significant financial costs and was not necessary at this time. Depending on how our EV projections go, it could be something we come back to and consider later in the decade but, certainly at present, with the growth in the EV fleet being around where we want it to be, if not slightly ahead, maybe it is just a little early to jump on that at present.

**Chairman:** Dr. O’Grady mentioned that the models predicted an increase, but we have levers at our disposal to determine whether there should be an increase. Are we letting the models lead us a little?

**Dr. Aoife O’Grady:** The model is assuming that, all things being equal and with existing incentives in place and the total cost of ownership reaching parity by the middle of the decade, this will be the likely impact on sales. If we change the policy environment, and change incentives and disincentives further, that is likely to shift, but the modelling was done on a neutral policy basis, taking the policies we have now and looking at what EV uptake would be envisaged out to 2030.

**Chairman:** Dr. O’Grady mentioned the EV policy pathway working group quite a few times. Is there any similar group in the Department that looks at active travel roll-out or sustainable transport roll-out?

**Dr. Aoife O’Grady:** A number of stakeholders are involved in that. I might pass over to Mr. O’Ciaruain because my role is specifically on EVs and demand management. I apologise. Mr. O’Ciaruain might have the specifics on active travel and sustainable mobility.

**Mr. Caoimhin O’Ciaruain:** We intend to publish the sustainable mobility policy in the next couple of months. It will set out and put structures around bringing together a more strategic approach to active travel and sustainable mobility. Structures are already there and a lot of work is happening at a bigger local authority level. There is engagement at that level on active travel.

**Chairman:** Is there a working group on active travel, similar to the EV policy pathway working group?

**Mr. Caoimhin O’Ciaruain:** There is no working group on active travel yet.

**Chairman:** I thank Mr. O’Ciaruain, Dr. O’Grady and Mr. Callanan for their answers. Three members have their hands raised. I will take three questions in order and we will then try to wrap it up pretty soon.

**Senator Alice-Mary Higgins:** There is concern about fossil fuel subsidies. We have heard that those subsidies amount to €2.4 billion, but the roadmap to exit them is only planned to be published in 2024. Is there scope to bring that forward to 2022 so that we can start implementing the roadmap in 2023? That seems to be one of the main things we could stop doing. Similarly, there is concern on timing in that the legally binding sectoral targets are only meant to come into effect in quarter 4 of this year, which seems to give the advisory council a very short period in which to give feedback to-----

*(Interruptions).*

**Chairman:** We lost the connection with Senator Higgins.

**Senator Alice-Mary Higgins:** Sorry. I asked that the timeline on fossil fuel subsidies be brought forward in order that we at least have a roadmap published this year. Publishing in 2024 makes it useless for our first budget period. Quarter 4 is when the legally binding sectoral targets are planned. Do we not need those targets a little earlier so we can assess if they are going to really work and give the Climate Change Advisory Council space to provide feed-

back? Should that include REACH targets in order that we consider what doing better would look like, rather than just looking to the minimum? What accompanying measures are there on climate justice, given we have heard the fair share issue is unlikely to be addressed in these two budgets?

**Chairman:** Those questions are all for Mr. Carroll.

**Deputy Bríd Smith:** One of my questions is on housing and retrofitting. One of my staff reminded me that the SEAI told us at an information session in late 2018 or probably 2019, she was not sure of the date, but the date she was sure of was that by July 2019, there would be no stipulation on the one home, one visit for retrofitting. In other words, if your attic was insulated 15 or 20 years previously, one would be entitled to apply for it again and that derogation was being lifted. That does not seem to be happening and certainly does not comply with what the council is telling us, which is that if you already had any retrofitting done and were considered to be at an appropriate BER rating, you could not have that revisited.

It is important to clarify where we are at. Has the SEAI gone back on its word that it would lift that one visit, one home obstacle? Is the council applying that when the SEAI is not? We have, and I cannot overstate this, so many elderly, sick people who are living in cold housing and looking for a bit more retrofitting and being rejected repeatedly by the council and the SEAI for any help. It just seems totally inappropriate.

My second question-----

**Chairman:** There is no time for a second question.

**Deputy Bríd Smith:** It is a quick question on transport. Can the 500,000 active travel increases that will happen before or around 2030 be broken down? Of those, what percentage is public transport, cycling and walking, respectively? I thank the Chairman for putting up with me.

**Chairman:** I will go to Senator O'Reilly now and then we will go back to our witnesses.

**Senator Pauline O'Reilly:** I will follow on from my previous comment on the county and city development plans. One point is that I do not believe the preparation of those will help us achieve the 51% and I ask that the Department review all of them and see what actions can be taken to address that. The second point is that if we have councillors who are continuously voting against climate measures, both in mitigation and adaptation, is there an emergency plan by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage? There is a real risk at the moment. I have already seen councillors voting against these measures. Measures have been taken around housing. What measures does the Department plan to take around climate action?

**Chairman:** I will go first to Mr. Carroll on the fossil fuels subsidy questions.

**Mr. Brian Carroll:** I think there were three questions from Senator Higgins. The timelines for completing work on the fossil fuels subsidies are as agreed in the climate action plan. Any decision to accelerate those would have to be looked at and agreed, but I hear the Senator's suggestion and her point. On the sectoral targets, to be clear, it is not that they will not be available until quarter 4. The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 has a statutory timeline for the economy-wide carbon budgets, which is four months from the date of publication of the proposal by the CCAC. That takes us to 24 February.

I have not got the words but the Act more or less says, as soon as practicable after that, the Government needs to adopt sectoral ceilings. The intention is to do so as quickly as possible. We are saying that once that is done, the update of the climate action plan will need to be made consistent with those ceilings. It is not that the ceilings will not be available very early; it is making the climate action plan consistent with them.

I am sorry, with the comings and goings, I did not hear Senator Higgins question on climate justice.

**Senator Alice-Mary Higgins:** I just basically said we heard that Ireland's carbon budgets are not really aligned with fair share or Article 4.1 and the idea of equity or even the UN environment programme, UNEP, which says 7.6% would be an average, whereas, of course, developed countries should be doing more. Given that it looks like we are falling short on the issue of fair share and common but differentiated responsibilities, what measures are planned to accompany the carbon budgets, especially the first carbon budget? I personally believe we need to be fighting for the second budget to be aligned with fair share at a minimum. What additional measures are planned in addressing the climate debt that a budget which falls short creates, such as climate funding, for example?

**Mr. Brian Carroll:** On that point, in terms of international climate justice, those issues are dealt with in the first instance through the Paris Agreement, including differentiated responsibilities. We contribute to that via the European Union's nationally determined contribution. That is how Ireland's contribution to the global effort in terms of the Paris Agreement feeds through. On some of the wider issues, I can supply a note to the Senator. She will be aware that at the COP, both the Taoiseach and the Minister with responsibility for climate announced some significant increases from the base we were at in terms of various forms of climate finance. Some of that was announced at the COP.

**Chairman:** If Mr. Carroll could come back to us with a note, that would be appreciated by members.

**Mr. Brian Carroll:** I am happy to do that.

**Chairman:** I will push the debate along. The remaining questions, from Deputy Bríd Smith and Senator Pauline O'Reilly, are for the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

**Mr. Paul Lemass:** There are two parts to Deputy Bríd Smith's question. I will not be able to speak to the SEAI point, but I will be able to speak to the social housing side of it. On the social housing side, there is not a one person, one visit arrangement. If a house is below the B2 energy rating, it will be considered for an upgrade and retrofit. We are aiming for 40% of those houses to be done by 2030. There is no exclusion based on the SEAI. The SEAI might be a separate cohort of houses.

On Senator Pauline O'Reilly's question, on the county development plans Ms Walsh outlined the intention to ensure that the development plan guidelines have regard to climate action. She also talked about the question of an Office of the Planning Regulator, OPR, review. The Senator is concerned about councillors voting against measures, but any plan will have to be reviewed by the Office of the Planning Regulator and it must be consistent with national policies. There is a safety net there.

**Senator Pauline O'Reilly:** The question in relation to councillors was not so much about

the county development plans, that was a separate issue. If councillors are voting against individual actions, would emergency measures be looked at if it were to happen on a continual basis?

**Mr. Paul Lemass:** I will refer that specific question to Ms Walsh.

**Ms Alma Walsh:** Will the Senator, for my benefit, provide clarity in terms of the other actions? These are outside of the development plan process.

**Senator Pauline O'Reilly:** There are specific measures, such as cycle lanes, for instance. They are related to planning and they are issues that councillors vote on. It causes significant difficulty when trying to advance things. Lots of councillors do not vote against it and it may not be an issue in a particular area. However, where it is an issue, does Ms Walsh think it appropriate to look at some kind of emergency measures?

**Ms Alma Walsh:** I take it from the Senator's question that it is possibly in reference to Part 8 development, which is local authority-owned development, and where the policy is already set out within the plan, and a proposal and application under Part 8 is progressed and put out for public consultation and returns to the members. It is actually a reserve function and I appreciate the issue being raised. We are aware in the Department of where decisions are made on resolutions to not agree on certain proposals and developments. How that is responded to is something we can consider but it sits outside of the planning process. It sounds like something that could be looked at legislatively. We will take that on board and bring it back to colleagues across some of our other units to perhaps scope out where there is merit in looking at that.

**Chairman:** I thank Ms Walsh and Senator O'Reilly. There was a question from Deputy Smith on active travel and a breakdown of the numbers. That is probably for Mr. O'Ciaruain.

**Mr. Caoimhin O'Ciaruain:** What we can do there is provide a note. We actually did a note on this for another committee, which I am frantically trying to find. We will give the committee a note separately on the breakdown of those numbers. It is mainly public transport but we have done some figures on it.

**Chairman:** It would be great if Mr. O'Ciaruain could circulate the note. He can send it to the secretariat, which will circulate it to the committee.

We are quite over time so I am going to wrap up proceedings. I thank everyone for coming in. It was probably a very difficult session for all of us because there are so many different Departments and witnesses and, of course, 14 members on the committee. It was a challenging session. Most of us would probably want to ask the witnesses more questions and they would want to give us better or longer answers. We did not have the time for today but we did the best we could. I thank the witnesses so much for coming in. It really is helpful to us to get their insights and it will help us in our consideration of the carbon budgets and in drafting our report in the next week or so.

I will adjourn the meeting now until next Tuesday, 25 January at 11 a.m.

The joint committee adjourned at 2.22 p.m. until 11 a.m. on Tuesday, 25 January 2022.