



Irish Rural Link
Nasc Tuaithe na hÉireann

Submission to Government's Long-Term Strategy on Greenhouse Gas Emissions

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Contact

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Rialtas na hÉireann
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Overview

Irish Rural Link (IRL) is the national network of rural community groups, representing over 600 groups and thousands of individuals committed to socially, environmentally and economically sustainable rural communities.

We welcome the opportunity to make a submission to the Long-Term Strategy on Greenhouse Gas Emissions (GHG) Reduction. Rural areas hold many of the solutions to the mitigation of Climate Change and reducing GHG emissions. By engaging with rural communities, they can become the producers of alternative energy, alleviation of pressure on urban centres and be innovators of new and cleaner ways of doing things.

A Just Transition approach must be central to this new Strategy and no person can be left behind or made worse off by trying to achieve the 2050 target of net zero emissions. There must also be a whole of Government approach and policy cohesion in achieving the target.

Consultation Questions

The following are Irish Rural Link's recommendations on how Green-House Gas emissions can be reduced

Q1 What are the appropriate 2050 targets for Ireland to set in the context of supporting a net Zero target at EU level?

Achieving a target of net zero emissions is very ambitious. It cannot be achieved by one single sector but needs a collaborative approach between Government at all levels, Government agencies, all sectors and local communities. There also needs policy coherence between Government policies and strategies, for e.g. the pursuit for economic growth and increasing the population by 1.5million people risks having a negative impact on the environment and increase GHG emissions if these goals are not implemented in a sustainable way with little impact on addressing GHG emissions.

Q2. What advanced technologies, across all sectors, could support a move to net-zero or negative emissions by 2050?

It is not just about what new and advanced technologies can be used but what is already available and used differently or indeed going back to how things used to be done – this can be particularly true for the agricultural sector. GLAS Scheme, farming for nature – BRIDE project where there are examples of diversification of farming.

Peatlands are rich resources when it comes to reducing GHG to zero. There are 1.4million hectares of peatlands across the country. The restoration of these peatlands could sequester the amount of carbon emitted into the air. Engagement with

communities and all stakeholders is needed to realise the importance of peatlands and alternative uses for them other than a fuel and energy provider.

Advanced technologies are also key, for example, anaerobic digesters can have an important role and using waste from agriculture as well as food waste can be used to produce alternative energy. The food and beverage sector could also use these – Having a community one where waste collection services are not available could encourage households to use these and excess used for compost in local community or generate energy for community buildings.

Q3. *What financial instruments could complement a decarbonised economy by 2050?*

There are still very little financial instruments available to help people switch to alternative energy or encourage them to do so. With the urgency now to reduce our carbon emissions and reach targets, the Government need to get serious about helping people make the switch and financial instruments/incentives are one way this can be done.

IRL have called for many years for the sale of excess energy produced from solar panels on people's homes and farm buildings and other buildings back to the grid. While people can produce their own energy through this, they still need to be connected to the grid and by allowing the sale of excess back to the grid, it also allows more energy to be produced.

Carbon Credits for uncut bog/restoration of bogland and forestry. Landowners are encouraged to plant forestry with grants etc, but carbon credits must also be encouraged. At present private peat landowners and those with turbary rights that are not cutting their bog or wish to restore it, should receive carbon credits.

MoorFutures

IRL and CWF have continued to call on the introduction of a MoorFutures style carbon credit.

MoorFutures are a way to raise funds for the rewetting and restoration of peatlands and wetlands. Essentially, they are a type of carbon credit used as an instrument for financing peatland protection, ecosystem services and biodiversity, through private investment. MoorFutures offer corporations an opportunity to offset their carbon emissions while investing in the biological diversity and the multiple benefits of peatlands and wetlands. MoorFutures create trust because projects are carried out in the local community and the buyer can visit the site easily; supplier and buyer are in direct personal contact. They started in Brandesburg state in Germany in 2012 with other states following suit. With

the amount of peatland and wetland across Ireland, there is an opportunity now to explore such a scheme to help Ireland achieve its climate targets¹.

Enterprise

Q8. Should enterprise lead the way in the transformation in the CHG impact of power, transport, buildings, waste and the circular economy?

Enterprise certainly has a key role to play and can be one of the leads but not the only one.

Enterprise is driven by its consumers and with consumers becoming more conscientious and knowledgeable about climate change, enterprise will have to make changes to respond to consumers' values and tastes. This will be a key driver to how enterprises will reduce their emissions. Businesses now will have to include sustainability in the strategic plan and reducing their carbon footprint.

Enterprises, especially small and micro enterprises must be supported to transition to zero carbon emissions. While larger and Multinational organisations can afford to make necessary changes they can also afford to pay penalties, smaller and micro enterprises may not be in position to do so and may take longer to transition. A just transition for these enterprises is needed. Haulage companies and small bus operators must also be included here.

Built Environment

Q9. How can Ireland retrofit almost all buildings by 2050, including options for heating fuels and what buildings will be most challenging to decarbonise?

With private dwellings it will be harder to retrofit older houses especially one off housing. This will be expensive for people to do. Retrofitting must also coincide with research into alternative fuels or decarbonising of fuels. Grants that were available for deep retrofit must be re-visited but better supports must be put in place for those on lower incomes who are unable to afford or do not own their own home to deep-retrofit.

Q10. What is the future of the national gas grid in a net-zero emissions pathway?

The national gas grid has an extremely important role to play in achieving the target of a net-zero emissions. Currently, piped natural gas is not available in every part of the country, especially in rural areas. Ireland has the highest potential for renewable gas in the EU and converting the current gas supply to biogas will help to achieve targets. Rural areas and in particular the agriculture sector can play a key role in this. There are a number of anaerobic digestion projects happening across the country which need to be further developed and replicated across the country. Engagement with the farming community must be carried out to further develop these projects and be lead producers of biogas.

¹ <https://www.moorfutures.de/>

Transport:

Q 12. Do you think modal shift will play a key role in decarbonisation by 2050? If so what is needed to drive substantial modal shift?

For a modal shift to occur, real investment in public transport, cycle lanes and other greener transport options for people is needed. People living in rural areas still do not have the same level of public transport as is available in the cities. As a result, accessing employment, health services, hospital appointments, education and training and socialising can be more difficult for people. Census 2016 showed 91% of households in rural areas owned at least one car; highlighting the over reliance on cars for people living outside Dublin. Vulnerable groups of people; older people and people with disabilities as well as those who are unable to afford a car living in rural areas are most affected by this. They rely on the goodwill of family members and neighbours to meet appointments and to go to the nearest town to do their day-to-day business.

There must be a whole of Government approach to a shift in transport use and how we move around. With a large number of people continuing to commute long distance by car, a greater push is needed to create more employment opportunities outside of the capital and also remote working. This can go some way in reducing carbon emissions from cars.

Q13. What should transport in our cities and rural areas look like by 2050?

A whole rethink in how public transport in rural areas is delivered is needed. This new Rural Development Policy must have greater influence on the Department of Transport, its Minister and the National Transport Authority (NTA) to develop a proper and reliable transport system for rural areas.

We welcome the growth of Local Link Services and that evening services in some areas continued beyond the pilot scheme. However, there are still a lot of people that do not have access to this service, or some services are limited in areas. IRL have become aware of changes to bus routes that means people have lost their Local Link service. IRL have recommended for many years that an uber-style car service or public car scheme in rural areas needs to be part of the overall public transport policy, where people can call for a car, similar to the community car scheme some of the Local Link companies already provide, to bring them to appointments or for social outings. The rural hackney programme also needs to be revisited and how this could better serve people in rural areas, especially older people and people with a disability who may not be able to drive.

Better integration of all public transport services – Local Link, Irish Rail, Bus Eireann and other service providers are needed for better connectivity across the country so every person, regardless of where they live, has access to some form of a reliable and robust public transport service, be that a bus or car type service.

Agriculture, Forestry and Land Use

While the agriculture sector is often seen as one of the main contributors to Green-House gas emissions, it can also be the solution to help reach the net zero target by 2050.

Q16. How do we secure viable family farms across our regions in an environment profoundly changed by the focus of climate change?

In 2018, just one-third (32.1%) of Irish farms were deemed viable with 34% sustainable and 33.9% vulnerable. (Teagasc, 2019)². This has been the trend for some years.

Diversification of farms, especially those that are vulnerable, can help to retain farms but also introduce new ways of farming that respond to climate change.

Encouraging younger and female farmers can also bring about new farming styles, alternative use of farmland and new technologies that can help mitigate climate change and reduce Green-House emissions. Collaborate farming can also help farms to grow but also allow small farm holders continue to farm their land while also allowing those with no farming background enter the sector³.

Q18. What type of nature-based solutions, including land use, land use change and management, could support emissions reduction and what is the associated emissions reduction potential of such solutions?

There is approx.1.4 million hectares of peatland. The conservation and restoration of these lands is essential if Ireland is to reach its target of net zero emissions by 2050.

Restored peatlands not only store two to three times more carbon than forestry, they also improve water and air quality and protect both plant and animal species that are important for soil quality.

Community Wetlands Forum

The Community Wetlands Forum (CWF) was established under the umbrella of Irish Rural Link in September 2013. The initiative came from community groups involved in wetland conservation who were developing the idea of wetlands as assets for their communities, as well as work undertaken by Irish Rural Link on behalf of communities affected by the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC). Since its inception, the CWF has held a number of meetings and visits to member sites, and in April 2016, the Forum agreed a constitution. Membership of CWF is open to community groups involved in wetland conservation, as well as other organisations and individual stakeholders who support the aims and objectives of CWF. The main aim of the CWF is to provide a representative platform for community-led wetland conservation groups based on the principles of community development namely empowerment; participation; inclusion; self-determination; and partnership.

² Teagasc (2019) 'Teagasc National Farm Survey 2018' <https://www.teagasc.ie/publications/2019/teagasc-national-farm-survey-2018-results.php>

³ National Rural Network Blog 'Key Aspects of Collaborating Farming' <https://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/farm-viability-blog/the-key-aspects-of-collaborative-farming/>

The provision of carbon credits or a scheme similar to the current Glas scheme should be made available to land owners that are storing carbon – see response to Q3 above on financial instruments.

The potential of farm buildings and community buildings to produce energy from solar panels being placed on the roofs of these buildings must be explored. There is an opportunity to exploit these more in creating energy for own supply with any excess produced allowed to be sold back to the national grid.

Q19. What is the emissions reduction potential from GHG-efficient food production, including future production scenarios?

Soil quality and use of chemical pesticides must be addressed to reduce emission from food production. Sustainable food production must be a key element of this Strategy and work closely with Food-wise 2030. Focus must turn to the quality of food produced and also how food is produced and that producers are given a fair price.

Waste and Circular Economy

Q21. What circular and bio-economy initiatives could support emissions reduction out to 2050?

Waste management has a key role to play in reducing emissions and reuse of this waste can create new products and new jobs. Anaerobic digesters in the production of bio-gas is an example of combining a circular and bio-economy. Extending the use of anaerobic digesters for food waste should be explored. The bio-economy has the potential of creating new jobs in rural areas as well as helping farms become more viable.

Q22. How should Ireland target reduction in food waste?

There must be better policy cohesion between *Food Wise 2025* and this Strategy on reduction of GHG. There must be less focus on increasing production of food and more focus on measures in reducing food waste. With the availability of cheaper food in large supermarkets, consumers buy more food which leads to most of this being thrown out each week. The food and beverage industry, including hotels and restaurants must aim to reduce food waste and have policies in place and communicate same to customers in how they reduce food waste.

Making more use of initiatives such as Food Cloud and Food Banks and highlighting these initiatives is important and educating people on food waste is needed.

Q23. How important will the development of the bio economy, biomass, biofuels, bio methane become in displacing fossil fuels and transforming farm opportunities and land use?

The development of the bio-economy and bio-fuels will be extremely important and we move away from the use of fossil fuels. However, people cannot be penalised for continuing to use fossil fuels if there are no alternatives or they are too expensive for low income households to use.

Irish Rural Link are one of 16 partners in a Horizon 2020 funded EU project which looks at the mix of ingredients for successful business models in the sectors of Food, Bioeconomy value chain and ecosystem services. Case studies of successful business cases in these sectors across the 11 partnering countries will be highlighted in the project and also on the project website <https://rubizmo.eu/>

Just Transition

Q24. What are the most important issues for the Government to consider in developing a long term strategy to 2050 in order to ensure a just transition?

A just transition must be central to this new strategy. People, especially those on low incomes cannot be made worse off or left behind. Indeed, such households, who are often the hardest to reach should be reached out to first and be brought along with every step of the transition to a zero GHG emission society.

Almost 50% of households living in consistent poverty had gone without heat at some stage over the course of 2018 with 30% unable to adequately heat their homes (SILC 2018). The majority of these households as well as households living in rural areas are dependent on fossil fuels to heat their homes, live in poorly insulated houses or do not own their own home to make changes or are unable to afford to make the changes to make their home more energy efficient.

Another issue that must be considered is the lack of public transport in rural areas and the reliance on a car. Also the cost of a new or even a second hand electric car is above the cost many rural households can afford, especially those on low incomes, but need a car to get to work. They cannot be made worse off by increasing carbon tax on diesel and petrol and other fossil fuels. It does not encourage people to change to greener alternatives when such alternatives are too expensive or simply not available to people. With the loss of almost 500 jobs in the Midlands region as a result of the closure of power stations and ceasing of turf cutting, employees must be engaged with and upskilling and re-training made available to them. This must happen now, so communities are not left behind, many of which have still not recovered from the recession.

Q25. What should the primary focus of adaptation policy for 2050?

The primary focus for adaptation policy must be **just transition** and that no person is made worse off as a result of achieving a net zero GHG emission target. Those on low income and marginalised and vulnerable groups must be reached first.

There must be more **policy cohesion** between different Government departments and cannot work in silos. There are many examples of where contradiction exists between Government policies and strategies, e.g. the budget for investment in new roads – bypasses and motorways while at the same time wanting people to reduce their dependency on the car but very little investment to improve the delivery of public transport, cycle lanes in towns and cities etc.

Ensuring jobs are protected and that the necessary **training and upskilling** is available to affected employees as we move away from the production of peat and fossil fuels. Also, the creation of new jobs and new sectors in biofuels and bioeconomy and new

technologies, must be met with the necessary training for people and engagement with communities is also needed.

Irish Rural Link the Organisation

Irish Rural Link (IRL), formed in 1991, is a national network of organisations and individuals campaigning for sustainable rural development in Ireland and Europe. IRL, a non-profit organisation, has grown significantly since its inception and now directly represents over 600 community groups with a combined membership of 25,000.

The network provides a structure through which rural groups and individuals, representing disadvantaged rural communities, can articulate their common needs and priorities, share their experiences and present their case to policy-makers at local, national and European Level.

Irish Rural Link is the only group represented at the national social partnership talks solely representing rural communities' interests.

'Our vision is of vibrant, inclusive and sustainable rural communities that contribute to an equitable and just society'

Irish Rural Link's aims are:

- To articulate and facilitate the voices of rural communities in local, regional, national and European policy arenas, especially those experiencing poverty, social exclusion and the challenge of change in the 21st century.
- To promote local and community development in rural communities in order to strengthen and build the capacity of rural community groups to act as primary movers through practical assistance and advice.
- To research, critique and disseminate policies relating to rural communities including issues such as sustainability, social exclusion, equality and poverty
- To facilitate cross-border networking between rural communities

'Our mission is to influence and inform local, regional, national and European development policies and programmes in favour of rural communities especially those who are marginalised as a result of poverty and social exclusion in rural areas.'