

Submission
From
Members of The Bray Heads U3A Climate Action Sub-Group, Bray
To
The Department of Finance

25 June 2019

This is a submission from Members of The Bray Heads Climate Action Sub-Group

This submission is our response to the Government's request for submissions in order to ascertain the views of the public on the Government's options for the use of revenues raised from increases in Carbon Tax.

We state at the outset that we accept without reservation the scientific evidence that the Climate System is dangerously warming our planet due to the activities of us humans; in particular, due to the emissions that we cause as a result of:

- Burning fossil fuels such as oil, gas, peat and coal
- Agricultural activities
- The way we use and develop land, extract its natural resources, develop its urban areas, plunder and pollute the seas, deforest our natural habitats and spread desertification.

We accept that the impacts of Climate Change, including in Ireland ,include:

- More intense storms and rainfall
- Increased river and coastal flooding
- Water shortages in summer
- New pests and diseases
- Adverse impact on water quality
- Loss of animal and plant life
- Climate Migration
- General social unrest particularly if both local and national Government fail to protect communities from the disruption that extreme weather events and Climate Change will cause.

We agree on the need for Ireland to transition to a Green Economy, with an immediate and radical reduction in carbon and other emissions.

All of this has been known for many years but, in place of an effective climate action plan to prepare Ireland for this and to meet international and EU climate action targets which Ireland had signed up to, Government chose instead to divert vital financial resources which could have been used to help meet these targets into paying enormous sums for carbon credits and in fines for failure to meet agreed targets, in addition to exporting the problem of much of our dangerous waste to third countries,

Against this background of unsustainable inaction in relation to the climate crisis, we very much welcome:

- the Citizens' Assembly recommendations on climate action
- the Oireachtas Joint Committee follow up on this, though this was a little less ambitious than the former
- the Government's recent acknowledgement that climate change and biodiversity loss now represent an emergency for Ireland
- the results of the local and EP elections, which clearly reflect our citizens' demand for urgent and effective climate action now;
- the Government's new draft Climate Action Plan. – very belated but still very welcome; and
- the invitation to the public to present submissions on the Carbon Tax issue, which we are availing of here.

If Ireland is to make the sort of urgent progress we need to avert a climate disaster, we accept that this will require major national investment, which cannot be further delayed as the alternative to this will ultimately be exponentially greater. We therefore accept that we must all be ready to play a part in a national campaign of action and that this is going to have to involve both some lifestyle changes and some sharing the burden of the costs involved.

What is vital, however, is that the burden of the costs for climate action is shared in a proportional and equitable way, firmly applying the 'polluter pays' principle. Those doing most damage to our environment - directly or indirectly, intentionally or negligently, businesses, authorities or individuals - must be required to pay proportionally for this, including through heavy penalty fines, effectively enforced, with these proceeds ring-fenced for climate action/environmental protection funding. And, based on the same principles of proportionality and equity, we must accept that those with greater ability to cover the costs of carbon usage and carbon reduction measures should pay more than more vulnerable members of our society, who will need extra support for this.

But before ordinary people are required to pay increased carbon-taxes we want evidence from our Government that all sections of our society are playing their part to deliver the transition to a new Climate Economy, for example:

- We want visible and transparent State action to support the transition to a low-carbon future
- We want the Government immediately to prioritise and strategise action that will serve to radically cut the amounts of taxpayers' money which is currently projected to be spent on fines for missed emissions targets – every cent of this is repugnant and unacceptable to us taxpayers
- We want any funds raised through carbon taxes/fines etc. to be carefully ring-fenced and targeted for specific priority climate action measures, not thrown into the Central Fund and not used to pay Carbon fines
- We want to see a new schedule of regulations, penalties and serious fines to be introduced to make major polluters and those contributing most to environmental damage and carbon emissions by illegal dumping, felling mature trees etc pay substantial costs for such actions, to boost climate action resources and and to help bring an end to their activities
- We want to hear Government instruct the IDA to market Ireland as a clean energy champion and not a tax haven;
- We want our Minister for Finance to work with the economists in our universities to model a new economy that is not dependent on growth and consumption.

- We want Government to make sure that a determination to deliver a new Climate Economy shapes all Procurement Policy and decisions
- We want Government to urgently review and adapt current agriculture, forestry, land-use and marine policies and priorities to maximise carbon emission reduction and our carbon sink potential of our woodland and boglands in particular.
- We want strict monitoring of the land use zoning activities and policies of local government so as to implement a spatial planning objective that makes it easy for us to transition to a zero-carbon economy.
- We want to see the acceleration of wind, wave and solar technology research, production and operationalisation
- We want government, local authority and planning regulations to be co-ordinated and streamlined to boost the installation of solar and photovoltaic panels and other energy-saving technologies in all state property and local government buildings, including all schools, in businesses and in all homes.
- We want community owned energy generation
- We want all who generate their own energy to be able to sell their spare capacity to the Grid
- We want more Government funded home energy efficiency upgrade schemes to help households reduce their fuel needs:
- We want a sustainable transport system, with the high carbon footprint of our public transport network to be radically reduced, an immediate halt placed all orders of high-carbon engine models, moves to low-carbon private transport to be incentivised and zero-carbon travel by bus and walking to be supported through more and better bike- and foot-paths
- We want there to be incentives for electric transport use and widespread charging points, including in rural areas
- We want lots of small electric mini buses collecting and delivering our children to school and carrying shoppers from one end of the town or village to the other so that we can leave our cars at home.
- We want extensive free Park & Ride facilities at public transport hubs
- We want local Government to provide free of charge spaces for use to grow a circular economy.

We now give you our views on the options outlined in section 3 of your paper:

We agree to the additional revenue raised as a result of an increase in the rate of Carbon Tax being used:

- a. To increase the fuel allowance to compensate those households likely to suffer from fuel poverty;
- b. To enhance the current grants towards the cost of energy efficiency improvements in the homes of those most vulnerable to fuel poverty through the Better Energy Homes scheme or the SEAI Better Energy Warmer Homes scheme;
- c. To fund sustainable transport including cycling infrastructure and local public transport;
- d. For broad climate actions like the development and use of energy-efficient technologies; radically reducing the carbon footprint of all public infrastructure, including buildings, the public transport system, subsidising energy-efficient retrofitting etc

We do not support the idea returning the proceeds of increased carbon taxes by way of a dividend to all individuals or households (“tax and dividend” approach as the emissions-reduction impact of this is likely to be minimal.

We object totally to the additional revenue raised as a result of an increase in the rate of Carbon Tax being used:

- To meet any fines the State is liable to pay arising from failure to meet our climate targets;
- By the Exchequer for general government expenditure;
- For broad climate actions (e.g. earmarked to the Climate Action Fund or similar);
- To act generally as a buffer against increasing the cost of doing business

Finally, we would like to add that we want to move to a low or zero carbon economy. We believe that Ireland could be a leader in Climate Change; the transition could be exciting; a new beginning, delivering new and interesting jobs, clean air, no pollution, better health, well connected communities, a better environment.

We believe that Ireland could be a clean Energy Super Power. Our children are smart and well educated; they will deliver the transition and we must help them in every way possible.

Thank you!

Members of The Bray Heads U3A Climate Action Sub-Group