

An Taisce's Climate Change related questions for Political Parties in advance of the General Election 2016.

The Questions:

1. **Policy:**
 - What will your party do to improve Ireland's record in climate policy-making?
2. **Emission Reduction Plan:**
 1. What approach will you take to managing emission reductions fairly across all sectors?
 2. How will you ensure that sectors with excess emissions pay for reductions in emissions elsewhere?
3. **Agriculture:**
 1. How will you move to a more sustainable and lower emission pathway for agriculture?
 2. How will you mandate cuts in agricultural emissions for 2020 and 2030?
4. **Buildings:**
 1. How do you intend to incentivise/legislate for increased efficiency in buildings, in relation to retrofitting and new builds?
 2. What plans do you have for a substantial programme for retrofitting buildings?
5. **Transport:** Do your plans to reduce transport emissions include:
 1. Investment in public transport in urban and rural areas;
 2. incentivising the use of alternative travel modes;
 3. urban planning policy situating essential services within walkable communities;
 4. adapting the national grid to cope with increased uptake of electric vehicles.
6. **Electricity:**
 - How do you propose that Ireland develops a sustainable electricity system?
7. **Communications:**
 - How do you intend to communicate the importance of acting upon climate change to the public?

Background

1. **Policy Question:** In October 2015, The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act was passed. The act requires that Ireland works towards becoming a low-carbon society, but it has been criticised as lacking ambition given the urgency of the climate crisis.
2. **Emission Reduction Plan:** As a nation we must develop a plan that reduces total national emissions across our economy in a fair and planned way. This plan will have to address the fact that not all sectors are equally carbon intensive, meaning that we face tough decisions regarding the division of the burden inherent in this challenge.

3. **Agriculture:** Agriculture is responsible for one third of all national emissions (Note 1). Agriculture is 45% of the non-traded emissions sector in Ireland, also consisting of transport and heating buildings, and together they have a target of cutting emissions by 20% relative to 2005 by 2020 (with cuts of 30% by 2030 likely required) (Note 2). However, there is no policy to cut Irish agricultural emissions - if anything emissions are likely to rise. Currently, Irish agriculture is largely based on maintaining a herd of over 6.5 million cattle of which much of the beef sector is uneconomic for food production (Note 3). The sector claims to help “feed the world” yet Ireland imports far more nutritional energy than it exports with very large greenhouse emissions that will soon be subject to very large financial penalties for failure to meet emission targets. So far the taxpayer is picking up the tab.
4. **Buildings:** Securing a well-insulated and efficient building stock not only ensures good health and lower electricity bills for citizens, it also means less fuel is burned for heating.
5. **Transport:** In 2013, transport contributed 19.1% of Ireland’s GHG emissions, making it the third largest contributing sector (Note 4). The EPA projects that the transport sector’s absolute emissions will grow by 20% between 2020 and 2035, with a private car fleet of 2.6 million in 2035 (Note 2).
6. **Electricity:** The generation of electricity accounts for approximately 20% of Ireland’s greenhouse gas emissions (Note 4). In 2014, 80.8% of Ireland’s electricity was generated using fossil fuels (excluding the source of imported energy) and only 14.5% was produced with renewables (Note 5). The transition to sustainable electricity production is a steep one, compounded by Bord na Móna’s intention to continue burning peat until 2030, and the resistance to many wind farm proposals. Meeting a 2°C pathway implies extremely rapid decarbonisation of the electricity system.
7. **Public Awareness and Engagement:** Implementing the necessary policies for preventing dangerous climate change requires the support of the public, and in international treaties Ireland has agreed that preventing climate change is a matter of social justice, intergenerational equity, and stewardship of the planet. However, the evidence shows that climate change is low on the public’s list of national priorities (Note 6).

Sources:

1. <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/ruralenvironment/climatechangebioenergybiodiversity/agricultureclimatechange/>
2. <http://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/air/airemissions/irelandsghgemissions2014-2035.html#.VIMLOXh59US>
3. Hennessy, T. & Moran, B. (2014). Teagasc National Farm Survey 2014 Results. Teagasc, Oak Park.
4. <http://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/air/airemissions/GHGprov.pdf>
5. http://www.seai.ie/Publications/Statistics_Publications/Energy_in_Ireland/Energy-in-Ireland-1990-2013-report.pdf
6. Lorenzoni, I., Nicholson-Cole, S., & Whitmarsh, L. (2007). Barriers perceived to engaging with climate change among the UK public and their policy implications. *Global Environmental Change*, 17(3-4), 445–459.