An Taisce
The National Trust for Ireland

30.10.15

Re: Public Consultation on the SEA Scoping for the National Mitigation Action Plan

To: Department of Environment, Community and Local Government

Dear Sir/Madam,

An Taisce attaches the following brief document as its submission to this Public Consultation. Our fully referenced Submission regarding the Draft NMP is available at http://www.antaisce.org/sites/antaisce.org/files/20150731_an_taisce_submission_national_mitigation_plan_0.pdf

We ask the Department and other readers to give full consideration to this contribution. In it we briefly outline reasons why the Scoping Report is too narrowly focused to provide an environmental assessment that respects the physical reality and environmental risks due to climate change. A much wider SEA is required for climate change plans and programmes, as is clearly called for in the European Commission document *Guidance on Integrating Climate Change and Biodiversity into Strategic Environmental Assessment*.

Please note that the none of the Report's questions for respondents are numbered, making cross referencing of questions and answers difficult for any future Consultation follow-up. We urge the Department to ensure that pdfs for Consultation are more user-friendly in future.

As per Article 6 of the SEA Directive, can the Department make known to An Taisce any further consultation planned regarding the making of this policy and issue An Taisce with notification of any proposed amendments in good time for a response.

Yours sincerely,

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Programmes and Administration Officer
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An Taisce's Response to the Public Consultation on the Scoping Report for an SEA on the National Mitigation Plan

An Taisce Climate Change Committee (ATCC)

October 2015

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Glossary

AR5	The Fifth Assessment Report by the IPCC, published 2013 to 2014
ATCC	An Taisce Climate Change (Committee)
CO_2	Carbon dioxide
DECLG	Department of Environment, Community and Local Government
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
NPP	Climate Action and Low-Carbon Development National Policy Position.
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Summary of An Taisce's NMP SEA Scoping Report Concerns

An Taisce believes the draft National Mitigation Plan Scoping Report (also described hereafter as "the document") prepared by RPS is inappropriately limited in scope for an environmental assessment of climate change mitigation planning. The document unduly restricts its scoping baselines, alternatives and objectives to national and sectoral concerns, entirely guided by Government's National Policy Position. This worryingly narrow view is contrary to the EU SEA Directive and clearly at odds with the advice in the European Commission document *Guidance on Integrating Climate Change and Biodiversity into Strategic Environmental Assessment* [1].

Article 5 of the Directive states:

> *Where an environmental assessment is required under Article 3(1), an environmental report shall be prepared in which the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing the plan or programme, and reasonable alternatives taking into account the objectives and the geographical scope of the plan or programme, are identified, described and evaluated.*

The Guidance Document states:

> *Both climate change and biodiversity therefore demonstrate the importance of distinguishing between magnitude and significance as you should normally in a SEA. In these cases, temporal and geographical scales may need to be greater.*

The current unprecedented rate of global warming, causing extremely rapid climate change, is a global problem with very long term implications resulting from human-caused greenhouse emissions past, present and future, including Ireland's. The level of warming due to these emissions will affects all States world-wide, essentially permanently, so the wider long-term effects due to Ireland's emissions need to be identified, described and evaluated. Even in Ireland, by committing to a definable carbon budget of future emissions based on the NPP-based NMP statements has a global geographical scope with very long-term cumulative effects that are significant in causing a definable percentage range of global environmental impacts. It is essential that the Scoping Report and the SEA acknowledge the baselines, alternatives and objectives that meet the scientifically observed and modeled physical realities of the Earth's climate system. Not doing so may well leave the resulting SEA and the Government open to legal challenge.

It is not acceptable to avoid SEA climate change scoping with regard to both: the clearly understood global and long-term trend of the current 'business-as-usual' baseline trajectory to likely-catastrophic global warming of 3 to 5ºC warming by 2100 (as shown by IPCC AR5); and the alternative carbon-budgeted baseline to limit warming to that Ireland has signed up to at the UNFCCC Cancun Agreement[2]. These alternatives, the science behind them and the

[1] http://ec.europa.eu/environment/eia/pdf/SEA Guidance.pdf

[2] UNFCCC (2011) *Decision 1/CP.16 The Cancun Agreements*, I(4): "deep cuts in global greenhouse gas emissions are required according to science, and as documented in the Fourth Assessment Report of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change, with a view to reducing global greenhouse gas emissions so as to hold the increase in global average temperature below 2 °C above pre- industrial levels, and that Parties should take urgent action to meet this long-term goal, consistent with science and on the basis of equity."

failure of the NPP (and the EU) mitigation policies to meet declared UNFCCC objectives have been clearly set out in An Taisce's previous Submission on the Draft NMP based on the science and Government documents. However, the critical need for a viable 2ºC whole-economy, carbon budgeted emission pathway (in line with science and equity) for any transition to a low-carbon economy in Ireland is ignored in the document's summary of the NMP Consultation Submissions in Section 8.1.

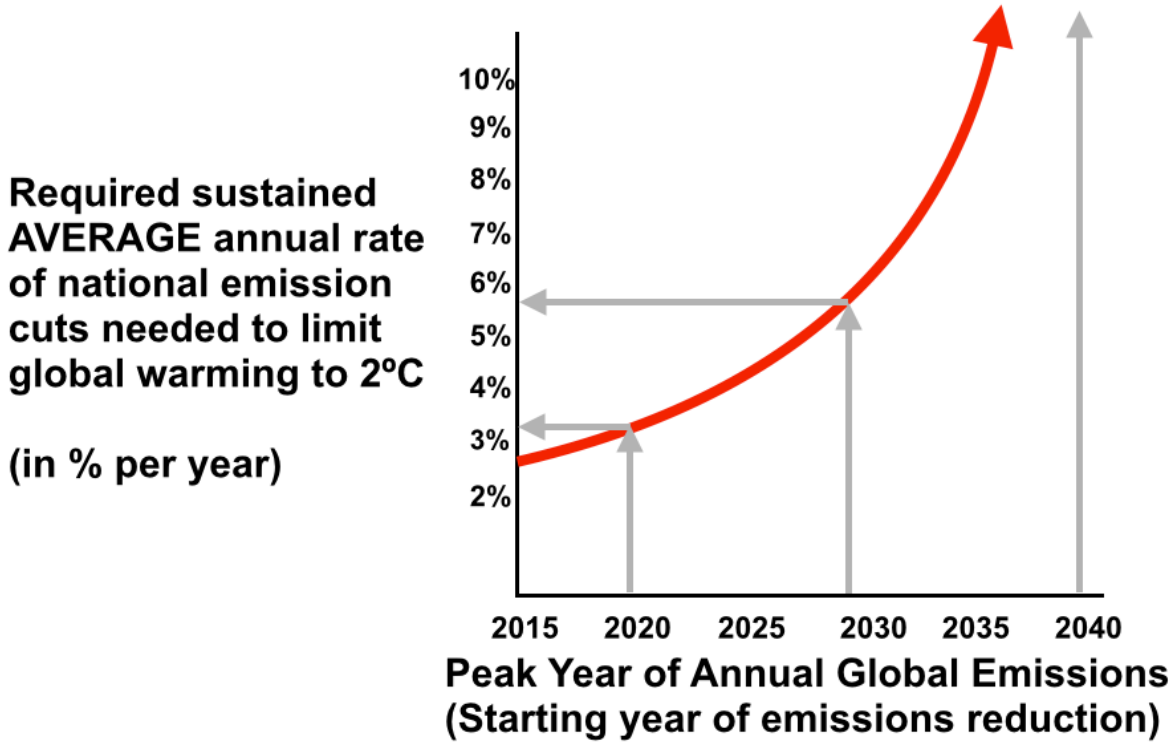


Figure 1. Average national emission reduction rates for 2ºC target, following a peak global emissions year beginning sustained global emissions reduction (From Stocker (2013) [3] redrawn to show only 'closing door' to the UNFCCC agreed 2ºC limit).

The level of economic and social change implied by *any* non-catastrophic climate target will escalate rapidly over the coming three decades. The unprecedented global warming now underway due to human caused emissions committed to now under national mitigation plans now risks the resilience of the biosphere – the 'environment' that supports human civilization and any sustainable economy. As shown by Thomas Stocker (Lead Author of IPCC's Working Group 1, The Physical Science), see Fig. 1, delayed mitigation action ensure either: rapidly escalating required whole-economy, annual decarbonisation rates; or commits the biosphere to rapidly escalating, irreversible climate risks. Delaying a peak date and not achieving the sustained after-peak rates necessary fails to meet the 2ºC-aligned carbon budget, and commits humanity and the biosphere to greater warming and more dangerous climate change. Ignoring the extreme urgency of the current baseline trajectory and the irreversible consequences of delaying mitigation action commensurate with physical reality cannot be acceptable in an SEA for the NMP.

As An Taisce's analysis has shown[4], the National Policy Position entirely fails to commit to anything close to the above rates for "substantial and sustained reductions of greenhouse gas emissions" required to limit climate change[5] and cannot even deliver emission reductions

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[3] Stocker T (2013) The Closing Door of Climate Targets VOL 339 SCIENCE

[4] An Taisce (2015) *Response to the Public Consultation on the Development of the National Mitigation Plan (NMP)* Section 4.

[5] IPCC (2013) *Climate Change: The Physical Science.* AR5 WG1 SPM p.19

in line with the minimum end of the EU 2050 target range of an 80-95% reduction relative to 1990. By excluding agriculture and business emissions, ignoring imported consumption-emissions and accepting meaningless 'end-date' emission targets, the NPP is totally inadequate to delivering Ireland's UNFCCC obligations. Even as written it is likely that the NPP will deliver no cut or only very small cuts in cumulative carbon emissions and a similar failure to deliver cuts in annual agricultural methane and nitrous oxide emissions. This completely plausible outcome is one necessary alternative baseline required of any acceptable SEA for the NMP.

In Section 2.3.1, *Long-term and cumulative nature of impacts*, the EC Guidance document states:

> *Climate change both mitigation and adaptation concerns long-term trends and entails changes that are often too gradual to detect over the lifetime of a typical PP. The long-term nature of climate change makes it more difficult to consider within normal (five-to-ten year) planning horizons. However, as many PPs are implemented over the longer-term, and may set a framework for infrastructure and other projects that will have a lifespan of many years, the consideration of climate change and biodiversity will be critical to their viability. This influences the baseline environment against which a PP should be assessed as part of an SEA.*

In our view the Scoping Report fails to provide a sufficient scoping basis of the global and long-term cumulative trends – nationally, at EU level, and globally – that are essential to an environmental assessment any plan that aims to mitigate climate change, especially in contrast to the commitments Ireland has made at the UNFCCC. A fundamental point is that an NMP that delivers emissions reductions that do not meet the mitigation rates outlined by Stocker or Anderson[6] commits future policy-makers and society to even more challenging emissions pathway in the very near future.

Ignoring this wider climate reality while looking only at local and near-term environmental effects is clearly unacceptable so all the baselines, objectives and impacts need to include the very real long-term consequences and extreme climate risks that Ireland's increasing emissions continue to contribute to. An Taisce hopes that a revised Scoping Report can properly reflect the urgency and global view needed to reflect climate change in an SEA of a National Mitigation Plan.

[6] Anderson K (2015) *Duality in Climate Science* Nature Geoscience (2015) doi:10.1038/ngeo2559

2 Comments on the Scoping Report Questions and Content

2.3 PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE NMP

The document states:

> *p.3: In addition to the main environmental considerations, there will, and must be, a strong economic dimension to the work that Ireland is carrying out to develop the NMP. Economic considerations will play a crucial role in Ireland's transition to a low carbon, environmentally sustainable economy, as Ireland's finances continue to stabilise and recover.*

This is indeed a stated aspiration of the Government's draft NMP but rather than using the relevant policy source as a quotation the Scoping Report states it as if it is relevant to the SEA scoping. Obviously, the Earth's climate system does not have any regard for the "economic considerations" of Ireland or any other nation, it simply responds to the future cumulative CO_2 emissions and annual GHGs actually resulting from combined national emission paths followed by the world's nations. If Ireland's planned economic transition within the NPP to a low carbon future (near-zero whole economy emissions by 2050) does not follow a plausible 2ºC trajectory then the SEA scoping is not only accepting a meaningless premise but is contributing to entirely misplaced optimism regarding the transition. Any SEA needs to scope reality so that the public and experts can judge whether economic policies meet a viable low carbon pathway.

On p.4, the document provides a summary of the EPA "best case scenario" projection as if this is highly relevant to the EU 2020 targets. Given the rapid current growth in transport and agricultural emissions, it is very likely (as the EU Country Report for Ireland found) that the actual outcome for the period to 2020 will be worse than the "worst case" EPA scenario. It may be that due to the initial lower emissions as a result of the economic crisis Ireland comes somewhere close to meeting this target, but not as an indented policy outcome.

As illustrated in these two comments, An Taisce is concerned that the tone of the document suggests that RPS and DECLG are more interested in producing a Scoping Report and SEA considerate of the wishes of the Government in power than with the interests of the environment that underpins the future well-being of Ireland and its people. We urge the Department to ensure that the Scoping and the final SEA are clearly politically independent and evidence-based so that the resulting assessment fairly informs the public to judge the very important political and economic decisions that have to be made over the next decade; decisions that will be Ireland's part in determining the future societal and economic viability of the global future.

Q. 4.4 Based on the plans, policies and programmes outlined are there any other key relevant international or regional plans, policies or programmes that should be considered in the SEA Environmental Report on the National Mitigation Plan?

The UNFCCC Copenhagen Accord and Cancun agreements signed by Ireland committing to 2ºC action in line with science and equity need to be considered as essential context.

Q. 5.3 Do you agree with the list of potential significant effects that have been identified? Should any be added or removed?

Effect on other states due to non-achievement of minimum rate required. Environmental damage effects on land use, material assets, architectural heritage for Ireland and elsewhere.

Q.6.1 Are there any other significant information sources that should be considered?

It is essential that the scientific and expert context provided by the three IPCC working group reports for the Fifth Assessment report forms a basis for the SEA Scoping of alternative scenarios. Peer-reviewed publications since the AR5 cut off dates of 2012 and 2013 should also be considered. At the very least the key conclusions of the IPCC showing the extreme urgency needed from policy responses needs to be considered.

The commitment to equity (climate justice) made by Ireland in the UNFCCC Cancun agreement means that decarbonisation rates need to be faster in Ireland than in poorer nations with less capacity and responsibility for action (faster therefore than the average rates shown in Figure 1. Therefore equity calculators such as Stockholm Environment Institute *Climate Equity Reference Calculator* need to be consulted to assess the approximate percent responsibility of Ireland for future climate damage due to the emission pathway resulting from the NMP.

Q. 7.1 Do you have any suggestions in relation to the overall approach to alternatives?

Regarding the SEA Directive, the EC Guidance, Section 5.4 *Assess alternatives that make a difference in terms of climate change and biodiversity impacts* states:

> *p.42: An analysis of alternatives is often viewed to be at the heart of the SEA process, as this provides confidence that the proposed course of action is the best one available. But there must be additional considerations of climate change and biodiversity issues if they are to be addressed effectively in SEAs. This is particularly important if consideration of long-term resilience — of the environment and of the PP — is to be built into the SEA.*
>
> *Considering alternatives should encourage the planning process to look for better ways to meet human needs without contributing to climate change, and minimise the risks resulting from previous development patterns and the likely expected climate change phenomena.*
>
> *The analysis of reasonable alternatives should consider the context of different climate change scenarios and climate impacts, and possible reasonable alternative climate change futures (see Annex 3, Scenarios)*

The effective, average whole economy NMP decarbonisation rate needs to be commensurate with 2ºC action entailing rates already approaching 'double digit' annual percentage reductions in total national emissions according to Anderson. The alternative is the current "business as usual scenario" accepting, as the NPP does, the current unmitigated drift to an untenable 4ºC world. This difficult reality may not be "realistic, reasonable and relevant" in terms of the NPP but it is very much the reality humanity now faces. It is unrealistic, unreasonable and irrelevant to pretend otherwise.

7.2 Do you have any comments regarding the draft SEA Objectives presented?

Objective 2, 6 and 7 need to be reframed in terms of the realities noted above. The need for no-regret policies employing the precautionary principle should be an essential basis of the objectives.

ENDS.