



Declan McAleer MLA
Chair
Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

11th February 2021

Re: CCC advice for NI in relation to the 2050 emissions reduction target

Dear Mr. McAleer

RenewableNI welcomes the opportunity to share our views with the AERA Committee on the Committee on Climate Change's (CCC) advice to the DAERA Minister. Having recently submitted our response to the climate bill consultation I have drawn out the key points from our submission.

RenewableNI is the trade association and the voice for the renewable electricity industry in Northern Ireland. We represent over 30 businesses, fostering knowledge exchange, sharing best practice and supporting policy development. Together, our members make up a large majority of the renewable industry supply chain in Northern Ireland.

Emission Reduction Targets

RenewableNI recognises that policy should be informed by evidence, including in this case, the CCC's Sixth Carbon Budget and advice to the DAERA Minister.

While the CCC did not set out a pathway for Northern Ireland (NI) to reach net zero by 2050, RenewableNI believes that the Climate Bill should have a stretch target of at least 94% greenhouse gas (GHG) reductions by 2050, as referenced in the CCC advice.

It would be better to 'fail' to reach this higher target and achieve 90% reductions than to 'succeed' in reaching the 82% reduction target set out in the CCC balanced pathway. The urgency of climate change requires that we maximise reductions and that we act quickly in doing so. All evidence since the Stern Report¹ in 2006 has shown that earlier action is both more effective and less costly.

In this context setting higher targets should be seen as a no regrets option and for that reason RenewableNI would not be opposed to a 2050 net zero target.

The CCC should be asked for further analysis of a 2050 net zero target for Northern Ireland given that they have stated:

¹ <https://www.lse.ac.uk/granthaminstitute/publication/the-economics-of-climate-change-the-stern-review/>

"There is no purely technical reason why Net Zero is not possible in Northern Ireland."

Experience also teaches us that what does not seem possible now may become so in the future. The All Island Grid Study in 2008 set 42% renewable electricity as the maximum achievable by 2020, yet Northern Ireland reached 48% by the end of that year.

We think it is important that Northern Ireland has its own target rather than simply a commitment to contributing to the overall UK objective. The latter approach could result in accelerated progress in one region used to allow slippage in another.

Interim Targets

It is important that there are interim targets to 2050 with action taken in the first years of a Climate Bill. Failure to act early could significantly impact our ability to meet 2050 targets.

The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) has made clear that a global inaction this decade would result in failure to meet the objectives of the Paris Agreement.²

The Climate Bill should require action at all levels of government. For example, councils should be required to report on how their policies are contributing to GHG reduction efforts and Local Development Plans should be in line with climate policy.

Reporting

It is important that the Climate Bill sets out how progress towards interim and longer term targets is monitored and reported against. It should establish how failure to achieve the targets should be highlighted and that remedial action taken will be required to ensure that targets are not missed or ignored. Penalties should be put in place where failure or attempts to obfuscate the targets are apparent.

The presumption should be that all public bodies report on mitigation and adaptation measures unless they can demonstrate that they should be exempt. Public policy should support private industry in mitigation and adaptation efforts.

Whole Government Approach

² <https://unfccc.int/news/cut-global-emissions-by-76-percent-every-year-for-next-decade-to-meet-15degc-paris-target-un-report>

It is vital that the Climate Bill and the forthcoming Energy Strategy work in tandem. RenewableNI welcomes Economy Minister Diane Dodds' commitment to a 2030 renewable electricity target of 'not less than 70%'. RenewableNI believes the target should be set at 80% by 2030, 100% by 2035 and net zero power by 2040.

The power sector has already reduced its emissions by approximately 50% with 48% renewable electricity being achieved in 2020. Heat and transport have struggled to decarbonise. Since 2001 transport emissions have increased by 5% with heat emissions having decreased by only 3%. We already have the technology and the know how to decarbonise the power sector and the electrification of heat and transport will be a vital part of realising our climate ambitions. For these reasons we are likely to, and need to, decarbonise power in advance of wider net zero ambitions.

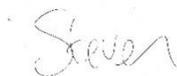
It is vital that both the Climate Bill and Energy Strategy are delivered on a cross departmental basis and at all levels of public administration. In the experience of RenewableNI, the planning system, at all levels, is failing to take account of the UK net zero requirement.

Increasingly restrictive policies in relation to renewable development are being proposed by councils, recent guidance from the Chief Planner has in effect suspended development of battery storage and the Minister for Infrastructure's recent decision to reject the SSE Doraville application has added to the perception that NI is a cold house for renewable developers.

To achieve its climate ambitions NI will need to lean heavily on the renewable electricity sector. Should planning policy not align with a future Climate Act and Energy Strategy then it will in effect have a veto on decarbonisation plans.

Again, I thank you for the opportunity to engage with the Committee's working on climate change and if I can be of any further help please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours Sincerely,



Steven Agnew,
Head of RenewableNI