

**Central Service and Contingency Planning  
Group**  
Central Management Branch



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Dear Stella,

**For Information- Follow-up letter to explain in more detail the Climate Change Committee advice for Northern Ireland in relation to the 2050 emissions reduction target.**

I previously wrote to you on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2020 to notify you that the UK Climate Change Committee (CCC), an independent, statutory body established under the Climate Change Act 2008, published its 6<sup>th</sup> Carbon Budget report on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2020. In addition, I provided you with a copy of a letter received by the DAERA Minister from Lord Deben, chairman of the CCC in response to the Minister's request for separate, specific analysis and advice on Northern Ireland's fair contribution to the UK Net Zero target. The 6<sup>th</sup> Carbon report and supporting documents can be viewed at <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/sixth-carbon-budget/>.

In my previous memo to you I highlighted some of the key points from the report and follow-up advice. The Minister has now had an opportunity to consider these in greater detail and, in particular, the CCC recommendation of a long-term target for Northern Ireland of an at least 82% reduction target from 1990 levels in all net Greenhouse Gases by 2050.

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During engagement by the Minister, and his officials, with a range of stakeholders it has become clear that some further explanation of the advice around the emissions reduction target is necessary. In particular one sentence in the advice appears to have been taken out of context- **“there is no purely technical reason why net zero is not possible in Northern Ireland”**. In isolation this indeed does sound like an endorsement for great ambition to reach net zero for Northern Ireland, but when read in the context of the rest of the advice it is much clearer that the CCC are clearly not recommending we do so. Their advice is clear- **“We therefore do not recommend that Northern Ireland set a Net Zero target for all greenhouse gases. Instead, Northern Ireland should aim for at least an 82% reduction in all greenhouse gases by 2050.”**

Achieving net-zero emissions for the whole of the UK by 2050 does not necessitate that every part of the UK (both geographical and sectoral) gets to zero emissions. Some parts of the UK will be ‘net sources’ of greenhouse gases by 2050 with emissions offset in other parts of the UK that are ‘net sinks’.

There are a number of factors to support that net zero is not appropriate or feasible for Northern Ireland and that a reduction of at least 82% of all greenhouse gases in Northern Ireland is the equitable share to the UK commitment to achieve net zero by 2050. This target incorporates the correct level of ambition with the realisation that Northern Ireland has unique challenges. This is not removing the responsibility in terms of emissions reductions in Northern Ireland which are still crucial for the UK to reach net zero by 2050.

The CCC do advise that getting to net zero in Northern Ireland would necessitate one or both of the following;

- A substantial reduction in output from Northern Ireland’s livestock farming sector that goes beyond the stretching scenarios they have analysed in their report.
- A much greater than equal share of all UK greenhouse gas removals being located in Northern Ireland compared to its current emissions, population or economic output.

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It is important to recognise that Northern Ireland is a significant net exporter of agri-food products with nearly 50% of all agri-food products produced in Northern Ireland consumed in the rest of the UK. The agriculture sector in Northern Ireland is important and this should be reflected in determining any targets. Reducing NI food processing would only serve to move production off shore. This unnecessary off-shoring of food production would result in serious damage to the NI economy with no consequential overall global emissions reduction. All sectors including the agriculture sector will need to contribute and play their part in order for the targets within NI to be achieved and for the UK to reach net zero.

Some Committee Members may be of the opinion that as a result of the agriculture sector in Northern Ireland we cannot achieve net zero, however the Minister also wants to dispel the rhetoric that a target of at least 82% is there just to protect agriculture. It is worth noting the CCC advice is that even if agricultural methane emissions were removed from a supplementary target, the Northern Ireland 2050 target would still only be a 93% reduction in emissions which there are a range of other reasons for also.

Northern Ireland is behind other administrations within the UK in taking steps to address climate change and is starting from a much lower baseline in terms of emissions reductions to date. This lower reduction in emissions to date crosses over a number of Departments within the Executive and no one Department is directly responsible for this deficit. One example of this is that the gas network is much less developed in Northern Ireland, with only 24% of households connected to the grid in 2017 compared to 97% of the UK as a whole. It should be noted that the 24% connected to the gas grid in Northern Ireland is increasing.

Whilst it is essential to reduce the level of emissions released into our environment we also have the opportunity to implement measures to use new technologies that remove and store our greenhouse gases. However it is important that these technologies are effective and cost efficient. We are aiming towards an all UK net zero target and Northern Ireland will have to make a significant contribution for this to be achieved. For Northern Ireland to achieve net zero it would lead to requiring a much greater than equal share of greenhouse gas removal technologies being located in Northern Ireland. Locating such technologies in Northern Ireland would be sub-optimal and unlikely to be cost effective and ultimately could be detrimental in achieving the UK net zero target.

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To meet the long term challenging target recommended by the CCC, it is important to recognise policy interventions need to happen now and be delivered in the 2020's and 2030's. The Minister is currently considering interim targets and other potential elements of a Northern Ireland Climate Change Bill. He will then be tabling an Executive paper in the next 2 weeks and will also be briefing the Committee to seek its views regarding the potential content of such a Bill.

To summarise, Northern Ireland's target of an at least 82% reduction in emissions is the evidence-based advice from the CCC and there are many complex reasons for this, which I hope you can appreciate. This is not to limit the ambition to aim to achieve much higher emissions reductions but rather ensures a binding commitment, with maximum buy in from all sectors, through targets that are evidence-based.

Yours sincerely,



**Michael Oliver**  
**Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer**

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