

THE CLIMATE CHANGE (NO.1) BILL

Summary Bill Report

What is Climate Change?

Climate Change is an umbrella term for changes caused to the natural environment and weather by the emission of greenhouse gases (GHGs).

GHGs are released into the atmosphere in two ways: the burning fossil of fuels such as oil and gas and through the digestive process of animals like cows, pigs and sheep.

These gases linger in the atmosphere meaning heat and light cannot escape. This causes a “greenhouse” warming effect raising global temperatures.

It is widely accepted that human activity, and in particular the use of fossil fuels, has significantly increased the amount of GHGs near the earth’s surface, causing intensive warming.

We have relied on fossil fuels as an energy source for decades to help us travel, make things, heat our homes and drive many aspects of our economy.

Why is it Important?

The increase in global temperature has caused the polar ice caps to melt, leading to rising sea levels and disruption to normal weather patterns.

As a result there are more frequent extreme weather events like floods, storms and fires along with significant changes in temperatures in different parts of the world.



The scale and cost of these episodes are significant – estimates suggest that over

500,000 people living in the global south have died as a result of such events in the past two decades, and they have led to over \$500 billion in economic losses.

Climate Change also has a harmful effect on the natural habitats of wildlife and plants. The release of gases into the atmosphere affects also the quality of air we breathe.

Many of the changes are so serious that they can never be reversed.

What is Being Done?

Countries across the world are taking steps to reduce their GHGs to help slow Climate Change and off-set some of its negative effects – this is known as “mitigation.”

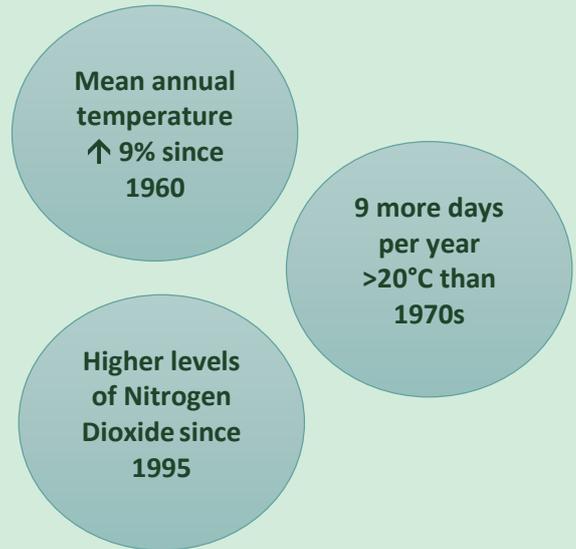
In 2015 196 nations signed the Paris Pledge to limit global warming to less than 2°C by the middle of the century as this would significantly reduce the risk of future harm.

In recent years global leaders have committed to deliver on this agreement and have encouraged ambitious climate action. The COP26 Conference held in Glasgow in November 2021 sought to intensify support for Climate Change mitigation.

Many nations have passed Climate Change laws which set out how they will reduce their GHG emissions, limit harm to the environment and deliver on the Paris Pledge.



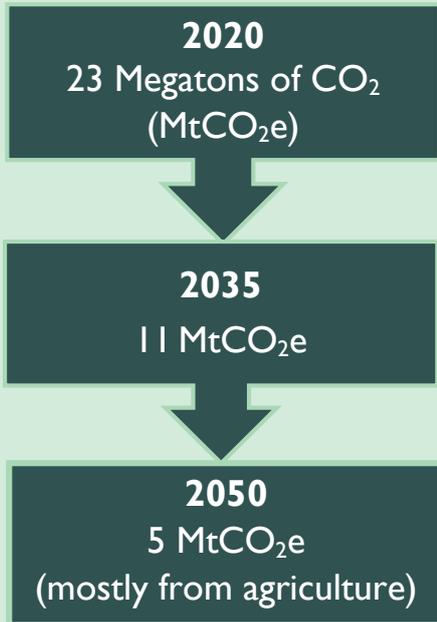
LOCAL CLIMATE CHANGES



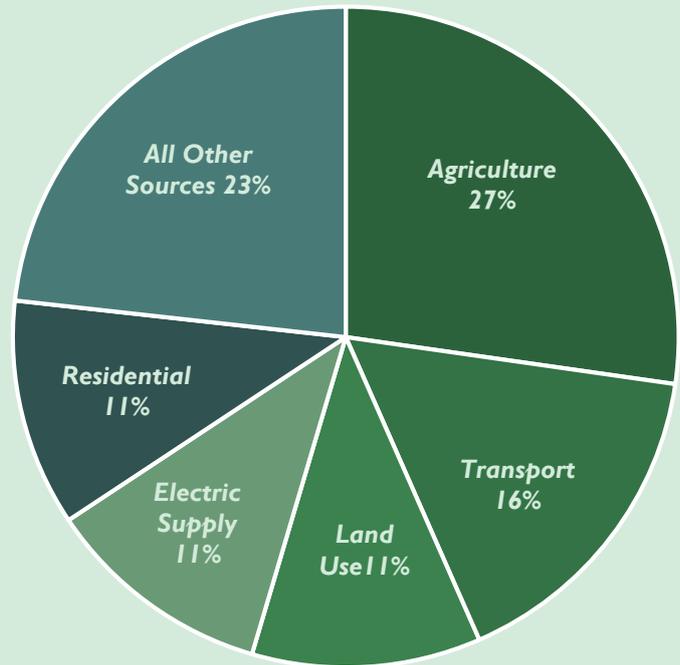
What are the Issues?

- Northern Ireland (NI) is the only part of the United Kingdom (UK) and Ireland which does not have its own Climate Change law
- Many countries have set a “net-zero” emissions target, i.e. to balance out the amount of GHGs that are released with those absorbed from the atmosphere through natural or engineered means
- The UK Committee on Climate Change (CCC), which is an expert advice body, has projected that NI can achieve an 82% decrease in GHG emissions by 2050 (compared to baseline levels)
- Climate Change measures will require a lot of investment
- Just under a third of NI emissions come from agriculture – this is because we have a large livestock population for meat and dairy production

UK CCC “Balanced Pathway” Emission Projections for NI



NI Emissions per Sector 2018



What does the Bill propose?

The Bill will bridge the gap between NI and its neighbours by establishing local Climate Change law, creating a legal pathway for the reduction of emissions.

Its main proposals include:

- Declaration of a Climate Emergency in NI
- A target to reach net-zero GHG emissions by 2045
- Development of Climate Action Plans by The Executive covering 5-year periods that will have emission, water and soil targets
- Sectoral plans will set out policies for different parts of the economy to reduce emissions
- A new Climate Office will be established with a Commissioner who will report on progress and hold government to account



What did we Do?

The Bill was referred to us in April 2021 for scrutiny and we asked our research team to analyse it and present any potential issues.

We then gave stakeholders the opportunity to give their views through an online call-for-evidence that was open from 20 May to 15 July 2021 – we received over **1,000 responses**.

We also held focus groups with over 300 pupils in local schools to hear their thoughts and opinions.

In addition, we heard from 16 organisations which attended the Committee to give us their perspective, including:

- **Climate experts and academics**
- **The local agri-food sector**
- **Environmental groups**
- **Representatives from local government, business and industry**
- **Executive Departments**

We also wrote to the Department for Finance and asked our research team to look at the estimated costs of the Bill and how these are likely to be funded in the years ahead.

What did we Find?

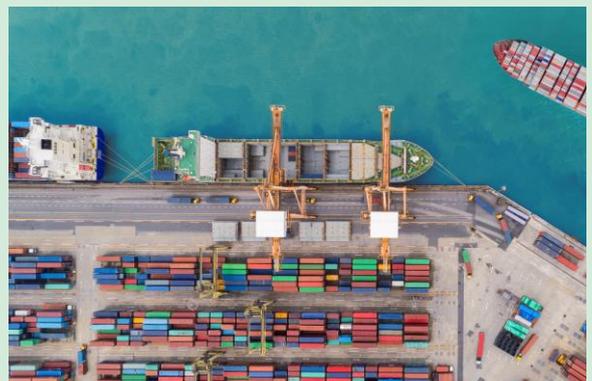
We understand that Climate Change is a very important issue which many people and organisations feel strongly about.

We heard that urgent action is needed and that government, businesses, the voluntary sector and members of the public need to work together to tackle it.

We recognise the progression of the Bill is important and that many people welcome its introduction as a positive step forward for NI.

We also heard how important it is to be careful that any actions we take to reduce local emissions do not cause an unintentional increase in GHGs elsewhere – this is known as “carbon leakage.”

For example, if we have to produce less food products in NI to meet our goal, we would have to import them from other parts of the world and this might offset our emissions reduction.



We considered the Bill's provisions and the evidence we received very carefully and our key findings are:

- There is a **strong difference of opinion** on the Bill's 2045 net-zero GHG target:
 - Some welcome it as an ambitious aim that will drive action
 - Others feel that it is unachievable and not credible, given it goes far beyond the CCC's advice (at least 82% reduction by 2050)
- There is significant concern about the **impact on the local agri-food sector** should the Bill's target be pursued because farmers will have to drastically cut livestock numbers to meet it. This would threaten job security and the economy at large
- In order to support the agri-food sector and other industries that will be challenged by the move to climate-friendly practices, government needs to provide adequate financial, training and other support mechanisms – **“a Just Transition”**
- The **Climate Action Plans are well-supported** as a means of charting a pathway to the emissions goal
- Having an independent **Climate Commissioner** would be beneficial to provide **scrutiny** and reporting of government action
- The vast majority of stakeholders recognise that Climate Change is a global problem and it is important that NI **works closely with its neighbours**, and countries further afield, to develop its policy
- The Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) made an extensive submission outlining a number of concerns about the wording of the Bill's provisions and their policy intent



What Do We Think?

Overall, we consider the Bill to be very important in setting a framework to reduce GHG emissions in NI and we support most of its provisions and proposals.

Therefore, we recommend that it moves to the next stage in the Assembly.

We have made a number of suggested amendments through our scrutiny, based on our considerations and the feedback received from stakeholders, including:

- Enhancing the provisions and mechanisms for providing Just Transition
- Ensuring the needs of small-medium enterprises and rural communities are specifically considered when developing the Climate Action Plans
- Specifically considering the risk of “carbon leakage” when making sectoral plans
- Adding safeguards in respect of the Commissioner’s powers
- Amending the Bill provisions in line with some of the suggestions put forward by the Department

We recognise that the Bill’s emissions target is contentious and we did not come to an agreed position on this.

Given the far-reaching consequences, we feel it is appropriate that this particular aspect of the Bill be debated and considered by all members of the Assembly in order to reach a decision.