

THE CLIMATE CHANGE (NO.2) BILL

Summary Bill Report

What is Climate Change?

Climate Change refers to changes in the natural environment and weather systems which have been caused by global warming.

Greenhouse gases (GHGs) are released when we burn fossil fuels like oil and coal and through the digestive processes of animals. GHGs remain near the earth's surface and prevent heat and light from escaping. This causes a warming effect, leading to a rise in global temperatures.

Sustained emission of GHGs over the last 200 years has led to intensive global warming, and profound Climate Change.

Governments across the world have pledged to limit global warming to less than 2°C by 2050 compared to pre-industrial levels in order to avoid irreversible harm to the environment.



Why are we Reporting on Climate Change Again?

We published a report in December 2021 on a Climate Change Bill that was introduced to the Assembly and promoted by an individual Member – known as a “Private Member’s Bill.”

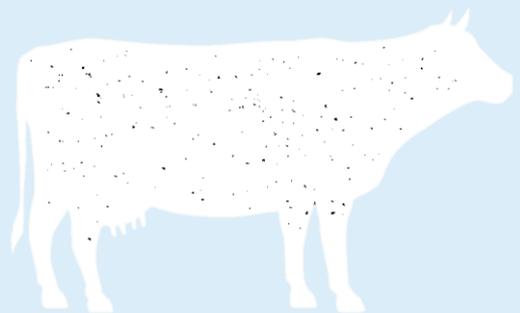
In recent months we have also been examining a different Bill that is being promoted by the Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and was referred to us in September 2021. This report is our summarised assessment of this Bill.

While both Bills cover the broad issue of how Climate Change should be tackled locally, they are quite different and have distinct provisions and aims.



What are the Issues?

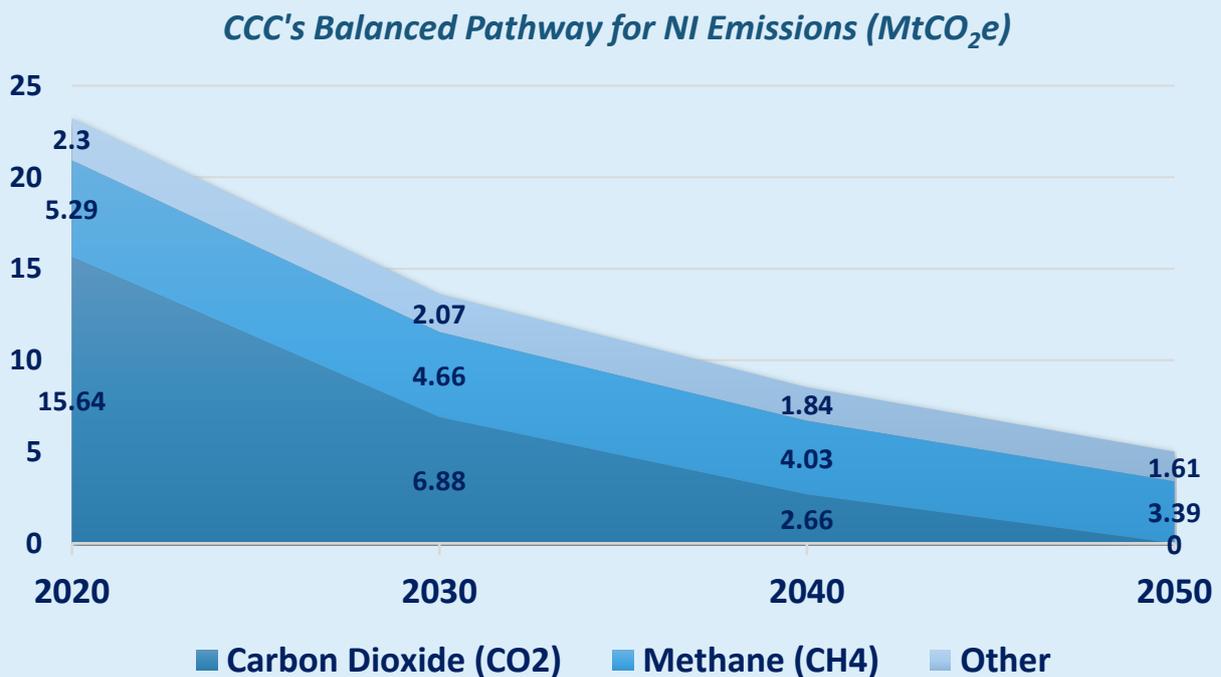
- The Executive made a commitment in *New Decade, New Approach* to address the fact that Northern Ireland (NI) is the only part of the United Kingdom (UK) and Ireland which does not have its own Climate Change law
 - Many countries have set a “net-zero” emissions target, i.e. balancing the amount of GHGs that are released with those absorbed from the atmosphere
 - The UK Committee on Climate Change (CCC), which is an expert advice body, has projected that NI can achieve an 82% reduction in GHG emissions by 2050 (compared to baseline levels)
- At the November 2021 COP26 Conference in Glasgow a number of agreements were made by countries to increase their ambition and action to reduce GHGs
 - The biggest proportion of local GHG emissions come from agriculture – this is because we have lots of livestock to produce meat and dairy products
 - It is very difficult to lower agricultural emissions significantly without reducing herd numbers and any move to do this would lead to a decline in agri-food output
 - While it is recognised that NI needs to contribute to emissions reduction, it also has a responsibility to help meet global food demand and export high-quality and sustainable produce
 - Other important issues such as future sustainability of energy sources and moving towards new, less emissive forms of travel need to be considered



What does the Bill propose?

The Bill sets out a legal pathway and mechanisms to reduce local GHG emissions over the next 30 years. Its main proposals include:

- GHG emissions will be at least 82% lower by 2050 (in line with the CCC's advice)
- Interim GHG emissions targets for 2030 and 2040
- The Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) will make Carbon Budgets that set maximum GHG levels covering 5-year periods
- All Executive Departments will have a duty to meet the emissions targets and implement policies and proposals to deliver on this
- DAERA will have the flexibility to amend GHG target years, percentages and baselines, and to adjust Carbon Budgets, subject to pre-conditions
- The CCC will provide independent progress reports
- Provision will be made to require public bodies to report on their Climate Change activities



What did we Do?

When the Bill was introduced to the Assembly we undertook an online call-for-evidence for 6 weeks and we received over **1,000 responses**.

We also engaged with our research team to analyse the Bill and how it differed from laws in other places.

After the Bill was formally referred to us in September 2021, we held four stakeholder events with organisations representing various sectors of the local economy.

Over the course of our evidence gathering we heard from:

- **The local Agri-Food sector**
- **Environment & Wildlife groups**
- **Local Government**
- **Business and Industry Representatives**
- **Climate Experts and Academics**
- **The UK CCC and Scottish Just Transition Commission**

What did we Find?

We considered the evidence that we heard very carefully and examined the Bill's provisions closely. Our key findings are:

- The introduction of local Climate Change legislation is very much welcomed by stakeholders. However, there is **increasing frustration** across industries about the lack of clarity and direction of travel in terms of emissions targets
- There is a very strong difference of opinion about the scope and ambition of the Bill's at least 82% reduction by 2050 GHG target:
 - Some stakeholders welcome this because it follows the CCC's advice as to what is achievable locally and recognises NI's role as an important agri-food producer
 - Others feel that it is significantly lacking and that a "net-zero" GHG emissions position should be legislated for to maintain parity with other areas
- The mechanism of **Carbon Budgeting is a well-supported, clear and proven methodology** to work towards emissions reduction



- Some stakeholders expressed concern that the Bill's provisions could **potentially be used to weaken or delay climate action** and that it is imperative to ensure that this does not happen: i.e., commit to **“non-regression”**
- The concept of **“Just Transition”** should be enshrined in Climate Change legislation to ensure that adequate financial, training and advisory support schemes are in place to help industries move to a greener economy
- Cross-border working is essential to ensure that there is **transboundary alignment** between NI and neighbouring jurisdictions in terms of Climate Change policy
- While the CCC 's role in terms of independent oversight is welcome, the prospect of having a **locally-based** entity provide **advice and scrutiny** of government action is desired by many stakeholders to hold Departments accountable

What Do We Think?

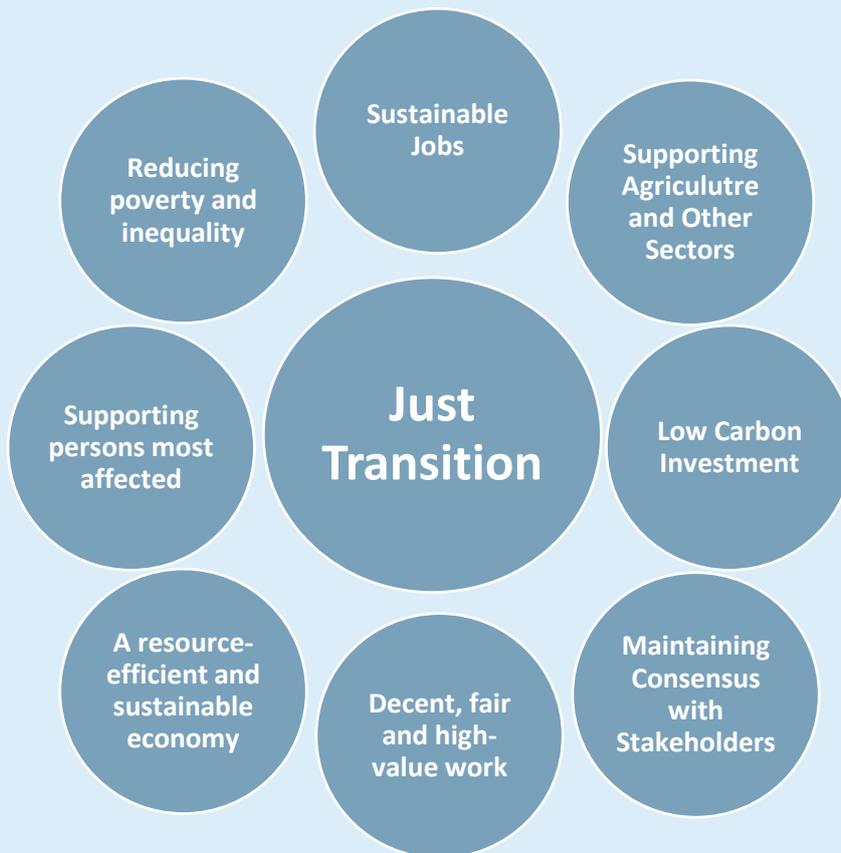
We consider that the Bill is well constructed and establishes a robust framework to bring forward future policies to help reduce local GHG emissions: we therefore recommend that it progresses to the next legislative phase.

We requested a number of amendments based on our scrutiny and consideration of the issues that have been adopted by DAERA including:

- Amending the overall emissions target to state specifically that there will be a **net-zero carbon dioxide (CO₂) position in 2050** as part of the overall 82% reduction in GHGs by this year.

This is important because CO₂ is arguably the most potent warming gas and it makes up the majority of local emissions

- DAERA will only be able to amend **GHG target years and percentages** to make them **more ambitious**
- Establishing a **Just Transition principle** meaning that Departments will have to consider a range of issues when developing Climate Change policies including:



- Departments will be required to consider **transboundary policy alignment** with jurisdictions in the United Kingdom, Ireland and elsewhere when developing Climate Change strategy
- DAERA will be legally required to carry out, and report on, a consultation within 2 years on the potential models for **facilitating a locally-based entity that will provide Climate Change advice and oversight**

While we support the vast majority of the Bill's provisions, subject to the areas of requested amendment, we did not come to a consensus opinion on the overall emissions target and consider that this best be decided by the Assembly as a whole.