

Women's Policy Group NI

**Women's Policy Group NI Submission to Committee
for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs on the
Climate Change Bill**

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1. Introduction

The [Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland](#) (WPG) is a platform for women working in policy and advocacy roles in different organisations to share their work and speak with a collective voice on key issues. It is made up of women from trade unions, grassroots women's organisations, women's networks, feminist campaigning organisations, LGBTQ+ organisations, migrant groups, support service providers, NGOs, human rights and equality organisations and individuals.

Over the years this important network has ensured there is good communication between politicians, policy makers and women's organisations on the ground. The WPG is endorsed as a group that represents all women of Northern Ireland on a policy level and we use our group expertise to lobby to influence the development and implementation of policies affecting women. This group has collective expertise on protected characteristics and focus on identifying the intersectional needs of all women.

We welcome the opportunity to submit evidence to the Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee on the Climate Change Bill. We also welcome the extensive work that has been done for the Climate Change Bill to reach this committee stage.

This response on behalf of the Women's Policy Group will provide an overview of a range of work and recommendations we have been making in relation to Climate Justice since July 2020, as well as a recommended amendment for the Bill to embed Gender Equality as an aim of the Bill, as this is an area we currently feel could be expanded upon. It is imperative that urgent action is taken in Northern Ireland to tackle the climate emergency that we all face.

When the WPG published our COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan in July 2020, we made several recommendations on the need to treat the care sector (including paid and unpaid care) as a part of our essential infrastructure, and for care to be prioritised in any action to address the Climate Crisis as it is a low-emission, green and essential sector¹. We also endorsed several recommendations from the UK Women's Budget Group and Women's Environmental Network on creating a Feminist Green New Deal. We would like to take this opportunity again to highlight these recommendations we made in relation to the Climate Crisis through both our response to the DAERA Minister's Climate Change Discussion Document² and the WPG Feminist Recovery Plan DAERA Bespoke Report³.

2. Endorsement of WPG Member Responses

Several members of the Women's Policy Group are also making submissions either as individuals or on behalf of their organisations to this call for views on the Climate Change Bill, including the Women's Regional Consortium and the Women's Resource and Development Agency. We would like to take this opportunity to endorse the responses from our members mentioned.

¹ See Women's Policy Group NI COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan 2020, particularly section 1.9 A Feminist Green Economy, p.61: <https://bit.ly/3k1IOen>

² WPG Response to DAERA Minister Climate Change Discussion Document (February 2021): <https://bit.ly/3zRn2PJ>

³ WPG COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan Departmental Summary: DAERA Bespoke Report (February 2021): <https://bit.ly/3hEJ2oO>

3. WPG Comments on Climate Change Bill

3.1 General Comments on the Climate Change Bill

The WPG welcomes the declaration of a Climate Emergency in the Northern Ireland Assembly in February 2020 and the work that has since been done to ensure that this Climate Change Bill has now reached Committee stage in its legislative process.

Northern Ireland remains the only part of the UK or Ireland with no binding greenhouse gas reduction targets and this needs to change urgently. It is crucial that any targets set in a Northern Ireland Climate Change Bill are based on the most up-to-date scientific evidence available, rather than political opinion.

In the creation of NI legislation, it is important to make robust legislation that sets achievable targets. The UK target to be net zero by 2050 is inadequate, and research by Tyndall Centre for Climate Action shows that Northern Ireland could achieve net-zero by 2042⁴. More ambitious targets for NI should be created given the existential threat of the climate emergency.

This Climate Change Bill [hereafter ‘this Bill’] currently at Committee stage includes the ambitious and achievable target for greenhouse gas reductions of net-zero by 2045 and the WPG welcomes this. In particular, we note that this Bill includes provisions for 5-year carbon budgets and is progressing through the Assembly.

The Climate Change Bill has been developed by legal experts, scientists, academics and environmentalists, and this is a welcome approach. This bill would build on commitments in the ‘New Decade, New Approach’ agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and create the necessary legislative basis for multi-level climate action.

The WPG also agrees with the below policy objectives of the Bill:

- Enable the mitigation of the impact of climate change in Northern Ireland,
- Establish a legally binding net-zero carbon target for Northern Ireland,
- Provide for the establishment and powers of a Northern Ireland Climate Commissioner and a Northern Ireland Climate Office,
- Guaranteeing existing environmental and climate protections.

We agree with these policy objectives for the following reasons:

- Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK and Ireland with no legally binding greenhouse gas reduction targets, and this must be rectified as a matter of urgency,
- Northern Ireland has a poor track record of performance on climate issues as our reduced emissions have been stagnant compared to those within the rest of the UK,
- There needs to be robust oversight on mitigating the impacts of climate change and it is important to have an independent office that is adequately funded and afforded the necessary information and enforcement powers,
- There should be no regression from any existing climate related protections, duties, standards and limits,
- The NI Assembly should take measures to ensure that NI is meeting targets in line with additional commitments and recommendations set out in international mechanisms such as:

⁴ Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research (Feb 2021), ‘Setting Climate Commitments for Northern Ireland’, *University of Manchester*, <https://bit.ly/3hGo16r>

- The Paris Agreement, where there is a requirement to ensure action on reducing greenhouse gas emissions takes into account the “imperatives of a just transition of the workforce and creation of decent work and quality jobs”⁵;
- as well as the CEDAW Committee recommendation that the UK ensures the equal participation of rural women and girls in policy making processes on disaster mitigation and climate change, in line with general recommendation No.37 on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change⁶ and,
- International Labour Organisation (ILO) arguments that without effective gender mainstreaming, sustainability in a green economy is inconceivable as “gender equality must be at the core of promoting green economies that are low-carbon, resilient and sustainable”⁷.

3.1.1 Investing in Care to Reduce Emissions:

The climate emergency is one that needs urgent action from the NI Executive within this mandate, and our response to this Bill is to call for a creative approach that will also support aims of gender equality.

The COVID-19 Pandemic has highlighted the very essential nature of both paid and unpaid care in NI, as our society would not have been able to function without them in this ongoing pandemic. We are calling for care to be placed at the core of our economy, and for investment into care as a means of achieving goals to tackle climate change.

Investing in care will not only strengthen our society and support tackling climate change, but it can also be a driver in recognising the unequal distribution of care between men and women. In recognising this unequal distribution, and creating measures to address this, it will support aims of achieving gender equality in Northern Ireland and to meet net-zero emission aims.

3.1.2 Rationale for Northern Ireland Legislation:

As noted in our response to the previous DAERA Minister’s Discussion Document on a Climate Change Bill. Northern Ireland is significantly behind other UK regions in reducing carbon emissions:

‘In total, the UK reduced emissions by 43% between the base year and 2018. England and Scotland reduced emissions by 46% and 45% respectively. Wales and Northern Ireland reduced emissions by 31% and 20% respectively’⁸

Whilst the UK Climate Change Act 2008 extends to Northern Ireland, it is clear that the structural differences of the Northern Ireland Economy alongside the considerably lower

⁵ Just Transition in the Paris Climate Agreement - <https://bit.ly/3xIX2dR>

⁶ General Recommendation No. 37 on Gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change, CEDAW/C/GC/37, February 2018
[CEDAW/C/GC/37 \(ohchr.org\)](https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/cedaw/crc/gc37)

⁷ Gender Equality and Green Jobs, International Labour Organization Policy Brief, 2015
[wcms_360572.pdf \(ilo.org\)](https://www.ilo.org/wcms_360572.pdf)

⁸ Discussion Document on a Northern Ireland Climate Change Bill, p.18.

reductions in carbon emissions warrants the introduction of a Northern Ireland Climate Change Act as a matter of urgency.

We recognise that this Bill could lead to significant, and urgently needed action, including:

- Be a cornerstone to a response to the declarations of a climate emergency by the UK and Northern Ireland,
- Legally underpin requirements for delivering international agreements and policies (e.g., the Paris Agreement).
- Deliver requirements of the NDNA agreement in regard to climate change legislation,
- Be an incremental legal tool in building climate change resilience within Northern Ireland,
- Underpin the Northern Ireland Executive's Green Growth Strategy and delivery Framework; and
- Drive forward a local low carbon, circular economy⁹.

While we fully support all of the above aims to address the Climate Crisis, we would like to add another significant impact this Bill could have:

- Promote gender equality in Northern Ireland through implementing gender proofing at each stage of the Bill to ensure that men and women both benefit equally.

In doing this, significant progress could be made in addressing both gender inequality and the climate crisis simultaneously. This could be implemented through ensuring gender-proofing of measures, initiatives and investment aimed at addressing the climate crisis through prioritising investment for social infrastructure in existing low-carbon, green sectors, such as childcare; address the unequal distribution of care work and unpaid domestic labour; ensuring gender budgeting is applied to investment into Green Jobs and ensuring that women have the opportunity to work in these sectors and contribute towards economic growth.

If the recommendations we have outlined throughout this response are incorporated into a Climate Change Bill for Northern Ireland and any Green New Deal, we could make significant progress in simultaneously tackling the climate emergency, recognising the essential nature of care, and contributing towards gender equality.

In taking this approach, a Northern Ireland Climate Change Bill could be locally-led and designed to meet the circumstances in Northern Ireland, as highlighted by the Climate Change Committee in 2016¹⁰. This Bill could also be world-leading, by incorporating the need to address gender inequality into core legislation on Climate Change in areas where simultaneous progress can be made.

Through a NI-specific approach that also incorporate measures to address gender inequality, the Climate Change Bill could take account for the lack of a government funded childcare provision, the greater gender segregation of labour markers in the social care sector and create unique approaches to boosting economic growth.

Therefore, the WPG fully agrees that local legislation is needed to tackle the climate emergency. In creating aims for Green Growth and a Just Transition, this must be done with a gender-lens. We urge the Committee to recognise the need to create targets within this

⁹ Ibid, p.24.

¹⁰ The Climate Change Committee 2016, 'The appropriateness of a Northern Ireland Climate Change Act - Northern Ireland Report (2015 update)', <https://bit.ly/3hW69LR>

mandate, and to do this in supporting the facilitation and implementation of this Climate Change Bill with additional measures to address gender inequality.

3.2 Response to Section 12(1) of the Climate Change Bill Consultation - Suggested Amendment

In response to Section 12(1) of the Climate Change Bill Consultation - ‘Are there any other measures not included in the Bill that you think should be included?’, we would like to suggest the following additions/amendments are made to this Bill:

Suggested Amendment:

- Add “and to ensure the just transition takes action to eliminate gender inequality through gender proofing the implementation of each stage of this bill, including sectoral plans and any subsequent budgeting and investment, to ensure men and women benefit equally”.

Suggested measures to be included:

- Specific measures to be taken to recognise and include the care sector as a part of our essential infrastructure and integral to addressing the Climate Crisis as an existing, low-emission and green sector.

4. Overview of Women’s Policy Group COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan Climate Justice Work

4.1 WPG COVID-19 Climate Justice Key Briefing

The WPG NI COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan made several recommendations to make a fairer recovery from the pandemic that addresses the pre-existing inequalities in our society that have since been worsened. This includes a range of recommendations on a Feminist Green New Deal, creating a Caring Economy and ensuring care is embedded within action to address the climate crisis.

A summary of these recommendations can be found below as well as in our WPG Feminist Recovery Plan Key Briefing on the Climate Crisis¹¹.

4.1.1 A Feminist Green Economy:

We note the NI Executive commitments to ‘tackle climate change head on with a strategy to address the immediate and longer-term impacts of climate change’ in the New Decade, New Approach agreement¹². The NI Executive commitments include¹³:

- *The Executive’s strategies to reduce carbon emissions will be reviewed in light of the Paris Climate Change Accord and the climate crisis.*
- *A new Energy Strategy will set ambitious targets and actions for a fair and just transition to a zero-carbon society.*
- *The Executive should bring forward a Climate Change Act to give environmental targets a strong legal underpinning.*
- *The Executive will establish an Independent Environmental Protection Agency to oversee this work and ensure targets are met.*
- *The Economic Strategy will support clean and inclusive growth and create jobs as part of a Green New Deal.*
- *The Executive will create a plan to eliminate plastic pollution.*
- *RHI will be closed down and replaced by a scheme that effectively cuts carbon emissions.*

In particular, the WPG would like to make reference to aims for a “fair and just transition” alongside the Economic Strategy that will “support clean and inclusive growth and create jobs as part of a Green New Deal”. This section of our plan will make recommendations relating to the NI Executive aims for a Green New Deal as identified above from a perspective that will support tackling gender inequality.

In recovering from COVID-19, many have discussed the need to avoid returning to the status quo or having some sort of “new normal” being necessary. The Women’s Policy Group would agree with the need to reassess our economic priorities as we recover from COVID-19. The lockdown exposed the severe impact of governmental decisions to neglect public services on our society. Many of the existing socio-economic inequalities were exacerbated during the

¹¹ WPG NI Feminist Recovery Plan Key Briefing: Climate Crisis (January 2021): <https://bit.ly/2V2t2Fl>

¹² New Decade, New Approach Agreement, p.8 (available online): <https://bit.ly/3j2gpnP>

¹³ Ibid, p.44.

lockdown, as the lack of resilience or ability to cope with the ramifications of the pandemic became glaringly obvious. The need for basic levels of income, access to food, childcare, a fully-functioning health service, education, changing considerations of “low-skilled” work to essential work, recognising the importance of unpaid care, digital poverty, holiday hunger, access to the internet and many more factors have been the topic of a lot of conversations in recent months.

Now, more than ever, it is necessary to reassess our economic decision making and recent history of severely under-resourced public goods. Northern Ireland would not have been able to cope without those working in the areas above, and it is necessary to recognise this undervalued work; redistribute care responsibilities and reduce the levels of harm to our social, health, economic and environmental infrastructures.

The Women’s Policy Group NI endorses the UK Women’s Budget Group and Women’s Environmental Network paper for the WBG Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy, *‘Towards a Feminist Green New Deal for the UK’*¹⁴. As described by Cohen and MacGregor in the WBG and WEN paper, discussions on Green New Deal frameworks rarely incorporate gender, race and class¹⁵. The UK WBG and WEN paper looks at a Green New Deal from an intersectional feminist perspective, and it is an approach that the WPG would endorse for Northern Ireland in relation to our economic recovery and the NI Executive’s aims for tackling climate change.

We have already highlighted many gender-equality priorities throughout our [Feminist Recovery Plan](#) and how they align to economic decision making, and will highlight further gender equality priorities throughout the entirety of this feminist recovery plan. Before highlighting what a Feminist Green New Deal may look like, it is important to consider what Green New Deals typically include.

Typical priorities highlighted by the UKWBG and WEN include:

- *Decarbonising the economy,*
- *Democratising the economy,*
- *Creating fair green jobs,*
- *Preserving the natural environment,*
- *Reform of finance and banking systems,*
- *Community organising and ownership,*
- *International responsibilities to repay debts and inequalities.*

In their proposed Feminist Green New Deal, these priorities would be combined with aims of gender-equality, including:

- *Redressing economic and social disadvantages faced by women,*
- *Changing social norms of gender at home and at work to share and value care,*
- *Increasing women’s representation in all aspects of public life and decision-making,*
- *Ending violence against women and girls.*

¹⁴ Maeve Cohen and Sherilyn MacGregor (2020), ‘Towards a Feminist Green New Deal for the UK: A Paper for the WBG Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy’, *UK Women’s Budget Group and Women’s Environmental Network*, (available online): <https://bit.ly/3xOQiVl>

¹⁵ Maeve Cohen and Sherilyn MacGregor (May 2020), ‘What would a Feminist Green New Deal look like? - Summary Briefing’, *UK WBG and WEN*, (available online): <https://bit.ly/3zTvptY> p.1.

The WPG would add that in the context of Northern Ireland, the need for women's involvement in peacebuilding processes should also be a priority, as set out in UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security¹⁶.

The WBG and WEN Feminist Green New Deal has several recommendations under five broad themes:

1. **Investment in (social) infrastructure** - including transport, housing, agriculture and social infrastructure such as jobs and training for carers and educators,
2. **Green jobs** - emphasising the need to be aware of reproducing occupational gender segregation and take steps to enrol women in STEM jobs crucial to a green economy,
3. **Sharing Care** - recognising that paid care jobs are low carbon and redress gender inequality and women undertake the majority of unpaid care work,
4. **Democracy and Ownership** - encouraging women's community involvement in governance, especially BAME and disabled women, as they are underrepresented in all areas of political life and this needs rectified to democratise the economy,
5. **(Inter)national responsibilities** - reducing and redressing international inequalities.

In the context of Northern Ireland, previous pillars in the Feminist Recovery Plan have addressed the need to decommodify housing, reduce gender segregated labour markets, tackle professional clusters, redistribute disproportionate levels of care work women face and tackle rural access poverty. The WPG would also like to endorse the following evidence and recommendations from the Feminist Green New Deal:

“WBG research indicates that a 2% GDP investment in care (social care, childcare, parental leave etc.), creates double the amount of jobs for women and almost as many for men than the same investment in construction¹⁷. Investment in free universal childcare especially, returns almost all of its initial investment”.

This is of particular importance to Northern Ireland given our calls for a **universal, free and high-quality childcare provision**¹⁸. If the Northern Ireland Assembly, and the Department of Education, introduce free universal childcare, statistics from the WBG submission to HM Treasury indicate that a full return would be made on this investment through additional tax revenue generated by the additional jobs created¹⁹. In addition to this, when relating the investment in social infrastructure to the environment, WBG and WEN reference Eurostat data which suggests:

¹⁶ UNSCR 1325 Women, Peace and Security.

¹⁷ ITUC (2016), 'Investing in a Care Economy: A gender analysis of employment stimulus in seven OECD countries', *ITUC*, (available online): <https://bit.ly/3zQsYIG>

¹⁸ See the Childcare for All Campaign: <https://bit.ly/3AAyVtS>

¹⁹ Women's Budget Group (February 2020), 'Budget Representation to HM Treasury: Invest in Social Infrastructure', *UK Women's Budget Group*, (available online): <https://bit.ly/2T2cPiK>

“The care industry is 30% less polluting (in terms of greenhouse gas emissions) than the construction industry and, the education industry is 62% less polluting than the construction industry”²⁰.

Recommendations from the WBG and WEN Feminist Green New Deal, which we have applied to Northern Ireland, include:

1. Investment in (social) infrastructure:

- Co-designing social infrastructure at a local level with the needs of women taken into account,
- Taking the differing transport needs of women with caring responsibilities into account when creating transport plans; particularly given issues in Northern Ireland of inadequate rural public transport and the fact that women are more likely to rely on public transport.

2. Green Jobs:

- Provide subsidies and other incentives, including paid education leave, to support women, particularly low-income and BAME women, in accessing training and development programmes in high-skilled work in a new green economy,
- Provide subsidies and other incentives to those working in jobs at high risk of being replaced by automaton, particularly as women are at much higher risk of this,
- Encourage women and girls into male-dominated green sectors that are encouraged through a Northern Ireland Green New Deal.

3. Sharing Care:

- Recognising the dual-benefit job creation and increased tax revenue through investing in paid care jobs that are already done in an unpaid capacity by majority women,
- Through increased investment in care jobs and the care sector, not only will women’s employment and economic opportunities increase, but children from disadvantaged backgrounds will benefit from increasing qualities of childcare and education,
- Broaden definitions of ‘green jobs’ beyond construction and technology to incorporate the care sector as an already existing low carbon, high compense sector that is increasingly neglected,
- Ensure that all green jobs in Northern Ireland include a real living wage, are securely contracted, ethically procured and unionised,
- Implement a 30-hour paid work week in recognition of unavoidable unpaid care,
- Actively encourage and incentivise care leave and caring responsibilities being undertaken by men,

²⁰ WBG calculations from Eurostat data: <https://bit.ly/3d5qUD9>

- Establish a Universal Basic Income or Universal Basic Services to ensure minimum living standards and recognise and remunerate the £4.6 billion unpaid carers contribute to Northern Ireland each year,
- Balance recommendations for greater food self-reliance with recognition of the gendered, unpaid and low-paid labour involved in producing and providing food, particularly as Northern Ireland may be disproportionately impacted by different food standards to Great Britain post-Brexit,
- Supporting and developing sustainable small businesses that reduce domestic work through mass preparation and distribution of locally grown food.

4. Democracy and Ownership:

- Promoting economic, ecological and carbon education campaigns for schools and the wider public to be adequately funded through a Climate Change Act and within the Programme for Government,
- Ensure equality impact assessments of all environmental policies and ensure consultation on policies with groups representing various genders, races and classes within civil society,
- Make socio-economic equality of protected characteristics a key goal of any new green new deal framework and ensure co-design of planning and policies with the Women's Sector,
- Promote a cultural shift towards valuing care as a key part of the infrastructure of the environment and economy.

5. (Inter)national Responsibilities:

UK Level:

- Ending the hostile environment in the UK towards migrants and fully remove information exchanges between public bodies (including those in Northern Ireland) and the Home Office,
- Promote fair tax policies which close tax loopholes, redistribute wealth between women and men and hold transnational corporations to account for exploitation of people and harm to the planet²¹,
- Introduce a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland,

Devolved:

- Protecting human rights, including sexual rights, reproductive rights, and working rights,
- Promote trade justice within supply chains and create ethical procurement guidelines in line with the above recommendations.

²¹ Examples provided by the WBG and WEN include a fossil fuels tax for corporations, a financial transaction tax and reforms of progressive taxation like income and corporation tax, p.3.

We have endorsed the above recommendations from the WBG and WEN Feminist Green New Deal and applied them to Northern Ireland and the aims of the NI Executive. In any forward planning for the future of Northern Ireland, the climate needs to be considered. The above recommendations would support the NI Executive in meeting the requirements set out in New Decade, New Approach, whilst applying a gender lens to support a care economy and gender equality in any new green economy.

4.2 WPG COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan Webinar on the Climate Crisis as a Feminist Issue

Over the past year, the WPG has hosted a Feminist Recovery Plan Webinar Series on a range of topics with various experts and women with lived experience on the issues discussed.

In April 2021, the WPG held a webinar on the ‘Climate Crisis as a Feminist Issue’ in collaboration with the Human Rights Consortium, the Women’s Resource and Development Agency and Friends of the Earth with speakers including Women’s Sector Lobbyist Rachel Powell, Eco-Feminist Academic and Activist V’cenza Cirefice specialising in environmental justice from a feminist lens and Linda Sullivan, writer and social and environmental justice activist from the Friends of the Earth. This webinar can be viewed [here](#)²².

A summary of the issues discussed in this webinar is available [here](#)²³.

Some of the main issues addressed which we would like to highlight includes:

- The need to place care work (paid and unpaid) at the centre of discussions around creating a feminist green and just economy,
- Recognising the care sector as an already existing low-pollution, low-emission sector, with 30% less green house gas emissions than the construction industry,
- Investing in care would not only address the unequal distribution of care work and the climate crisis, but could also mean taking meaningful steps towards creating a gender equal society in Northern Ireland,
- Small investments in care create significant returns in both employment and service improvement, for example, a 2% GDP investment in care creates double the amount of jobs for women and almost the same amount of jobs for men as the same amount of investment into construction,
- The links between gender inequality, climate injustice and the climate crisis,
- How women are in line to face the brunt of the climate crisis, not due to essential identity making them more vulnerable, but due to pre-existing structural inequalities,
- Widespread eco-feminist action is already happening across the world and is primarily being led by women, therefore, Northern Ireland could be world-leading in recognising the inextricable links between gender inequality and the climate crisis,
- The links between extractivism and climate justice through a feminist lens, specifically in how “high-intensity, export-orientated extraction of common ecological goods” has profound gendered impacts in the domestic sphere as well as the public sphere,
- How climate justice efforts should not only be about reducing levels of carbon emissions in our atmosphere, but also about issues such as food sovereignty, industrial

²² WPG COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan Webinar Series: Climate Crisis as a Feminist Issue – Webinar Recording (April 2021): <https://bit.ly/3ABwy9U>

²³ WPG COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan Webinar Series: Climate Crisis as a Feminist Issue – Summary Briefing (April 2021): <https://bit.ly/3AyAWqp>

agriculture, reclaiming the commons (water, energy, social care etc.), creating sustainable local economies, community wealth-building and more,

- Recognising that action on the climate crisis cannot simply take the form of switching to renewable energies, rather we need to drastically alter our levels of extraction, consumption and waste on a global level, particularly as just 100 fossil fuel companies are responsible for 70% of carbon emissions around the world,
- In a Just Transition, we need to “build back better” and value the life-sustaining work undertaken by women in the care sector and ensure that a holistic approach is taken to tackling climate change with social justice at its core.

4.3 WPG Response to the DAERA Minister Climate Change Discussion Document February 2021

As stated previously in this evidence submission, the WPG submitted a response to the Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Climate Change Discussion document where we highlighted many of the issues covered in this response. In addition, in the previous response we also endorsed the Friends of the Earth NI submission and called for the Department to instead focus on the progression of this Climate Change Bill.

While the WPG welcomes the progress made in this Bill, we sincerely hope our recommendations in relation to a caring economy, a feminist green new deal, gender equality and the just transition will be incorporated by the Committee.

Our response submitted in February 2021 is available [here](#).

5. Gender Equality Strategy Expert Advisory Panel Report Recommendations on Climate Change and Gender Equality

The Expert Advisory Panel for the Department for Communities Gender Equality Strategy released a report in March 2021 which also identified various recommendations to tackle the Climate Crisis with a gender lens. The Expert Advisory Panel produced both a full report²⁴ and an executive summary report²⁵. A brief overview of the recommendations will now be highlighted below:

“The environment is central to the way we live our lives, acting as not only our home but providing everything that keeps us alive from the food we eat, the water we drink to the air we breathe. It is therefore crucial that we care for the environment and use the resources it provides in a sustainable way to safeguard it for future generations.

The current economic model has damaged the environment and the long-term effects of this will be felt for many generations to come. Concern for the environment has led to calls for global Government action on environmental issues. Many of these Government proposals contain broad goals to reduce carbon emissions and create new jobs in green energy sectors. Concerns for the

²⁴ Department for Communities Gender Equality Strategy Expert Advisory Panel Report (2021), Section 10, pp.171-177: <https://bit.ly/2SRZcmu>

²⁵ Department for Communities Gender Equality Strategy Expert Advisory Panel Executive Summary Report (2021), Section 10, pp.51-52: <https://bit.ly/3yu0pPT>

environment are also high on the public agenda with climate change the biggest environmental concern for households in Northern Ireland.

The 'green economy' has the potential to provide better, more decent jobs. However, there are concerns that women may not have the same access to these jobs as they are mostly located in male-dominated sectors and because women often lack the necessary training and experience to apply for them. In greening the economy there is a need to acknowledge existing gender inequalities to ensure that women and men can benefit equally from the opportunities provided by the green economy.

The impact of the Covid19 pandemic has put a focus on the need to value care work and resulted in proposals for a more 'caring economy' which prioritises care for each other and for the environment in which we live. Research has shown that investments in the care economy create twice as many jobs as investment in construction and promote gender equality. Added to this the fact that the care industry is less polluting than the construction industry which makes these types of investments economically, environmentally and equality sound.

Rural women are often disproportionately impacted by environmental issues and climate change and while rural women play an important role in rural businesses and the rural economy in Northern Ireland they continue to be underrepresented in rural programmes and policies. There are opportunities to make positive changes to the lives of rural women by actively engaging them in decision making processes which can benefit their lives and the wider environmental and sustainability agenda.

Recommendations:

- *Co-design social infrastructure at a local level with the needs of women taken into account. This should include transport which is one of the biggest contributors to climate change, taking into account inadequate rural public transport in Northern Ireland and the fact that women are more likely to rely on public transport.*
- *Conduct a skills-needs analysis to establish the skills required by men and women to equally participate and benefit from opportunities created in the green economy. The information should be used to create targeted green skills development and training initiatives for both men and women.*
- *Provide subsidies and other incentives, including paid education leave, to support women, particularly low-income and BAME women, in accessing training and development programmes in high-skilled work in any new green economy.*
- *Ensure funding and resource allocation prioritises programs that train women and girls for non-traditional roles to enable them to make the transition into male-dominated occupations in the green economy.*
- *Ensure that all green jobs in Northern Ireland are paid at a real living wage, are securely contracted, ethically procured and unionised.*
- *Put in place accountability procedures to ensure all relevant stakeholders are held accountable for operating in a gender-responsive manner to achieve gender equality outcomes in the green economy. This can be done through gender responsive planning, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure that measures to advance gender equality in the green economy are having the desired impact.*

- *Invest in gender-disaggregated data which is critical for understanding the constraints affecting women and men’s equal representation and participation in green job sectors.*
- *Broaden definitions of ‘green jobs’ beyond construction and technology to incorporate the care sector as an already existing low carbon, high recompense sector.*
- *Promote a cultural shift towards valuing care as a key part of the infrastructure of the environment and economy.*
- *Recognise the dual benefit of job creation and increased tax revenue through investing in paid care jobs that are mostly done by women.*
- *Actively encourage and incentivise care leave and caring responsibilities being undertaken by men.*
- *Promote economic, ecological and carbon education campaigns for schools and the wider public to be adequately funded through a Climate Change Act and within the Programme for Government.*
- *Ensure the equal participation of rural women and girls in policy making processes on disaster mitigation and climate change.*
- *Ensure rural women are a target group in the development and delivery of a new Rural Development Programme for NI.*
- *Ensure equality impact assessments of all environmental policies and ensure consultation on policies with groups representing all Section 75 characteristics.*
- *Reallocate spending according to equality, wellbeing and sustainability objectives, for example, from polluting industries to green industries.”*

6. WRDA Guidelines – Women at the Heart of Public Consultations

In the current political climate, there has been unprecedented numbers of public consultations, surveys to support private members bills and calls for evidence submissions to a range of committees in relation to various forms of legislation. The Women’s Sector has faced funding challenges for many years, alongside additional challenges in working to support women throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. WRDA produced a guide for public authorities on ‘Putting Women at the Heart of Public Consultations’, and we would like to take this opportunity to share this resource again.

Women in Northern Ireland have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic; financially, socially and in terms of health. This has been particularly evident in relation to the under-valuing and under-investment in the care sector; work which is predominantly undertaken by women.

It is crucial that legislative processes on issues relating to women are accessible and open, as women’s lived experience is crucial to finding innovative and inclusive ways to tackle the many threats posed by the climate emergency.

The full guidelines can be read [here](#).

ENDS

For questions or queries in relation to this evidence submission, please contact Rachel Powell, Women's Sector Lobbyist – rachel.powell@wrda.net.