



Call for Views on the Climate Change Bill

**Issued By: Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
Committee**

July 2021

1.0 Introduction

This response has been made by The Women's Regional Consortium which is funded by the Department for Communities and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in Northern Ireland.

The Women's Regional Consortium consists of seven established women's sector organisations that are committed to working in partnership with each other, government, statutory organisations and women's organisations, centres and groups in disadvantaged and rural areas, to ensure that organisations working for women are given the best possible support in the work they do in tackling disadvantage and social exclusion. The seven groups are as follows:

- Training for Women Network (TWN)
- Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA)
- Women's Support Network (WSN)

- Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN)
- Women's TEC
- Women's Centre Derry
- Foyle Women's Information Network (FWIN)

The Women's Regional Consortium is the established link and strategic partner between government and statutory agencies and women in disadvantaged and rural areas, including all groups, centres and organisations delivering essential frontline services, advice and support.

1.1 Endorsement of Women's Policy Group Response

We wish to endorse the response made by the Women's Policy Group (WPG) on which the Women's Regional Consortium is represented. We fully endorse the WPG's response and urge the Committee to take particular note of the issues raised in relation to the need for a caring economy (which is a low emission and green sector) and the introduction of a Feminist Green New Deal. The WPG's [Climate Justice Key Briefing](#) issued as part of the Feminist Recovery Plan for Northern Ireland contains evidence and recommendations for tackling climate change without exacerbating existing inequalities.

The women's sector in Northern Ireland recognises climate change as one of the biggest issues of our generation and that women are often the first and worst affected by climate change. It is clear that communities are often on the frontline of the climate crisis. The Women's Sector have argued that we need robust legislation with ambitious targets given the existential threat of the climate emergency and support this Climate Change Bill. We argue that any targets set by the Bill should be based on the most up to date scientific evidence available rather than political opinion.

1.2 New Decade, New Approach Commitment

This Bill meets an important commitment within the New Decade, New Approach agreement. It committed to "*tackle climate change head on*" and that the Executive

“will introduce legislation and targets for reducing carbon emissions in line with the Paris Climate Change Accord.”¹

1.3 The Policy Objectives

The Women’s Regional Consortium agree with the policy objectives of the Bill:

- **Enable the mitigation of the impact of climate change in Northern Ireland** – we believe that this is an urgent issue which needs addressed as a priority. Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK and Ireland with no legally binding greenhouse gas reduction targets.
- **Establish a legally binding net-zero carbon target for Northern Ireland -** Northern Ireland has a poor record of performance on climate issues with our emissions not falling at anywhere near the same rate as those in the UK. We reduced emissions by 18% between the base year and 2019 compared to 44% in England, 45% in Scotland and 31% in Wales.²
- **Provide for the establishment and powers of a Northern Ireland Climate Commissioner and Northern Ireland Climate Office** – we agree that there needs to be robust oversight on mitigating the impacts of climate change and it is therefore important to have an independent office to carry out this work. The success or otherwise of this role depends on it having the necessary access to information and powers of enforcement to effect real change.
- **Guarantee existing environmental and climate protections** – there should be no regression from any existing climate related protections, duties, standards or limits.

1.4 Declaration of a Climate Emergency in Northern Ireland

The current economic model is unsustainable leading to high levels of carbon emissions and global temperatures which continue to increase at unsustainable rates. The damage to the environment as a result of the way the economy is organised has resulted in increasing air pollution, extreme weather and devastating

¹ [2020-01-08 a new decade a new approach.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

² <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/NI%20Greenhouse%20Gas%20Statistics%201990-2019.pdf>

floods at both local, national and global levels. Northern Ireland is lagging behind in climate action and is the only nation in the UK without its own climate change law.

The impacts of this climate emergency are not equally felt with socially vulnerable groups such as older people, the very young, people in poor health and people in low incomes tending to be the worst affected.³

The current Assembly's declaration of a Climate Emergency will lapse when the next Assembly is elected. It is important that into the future the Northern Ireland Assembly continues to have a responsibility to act on this climate emergency. We therefore support the Bill's declaration of a Climate Emergency.

1.5 Net Zero Target

We support the Bill's target to achieve a net zero carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by the year 2045. We believe that we need strong and ambitious climate change laws with legally binding greenhouse gas reduction targets in order for Northern Ireland to make real progress and to contribute its fair share. Climate inaction is no longer an option and Northern Ireland must play its part in emission reductions rather than relying on other nations to take responsibility for our failures.

Northern Ireland accounted for 4% of UK greenhouse gas emissions which is slightly higher than our population share of 3%.⁴ Northern Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions are higher than the UK average and are falling more slowly. Despite our poor performance the level of public concern on environmental issues is high. In 2020/21 82% of households were very or fairly concerned about the environment.⁵ We believe that this shows there is an appetite for action on climate change in Northern Ireland and that our politicians should be ambitious in their efforts to make progress in this area given the existential crisis it poses.

³ <https://www.climatejust.org.uk/socially-vulnerable-groups-sensitive-climate-impacts#:~:text=Older%20people,%20the%20very%20young,to%20others%20in%20the%20populati on>

⁴ <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/ni-environmental-statistics-report-2021.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/ni-environmental-statistics-report-2021.pdf>

The Paris Agreement requires parties to increase action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while taking into account “*the imperatives of a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs.*”⁶ The principle of just transition should support jobs and the growth of jobs that are climate resilient and environmentally and socially sustainable, support net-zero carbon investment and infrastructure, create work which is high-value, fair and sustainable, reduce inequality as far as possible and reduce, with a view to eliminating, poverty and social deprivation.

1.6 Office of a Climate Commissioner

We support the creation of an Office of a Climate Commissioner. We believe that there is a need for independent oversight and it is vital that the Commissioner has sufficient functions and robust powers to effect real change. The Commissioner has an important scrutiny role to ensure progress is being made. Northern Ireland’s slow rate of emission reduction demonstrates the need for an independent body to push forward important environmental protections and improvements.

1.7 Sectoral Plans

The sectors listed in the Bill are the most significant contributors to greenhouse gas emissions. The largest sector in terms of greenhouse gas emissions was agriculture representing 27% of emissions with transport at 23% and energy supply at 15%.⁷ It makes sense to target the sectors who are the most significant contributors to the problem. Ensuring that emissions reductions for these sectors are built into Climate Action Plans will be important in monitoring progress and ensuring that improvements are made.

Climate Action Plans are a key part of the Bill setting out the cuts needed to achieve the 2045 net-zero target. The Climate Action Plans will provide guidance and focus

⁶ [Just Transition in the Paris Climate Agreement - International Trade Union Confederation \(ituc-csi.org\)](https://www.ituc-ctsi.org/)

⁷ <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/ni-environmental-statistics-report-2021.pdf>

for the response to the climate emergency and without these there is a risk that Northern Ireland's response would fail to meet the net-zero target.

We understand that the agriculture sector will be particularly impacted in Northern Ireland as we have a large rural population and farming is Northern Ireland's biggest industry. In June 2020 there were 25,896 farms in Northern Ireland with approximately one million hectares (1,029,822 hectares) of land farmed.⁸ Meat, dairy and eggs is the largest sector (accounting for 80% of all agricultural output compared to around 50% for the UK average).⁹ Farming is vital for the local economy employing more than 2.4% of total employment compared to the UK average of 1%.¹⁰ While there will be challenges for the agriculture sector it is the sector with the biggest emissions and therefore has a duty to play its part in making significant emission reductions.

1.7.1 Transport

Proposals to decarbonise transport will have a greater impact in rural communities as there are additional challenges in providing for public transport and active transport in rural communities due to the dispersed settlement pattern and longer travel distances.

Women are much less likely to have access to their own private transport than men. This means that women depend much more on public transport and are at an economic disadvantage to men. The lives of rural women are affected directly and indirectly by their access to transportation. The absence of public transport in most rural areas makes the majority of women dependent on private automotive transportation. Rural women, like youths and seniors, are one of the groups that are most often 'transportation disadvantaged'. Research indicates that rural women have more limited access to family vehicles than do men. The disadvantage women face in accessing reliable transportation affects their livelihoods, access to social services

⁸ <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/Agricultural%20Census%202020%20Publication.pdf>

⁹ <https://friendsoftheearth.uk/latest/food-and-farming-northern-ireland#:~:text=What%20type%20of%20farming%20is%20in%20Northern%20Ireland%3F,compares%20to%20around%2050%25%20for%20the%20UK%20average.>

¹⁰ [Stats Review 2020 final_1.pdf \(daera-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

and impairs their ability to undertake the role of caregiver to family members. Lower incomes for women in rural communities mean that maintaining a vehicle may be beyond the reach of individuals, even when they need one to get to work¹¹ or access childcare.

Research conducted by NIRWN¹² confirmed lack of access to transport as a major issue for rural women accessing education, training work and childcare. It was clear also that the picture regionally varies greatly depending on where you live; with West of the Bann having particularly poor infrastructure. Often provision is linked to the school terms, resulting in no service during holidays.

We need to consider how we can reduce the need for rural citizens to travel.

Remote working needs to be supported in a more systematic way and employers encouraged to allow employees to work from home at least for part of the week (the feasibility of many jobs to be done remotely has been demonstrated by the pandemic). Local businesses in rural communities could expand to provide more local employment opportunities if broadband and mobile phone networks were improved across rural NI. This can be seen as an opportunity for sustainable development in rural communities.

NI needs significant investment in charging infrastructure for electric vehicles in rural communities as well as investment in public transport infrastructure. These issues are currently being considered by the Dept for Economy consultation on the Energy Strategy for NI. We need to ensure that the grid is upgraded to allow widespread home charging of electric vehicles across the Network. We also need to expand the number of EV public charging points and facilitate the installation of rapid charging points. The higher purchase costs of EVs is still a factor and most moderate/low income households will need to support to transition from petrol/diesel vehicles to EVs.

¹¹ Winson and Leach: Contingent Work, Disrupted Lives: Labour and Community in the New Rural Economy

¹² NIRWN 'Rural Voices' Research Report 2018

Could the train network across NI be revitalised? Will investment be there to make improvements and extend rail network? ABC Council are exploring feasibility of re-opening rail line between Portadown and Armagh.

Active travel in rural communities needs to be considered in much more detail in partnership with rural citizens to understand how it can be redesigned to meet travel needs. The Department for Infrastructure and local Councils need to prioritise how they can extend active travel networks into rural communities. Public and active transport needs to be considered in much more detail so it can be better facilitated in rural communities with dispersed settlement patterns to reduce the mileage required for EVs and to connect in with public transport networks.

1.8 Transboundary Considerations

We agree that there should be a transboundary approach to Climate Change. Climate change and environmental damage do not respect borders and as Northern Ireland shares a border with the Republic of Ireland these considerations must be included. This will ensure that the actions taken to achieve the net-zero carbon target are fair.

1.9 Rural Impact Assessment

We believe it is important to assess the impact on rural communities of the proposals provided for in the Bill. The difficulty with the Bill is that it does not fall within the scope of the Rural Needs Act; individual MLAs are not designated as public authorities by the Rural Need Act and so are not subject to the duty. There is no clause in the Rural Needs Act which deals with Rural Needs in relation to Private Members' Bills. The Women's Regional Consortium view is that this is a loophole that should be considered and closed by amendment to the Rural Needs Act 2016 to account for any future Private Members' Bills.

The nature of the legislation, as a framework bill, means it is difficult to state the explicit impacts on rural dwellers of the various aspects of the Bill.

With the sectors impacted, particularly agriculture, land use and forestry, transport and heating and cooling there will be specific rural needs depending on the policies which emerge in the Climate Action Plan and sectoral plans. Rural Needs Impact

assessment should be more meaningful when the Climate Action Plan and the Sectoral Plans are produced as these plans will be developed by public authorities who are subject to the Rural Needs duty.

This will need to be part of the detailed scrutiny of the Climate Action Plan and sectoral plans envisaged in the Bill which will be subject to full public consultation.

The CEDAW Committee recommends that the UK ensures the equal participation of rural women and girls in policymaking processes on disaster mitigation and climate change, in line with its general recommendation No. 37¹³ on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change.

Rural women play a vital role in farm families, businesses, as entrepreneurs and custodians of our rural environment. entrepreneurship, improving villages, contributing to the environment and developing sustainable rural tourism, but rural women must be recognised as a target group and actively sought to engage in the Climate Change Bill from development to delivery. At present this is not happening at the level that is needed.

1.10 A Caring Economy

The Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy have proposed the creation of a 'Caring Economy'¹⁴ based on gender equality, wellbeing and sustainability as a way to build back better after the Covid19 pandemic. This call to action highlights that central to feminist ecological economics is the principle that gender equality must not be achieved at the expense of ecological degradation, and at the same time, environmental sustainability must not be achieved by exploiting feminised labour, particularly unpaid care.

¹³ 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/cedawc/gc37)

¹⁴ Creating a Caring Economy: A Call to Action, Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy, Women's Budget Group, October 2020
<https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/WBG-Report-v10.pdf>

A Caring Economy would prioritise care for each other and for the environment in which we live. *“A caring economy simultaneously ensures achievement of gender equality, sustainability and wellbeing. While these three objectives can, to some extent, be achieved separately, a caring economy allows them to be achieved together. For example, investment in paid care services improves wellbeing through ensuring that people’s care needs are met; it improves gender equality because it raises the overall employment rate and reduces the gender employment gap (which are particularly crucial as we seek to counter the looming jobs crisis), and it is sustainable because care jobs are green.”*

The Women’s Budget Group (WBG) highlights that the narrow definition of green jobs as those in construction and technology can obscure the fact that the care industry is already a low carbon and high recompense sector. WBG research¹⁵ found that a 2% GDP investment in care (for example, social care, childcare, parental leave and care leave) creates double the number of jobs for women and almost as many for men than the same investment in construction. Investment in free, universal childcare especially returns almost all of its initial investment. Eurostat data suggests that the care industry is 30% less polluting (in terms of Greenhouse Gas emissions) than the construction industry and that the education industry is 62% less polluting than the construction industry.¹⁶ This makes investment in this type of social infrastructure economically, environmentally and equality sound.

If the recommendations around a Caring Economy were incorporated into a Climate Change Bill for Northern Ireland we believe that this 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. It could take account of the lack of a government funded childcare provision (CEDAW has recommended action on accessible,

¹⁵ Investing in the Care Economy: A gender analysis of employment stimulus in seven OECD countries, International Trade Union Confederation, March 2016

[Investing in the Care Economy - International Trade Union Confederation \(ituc-csi.org\)](https://ituc-csi.org)

¹⁶ WBG calculations from Eurostat data

<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>

affordable childcare particularly in Northern Ireland¹⁷), the greater gender segregation of labour markets in the social care sector and create unique approaches to boosting economic growth.

1.11 A Feminist Green New Deal

The International Labour Organization (ILO)¹⁸ has argued that without consistent gender mainstreaming, sustainability in a green economy is inconceivable arguing that *“gender equality must be at the core of promoting green economies that are low-carbon, resilient and sustainable.”*

The green economy and the creation of ‘green jobs’ offers the potential to pay higher wages and offers career paths to workers with the necessary skills and education. However, due to pre-existing gender inequalities there is concern that the green economy may not necessarily guarantee equal access to these green and decent jobs for women. Many of these jobs are expected to be concentrated in parts of the economy which are traditionally male dominated and women’s access may be further limited due to a lack of the necessary training and experience.

There is therefore a need to acknowledge existing gender imbalances to ensure that women and men can equally benefit from the opportunities the green economy can provide. A failure to do so will result in the continuation of existing gender inequalities and prevent the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.¹⁹ The ILO recommends that *“all measures must be taken to ensure that pre-existing gender inequalities are not transferred to the emerging green economy and the opportunities for women in the changing labour market must be identified and grasped. Women and men must be encouraged and given the necessary support to enable equal access and benefit from green jobs.”*²⁰

¹⁷ Concluding observations on the eighth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, CEDAW/C/GBR/CO/8, March 2019, Paragraph 46
[Treaty bodies Download \(ohchr.org\)](#)

¹⁸ Gender Equality and Green Jobs, International Labour Organization Policy Brief, 2015
[wcms_360572.pdf \(ilo.org\)](#)

¹⁹ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5>

²⁰ Gender Equality and Green Jobs, International Labour Organization Policy Brief, 2015
[wcms_360572.pdf \(ilo.org\)](#)

A paper from the UK WBG and the Women's Environmental Network (WEN)²¹ puts forward suggestions on what a Feminist Green New Deal would look like. It looks at a Green New Deal from an intersectional feminist perspective and makes 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.

We need systemic change. To quote V'cenza Cirefice, an ecofeminist researcher speaking at a Feminist Recovery Plan webinar²² you "*can't just add women and stir*". We need to address the inequalities built into current systems and take a gendered lens to climate change solutions.

²¹ What would a Feminist Green New Deal look like?, Briefing from the UK Women's Budget Group and Women's Environmental Network, May 2020

[A-Feminist-Green-New-Deal.pdf \(wbg.org.uk\)](https://www.wbg.org.uk/A-Feminist-Green-New-Deal.pdf)

²² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-vbM3GipR90>