

# BRIEFING

## CLIMATE CHANGE COMMITTEE ADVICE FOR NI IN RELATION TO THE 2050 EMISSIONS REDUCTION TARGET

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the information outline in the letter from the Climate Change Committee and the Minister's subsequent response. Please find following our response in detail.

### Introduction to Business in the Community

Business in the Community is the responsible business network. A registered charity and membership organisation, we exist to support and challenge business on its social and environmental responsibilities.

### Key points from the two letters

- **Nature-Based solutions** for carbon storage are mentioned and included in the analysis but could play a bigger part in Northern Ireland. While the role of woodlands and peatlands is clearly mentioned (see Table 1.1 page 10 of Lord Deben's letter), as well as the importance of introducing responsible farming practice, we believe there is also great potential for blue carbon. The RSPB has recently presented the potential of Nature-Based Solutions for Northern Ireland to the All-Party group on Climate Change, stating that "salt marshes and seagrass meadows can store up to 1,000 tons of carbon per ha – much higher than most terrestrial ecosystems". This is particularly relevant as Lord Deben's letter mentions that to reach a GHG Net-Zero target, Northern Ireland would have to have more than "an equitable share of all UK GHG removal technologies".
- The specificities of the Northern Irish context are framed as challenges to reach an ambitious target. **We see them as opportunities.** The rural setting and prevalence of the agri-sector in Northern Ireland lay the ground for innovation and experimentation and present an ideal context for some of the solutions mentioned in page 21 of Lord Deben's letter. The electrification of the grid coupled with decentralised production and storage solutions are particularly relevant in a rural setting. With the COVID crisis, we have seen an uptake of working from home practices, and it is unlikely that all employees will go back to their long commute. Because of the importance of the agri-sector and how it shapes our natural environment, we have the unique opportunity to test and develop innovative nature-based solutions on farms to capture carbon, better land management and more responsible farming practices.
- "Northern Ireland is behind other administrations in the UK" (page 3 of DAERA's response). The Scottish administration has shown leadership by setting a Net-Zero GHG target for 2045. The Welsh administration has shown leadership by defining and implementing a *Towards Zero Waste* strategy. The UK has shown leadership on the global stage by setting a Net-Zero GHG target for 2050. All of these ambitious targets were

defined before pathways were identified, before we knew if it was possible, searching for what is required, and not what is attainable. **Why should Northern Ireland not show similar leadership and ambition?**



## What is expected of business?

### Setting Science-Based Targets for greenhouse gases reduction

- [Science-Based Targets](#), aligned with a global temperature increase of 1.5°C, are now generally recognised as best practice for business, regardless of their size and sector.
- Setting Science-Based Targets as a basis for GHG reduction is a paradigm shift for the business world: it requires all organisations to aim for what is needed or required instead of what is attainable, to move from “safe” goals to disruptive ambition; in other words, moving from “what **could** we do?” to “what **should** we do?”.
- When defining their strategy and pathway to reach those targets, businesses are almost always faced with **uncertainty**: a shift in gear, change of business model and/or bold innovation will often be required to achieve the necessary reductions in GHG emissions. In that uncertain space resides the opportunity to show true leadership, innovation, collaboration and to shape what the future looks like.



Figure 1 - Pathway to reach SBTs (source: Quantis)

- If businesses are expected to act in such an ambitious way with such a level of uncertainty, should it not be the role of government to be ahead of them to ensure the rights legal and financial levers are in place?

### Address two major crises at once

- Nature is also facing an unprecedented crisis, closely linked to the climate one. Targets on nature preservation and biodiversity enhancement are needed and expected from businesses, alongside GHG reduction targets. Initiatives to set Science-Based Targets for other “[planetary boundaries](#)” (land use, water, biosphere integrity etc.), just like those set for GHG, are ongoing, and businesses will be expected to define their business strategy along those guidelines.
- In that context, the role of Nature-Based Solutions and the agri-sector in a Northern Irish specific context cannot be downplayed.

## Build Back Responsibly

- The COVID crisis has had, and continues to have, a long-term effect on how businesses operate. Not only have they shown unexpected levels of solidarity throughout the crisis, but Business in the Community NI sees a strong willingness not to go back to business as usual, but to a better way of doing business.
- Lockdown and health measures have and will have a long-lasting impact on the use of individual transport for commute with the uptake of working from home, the re-localisation of supply chains and the need to be more resilient. These will undoubtedly contribute to reduce GHG emissions from businesses in a way we cannot predict precisely yet.

## What the public sector can learn from the business world

- **There is virtue in setting bold targets.** As stated in the follow-up letter from DAERA: “Policy interventions need to happen now and be delivered in the 2020’s and 2030’s” (page 4). Only by setting targets that are bold and ambitious enough will we see action from all stakeholders be implemented with the level of urgency that is required. In 2019, the IPCC [published its report](#) stating that we only have 12 years to turn this ship around. Action, not reflection nor negotiation, is required now.
- **There is virtue in setting Net-Zero Targets for GHG.** Setting reduction targets for GHG emissions reduction only would leave room for negotiation and lobby from polluting sectors. Put simply, it will give some sectors “the right to continue to pollute”. Net-Zero Targets for all GHG, and not only for CO<sub>2</sub>, reduces that possibility and highlights the role every sector and business have to play.
- **Momentum will come from the UK but also from ROI.** Businesses operate on both sides of the border and are subjected to different obligations. We need to take into account both the increased level of obligation coming from the ROI (still part of the EU) and the possible synergies that will necessarily happen.

We hope the above response is useful and informative. We would be happy to discuss the matter further with you.

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