

Written Ministerial Statement

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Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

NET NORTHERN IRELAND EMISSIONS ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR 2030

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Mr Muir (Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): In accordance with section 6(2)(b) of the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 (the Act) I am required to lay a statement before the Assembly.

This statement is to advise Members of my decision to maintain the requirement placed on all Northern Ireland departments to ensure that the net Northern Ireland emissions account for the year 2030 is at least 48% lower than the baseline.

This level is what the previous Assembly voted for when the Act was passed in 2022, and I am pleased to be able to reassure you that I have decided to keep this strong commitment for all departments to work towards this ambitious and necessary target.

To deliver on this decision means that I will not be making an amendment to section 4 of the Act.

As many of you will be aware there is a statutory requirement on my department to consider whether the 2030 and 2040 emissions reduction targets in the Act are consistent with meeting the 2050 net zero target.

As part of the consideration required under section 56 of the Act, my officials sought the advice of the Climate Change Committee (CCC) on appropriate emissions reduction targets for 2030 and 2040, that would be consistent with the 2050 net zero target for Northern Ireland.

On 2 March 2023, the CCC published their advice "[The Path to a Net Zero Northern Ireland](#)". This advice recommended that the 2030 and 2040 interim targets for Northern Ireland should be set at reductions of 48% and 77% on 1990 levels, respectively.

The recommended 2030 target is therefore in line with the Act and the requirement placed on all Northern Ireland departments remains to ensure that emissions in 2030 are at least 48% lower than the baseline.

I can reassure members that alongside retaining the 2030 target I have also laid regulations under the draft affirmative procedure to amend section 3 of the Act in order to establish a new 2040 target for the net Northern Ireland emissions in that year to be at least 77% lower than the baseline. Responsibility for delivering on this requirement will again be placed on all Northern Ireland departments, requiring us to work together collaboratively right across government for all of our people.

As members will be aware I have also laid regulations that set the first three five-yearly carbon budgets for Northern Ireland covering the periods 2023-2027, 2028-2032 and 2033-2037. These are the carbon budgets that have been recommended by the CCC. They have been consulted on and agreed to by the Executive and are set at a level which the CCC considers to be consistent with the 2030, 2040 and 2050 emissions reduction targets.

In order to come to my decision, I have carefully considered the CCC advice and the feedback and outcomes from the extensive public consultation undertaken by my Department between 21 June 2023 and 11 October 2023 on the proposed 2030 and 2040 emissions reduction targets and the first three carbon budgets.

78% of respondents to that consultation agreed with keeping the 2030 target at the current level of an at least 48% reduction in emissions against the baseline.

I have also considered and given due regard to the expertise and advice of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, and of the Republic of Ireland Climate Change Advisory Council. The 2030 target is consistent with the advice from both these bodies.

Meeting the targets in the Act, and the carbon budgets set under it, is the responsibility of all departments. Accordingly, I wrote to my Executive colleagues to inform them of my intention to retain the current 2030 emissions reduction target in the Act and I thank them for their support for this approach.

I do not underestimate that achieving an at least 48% reduction in emissions by 2030 represents a significant challenge for the Executive and for this Assembly. However, the decision to retain the current 2030 target is a recommitment to our collective ambition that the previous Assembly, including many of you in this current Assembly, voted for when this target in the Act was passed.

People here and especially our young people can see how much our climate is changing, and the impact that is having on our infrastructure, on our largest Lough, our natural heritage and our biodiversity, and they want to see the Assembly taking action and taking action quickly.

It is clear that delaying action that we know we must take will mean more radical action will be required at a future point, and over a shorter period which will result in significantly higher additional costs and negative impacts.

Meeting these targets will require considerable action across the Executive, right across government and involve all of wider society. But there will be significant benefits for all of the people here if we fully embrace the opportunities provided by addressing climate change, not only through welcome investment in sustainable, green energy and technologies, but also through the new employment opportunities this will bring, and the benefits of decarbonisation through increased energy supply security. I am committed to delivering on the requirements of the Act and I will work closely with Executive colleagues to implement effective and joined up climate action for the benefits of all of our people in all of our communities.

Retaining the 2030 target and setting a 2040 target in law is an important step forward in providing a commitment and certainty for our business community, on setting clear ambition and a pathway for Northern Ireland to play its part in the global challenge of reducing emissions and tackling climate change. Future generations will thank us for stepping up to this challenge of our lifetimes.