

# Written Ministerial Statement

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## **DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL AFFAIRS - PUBLICATION OF THE DRAFT CLIMATE ACTION PLAN (2023-2027) FOR PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

*Published at 9am on Thursday 19 June 2025*

**Mr Andrew Muir (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs):** This statement sets out the statutory basis and proposed content of Northern Ireland's first draft Climate Action Plan (CAP) to cover the first carbon budget period 2023 to 2027. I am publishing the draft CAP for consultation later today.

### **Background**

On 9 December 2024, I laid a written statement before the Assembly advising members of my decision, endorsed by the Executive, to maintain the target in the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 (the Act) that the net Northern Ireland emissions account for the year 2030 is at least 48% lower than the baseline. On 10 December 2024, this Assembly voted to set Northern Ireland's first three carbon budgets and to set a target that the net Northern Ireland emissions account for the year 2040 is at least 77% lower than the baseline. The Statutory Rules approved by the Assembly set the first, second and third carbon budgets at an average annual reduction of 33%, 48%, and 62% respectively.

In the Assembly debate which accompanied the vote on the carbon budget regulations, I highlighted that agreeing the carbon budgets was a first step in a process of delivering on the ambition of the Act, which sets a Net Zero target for 2050, and which this Assembly passed over three years ago. I stated then that the next step would be to bring forward Northern Ireland's first Climate Action Plan for the first carbon budget period 2023 to 2027. On 5<sup>th</sup> June, the Executive agreed that the Plan should be consulted on, and I am delighted to be launching that 16-week consultation today.

In doing so, this delivers not only key requirements of the Act but also the commitment in our Programme for Government 2024-2027 to finalise development of the draft Climate Action Plan and consult on it this year.

### **The Draft Climate Action Plan**

The publication of the draft CAP for consultation marks an important milestone in our journey to Net Zero and to a sustainable and prosperous future. Reflecting its cross-cutting and collaborative nature, development was overseen by DAERA-led cross-departmental governance groups. While DAERA's role is to prepare and publish the draft CAP, every department has a legal obligation to contribute to its development by providing DAERA with policies and proposals which will deliver on our first carbon budget. The Act is very clear that this is a shared responsibility. A partnership approach has been taken seriously by all departments and I am grateful to all government departments for their cooperation in identifying policies and proposals which span departmental functions. Examples of the types of policies and proposals across sectors identified are:

- Increasing the proportion of electricity consumption from renewable sources (Energy Production and Supply sector led by the Department for the Economy).
- Reducing vehicle emissions by switching fuels to electric and low emission alternatives (Transport sector led by the Department for Infrastructure).
- Increasing the energy efficiency and environmental performance of the business and industry sector (Business and Industrial Processes sector led by the Department for the Economy).

- Improving energy efficiency in residential homes and public buildings (Residential Buildings sector led by Department for Communities and Public Buildings Sector led by Department for the Economy).
- Diverting biodegradable waste from landfill, increasing household recycling and introducing mandatory recycling for the commercial and industrial sector (Waste sector led by DAERA).
- Introducing a programme of sustainable agricultural measures (Agriculture sector led by DAERA).
- Increasing forest cover and restoring peatland habitats (Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) sector led by DAERA).

The Act specifies that the draft CAP must be ambitious enough to provide confidence that it will meet the first carbon budget. Led by the DAERA Chief Scientific Adviser, my department has worked with representatives of all other departments to undertake a quantification exercise which assesses the draft Plan's projected impact on total emissions levels in Northern Ireland.

Using the expected scenario defined in this quantification exercise, implementation of the policies and proposals contained in the draft CAP would achieve an average annual reduction of 33.1% over the years 2023 to 2027 compared to the baseline and, therefore, the combination of quantified policies and proposals contained within the draft Plan is expected to be sufficient for Northern Ireland to meet its first carbon budget.

A suite of impact assessments has been carried out and will form part of the consultation. Results of a Financial, Social, Economic and Rural Needs Impact Assessments; a Strategic Environmental Assessment; a Habitats Regulations Assessment; a Children's Rights Impact Assessment; and an Equality Impact Assessment report no major adverse impacts and identify appropriate mitigation measures. A Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) has been screened out as the draft CAP itself will not make any new regulations, however RIAs will be carried out on individual policies and proposals, where appropriate.

Across the four full financial years of the Climate Action Plan (2023/24-2026/27), it is estimated that a total of £718 million of capital investment in our future to deliver the policies and proposals within the draft Climate Action Plan, a significant proportion of which has already been invested, recognising that the plan commencement date is 2023/24 financial year.

Climate action is the economic opportunity of our lifetime, an opportunity to create new good green jobs as we increase our renewable energy capacity, as we build and refurbish our buildings to save energy, as we decarbonise our businesses and implement the new green technologies of the future, and as we work to implement the farming and land management practices which will deliver a sustainable future for our globally competitive agri-food sector. Our business community want to see us making clear commitments on the necessary actions to deliver on our Net Zero requirements. Northern Ireland needs to be in a position to compete for UK, EU and international funding that will help unlock innovation and support the transition to a lower emissions society and economy. This consultation marks an important step towards providing that certainty.

It is my intention, as AERA Minister with lead responsibility for four sectors within the draft CAP (Agriculture; Fisheries; LULUCF; and Waste), to prioritise my department's budget allocation to ensure that funding and resources are available to enable implementation of DAERA's policies and proposals. I have already secured £12.3m for a Just Transition Fund for Agriculture in 2025/26. I encourage other departments to do the same.

A failure to decarbonise at sufficient pace costs more in the long run. It may mean a greater number of relatively more expensive technologies have to be deployed in later years to ensure Northern Ireland is on a net zero pathway. This is likely to negatively impact public finances and our ability to ensure that the transition is just and fair.

The Act requires my department to develop the Climate Action Plan in draft and then to publish it for a 16-week consultation. I have no discretion in that respect; it is what the law requires. A consultation is exactly that - it is seeking the views of others. There are no decisions made, there are no conclusions drawn. We want to hear what people have to say. I anticipate that a wide range of views will be expressed and that some of the issues raised in the consultation will be debated robustly. However, this must be done respectfully and in the understanding that the nature of our democracy must enable

the exchange of differing views and permit the public to express their opposition or their support for what government is proposing.

The Act contains two separate deadlines for laying the final CAP - the end of 2023 and June 2024. While publication of this consultation is an important step forward, I am mindful that both these deadlines have been missed. My department has been facing legal challenges for missing these statutory deadlines and therefore it is vital that we make progress.

When this Assembly legislated for Net Zero in 2022, we did so with a purpose. A purpose to deliver a better future for the generations to come; a purpose that Northern Ireland would play its role in protecting ourselves and those with whom we share this planet from the worst of the devastating impacts of climate breakdown; and a purpose to grasp the economic opportunities which await and deliver good green jobs across Northern Ireland.

The fundamentals on which the Act is based are as relevant now as they were when we overwhelmingly voted to approve the legislation over three years ago. I have been very clear that I see delivering on the ambition of our climate legislation as a defining challenge of not just my tenure as Minister but of the ability of this Assembly to deliver on its promises to the people who elected us. I will not pretend that the way forward will always be easy, but I know that we need to be ambitious, for our future, for our people, for our economy and for our environment. Today is another important step forward for Northern Ireland as we play our part in the global challenge of mitigating against climate change. I look forward to engaging with the public through this consultation over the next 16 weeks. Future generations will thank us for stepping up to this challenge of our lifetimes.