

Minority Statement on the Report of the Joint Committee on Climate Action

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PEOPLE BEFORE PROFIT

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Foreword

“Our civilisation is being sacrificed for the opportunity of a very small number of people to continue making enormous amounts of money” - Greta Thunberg

We agree with Greta Thunberg.

According to a recent International Panel Climate Change (IPCC) report, we have 11 years to turn our society around and achieve real cuts in CO₂ emissions in energy and transport. In the IPCC's words, “limiting global warming to 1.5°C... would require rapid and far-reaching transitions in energy, land, urban and infrastructure (including transport and buildings), and industrial systems... These systems transitions are unprecedented in terms of scale...”¹

We will see more extreme weather events here and globally in the years ahead. Dealing with these events and their consequences will require major resources and a collective effort which is unprecedented in human history.

We have seen a concerted campaign over three decades by vested interests in the fossil fuel industry to mislead and deny the causes and consequences of climate change. At the same time we have seen repeated attempts to use market mechanisms such as ‘cap and trade’ and ‘offsets’ to limit CO₂ emissions. These mechanisms have met with abject failure.

Last year, almost three decades after the scientific community warned humanity of the consequences of continued reliance on fossil fuels, we emitted more CO₂ from human sources than ever before in history.

Most ordinary people understand that radical action is needed. Many of the actions required will improve the quality of people's lives, for example, free and plentiful public transport, energy efficient homes and a healthier diet. Society has the resources and wealth to make these changes and to aid developing nations to make the switch to carbon neutrality.

Ordinary people also understand that the amount of carbon they consume is governed by structural constraints and financial pressures and demands rather than lifestyle choices. Most people do not choose high carbon lifestyles. They have no alternatives in the transport they use, little control over the energy efficiency of their homes or the renewable content of the electricity they use. Continued reliance on fossil fuels will only benefit a small number who profit from that industry. It is not people's behavioural choices that need to be challenged and changed but rather the power, influence and wealth of those involved in the fossil fuel and related industries.

¹ IPCC (2018) *Global Warming of 1.5 °C: Summary for Policy Makers*. http://report.ipcc.ch/sr15/pdf/sr15_spm_final.pdf

Introduction

The Dáil Committee on Climate Action was convened to consider the Citizens' Assembly recommendations on how to tackle climate change. That assembly had 13 core recommendations. It did contain a recommendation on carbon taxes but was careful to make clear that it should not to be a tax which was regressive or hit those unable to shoulder the burden.

Tellingly, while the Citizens' Assembly were used to justify the Committee's support for its version of a carbon tax, other recommendations such as carbon taxes on agricultural emissions or prioritising the expansion of public transport spending over new road infrastructure spending at a ratio of no less than 2-to-1 were quietly ignored by the majority.

The starting point for the Committee on Climate Action's report is that Ireland must cut its own CO₂ emissions dramatically and play its part in an international movement that is demanding radical and immediate action to stop and reduce fossil fuel usage in industry, transport and the built environment. Ireland is failing in all of these areas. Allied to this, we must move away from industrial methods of agriculture to sustainable and low carbon methods of feeding Ireland and the world's population.

This Committee's report was an opportunity to re-orientate the State and map out the clear direction that we must take in a number of key areas to achieve the goals set out in the Paris Agreement of limiting global temperature rises to under 1.5° Celsius.

Unfortunately, while containing many interesting ideas and observations (and many recommendations that we argued for and agreed with), the Committee's report fails to do this. We fear that the report will instead be remembered chiefly for giving the Government political cover to introduce increases in carbon taxes.

In key areas such as transport, energy and agriculture, the report is modest and unambitious considering the scale of the crisis we are facing.

The main reasons we are moved to issue this minority statement and to oppose the Committee's report are its recommendation on carbon taxes, its refusal to call out the Government's policies in agriculture and forestry and its adherence to a belief in market forces and private investors and capital in almost every area considered.

The role of the State and Government, while acknowledged is not seen as the main way to reorganise our energy, transport and built environment in the rapid and radical way that is needed to mitigate and avert catastrophic climate change. There is a preoccupation with the role of individual behavioural and lifestyle changes

allied with private enterprise and possible business opportunities. The chapter on agriculture is particularly notable for the absence of any real acknowledgement of the reckless policy of continued growth of the dairy herd.

We do not believe that climate change is a business opportunity or that it can be dealt with by correct 'price signals' or continued adherence to market forces. The market failures and externalities identified in the report are not aberrations in our economic system; they are central to it. Placing faith in yet another market mechanism as the solution to a market failure is not only incredibly ideologically blinkered, it is also a major mistake.

What we need to do NOW.

Following on our engagement with the climate change crisis inside and outside the confines of the Climate Action Committee, People Before Profit believes the Government should immediately declare a **Climate Emergency**. That declaration should be accompanied by a public information campaign, which would tell the scientific truth about the catastrophe the world is heading towards as opposed to spinning its own 'achievements' and lecturing ordinary people on their behaviour.

To that end, People Before Profit have introduced a number of legislative bills and policy initiatives to address Climate change and the environmental crisis:

Climate Emergency Measures Bill. This Bill would stop the Government issuing any licences for oil and gas exploration and make Ireland the fifth country globally to take this action. It has been delayed in the Dáil for almost a year due to Government opposition and its support for the fossil fuel industry.

Ban on LNGs and other fossil fuel infrastructure. This month, Brid Smith TD will introduce an amendment to the Planning and Development Act that would remove LNGs (Liquefied Natural Gas) and other fossil fuel infrastructure from access to any fast tracked planning processes and force An Bord Pleanála to have regard to the impact of any such infrastructures of our CO₂ emissions.

People Before Profit have also made proposals on a number of key issues for inclusion in the report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action, including those listed below:

Establish extent and nature of fuel poverty. An enquiry into the extent and nature of fuel poverty and the impact of increased carbon taxation on all cohorts of the population prior to taking any decision to increase carbon taxation.

Move toward free public transport. The Committee rejected this and the proposal to shift funding away from roads to public transport.

Overhaul SEAI grants to assist those on low/ordinary incomes to retrofit their homes. A radical overhaul of the SEAI grant system with a view to increasing the amount of grant aid available and expanding the eligibility criteria for such grants.

Ensure community buy-in to renewable energy projects and that micro generation by local communities has access to the national grid.

Just Transition. Guarantee sought from the Government to underwrite the current pay, conditions and pensions rights of workers affected in the event of any decision to close Moneypoint or to end peat production.

State investment in off-shore wind energy. Offshore wind energy could deliver huge amounts of renewable energy but to be utilised correctly and in the time needed requires state-led investment. We would mandate semi-state companies to begin this task and redraft the Maritime and Foreshore Act to prioritise renewable energy projects.

Radical overhaul of Bord na Móna and Coillte to deliver a new major reforestation programme based on broadleaves and native species and on the recognition of our peatlands as an asset in the sequestration of carbon. At present these companies are geared toward commercial criteria in their actions instead of any vision on climate change and the environment. prioritise renewable energy projects.



MINORITY STATEMENT ON OIREACHTAS COMMITTEE REPORT

Our Minority Statement opens with our response to the report's recommendations in relation to the significant increases to be made to carbon taxation. While the publicity surrounding the report makes repeated references to the wide and far-reaching nature of the report's recommendations, the imperative which has attached to securing political agreement to increased carbon taxation has been extraordinary. This preoccupation with carbon tax signals the inherent conservatism of this report which is predicated at all times on effecting changes to the notional behavioural choices available to individuals and individual households. Meanwhile, the report has remained resolute in its refusal to address either the structural factors which have locked individuals and households into high-carbon use or the very significant responsibility which the fossil fuel industry and associated corporate interests, which continue to derive vast profits from the production, sale and use of fossil fuels, bear in this matter.

THE CONTENTIOUS ISSUE: CARBON TAXES ON ORDINARY PEOPLE

Chapter 6: Incentivising Climate Action

We are opposed to the Committee's recommendations on increasing carbon taxes on ordinary people. This is a regressive measure that shifts responsibility from corporate sources onto consumers while absolving the State and Government of any responsibility to take measures that target corporate fossil fuel producers.

The Committee endorsed a quadrupling of the current carbon tax from €20 euro to €80 per tonne by 2030. If big corporations continue to produce oil and gas on the basis of their profitability, consumers will have little choice but to continue using them – particularly as alternatives in heating and transport are often prohibitively expensive and in many cases non-existent.

Only one form of a carbon tax will work. Only one form of carbon tax will target the real behaviour responsible for CO₂ emission - a tax on the profits of those companies producing and exploring for oil gas and coal.

One of our key recommendations on this issue:

"The Committee recommends that the Department of Finance commission an enquiry into the revenue that could be realised through the introduction of a carbon tax on the profits of corporations and firms directly linked to the production and sale of gas, oil, coal and other fossil fuels. That enquiry should also look at the revenue that could be realised from the imposition of a carbon tax on the profits of other corporations and firms linked to high usage of fossil fuels including aviation, shipping etc."

We made it clear that we do favour and would recommend imposing a serious carbon tax on the sources of CO₂ emissions, specifically the profits of businesses directly linked with continued production and usage of fossil fuels and CO₂ emissions. This would apply in all areas examined. It would be the clearest “price signal” to the market that we will not support continued profiteering from activities that are destroying our planet.

We believe that the emphasis on raising taxes on the consumption of fossil fuels means that the corporations and industries that amass profits from CO₂ will continue to invest in and produce fossil fuels. Carbon taxes on ordinary people will not assist the kind of radical shift needed to transform our energy systems in the rapid time frame needed. They will instead function as a regressive taxation measure on ordinary people and we remain seriously concerned that the trajectory for increases in the tax and its use will not be delivered in an equitable manner.

Such tax increases will not achieve the kind of reductions in CO₂ levels necessary in the time needed to stop catastrophic climate change.

The IPCC report released in October 2018 shows that to keep the global mean temperature rise below 1.5°C requires global emissions reductions of 50% by 2030 and to be net-zero by 2050. The evidence from other countries and regions that have implemented carbon taxes makes it clear that any reductions secured are nowhere near the scale needed and, indeed, it is questionable whether any real reductions are achieved at all.²

One study of 19 jurisdictions with carbon taxes found that any reductions secured were generally moderate and that it would take over 110 years to reach the 80% emissions-reduction target on the trends exhibited.³

The reality may be even worse as many of the claims of success in the implementation of carbon taxes do not, in fact, show any overall reductions but are based on assumptions of how much more CO₂ would have been emitted in the absence of carbon taxes.

Many of the claims for the success of carbon taxes are based on models that predict what will happen when they are implemented as opposed to what has actually happened in places where they have been introduced. It is clear from these experiences that carbon taxes on consumers will not alter the behaviour of the fossil fuel and related industries as it leaves the potential profits untouched.

2 Food & Water Watch (2016) *The British Columbia Carbon Tax: A Failed Experiment in Market-Based Solutions to Climate Change*. https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/sites/default/files/rpt_1609_carbontax_web17011.pdf

3 Nadel (2016) *Learning from 19 Carbon Taxes: What Does the Evidence Show?* (American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy) https://aceee.org/files/proceedings/2016/data/papers/9_49.pdf

Claims that a higher tax and a guaranteed rise in such a tax can lead to radical shifts in the economy and society are naïve at best and dangerous in the current situation. They rest on mainstream economic thinking about individual behaviour that is deeply flawed - claims whose entire theoretical underpinning has been shaken by the recent recession and economic crisis.

Petroleum products are defined as 'inelastic' by economists, meaning that individuals tend to stick with them regardless of their prices. Motorists currently pay 90 cents in tax on a €1.50 litre of petrol - but this has done little to stop people driving their cars. Indeed, so sure are the Government of the revenue from petrol, that they lump it in with cigarettes and alcohol as 'old reliables' come budget time.

The major oil and gas companies are equally sure that these taxes don't work. ExxonMobil estimated that an effective carbon tax would have to increase the cost of petrol by 300%, equivalent to €4.60 a litre⁴. The ESRI have calculated that an effective tax would add €1,500 to every person in the country or up to €2,350 if agricultural emissions are not tackled.⁵

It is for this reason that companies like ExxonMobil publicly support carbon taxes, whilst privately reassuring shareholders that "world climate policies are highly unlikely to stop it from producing and selling fossil fuels in the near future."

We do welcome the fact that the report notes that:

*"If climate change is caused by market failure, the State cannot leave the solutions entirely to the market. Market forces are driving higher rates of consumption and pollution and therefore the market economy itself must be transformed to give people real, low-carbon choices such as affordable public transport and sustainable livelihoods, whether they live in urban or rural environments, and facilitate community-led, non-market based solutions."*⁶

The report ignores the systemic nature of carbon pollution, its roots in the free market economy and the vested interests of fossil fuel corporations who profit from the continued reliance on oil, coal and gas.

Carbon taxes on ordinary people and their consumption are a distraction from the real actions we need to take.

The State needs to take a leading role in investing in renewable energies in the next decade. These measures require massive levels of investment that cannot be left to the whims of the free market and private investors. Carbon taxes on ordinary people pretend that the problem with CO₂ emissions rests with the individual actions and choices of consumers.

4 Crooks (2018) *ExxonMobil gives \$1m to campaign for a carbon tax*. *Financial Times*, 9th October. <https://on.ft.com/2Ev280q>

5 O'Sullivan (2018) *Massive hike in carbon tax needed if Ireland to meet targets* - ESRI. *Irish Times*, 20th November. <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/environment/massive-hike-in-carbon-tax-needed-if-ireland-to-meet-targets-esri-1.3704655>

6 Joint Committee on Climate Action (2019) *Climate Change: A Cross-Party Consensus for Action*

This is very likely to alienate working people and to create a barrier to real climate action on the basis of its unfairness. Asking ordinary people to shoulder the blame for climate action when 71% of all emissions come from just 100 global corporations is not only regressive, it is also dangerous.⁷

The 'Theoretical basis' for Carbon Taxes

The Committee's report cites a recent study from "Nature Climate Change" that is presented with the endorsement of "preeminent experts in the field." All of the authors of this report are mainstream economists and advocates of the market system for dealing with societal problems. The study used by the Committee to justify carbon taxes does not look at the actual and verifiable impact of such taxes to see if they result in the kind of reductions in emissions needed. It is instead a study into how to make such a tax acceptable to the public.

We contrast this preoccupation with the selling and framing of this very limited policy response to climate change with the considerably more critical perspective taken on carbon tax by the co-director of the Food & Water Justice project⁸:

"Carbon tax proponents sell the idea as just one tool in the climate tool kit, ignoring the fact that once a carbon tax is implemented, policy-makers will be strongly disinclined to enact any other, truly meaningful measures to reduce climate pollutants. The 'one tool' quickly becomes the only tool, and its one that will undoubtedly leave us facing the worst impacts of climate change in the years to come."

Despite acknowledging the past failure of market mechanisms, the study cited in the Committee's report simply accepts the theory behind carbon taxes as accepted wisdom among mainstream economists. It proceeds on the basis that if you place a correct price on CO₂, the market will provide the solution with correct government support. It does not analyse real world experiences of carbon taxes on individual behaviour to see if they have resulted in actual reductions in CO₂ levels. Instead it simply accepts the theory and the rest of the study is an exercise in devising a model on how to make such a tax palatable to people.

Not only does it accept the theory without question, but it also assumes that people subject to increased carbon prices are in a financial position to change their behaviour or secure access to alternative forms of energy. Nowhere does it consider why past market mechanisms failed or the role played by market pressures such as competition and the drive to create profits in repeated failures. Nowhere does it look at the responsibility of business and corporations in accentuating and continuing increases in CO₂ emissions globally.

⁷ CDP (Carbon Disclosure Project) (2017) The Carbon Majors Database CDP Carbon Majors Report 2017. <https://bit.ly/2OVCbLb>

⁸ See <https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/>

It ignores completely the power and continued reach of vested interests in fossil fuel industries and ignores the wealth and capital invested in existing infrastructure in which these interests have massive investments.

It is important to note on this point that we took issue with the late introduction of the findings of the above study from “Nature Climate Change” into the discussions which preceded the finalisation of the Committee’s report. We deemed the inclusion of this material to be particularly problematic as no opportunity was afforded those advocating an alternative position on carbon tax to formally set out their concerns about and opposition to the report’s carbon tax proposals. An opportunity to consider a 2016 article by Food & Water Watch: “The British Columbia Carbon Tax: A Failed Experiment in Market-Based Solutions to Climate Change”⁹ and the below finding might have been particularly instructive in this respect.

“Many frequently hold out British Columbia as an example of a successful carbon tax program that significantly reduced CO₂ emissions. The data do not support these claims. British Columbia achieved only minimal and short-term province-wide greenhouse gas emission reductions immediately after the tax was implemented, and it is highly questionable whether the carbon tax even caused these declines... British Columbia’s carbon tax failed to reach the reduction targets necessary to ensure a sustainable climate, demonstrating that carbon taxes are not a viable policy solution to climate change.”

A carbon tax we could support

We support a carbon tax that targets the causes of carbon pollution. Such a tax would be levied at the profits of business with direct links to fossil fuel production and the manufacture of fossil fuel based products. We must ensure that it is no longer possible to profit from the destruction of our environment.

Instead of hoping that a market signal might change corporate behaviour and investment decisions, states must lead by regulating, banning and restricting CO₂ emissions across all sectors. The State must lead in providing alternatives in each case: public transport, home energy, access to renewable sources of power and retrofitting of homes.

Carbon Tax & Fuel Poverty

At the insistence of People Before Profit, the Committee was forced to address the issue of fuel poverty in a more comprehensive fashion. We pointed out that the initial recommendation on raising carbon taxes only looked at the issue of fuel poverty as one that affected those who qualified for the Fuel Allowance when it is clear that the numbers in receipt of Fuel Allowance should not be taken as an accurate measure of all those in or close to fuel poverty. This is a matter of some significance as the Department of Social Protection has confirmed it was “not possible” to determine how many households were refused fuel allowance.¹⁰

⁹ <https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/insight/british-columbia-carbon-tax-failed-experiment-market-based-solutions-climate-change>

¹⁰ Holland (2019) Couple in damp house cannot get fuel allowance because income is €9 too

Those who do not qualify for the fuel allowance will also fail to qualify for the SEAI grants for home insulation. Thus, a huge number of ordinary workers are excluded from getting precisely the type of work done in their homes that could dramatically cut energy use and reduce CO₂ emissions.

To rectify this very significant anomaly, we requested that the Government:

“Commission a comprehensive enquiry into the extent and nature of fuel poverty across all cohorts of the population and the short, medium and long-term impact of increased carbon taxation on all cohorts prior to taking a decision to increase carbon taxation.”

We believe that it is premature to make any recommendation about the introduction of increased carbon taxation without having first assembled clear empirical evidence about the short, medium and long-term impacts of such a measure on energy and fuel poverty. In making this request, we were very mindful of the findings of a recent MABS report on fuel poverty which pointed to the need for:

“a more integrated, multi-dimensional, policy approach to fuel poverty... to better address related socio-economic, institutional, environmental, cultural and individual dimensions in the round.”¹¹

While the Committee’s final report does contain a recommendation that has drawn heavily on the text of our original recommendation, that recommendation is now couched within a larger suite of measures that follows on the Committee’s recommendation that:

“the Minister for Finance should set out a carbon price trajectory that rises to €80 per tonne by 2030.”

It remains to be seen what precise actions and provisions will be taken in fulfilment of the report’s recommendation that this should only be implemented when an evidenced-based plan is in place to increase supports and incentives for climate action measures, including the protection of those vulnerable to fuel poverty.

However, the imperative which has attached to the approval of an increased carbon tax and the support which this measure has received from the four mainstream political parties in this process - Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil, Labour and the Green Party – leaves little doubt about the increases in carbon taxation that those on low and ordinary incomes will be obliged to incur in the coming years. Such policies will not help the battle against climate change and risk alienating the very people that this report is seeking to engage.

high. Irish Times, 5th March. <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/couple-in-damp-house-cannot-get-fuel-allowance-because-income-is-9-too-high-1.3814283>

11 MABS (2018) *Left Behind in the Cold? Fuel Poverty, Money Management & Financial Difficulty among Dublin 10 & 20 MABS Clients 2013 and 2017*. <https://bit.ly/2UvHMvj>

Chapters 1-10

COMMENTS & CONTRIBUTIONS

While it is not possible within the constraints of this short statement to provide a full commentary on all aspects of the Committee's report or on each of the amendments we sought to make to the report's ten chapters, the following are offered as an indication of the key issues we raised within the report and the amendments which we sought to make to the content of the report's other nine chapters.

Chapter 1: The need for a new national framework

We urged the Committee to open the report by relaying the following quote from the IPCC report to convey the gravity of the crisis:

"Pathways limiting global warming to 1.5°C with no or limited overshoot would require rapid and far-reaching transitions in energy, land, urban and infrastructure (including transport and buildings), and industrial systems (high confidence). These systems transitions are unprecedented in terms of scale..." IPCC (2018: 21).

We voiced our concerns about the contradiction that arises whereby the Government retains collective responsibility for climate change while its agricultural policy remains committed to an ever-expanding dairy sector and it remains committed to fossil fuel exploration and extraction that is resulting in ever increasing Green House Gas (GHG) emissions.

We also sought to expand the proposed role of the new Standing Committee on Climate Action in relation to the examination of the climate implications of new Bills to include other and more critical government and statutory decisions.

Our recommendation on the remit of the new Standing Committee on Climate Action:

"Recommend that the remit of the proposed Standing Committee be extended to consider decisions taken by other government departments and bodies which have significant climate implications, e.g. decisions taken by An Bord Pleanála granting permission for LGNs or the granting of oil exploration licences by the Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment."

Chapter 2: Supporting a Just Transition

We welcome the reports' commitment to a Just Transition but that commitment needs to extend beyond the rhetorical. In the case of Bord na Móna workers, it would have to mean new jobs that were pensionable and had the same wages and conditions that applied under their employment with Bord na Móna. *Just Transition* must not mean hitting ordinary, already hard-pressed, people with carbon taxes. To that end, we proposed a set of criteria by which Ireland's progress in ensuring a Just Transition can be gauged. In a later discussion about the future of Bord na Móna and Moneypoint workers, we successfully argued for the inclusion of a specific recommendation in relation to the protection of workers' rights.

Our recommendation on Moneypoint and peat production workers:

"In the event of any decision to close Moneypoint or to end peat production, the Government in the interests of a just transition will guarantee to underwrite the current pay, conditions and pensions rights of workers affected."

Alongside the above, we also successfully argued that the Committee should reject a proposal in this chapter that commercial airlines could be partners in financing the rewetting of bogs as part of a Just Transition package for the Midlands. We did so on the basis that any proposals relating to offsets or looking to polluting industries like aviation to voluntarily support a Just Transition while increasingly expanding their services have no place in any serious report on climate action.

Chapter 3: Citizen and Community Engagement

We successfully argued that opposition to wind farms in many communities should be investigated fully and not dismissed as Nimbyism. Wind energy needs to be harnessed in a manner that is acceptable to local communities, with their support and in manner which shares arising benefits equitably. We also urged recognition of the difficulties that low-income urban communities would experience in gaining access to benefits from renewable energy projects.

Our recommendation on research into community resistance:

"To establish (via research in those areas where wind farms have been constructed) the precise grounds and concerns which have provoked such resistance and on which opposition has been mounted, i.e. issues in relation to the planning process through which permission for wind farms has been secured, the manner of their construction, the manner of their operation and their precise impacts on the surrounding land, environment and community."

Chapter 4: Education and Communication

We objected to the emphasis of this chapter on education and communication which framed the climate crisis in such a way as to unfairly scapegoat individuals and their lifestyle choices. We instead sought to include an account of the role played by fossil fuel corporations and businesses in sabotaging climate change and funding climate change denial in this critically important education programme.

Our recommendation on climate change denial and role of vested interests:

“Any public information campaign should review the attempts at climate denial funded by fossil fuel corporations over three decades and seek to educate the public on how this campaign stopped effective action being taken to curb CO₂ emissions globally. It should further seek to increase climate literacy by highlighting the role of vested interests such as fossil fuels corporations and how their interests can result in skewed policy discussions on climate actions.”

Our recommendations on the content of this public information campaign extended to the role of the broadcast media.

Our recommendation seeking a more critical public discussion:

“The Committee also encourages RTE to broaden its coverage of climate change beyond the responsibility borne by individuals to facilitate a broader and more critical public discussion about the structural causes and responsibility borne by the fossil fuel industry (and associated corporate interests) for climate change.”





Chapter 5: Unlocking potential

We again objected to the emphasis of this chapter which seemed to suggest that catastrophic climate change is a wonderful business opportunity as opposed to an existential threat to civilisation and the earth's biodiversity. We also highlighted the fact that many projects needed to deal with climate change require long-term investment plans with limited scope for immediate returns to private investors. As such, we argued that the State must take the lead in investing in and co-ordinating the many large-scale projects required.

Our recommendation on the importance of the State taking the lead on climate change:

"The Committee recognises that climate change poses an existential threat to human and all life on earth. As such, it does not wish to convey the misleading impression that in order to take sustained action that reduces and stops CO₂ emissions, it must first be seen as some sort of 'business opportunity' in order to win support for substantive action. As such, the Committee wishes to emphasise that technological innovation, business models and possible export opportunities are subsidiary to direct state-led initiatives to reduce CO₂ emissions and fossil fuel usage in the coming years."

Chapter 7: Energy

There is again much in the chapter that we can agree with, but the report remains mainly aspirational. The State must commit to leading the investment needed in offshore wind and other renewables and in such key semi-states bodies as Bord na Móna and Coillte.

The Government must stop its facilitation of and support for fossil fuel exploration and extraction. Its opposition to the Climate Emergency Measures Bill, which would ban all licences for oil and gas exploration, reveals a breathtaking hypocrisy on climate change. Additionally, the facilitation in planning law of projects like the proposed LNG (Liquid Natural Gas) terminal on the Shannon is outrageous in light of the known science on gas and the need to avoid the State being locked into fossil fuel infrastructure that will last 50 years and more.¹²

In this situation, any legislation such as the Maritime Area and Foreshore Bill must not be used as a vehicle to also facilitate gas projects. Potential opposition to large-scale renewable projects by communities can be ameliorated if people are assured that the private profitability concerns of project developers are not taking precedence over people's legitimate concerns about the likely impact on their local environment. This is an additional reason why state bodies should be tasked with this kind of large-scale transition, which seeks the support of local communities in achieving the rapid transformation needed in our energy systems.

We support the calls for facilitating micro-generation of electricity in homes and schools across the country. However, this must again be state-led and funded otherwise access to this important energy source will not be equitable or just. It will not reach its full potential in terms of mitigation and reduction of our overall energy demands if left to private investors or restricted to those with the finance necessary to invest in solar, wind and other renewable sources of micro-generation.

Our recommendation on community ownership and access to the grid:

"Recommend that measures be put in place to ensure that the 'community ownership' (referred to in Recommendation 6 of the Citizens' Assembly) benefits all members of communities in equal measure and not just those in a financial position to engage with renewable energy projects. Recommend that provisions also be made so that community energy projects can secure access to the grid."

We support calls for the immediate shut down of peat and coal fired power generation and again support calls for this to be done in tandem with the principals of a Just Transition for those workers and communities affected by this shift (see Chapter 2).

¹² McMullin et al. (2018) Is Natural Gas "Essential for Ireland's Future Energy Security"? https://www.stopclimatechaos.ie/download/pdf/is_natural_gas_essential_for_irelands_future_energy_security_scc_study_november_2018.pdf

Our recommendation on legislative provision for offshore renewable energy:

"The Committee notes that the draft heads of a Bill have been published on the proposed legislation to deal with offshore renewable energy, namely the Maritime Area and Foreshore Amendment 2013 Bill. The Committee recommends the speedy delivery of this proposed legislation to facilitate offshore wind energy. As it notes that these proposals also look to facilitate offshore gas storage facilities, the Committee recommends that this legislation should concentrate on facilitating renewable energies in the maritime area only."

Chapter 8: Agriculture, Forestry and Peatlands

The Committee's report acknowledges that agricultural emissions are growing and are part of the reason for Ireland's abysmal record in reducing our CO₂ emissions. It rightfully acknowledges that farmers are not adequately rewarded for current production as a result of the power of large retailers and points to the variation in average farm incomes across different farming sectors – a point which we were adamant should be included in the report.

However, the report fails to clearly state that these are not accidental side effects but rather the direct consequences of deliberate policy choices on the part of Government. **Ireland has massively increased its dairy and beef exports, not to service a market but to create a market, especially since the removal of milk quotas in 2015.** The growth in dairy is expected to continue according to Teagasc with dairy cow numbers expected to reach 1.6 million by 2020. The growth is deliberate Government policy which is unsustainable and contrary to the long-term interest of Ireland's farming community.

A bizarre side effect of this is that we are witnessing a fall in horticultural produce that is, in fact, ideally suited to Ireland's climate - produce which could be done in a sustainable low-carbon way that could also enrich the State's biodiversity. As a consequence of this decline in horticulture produce, we now import much of our food.

Additionally, the report only partially recognises Coillte's unsustainable business and environmental practices. Coillte's obsession with Sitka Spruce plantations and profitability is environmentally damaging and does nothing for Ireland's climate action.

The Committee has refused to endorse the Citizens' Assembly call for a tax on Green House Gas (GHG) emissions from agriculture. As the blanket imposition of this tax on agricultural emissions would function as a tax on ordinary farmers, we would not support such a tax. However, we feel that the option of implementing taxes on global food corporations (e.g. Glanbia PLC, Kerry Group) and beef conglomerates (e.g. ABP Food Group) should be explored alongside the use of revenues raised to

fund a new, diversified and low-carbon future for our agricultural sector.

Our recommendation on taxing global food corporations and beef conglomerates:

“The Committee recommends that the Department of Finance commission an enquiry into the revenue that could be realised through the introduction of a carbon tax on the profits of large agri-food producers and the feasibility of ring-fencing that revenue to help low-income farming communities move to sustainable low-carbon food production.”

Bord na Móna and Coillte need to be radically reorganised and reoriented in a manner that recognises the critically important role that each must play in leading the challenge of reducing our CO₂ emissions in land use and sequestering carbon as opposed to seeking profitable business ventures. They must also lead by example in a ‘Just Transition’ for their workers and the communities they work in.

We need a clear shift to growing more and varied horticultural produce, planting broadleaf trees as opposed to fast growing conifers, and storing and safeguarding our remaining peatlands.

Chapter 9: Built Environment

We support the report’s calls for the retrofitting of 75,000 homes a year. This could dramatically reduce our energy consumption and could, if made available to all citizens, serve to build huge support for radical action across society on climate change.

Our concerns relate to how such an ambitious programme can be delivered. We are extremely concerned about the report’s attempts to differentiate between those who must be supported by the State in retrofitting their homes and those who “may be expected to repay some or all of the capital investment required” in undertaking this work. It is clear that using access to the Fuel Allowance as a benchmark in making any such distinction would be deeply flawed. Many who do not qualify for fuel allowance assistance are still in or close to fuel poverty and will require significant financial assistance if they are to participate in any retrofitting programme.¹³

There are many tens of thousands of ordinary people and households who will not be able to pay for a retrofit or afford to borrow to get such work done. Nor is there any real banking alternative at the moment that would allow people access to low-interest loans. It is worth noting that a proposal for a community banking system based on the Post Office network that might be able to afford such loans has only recently been rejected by the Government.

¹³ McAvoy (2007) *All-Ireland Policy Paper on Fuel Poverty and Health*. https://www.publichealth.ie/files/file/FuelPoverty_0.pdf https://www.mabs.ie/downloads/reports_submissions/Left_Behind_in_the_Cold_Dublin_10_and_20_MABS_Report.pdf

Therefore, we think it is essential that the State takes the lead in providing the funding for any retrofitting programme. Otherwise, the target of 75,000 homes will remain aspirational only.

Additionally, the regulation of building standards and the enforcement of those standards need to be radically overhauled. Specifically Part L of the building regulation for new builds should set the highest net zero targets for all new builds.

Our recommendations seeking greater financial assistance for retrofitting of housing:

“We request a comprehensive review of the current SEAI grant scheme to ensure that it is enabling the maximum number of low and ordinary income households to undertake retrofitting of their homes and pursue maximum energy efficiency therein”

“[Grant schemes] should be reviewed to address equity considerations and to identify any eligibility criteria militating against the inclusion of low-income households experiencing fuel poverty whose income may place them marginally above existing eligibility thresholds.”

In addition to pointing to the financial assistance required by low/ordinary income homeowners facing increasing fuel and energy costs, we were also very conscious of the vulnerabilities attaching to the increasing numbers of people now housed and potentially locked into long-term private rented accommodation. We were adamant that those vulnerabilities must not be compounded by rising rents or evictions in those instances where landlords *do* choose to retrofit their rental properties or by rising energy costs in those instances where landlords *decline* to do so.

Our recommendation on protecting tenancies and rent levels in private accommodation:

“Careful consideration to be given to guarding against any unintended consequences (evictions or increased rents) for those in private rental accommodation as a result of any assistance or incentives for retrofitting provided to the private residential market. The provision of any such assistance or incentives to be contingent on the protection of tenancies and maintenance of rent levels prior to retrofitting. The Committee recommends that the Residential Tenancies Act be amended to ensure that tenants cannot be evicted as a result of landlords refurbishing rental properties.”

Chapter 10: Transport

Public Transport will form a major part of any coherent response to climate change. Ireland needs a commitment to free and frequent public transport. Mass transit of all forms must be the first priority in shifting our society away from private car usage and reducing the demands for fuel.

While Electric Vehicles (EVs) may form a part of our response to reducing emissions, an overemphasis on EVs as the transport solution is mistaken as it will not lead to a dramatic reduction in overall CO₂ emissions. EVs will remain unaffordable to very large numbers in any case.

For that reason, we were very supportive of the Citizens' Assembly recommendation that "the State should prioritise the expansion of public transport spending over new road infrastructure spending at a ratio of no less than 2-to-1 to facilitate the broader availability and uptake of public transport options with attention to rural areas" and were very disappointed at the report's failure to take any concrete steps to give practical effect to progressing and implementing this recommendation.

The most pressing and immediate action needed is a massive increase in the bus fleet in Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus. The overall fleet numbers in both companies have still not reached the numbers prior to the last recession. Any discussion on transport needs to start by acknowledging and addressing this very regrettable diminution in fleet numbers. This is a by-product of decades of under investment and low subsidies to public transport in general and CIE companies in particular. We pointed out that the standard cash fare in Dublin Bus has risen by over 80% since 2011.

We urged the Committee to endorse a call that the State would aim to provide free public transport in the long term as a way of encouraging a move away from private transport. The merits of such a policy are gaining support in many jurisdictions and would obviously need to take place in tandem with a commitment to radically increase investment in bus fleet numbers and undertake large infrastructural projects such as additional light rail systems in cities outside Dublin and an enhanced and completed Western Rail Corridor.

Our recommendation on free public transport:

"The Committee recommends that the Government make a commitment to introducing free public transport as a long term policy goal to help reduce CO₂ emissions from private car usage."

The call for Free Public Transport is a practical policy and measure. It is also one that has a clear potential to win widespread public support for the collective actions and transitions necessary to deal with climate change. In contrast to calls for the imposition of increased carbon taxes on ordinary people, it is a measure that can

build support and show that the State understands the gravity of the issue and send a powerful signal about the direction we must take.

We were also attentive to the other steps which the State must take to reduce emissions from the transport sector. We argued, for example, that the State should subsidise rail freight to the same level as other European countries as a way of reducing the number of heavy goods vehicles on our roads. This is again in accordance with the Citizens' Assembly recommendation that the overall transport budget must be changed from its present preponderance towards roads to all forms of public transport.

CONCLUSION

Given the scale and consequences of the crisis facing humanity, People Before Profit sincerely believes that the report of the Joint Committee on Climate Action, while containing useful ideas and recommendations, is seriously lacking in ambition and is not adequate to the challenge facing us.

The Committee's report is neither radical nor does it equate to the "rapid and far-reaching transitions in energy, land, urban and infrastructure (including transport and buildings), and industrial systems" identified as being necessary by the IPCC (2018: 21). The IPCC has been very clear on this point: "these systems transitions are unprecedented in terms of scale." Rather than effecting any such system transitions, we fear that this Committee's report will instead be used by the Government to justify the most conservative and regressive of measures – the imposition of increasing carbon taxes on ordinary people. Meanwhile, the structural and systemic nature of fossil fuel use remains unquestioned.

This is at best a distraction from the kind of measures needed to rapidly reduce our CO₂ emissions. Those measures cannot be left to the market or private investors as they require massive long-term investments while the market and market mechanisms aimed at reducing CO₂ emissions have been shown to fail abjectly in the past.

We believe the Government should immediately declare a **Climate Emergency**. As part of this emergency, it should launch a massive public information campaign, which would tell the scientific truth about the catastrophe the world is heading towards as opposed to spinning its own 'achievements' and lecturing ordinary people on their behaviour. This campaign must emphasise not only the extent to which sea levels will have risen by the end of the century but also the immediate and current disastrous increase of extreme weather events. The horror of Cyclone Idai in South East Africa represents the shape of things to come as disasters of this kind are becoming steadily more frequent.

We close our Minority Statement by turning to the testimonies of the young people

who addressed the Joint Committee on Climate Action on the final day of the Committee's deliberations on its report. We refer in particular to the contribution of one of those young people who spoke about the need to take a giant leap forward.

*"I find the repeated appeals by this committee to highlight the positive benefits of climate action, rather than the negative consequences of inaction to be quite surprising and indeed dispiriting. Climate action does indeed have benefits, benefits which will doubtlessly exceed the cost. It is vital that we do not forget why we need climate action. One of the main reasons we are in the desperate situation that we are in now is because of the apathy and a general lack of awareness surrounding the issue. Do not for a second think that we are not in a desperate situation. It is vital that we communicate this to the public. Trying to obscure this fact is not only deceptive, it is downright irresponsible. Today our generation is saying that we demand politicians stop taking baby steps. Take a leap instead. Lead us to the future we deserve. Ireland and the planet cannot afford to wait. It is time to stop playing politics with our future."*¹⁴

In our view, the Report of the Joint Committee on Climate Action represents only a small step forward rather than the giant leap requested. People Before Profit believes that the analysis presented in this Minority Statement alongside our own work on climate change - as exemplified by our Climate Emergency Measures Bill - can play a very significant role in making the giant leap forward requested by these young people. We understand the magnitude and unprecedented nature of the 'system transitions' required and are committed to taking the leadership role that will effect such system transitions and ensure that young people do indeed have the future that they deserve. As the young people continually chant outside the House of the Oireachtas:

"We need system change, not climate change."



¹⁴ Joint Committee on Climate Action, 28th March 2019, Transcript, p2. <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/committees/32/climate-action/debates/>

