

Call for evidence and views on the Climate Change Bill

Closes 15 July 2021

Opened 20 May 2021

Overview



Climate Change is one of the most important issues facing our society and how we address it could affect how we live, work and travel.

[The Climate Change Bill](#) that has recently come before the Northern Ireland (NI) Assembly sets out a framework to mitigate the effects of Climate Change in the coming years.

This includes reducing the amount of greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere and balancing the amount removed by our industries and through energy use.

The Bill proposes several mechanisms to help achieve its aims including establishment of Climate Action Plans across various sectors and regular reporting to monitor progress in terms of delivering the net-zero target.

Why we are consulting

As part of the NI Assembly's normal legislative processes, the Climate Change Bill has been referred to the Assembly's Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (AERA) for scrutiny and evaluation.

The Committee is seeking views from stakeholders on the objectives, proposals and potential consequences of the Bill so it can understand how the legislation could affect different parts of society and how effective it may be in achieving its aims.

Your views will help to inform the AERA Committee's consideration of the Climate Change Bill and any recommendations it may suggest as the Bill moves to the next stage of the legislative process.

Consultation contents

You only need to answer the questions that are most relevant and important to you but we ask that you complete this response form in full, providing your views and making suggested amendments to the Bill where possible. If you are unsure as to how to answer a particular question, you may leave it blank.

Tips for completing your response

I'm not sure how to answer all of the questions.

To help inform your views before completing your response, we recommend reading the [Climate Change Bill document first](#).

Do I have to answer every question in the consultation?

You are required to answer the consent question for publishing your response. The rest of the survey questions are optional. Please answer the questions that are most important and relevant to you.

Introduction (Required Section)

Please note that in most cases **your written submissions will be published** on our website and may be quoted in the Committee's report or in Committee meetings (which are public and broadcast).

If you would like to request that your name not be included in what is published, or to request an alternative format to give comments, please contact the Clerk at the following email address: Committee.AgriEnvRural@niassembly.gov.uk. We will consider all requests for information to be treated anonymously.

Please provide comment on any or all parts of the template. If you do not agree with a particular clause of the Bill, please consider suggesting how it could be amended.

1. How would you like your response to be published?

I would like my response to be published

I would like to request my response not be published, and I understand this will only be accepted in exceptional circumstances

If my request is turned down I understand that I can choose to withdraw my submission or agree to my response being published in full or as amended by me.

2. What is your name?

Steven Agnew

3. What is your email address?

Steven.agnew@RenewableNI.com

4. Please indicate if you are providing a submission as:

An individual

On behalf of an organisation or business

If on behalf of an organisation or business, please state its name:

RenewableNI

And please tell us briefly how the organisation or business relates to the subject matter of the Bill:

RenewableNI is the trade association and voice for the renewable electricity industry in Northern Ireland. We represent over 30 businesses, fostering knowledge exchange, sharing best practice and supporting policy development. Engaged in wind, solar, tidal and battery storage, our members make up a large majority of the renewable industry supply chain.

Question 1: The Policy Objectives

The policy objectives of the Bill are to:

- Enable the mitigation of the impact of climate change in Northern Ireland;
- Establish a legally binding net-zero carbon target for Northern Ireland;
- Provide for the establishment and powers of a Northern Ireland Climate Commissioner and Northern Ireland Climate Office;
- Guarantee existing environmental and climate protections

1. What are your views on the overall policy objectives?

RenewableNI (RNI) supports the principle of establishing a net zero emissions target to mitigate our impact on climate change. All other jurisdictions in the UK have embedded Net Zero into legislation and NI has to move swiftly to catch up. We fully support the use of targets as they inform decisions and actions from all players who have a responsibility to deliver decarbonisation for NI. Therefore, we are supportive of the move to set targets as soon as possible into legislation, providing a clear signal to the market.

As RNI members are engaged in the renewable electricity sector, they will have a significant contribution to make in NI's decarbonisation journey. Our sector has led the way on decarbonisation with 49% of NI's electricity having been generated by renewables in 2020. As a result, according to the Department for the Economy Energy Strategy [options paper](#), power sector emissions have reduced by 45% on 1990 levels.

As the heat and transport sectors seek to decarbonise through electrification, it is essential that there is an ambitious target for net zero power. The Committee on Climate Change's [Sixth Carbon Budget](#) sets a UK target of zero carbon power by 2035 while the International Energy Agency *Net Zero by 2050* [roadmap](#) sets 2035 as the point by which all advanced economies must achieve a fully decarbonised power system.

RNI has called for a target for zero carbon power by 2035 in response to the Energy Strategy consultation and believes it should also be included in the Climate Bill.

2. Do you think that the Bill will meet these objectives?

Yes

No

Unsure

Please give us a reason for your answer:

Legislating for targets will be an essential part of delivery net zero but will not in itself result in the achievement of these targets. Joined up action across departments and at all levels of government will be required to meet this challenge.

RNI highlighted five key policies that will be required in the new Energy Strategy:

1. A zero carbon power system by 2035

The International Energy Agency *Net Zero by 2050 [roadmap](#)* sets 2035 as the point by which all advanced economies must achieve a fully decarbonised power system. This target is echoed in the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) *[Sixth Carbon Budget](#)* and should be included in the Energy Strategy for NI.

2. 80 by 30

Almost 50% of NI's electricity was generated by renewables in 2020 – this was a tremendous achievement and one we should build on. RenewableNI has outlined how 80% could be achieved by 2030. Baringa's *Pathway to a Zero Carbon Power System* study shows that doing so would result in an additional net saving for consumers of more than £50m, when compared with a 70% scenario.

Accompanying 2030 capacity targets would provide certainty for investors and we propose aligning with the SONI 'Accelerated Ambition' scenario which envisages 2,540 MW of onshore wind, 500 MW offshore wind, and 1,170 MW of solar PV in NI.

3. NI inclusion in Contracts for Difference (CfD) Auction Round 5

NI is the only part of these islands without an effective route to market and as a result we risk going from leaders to laggards in respect of renewable electricity generation. Accepting that it is too late for NI to be included in Auction Round 4 at the end of this year, it is vital that all steps are taken to ensure NI does not miss out again.

To ensure build out of local projects, we propose that there be ringfenced capacity for NI.

4. Developer led grid investment

It is essential that grid build out is simultaneous with the connection of new renewable generation. This must continue to be 'developer led' as described in the SONI *[Shaping Our Electricity Future](#)* proposals. RNI pipeline survey results show that the bulk of new renewable generation, up to 2030, will be sited in the north and the west. Sharing our data with SONI, key bottlenecks can be identified, and least regret investments made in parallel with the pipeline of onshore projects expected. Grid investment. Analysis by both Baringa and NIE Networks shows that such investment will result in net consumer savings.

Facilitation of net zero should be included within the Utility Regulator's remit and allowance made for anticipatory investment in the network by both SONI and NIE.

5. NI inclusion in next Crown Estate leasing round

As offshore development continues at pace in GB and ROI, NI risks being left behind. RNI's pipeline survey shows considerable interest in developing projects off NI's shore. To capitalise on this, NI must be included in the next Crown Estate leasing round and with preparatory work taking place to facilitate offshore connections from 2030 onwards.

Achievement of these objectives will unlock over £1bn of private investment in new renewable generation, helping power a green recovery for NI.

Question 2: Declaration of a Climate Emergency

- Clause 1 of the Bill legally declares a Climate Emergency in Northern Ireland.

1. Tell us your views on declaring a Climate Emergency in Northern Ireland.

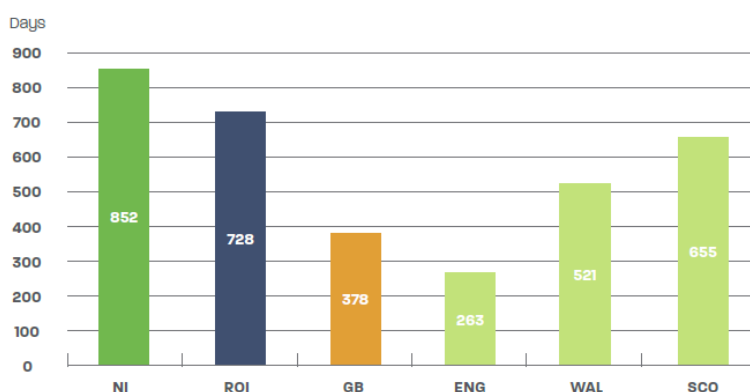
RNI supports the declaration of a Climate Emergency and believes that we should act with the urgency that that suggests.

In its response to Covid, the Executive has shown that it can deliver legislative and policy changes at pace not previously seen. The declaration of a Climate Emergency must be followed by swift and decisive action.

Our planning system must deliver new energy projects and infrastructure at an unprecedented pace. While RNI welcomes the Minister for Infrastructure’s forthcoming review of renewable energy planning policy, we are mindful that such reviews can take time to conduct and to implement the resultant changes.

It is vital that our current system delivers more efficiently. The AFRY [The Power of Renewables](#) study shows that a wind or solar farm typically spends twice as long in planning in NI when compared with GB. This must be addressed if we are to act with the required urgency that is suggested by the Assembly’s declaration of a climate emergency in February 2020.

Figure 10 – Typical duration for granting of wind and solar planning permission



Note: Granted includes applications that were granted (either initially, on appeal or by the Secretary of State), projects that are either operational but have no record of being granted or are under construction (both of which can thus be assumed to have planning permission), have now decommissioned or had planning granted but which has since expired.

Source: BEIS UK Renewable Energy Planning Database – UK nations; IWEA – Ireland.

Question 3: Net Zero Target

1. What are your views on the target set out in the Bill to achieve a Net Zero carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by the year 2045?

RNI notes that the Bill defines “Net Zero carbon” as “a net reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by at least 100% from the 1990 baseline”. RNI’s expertise is on energy, and we do not feel qualified to comment on other aspects of the economy e.g. agriculture.

RNI strongly believes that we can reach zero carbon power by 2035 and wider energy decarbonisation, including heat and transport, by at least 2045. Our members are ready to meet the increased electricity demand that will result from this. However we need policy makers to adopt the proposals we outlined previously.

In addition, RNI believes that embedding a Net Zero obligation in the Utility Regulator’s decision making will enable the transition and ensure that regulatory decisions are being made with Net Zero as a priority. This will be an important step to ensuring that the right regulatory framework exists to meet these targets.

RNI recognises that policy should be informed by evidence and believes that the lack of climate policy in NI to date has resulted in an absence of quality data with regards to our emissions and our ability to meet climate objectives.

RNI is aware of two key pieces of evidence available to inform decision making on climate policy in NI; the Committee on Climate Change's (CCC) *Sixth Carbon Budget* and the University of Manchester (UoM) [Setting Climate Commitments for Northern Ireland](#) paper.

While the CCC did not set out a pathway for Northern Ireland (NI) to reach net zero, RenewableNI would highlight that it does include a stretch target of at least 94% greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction by 2050. This contrasts with the CCC’s ‘balanced pathway’ of 82% GHG reduction by 2050. RNI does not believe that a balanced pathway is compatible with our view that we are in a Climate Emergency.

It would be better to 'fail' to reach the stretch target and achieve 90% reductions than to 'succeed' in reaching the 82% reduction target set out in the CCC balanced pathway. The urgency of climate change requires that we maximise reductions and that we act quickly in doing so.

In this context setting higher targets should be seen as a no regrets option and for that reason RenewableNI is supportive of a 2045 net zero target, while repeating our caveat on non energy emissions.

Higher, more ambitious targets send a locational signal to developers and investors, to invest in decarbonising technologies. Higher targets create more confidence in the market and will therefore attract investment and renewable development.

The CCC should be asked for further analysis of an NI net zero pathway given that they have stated:

"There is no purely technical reason why Net Zero is not possible in Northern Ireland. "

The UoM paper focuses on CO2 from energy and does not provide detailed analysis of non carbon emissions. However it provides a number of valuable inputs that supplement the CCC report and in some cases challenge its assumptions.

The UoM differs from the CCC approach in that it looks at NI's equitable share in relation to the Paris Agreement rather than the UK net zero target. It points out that the UK target allows for international carbon offsetting, something which the CCC recommends against. This is something that the AERA Committee should consider. RNI is opposed to the use of international carbon offsetting in achieving net zero and that NI should not look to export responsibility for meeting its climate objectives.

While less focused on a target date, the UoM analysis does suggest that NI could reach net zero CO2 by 2042. The CCC concludes that NI could reach net zero CO2 by 2050 but does not rule out achieving this by an earlier date.

We recommend that the Committee seeks the CCC's views on the UoM paper.

2. Do you think that the Net Zero emissions target is achievable?

Yes

No

Unsure

3. Do you think that the timescale to deliver the Net Zero emissions target is achievable?

Yes

No

Unsure

4. Do you think that the timescale outlined in the Bill to achieve Net Zero should be revised if circumstances change?

Yes

No

Unsure

Please tell us why.

RNI supports the 'non regression' clause within the Bill i.e. that targets should only be revised upwards. We cannot act too quickly but we are at risk of not acting quickly enough.

Again, accepting that we are in a Climate Emergency, urgency is key to effective mitigation of climate change. We are already seeing the type of feedback loops that climate scientists warned of e.g. a warmer climate is increasing forest fires which release carbon and reduce our ability to absorb it thereby furthering global warming.

Question 4: Climate Action Plans

Clause 3 of the Bill requires the government to produce Climate Action Plans on a 5-yearly basis to achieve the Net Zero Target. The Climate Action Plans will:

- Have annual targets for net greenhouse gas emissions, water quality, soil quality and biodiversity
- Outline measures to achieve the target including carbon budgets and nitrogen budgets

1. Tell us your views on requiring the government to produce Climate Action Plans.

RNI supports the introduction of five yearly Climate Action Plans (CAPs). The Climate Bill will set the timetable, CAPs are needed to outline the actions that are required. They should compel action across all departments and councils. For our climate response to be effective, it must be joined up.

We note that the draft Bill says that a Climate Action Plan must be produced “within 3 years of the date” that this Bill passes into legislation. This timeline is far too late. On the one hand we are declaring a Climate Emergency, but here we allow a further three years on top of this late piece of legislation before there is a coordinated approach to meeting Net Zero. It could potentially be 2025 before we see a Climate Action plan.

RNI strongly suggests that 3 years is reduced to 12 months to deliver a Climate Action Plan. Some sectors have already started the planning in these areas, such as the Energy Strategy that is due to be published later this year.

We believe carbon budgeting is an essential part of this and we welcome its inclusion in the Bill. Establishing a carbon budget process aligns NI with the processes already established in GB and Scotland, and with the process being established in ROI.

We note, however, that the Bill looks to establish this process on an annual basis. This is different to the 5-yearly process established in GB and proposed in ROI. Whilst any scheme is welcome, RNI’s view is that a 5-yearly process more sensibly aligns with the timescales over which change and emission reductions of scale are likely to be achieved. It also better aligns with business planning horizons. One year is, perhaps, too granular a timescale over which to drive the scale of change we need.

2. Do you think the proposed Climate Action Plans are an effective way of delivering the Net Zero target?

Yes

No

Question 5: Office of a Climate Commissioner

Clauses 5 and 6 of the Bill provide for the establishment of an independent Office of a Climate Commissioner in Northern Ireland that will:

- Lay annual reports on progress made against the Climate Action Plans
- Make annual legislative reports on the effectiveness and appropriateness of the Bill
- Make recommendations about how the aims of the Bill are being achieved
- Have the power to request access to persons and documentation as required to discharge their duties

1. Tell us your views on the establishment of a Climate Commissioner.

There is considerable expertise on the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) and a consistent UK wide approach is valuable for RNI's members, many of whom work across the UK (and Ireland).

That said, since the Climate Act in 2008, Northern Ireland has been allowed to sit on the periphery of UK policy in this area, as it makes up a small proportion of overall UK emissions. While it is welcome that the Agriculture and Environment Minister, Edwin Poots, has engaged the CCC to help establish an NI specific target, it is important that NI sets its own ambitions and that the NI Executive is accountable for NI's climate impact.

RenewableNI is open minded as to whether this is done through a Climate Commissioner or through a CCC which puts a greater focus on NI than it has done to date. Either way there is a need to develop on a stronger evidence base on Northern Ireland's climate emissions, the success of its mitigation measures and opportunities for decarbonisation.

RNI believes that the CCC is by a significant margin the most appropriate source of expertise available to NI. The CCC world-renowned expertise is a significant asset to NI as we set our climate targets and progress over the coming years. We believe it will provide certainty to business and those looking to invest that a credible body of expertise will be scrutinizing NI's plan and progress. It is therefore important that any NI Climate Commissioner works in concord with the CCC.

Question 6: Sectoral Plans

The Bill sets out that within the Climate Action Plans there will be specific policies and proposals in the following sectors to achieve the overall emissions target:

- energy production and supply (including for residential, public and district;
- heating and cooling purposes;
- transport (including shipping and aviation);
- infrastructure (including infrastructure for electric vehicular transport);
- business and industrial processes;
- residential and public (in relation to buildings in these sectors);
- waste management;
- land use and land-use change, including forestry; and
- agriculture

1. Do you agree with the proposal to have specific sectoral policies associated with the Climate Action Plans?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

2. What impact do you think that these sectoral plans will have in terms of helping to achieve the Net Zero target?

The renewable electricity sector has led the way on delivering clean energy and having already helped reduce power sector emissions by 45%, RNI members are ready to support the decarbonisation of heat and transport as these sectors electrify.

Having a clear pathway for each sector, along with the other policy interventions previously outlined, will create the conditions necessary for further investment in energy generation and associated infrastructure.

3. How do you think the above sectors might be affected by the proposals?

The renewable electricity sector will be required to at least double its capacity by 2030. RNI estimates that setting a 80% by 2035 renewable electricity target will stimulate over £1bn of private investment. RNI believes such a target is both achievable and desirable.

Question 7: Resource Implications

1. What do you think the resource implications of the Bill will be for:

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

RNI has noted that there seems to be a skills shortage with regards to planning officers in the NI Environment Agency. Timescales for projects and applications have been delayed because of understaffing/under-skilled in these departments. We urge government to consider this as a short-term priority that needs to be addressed if we are to meet targets outlined in this Bill.

The Northern Ireland Executive

Specific sectors of the Northern Ireland economy

The decarbonisation of power will be delivered through private investment as it has been for the passed 15 years or more. Setting the appropriate targets along with the extension of the CfD will ensure that investment is delivered at the necessary pace.

As highlighted previously, it is essential that our planning system is efficient and it must therefore be adequately resourced. In particular statutory consultees must have sufficient staffing to respond to applications in a timely manner.

A relatively modest investment by the NI Executive, along with the right policy interventions, will unlock over £1bn of private investment in new renewable generation.

2. What do you think are the most important issues for the government when making funding plans to help achieve the aims of the Bill?

When a Covid pandemic was declared, resources followed and the same must happen in respect of the Climate Emergency. We need to act with the same speed and departments and wider society should be sufficiently resourced to do so.

While the power system has largely been decarbonised without any disruption to consumers, the electrification of heat and transport will require individuals to change for example their car and their heating system. It is important that they are incentivised to do so and that vulnerable consumers are supported to ensure the many benefits of decarbonisation can be realised by as wide a group as possible.

Traditionally there were only three power generators in NI, there are now over 23,000 according to NIE Networks. This democratisation of energy must continue, to ensure a 'Just Transition'.

Question 8: Access to Specialist Advice

The Bill proposes that the UK Climate Change Committee (UK CCC) will provide advice to the Commissioner when they report annually against the Climate Action Plans.

1. Do you think that this is appropriate?

Yes

No

Unsure

2. Are there other sources of expertise that may be needed to inform progress to achieve the Net Zero target?

In the first instance NI policy should follow the evidence from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. In the UK, as well as the CCC, the Tyndall Centre also produces high quality evidence on climate change. However, it is important that we build on evidence specific to NI as the absence of NI climate targets in the 13 years since the UK Climate Act has meant we are behind in this regard.

Question 9: Responsibility on Public Bodies

The Bill places obligations on a wide range of organisations to help achieve the emissions targets and it will influence policy across a number of public Departments. This includes introduction of a scheme to track carbon usage that will be overseen by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

1. What are your views on the roles and responsibilities placed on public bodies as set out in the Bill?

It is key that we monitor local carbon emissions for any targets to be meaningful. This is a clear evidence gap and systems need to be developed in this area. RNI therefore supports the responsibilities on departments outlined in the Bill.

2. Do you think that there should be a lead responsible government Department for delivering the aims of the Bill?

Yes

No

Unsure

3. If you think there should be a lead Department, please tell us which one and why:

Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Department for Communities

Department for the Economy

Department of Education

The Executive Office

Department of Finance

Department for Health

Department for Infrastructure

Department for Justice

Why do you think this government Department should be responsible?

For the Climate Action Plans to be effective, resources must follow. The Executive Office has the power to pull all departments together to ensure that policy and resources are aligned.

4. What are your views on the implementation of a carbon usage-tracking scheme?

RNI believes this to be a sensible proposal.

Question 10: Transboundary Considerations

1. What are your views on how the Bill addresses transboundary issues in relation to Climate Change?

It is important that the transboundary impacts of activities in NI are considered. RNI believes that enabling a stronger price signal through carbon pricing would provide the right incentives in terms of transboundary issues. For example, applying a border charge to prevent the 'offshoring' of emissions.

As this is a legislative framework, there is little detail as to what this will be in practice. RNI would expect such detail to emerge in future CAPs and related policies.

2. Do you think that there should be a transboundary approach to Climate Change?

Yes

No

Unsure

Question 11: Rural Impact Assessment

1. Do you think it is important to assess the impact on rural communities of the proposals provided for in the Bill?

Yes

No

Unsure

2. What do you think is the best way to consider the potential rural impacts?

The energy transition can bring many benefits to rural areas. Wind farms are typically sited in rural areas with 26% of such investments staying in the local area therefore bringing benefits to areas with underdeveloped economies.

The small scale wind sector in particular has allowed many in rural areas to invest in generating their own energy. This sector supports 500 jobs with significant growth potential, as evidenced in the KPMG [Analysis on the Future Role of Distributed Generation in Northern Ireland](#).

Question 12: Additional Information

1. Are there any other measures not included in the Bill that you think should be included?

2. Do you have any other comments you would like to make about the Climate Change Bill?