

# Pre-Consultation Seeking Views on the Need for a Northern Ireland Climate Change Bill

*Comments by*

**Northern Ireland Environment Link**

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Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) is the networking and forum body for non-statutory organisations concerned with the environment of Northern Ireland. Its 62 Full Members represent over 90,000 individuals, 262 subsidiary groups, have an annual turnover of £70 million and manage over 314,000 acres of land. Members are involved in environmental issues of all types and at all levels from the local community to the global environment. NIEL brings together a wide range of knowledge, experience and expertise which can be used to help develop policy, practice and implementation across a wide range of environmental fields.

These comments are made on behalf of Members, but some members may be providing independent comments as well. If you would like to discuss these comments further we would be delighted to do so.

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NIEL welcomes the opportunity to comment on the need for a Northern Ireland Climate Change Bill. We endorse the Minister's view, expressed in the consultation document, that climate change is one of the most serious challenges facing the world, and Northern Ireland, today and in the coming decades. Action is urgently needed to limit the wide-ranging impacts that climate change will have on society (even those living in the temperate mid-latitudes). We believe that we have a responsibility to act both for the good of our own society, and for the global community of which we are a part.

### **Q1. Should Northern Ireland have a Climate Change Bill?**

NIEL believes that NI should have a Climate Change Bill. Legislation would act as a positive and necessary driver for change. A Bill would provide the framework necessary to guarantee an integrated and comprehensive approach to climate change mitigation and adaptation, ensuring that Northern Ireland's people and economy realise the benefits of developing a low carbon economy and protecting our infrastructure from inevitable climatic changes.

NI is specific enough in its societal and economic characteristics that we believe setting up our own legislative framework would be beneficial, allowing greater control of our own particular circumstances. It will bring to the forefront of politics, business and the public the reality that there are advantages to proactively addressing climate change issues and impacts.

NIEL has some concerns about the length of time that it takes to develop primary legislation in Northern Ireland – it could potentially take two years or more for a Climate Change Bill to make its way through the legislative process (assuming that it has a straightforward passage). The challenge of climate change is an urgent one – we therefore stress that work should start immediately on the Bill and on the secondary legislation that will inevitably follow, and that all Government departments need to start work on planning for reducing their emissions and those in the non-governmental sectors that they are involved with.

### **Q2. Is a long term target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions for NI necessary?**

Yes – a long term target is absolutely necessary. Legislation implies that a target is there to be achieved, and demonstrates that the government in NI takes climate change seriously and is committed to action. The target should be ambitious but achievable for NI (in line with the targets set in other parts of the UK i.e. an 80% reduction by 2050).

A strong target complements the Minister's vision of NI as a global leader in low carbon economies.

**Q3. Is an interim target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions for NI necessary?**

NIEL believes that an interim target(s) is necessary. The existence of interim targets makes the achievement of the long term target more likely – they set the trajectory for meeting that target.

While we recognise that establishing less ambitious interim targets in the short term is an attractive option, we would stress Lord Stern’s position – that it is *more economically beneficial to front-load change* (i.e. a steep interim target in the short term). NIEL suggests that 2020, at the latest, should be the first interim reporting date. It is also vital to recognise that early changes are both the most beneficial and the easiest to achieve; delaying action will cost more and, ultimately, make change more difficult.

**Q4. Should targets be set in primary legislation (the Bill) or in subordinate legislation?**

While setting targets in subordinate legislation would give more flexibility, this may not always be a positive thing. NIEL believes that having some overarching targets in primary legislation demonstrates greater commitment to act and is more likely to generate early and significant action. It may be reasonable to use subordinate legislation to fine-tune interim targets and to set sectoral targets based on evolving scientific evidence and technology.

**Q5. Should provision for an independent advisory body be included in a NI Climate Change Bill?**

NIEL believes that the existence of such an advisory body would be beneficial (if genuinely independent), and would facilitate greater cross-government advice and working in the area of climate change. A local committee would be useful in monitoring and reporting on progress against local targets. Close liaison and integrated membership of a local Committee with the UK Committee would be essential, with access to their expertise and research. The local body would not need to be large (indeed it could probably be a single individual, perhaps in an ombudsperson type role) or expensive, but should have significant status and authority.

**Q6. Should provision for reporting on adaptation measures by public bodies be included in a NI Climate Change Bill?**

Yes, NIEL believes that legislating implies / demands the need for public reporting / measurement of change.

Adaptation will eventually be the most important aspect of our response to climate change – thought is therefore needed as to how we can monitor how well we are adapting to climate change impacts. Mitigation has clear/unambiguous targets through emissions reduction –

similarly, there is a need for *adaptation targets* measuring behavioural response (perhaps a more qualitative approach than for mitigation).

**Q7. Should provision for reporting on mitigation measures by public bodies be included in a NI Climate Change Bill?**

Yes, NIEL believes that legislating implies the need for public reporting / measurement of change.

NIEL believes that undertaking mitigation measures should be a requirement for all public bodies as well as those industries which are reliant upon public monies. This includes our agricultural industry (the largest single contributor to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in NI) which receives significant public money. It is therefore appropriate that public goods in the form of reductions in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are derived from this investment.

**Q8. To which public bodies and/or statutory undertakers should the reporting duties apply?**

Reporting duties should apply to all public bodies. Ultimately, however, such duties should go beyond public bodies to all organisations. Reporting should be present and transparent across the board (though within NI's SME context, some tailoring would be needed to protect smaller businesses). As such, there would be a need for significant stakeholder engagement in introducing these measures (education, capacity building).

**Q9. Should provision for reporting on an adaptation programme to the Assembly be included in a NI Climate Change Bill?**

Yes. This would demonstrate a stronger support for adaptation-related action in the Bill. It should also make clear the consequences associated with not reporting.

NIEL suggests that reporting on a mitigation programme should also be included. It is important that the Assembly is fully involved in all action to deal with climate change and its possible outcomes, so that it may use the knowledge in shaping and delivering legislation more generally – climate change will affect everything that we do.

**Q10. Can you provide evidence on the impact the introduction of a Bill may have on economic structure, employment, performance and competitiveness relevant to NI?**

Certain sectors may resist the introduction of targets within the Bill. Thus, the Bill would need to consider sector-specific implications. That said, NIEL believes that the potential positive impacts on the wider economy are significant.

Considerable work is required to enable the electricity grid in NI to deal with an increased proportion of renewable energy. In addition, work needs to be done on establishing local 'shared delivery' of heat (e.g. Community level CHP). In the 2008 report, *Northern Ireland Renewable Energy Supply Chain*, the Carbon Trust estimated that as many as 33,000 jobs could be created in the renewables sector.

The Green New Deal Group demonstrated how 10,000 – 15,000 jobs could be created in retrofitting homes with energy efficiency measures. In the city of Freiburg, Germany, around 10,000 jobs have been created in the renewables and environmental services sector. Over 300,000 jobs have been created in the German renewables sector. Evidence for growth of the sustainable building industry in UK (even during recession) is given in the following report:

[http://www.worldgbc.org/files/1513/6608/0674/Business\\_Case\\_For\\_Green\\_Building\\_Report\\_WEB\\_2013-04-11.pdf](http://www.worldgbc.org/files/1513/6608/0674/Business_Case_For_Green_Building_Report_WEB_2013-04-11.pdf)

The report, *Low Carbon and Environmental Goods and Services: an industry analysis*, from the Department of Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform estimated the Northern Ireland market value of Low Carbon Environmental Goods and Services to be £3.3 billion with 1,620 companies employing 30,600 people. A Climate Change Bill would allow for significant expansion of this market.

The Bill would provide the opportunity for the private sector to lead positive change and stimulate competition. There is thus incentive for industry to lead now, rather than being caught on the wrong side of legislation/policy in the long run. Legislation provides the certainty, 'level playing field', and opportunity to compete internationally, which business requires.

**Q11. Do you have any comments in respect of the issues raised in this pre-consultation document or are there any important issues you feel have not been adequately covered?**

- The relationship between climate change and energy production and use should be elucidated in the Bill.
- The Bill should have a statement on potential for grants and assistance; support mechanisms are needed to enable and assist action.

- There is no mention in the consultation document of the need for a Land-use Strategy (as per the Scottish Model). Given the importance of Northern Ireland's natural environment as a carbon store and the significance of the agricultural industry this should be included in the Bill. In Scotland the relationship between land use and climate change has been considered and land use planning is an integral part of managing the net carbon budget. This land use planning is at national level through the Scottish Land Use Strategy, which is a requirement of the *Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009*, is integrated within Scotland's National Planning Framework (NPF2) and requires an integral mechanism within the Strategic Environmental Assessments that form part of all major spatial planning and land use decisions.
- There was no reference in the consultation document to the Marine Environment and Climate Change; this should be rectified.
- Planning structures are in place for renewables but little or no funding or finance is available from the banking sector to help industry take advantage of the huge opportunities available.