

## Reducing Emissions in Northern Ireland (2019) - NIEL Summary

The UK Committee on Climate Change Emissions Reduction report for Northern Ireland states that Northern Ireland has achieved a 16% reduction in emissions since 1990. However, emissions have fallen much more slowly in NI since the CC Act 2008 compared to the UK as a whole; emissions fell by 9% from 2008-2016 in NI, compared to a 27% fall for the whole of the UK.

In order for the UK to achieve the stated goal of 35% reduction in emissions on 1990 levels, Northern Ireland has important role to play. NI is currently in line to achieve a 32% reduction by 2030. The Committee has set out a number of focus areas for policy makers to help 'close the gap'. They include:

- The need to develop a route to market for new low-cost intermittent renewables, especially onshore wind, in the electricity sector.
- The post-CAP framework is an opportunity to more closely link financial support to agricultural emissions reduction and increased carbon sequestration, including afforestation.
- The rate of tree planting, which falls short of meeting the Committee's recommendations for the fifth carbon budget or the average rate targeted in Northern Ireland's most recent Forestry Strategy, should be prioritised.
- There is no policy support to incentivise consumers to install low-carbon heating, especially heat pumps, in homes off the gas grid. There is considerable potential to switch households off the gas grid from use of oil boilers to heat pumps.
- Policies to incentivise energy efficiency improvements in homes are largely targeted at low-income households. Northern Ireland should consider policy options to deliver an attractive package for able-to-pay householders aligned to trigger points (such as when a home is sold or renovated).
- More rapid deployment of electric vehicles, tighter conventional vehicles standards, and transport behaviour change.

A number of other policy observations have been teased out from the report. Some of these issues, which have wider environmental implications beyond reducing emissions, support existing sectoral policy asks, while others present new areas of opportunity. They include:

- There is a GB-wide commitment to remove all unabated coal fired power stations by 2025. The Committee recommends that this is replicated in NI.
- The NI Waste Strategy, Delivering Resource Efficiency, was produced in 2013. There are currently no targets beyond 2020. There is need for a new long-term waste strategy with new milestones and targets to 2050 which includes a commitment to ban food, paper/card, wood, textiles and garden waste from landfill by 2025 at the latest.
- There is a need for a strategic land management policy to determine the most appropriate use of land.
- Land use policies should promote transformational land uses and reward land owners for providing public goods that deliver climate mitigation and adaptation objectives. Policies should better reflect the value of the goods and services that land provides. Measures should include: low carbon farming practices, afforestation and forestry management,

restoration of peatlands, improved soil and water quality, reducing flood risks, improving the condition of semi-natural habitats.

- De-carbonisation efforts are stagnating in NI. For example there is no route to market for new low carbon energy generation. The strategic energy framework expires in 2020. Therefore, a new strategy is required to set out the long-term energy ambition to guide and progress decarbonisation of the energy sector.
- New vehicles in the public sector fleet should be low, or ultra-low emissions.
- The importance of sustainable transport plans must be strengthened throughout the design process and integrated into new developments with appropriate walking and cycling routes.
- The geographical size of NI presents an opportunity for more rapid uptake of electric vehicles. Adequate charging infrastructure is essential.
- The future inclusion of degraded peatland in the UK emissions inventory could add 9% to Northern Ireland's total emissions. Peatland protection and restoration should be prioritised.
- The way new homes are built and existing homes are retrofitted falls short of stated design standards, with consumers paying the price of for poor quality build and retrofit. To tackle this, greater levels of inspection and enforcement of building standards are required, alongside tougher penalties for non-compliance.
- The Northern Irish government could encourage central and local government agencies to adopt the UK Clean Growth Strategy voluntary public sector target of a 30% reduction in carbon emissions by 2020/21.