

# How the state can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change

## Submission from Transition Town Kinsale

1. What would a nation, which is a leader in tackling climate change look like?
2. What do we do well?
3. How are we doing so far in tackling climate change?
4. What does the state need to do?
5. Who are Transition Town Kinsale?
6. To conclude

### 1. What would a nation, which is a leader in tackling climate change look like?

It would be:

- equitable and inclusive;
- a caretaker for the environment;
- its economic growth would not be at a cost to society or to the environment;
- optimistic, but realistic about the future;
- solution focussed;
- innovative;
- it would trust the state to drive policies and directives that would fulfil its moral responsibility for climate justice;
- demonstrate a model of an effective participatory approach in decision making.

### 2. What do we do well?

Ireland, as a nation, has a track record of a commitment to global justice. The realisation that climate mitigation is ultimately about Ireland 'paying its fair share' will assist us in losing our 'sure it's grand approach'; from dragging our feet to being leaders in tackling climate change.

Ireland and its citizens have shown their ability to drive change. The Irish smoking ban in the work place was a model for others to follow and we transitioned from 'before to after' effortlessly despite the protests of a strong lobby group. The successful implementation was probably because most people wanted it, and it also built on previous legislation in this area.

In the same way, the transition to 'green policies' and sustainable economic development will be smooth if our awareness is raised to the benefits of a 'green' economy, and the consequences already taking place globally because of inaction. Education at every level will lead to effective roll out of good practice at a local level where global; EU and national policy meet the ground swell for these changes through public participation.

### 3. How are we doing so far in tackling climate change?

State agencies e.g. The Climate Change Advisory Council, The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are telling us we are not doing what we need to do; they state this categorically. Many other organisations are very critical of the lack of action by the state. Ministers have stated that we will not meet the targets we

have committed to under the Paris Agreement. Ireland is one of only two countries in the EU which will overshoot its 2020 targets for greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reductions. It also has the third highest emissions per capita in the EU. Transition Town Kinsale (TTK) would argue that this is not acceptable for moral reasons and because of these international commitments.

#### **4. What does the state need to do?**

- The state needs to acknowledge that it is not doing enough to tackle climate change, and the consequence of this both nationally and globally.
- The state must insure that we all benefit from the green economy and that any lifestyle costs are shared in an equitable way.
- The state needs to show strong leadership and develop policies and directives based on our Climate Adaption and Mitigation Plans with clear commitments which are resourced for implementation. Communities across Ireland and sectors (e.g. energy, agriculture, transport) need to work collaboratively to develop action plans to achieve these commitments. An effective participatory approach at local level will enable communities to develop these plans. County Development Plans need to have measurable outcomes listed; as do Local Area Plans.

Investment and funding over the lifecycle of each Regional Plan needs to be prioritised in context of Ireland's Mitigation Plan, which outlines how Ireland will achieve targets for 2050, and the forthcoming National Adaption Framework. Adaptation strategies need to develop and express a vision for a well-adapted local community that is resilient to the impacts of climate change (Ref. Climate Act - National Adaptation Framework on Local Adaptation Plans). Climate change is inevitable due to emissions already released into the atmosphere so Ireland need to adapt to reduce exposure to climate risks and reduce emissions at the same time.

The EPA and the Climate Advisory Council describe what is required as "a major societal and economic transformation". The Advisory Council was clear that the National Mitigation Plan should not just focus on our EU targets for 2020 and 2030 but "should outline the roadmap to achieve the 2050 national objective". That objective, set out in the National Policy Position on Climate Action, is an 80% aggregate emissions reduction between the buildings, energy, and transport sectors, and carbon neutrality in agriculture.

To be consistent with the national 2050 objective of an 80% cut in net emissions, this will require year-on-year cuts of 5% per annum starting in 2017. Ireland is already heading towards paying non-compliance costs. This money would be better spent on investing in the future economy.

Each County Plan needs to refer to how the National Mitigation Plan and the National Adaptation Framework will be devolved locally. Energy generation; land use planning; transport; housing; waste management; economic development and agricultural practices, all need to be considered in this context. Integrated planning and collaborative work will be required to achieve this between many stakeholders and TTK hopes that processes will be put in place to facilitate this. Aspirations in National Policy Documents need to be resourced actions in our County Development and Local Area Plans.

For example, as Cork County is the largest producer of energy in Ireland, could it also be the leader in the conversion to a sustainable energy supply and a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. Community sustainable energy generation needs to be considered and supported and land should be zoned for the development of same. At the launch of the Energy White paper (2015) the Minister for Energy, Alex White, stated "The State will provide the supports to enable energy consumers to become active energy citizens.

Our energy system is going to change from one that is almost exclusively led by Government and utilities, to one where individuals and communities will increasingly be participants in energy efficiency and renewable energy generation and distribution. It's a story that will impact on all our people."

All planning for infrastructure should be carried out in context of climate resilience. Though Ireland already anticipates not reaching its emission reduction commitments in 2020 what we do in the next 4 years will impact on our ability to make our committed targets for 2030 and beyond. Ireland also needs to adapt to reduce exposure to climate risks. The economic argument is to do it right 'first time' rather than the more expensive option of fixing later. [Ref. Global Commission report on the economy and climate change (2016), The Sustainable Infrastructure Imperative]

Our agricultural policies now need to enable the transformation required in this sector. Without this transformation, it will be very difficult to achieve our commitment for GHG emission reduction for 2030 and beyond.

TTK would also propose that:

- only responsible and sustainable investment (i.e. climate proofed and low carbon) should be endorsed by the state going forward e.g the Fossil Fuel Divestment Bill should be brought before the Dáil;
- a person should be appointed who is responsible for enabling the implementation of the commitments, which are made under The National Mitigation Plan and Adaptation Framework, in each county.

TTK would also like to note that people in our community, living in areas which are considered to be at risk of increased flooding, are already experiencing the economic consequences, through the non-availability of house-insurance to a prospective buyer of their home. TTK would support, as a long-term strategy for flood prevention, green engineering and 'soft strategies' such as forestation in the river catchment area; wetland management, consideration of alternative agricultural techniques and protection of green spaces as per the Flood Directive.

These green engineering or soft-strategies reduce the need to build flood protection and will maximise the natural capacity to 'soak up' or attenuate water in order to protect critical infrastructure from flooding. This is critical given future climate change scenarios which predict increases in precipitation and rising seas levels [Ref. Ireland's Sixth National Communication to the UNFCCC (2014)]. Each Local Area Plan needs to address this issue, with resourced actions that will be taken over the next 5 years.

## 5. Who are Transition Town Kinsale?

Transition Town Kinsale is a voluntary community organisation which was set up in 2006 to look at how the area of Kinsale could adapt to the global challenges of climate change and peak oil. It was the birthplace of the global transition movement (over 1000 towns/ cities/ districts in 43 countries). Its vision is a sustainable and resilient town. It is a member of Transition Ireland and Northern Ireland (TINI).

Along with many other communities across the island of Ireland it has run events and initiatives to promote green awareness and sustainable development. To involve all citizens in the 'transition' to a low carbon economy, so as to achieve our climate action commitments, community engagement needs to be facilitated by the state.

In Transition Town Kinsale's recent Submission to our Local Area Plan we called for the integration of National Mitigation Plan (2017) through:

- Climate action commitments in our Local Area Plan;
- Community energy generation;
- Climate resilient infrastructure;
- Responsible and sustainable development;
- Appointment of person responsible for the implementation of the commitments which are made under The National Mitigation Plan and National Adaption Framework in our Local Area Plan (2017-2022).

The National Mitigation Plan needs to drive this and the state needs to facilitate implementation though public partnership.

## **6. To Conclude**

Mary Robinson, a past-president of Ireland, is a global leader in tackling climate change. Ireland, as a nation, could be a leader also. The National Mitigation and National Adaptation Framework could be more than 'what we should be doing' documents. The National Planning Framework currently being developed needs to visualise and strategise for the "major societal and economic transformation" needed to tackle climate change, described by the EPA and the Climate Advisory Council. Such a framework will then lead to implementation in our communities through effective public participation; integrated planning and collaborative work between many stakeholders in different sectors. With the state putting the processes in place to facilitate this.

The health and well-being benefits, as well as the economic benefits, of mitigating and adapting to climate change are being established. Acknowledgement of our moral responsibility leaves us no choice but to shift from aspiration to implemented actions towards achieving our climate action commitments. The 'Smoking Ban', alluded to above, was society adapting to a policy driven by government. A similar societal push, to that which helped drive the legislation for same sex marriage, is needed to drive our green transition. We can all play our part in this.