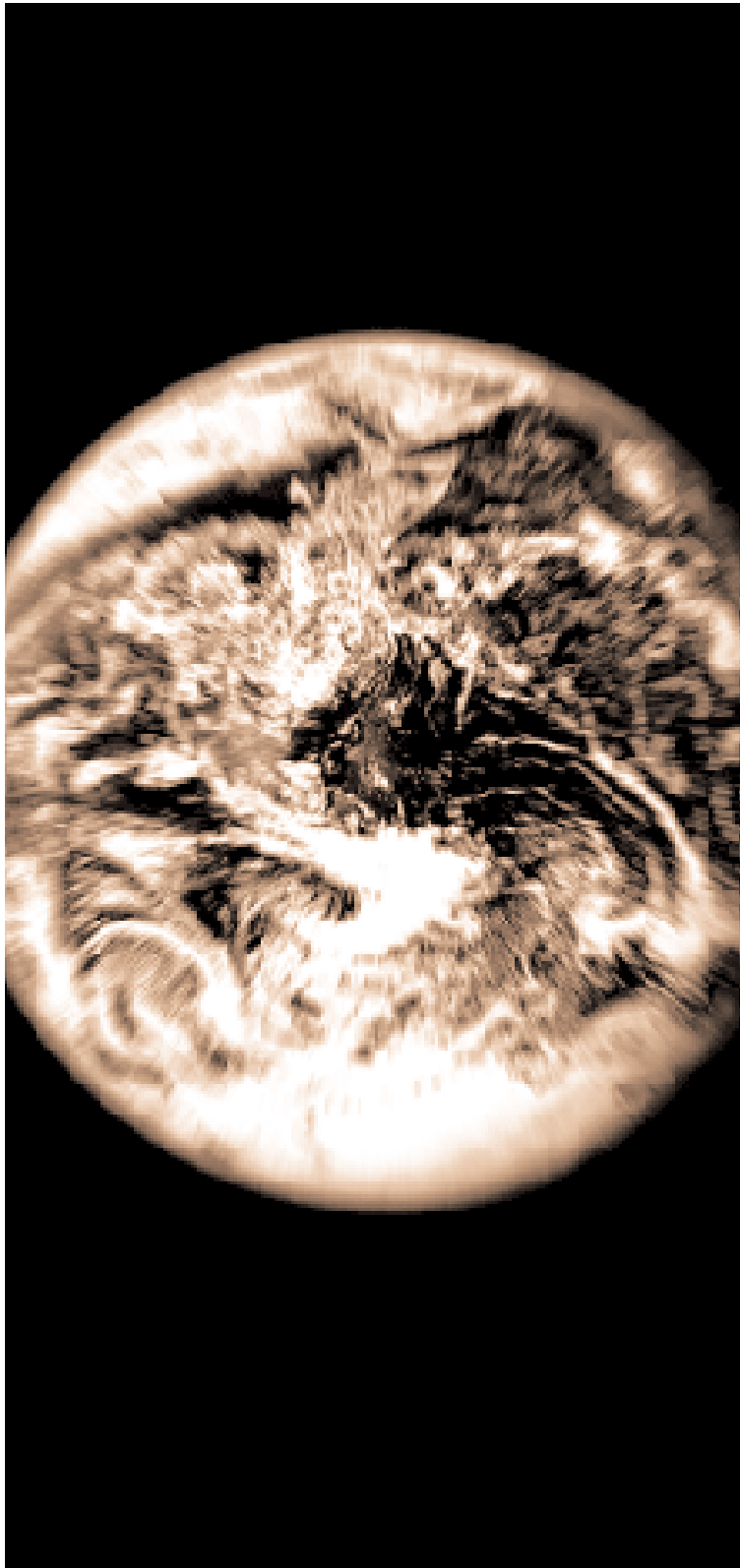


National Climate Change Strategy

The Plain Guide



A grim future unless we change

Ireland could face flooding, more frequent storms, wetter winters and summer droughts as a consequence of global climate change. The changes will be unprecedented and will create a very different living and working environment. This changed climate won't simply be an inconvenience, it will radically alter the Irish economy threatening our prosperity and economic well-being. Globally, other countries are likely to experience even more traumatic shifts in weather and climate, putting pressure on peoples, societies and resources. In short, it is the most significant and threatening global environmental problem facing humanity.

These changes have come about in the most part as a consequence of human activity. Everything from farming, through manufacturing to simply running your car or heating your home can generate greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄) and nitrous oxide (N₂O). We are producing more and more of these each year. They rise in the atmosphere and blanket the earth in a kind of insulating layer – keeping in the heat. While this may seem a welcome development for Ireland now, over time it raises the world's temperature resulting in potentially catastrophic climate change.

Global commitment to act

At a UN climate conference held in December 1997, in Kyoto, Japan, the industrialised world agreed an historic Protocol to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to protect the environment. The Irish Government agreed to legally binding limits to the production of these harmful polluting gases here in Ireland. The National Climate Change Strategy turns that agreement into a programme for action.

Ireland's account already in the red

The Kyoto agreement used 1990 as its benchmark year. In that year Ireland produced approximately 54 million tonnes of greenhouse gases. Since then, fuelled by our tremendous economic growth, our output has increased by over 20%. At

current rates this will grow to close to 40% above the 1990 figure by 2010. However, as one of the richest countries in the world, we have agreed to keep our emissions to just 13% above the 1990 level by 2008 to 2012. Already, therefore, our account is in the red.

The Government is committed to action – equally shared

The Government is legally bound to take action that will reduce emissions. The **National Climate Change Strategy** describes how we will achieve this. The Strategy stresses that the burden must be shared equitably. All sectors will have to take action but none will have to bear an unequal share of the reductions. Some of the savings will come through the promotion of sustainable development – that is development that does not damage the environment through its activities. The Strategy also sees early action as a key to reducing the impact of climate change. The necessary action must, of course, protect national economic

development and competitiveness.

In broad terms the strategy proposes a number of distinct approaches:

- 4 Financial incentives such as tax breaks for 'green initiatives' and disincentives for activities that pollute,
- 4 Policies targeted at helping specific sectors reduce their impact,
- 4 Co-ordinated action with our EU and other international partners to reduce greenhouse gas levels,
- 4 Buying and selling emission allowances internationally to give priority to the least cost reductions and to deliver the maximum environmental benefit.

What type of changes will this bring about?

From 2002 onwards taxes will begin to take into account the amounts of greenhouse gases produced in any activity. Tax changes will be phased in so that sectors can adjust incrementally to the changes.



The energy we use

Our energy sources will change. The Government will put in place policies to support the phase out of coal in electricity generation at Moneypoint and switch towards less carbon rich fuels. Much more of our energy will come from renewable resources such as wind. Efficient use of energy will also be more important. We will also make better use of the energy that we generate by using waste heat from electricity production for industrial processes or even to heat our homes and offices.

The way that we travel

The number of cars and trucks on our roads has rocketed in the past decade and with it the amount of greenhouse gases coming out exhaust pipes. In future, the Vehicle Registration Tax will favour fuel-efficient cars. The National Car Test will help promote better fuel combustion and provide valuable information on the health of the nation's car fleet. The European Commission has reached an agreement with the major car manufacturers to reduce CO₂ emissions by a quarter in the period from 1995 to 2008/9. In future too, new cars will have a fuel economy label so that buyers will be aware of the environmental cost of cars that they buy.

These initiatives will not reduce sufficiently the gases produced by traffic. So, there will also be increased investment in public transport, reducing the number of car journeys; we will have better management of traffic; and, greater residential densities will be promoted with services, amenities and public transport planned to be within easy reach.

Our homes and workplaces

Our homes will also have to change. New building regulations will reduce energy consumption in new houses by up to 20% in 2002 with further savings following by 2005. The New House Grant will be redesigned to encourage



sustainable building and the Government will take action to support low energy housing projects. Homeowners will be encouraged to reduce their energy consumption with improvements such as double glazing, improved insulation, using more efficient appliances etc. The Government proposes to introduce 'Energy Efficiency Certificates' for houses built before 1991. Those selling their house will have to get such a certificate from a competent contractor. The certificate will show the house's annual energy use, the work needed to reduce this and future savings from carrying it out.

Commercial buildings will also face monitoring, with a mandatory energy rating system to show the energy cost as an overall rental. Firms will be encouraged to adopt internationally recognised energy efficiency standards when refurbishing their premises. Simple changes such as better insulation, using windows for ventilation and turning off unnecessary lights can have a profound impact on a firm's energy demand.



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Forests and farms

Agriculture and forestry can make a major contribution to reducing greenhouse gases. Plants use CO₂ as a food source, taking it out of the atmosphere, and trees store the carbon in their trunks, branches and roots. The Strategy envisages that the current forestry programme will fully achieve its planting target and that this programme will be intensified. In addition, the Strategy recommends that there should be closer ties between agriculture and forestry to promote additional tree planting on farms.

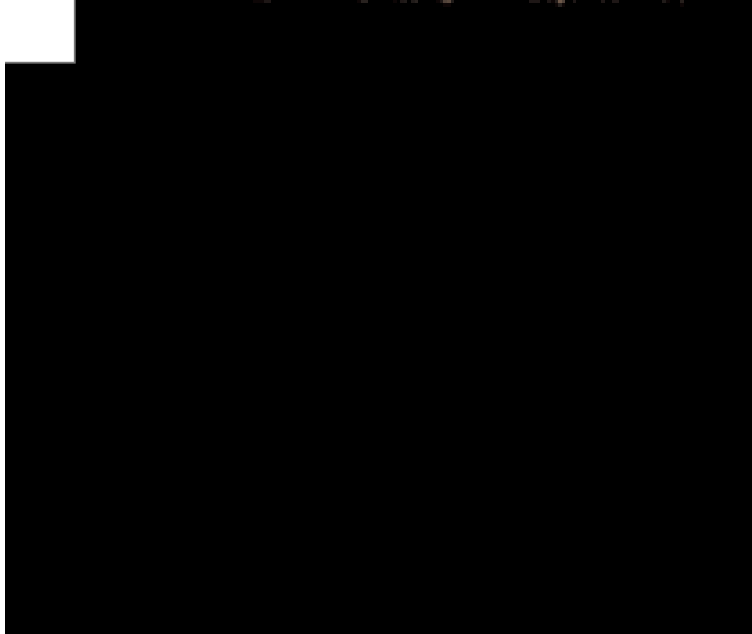
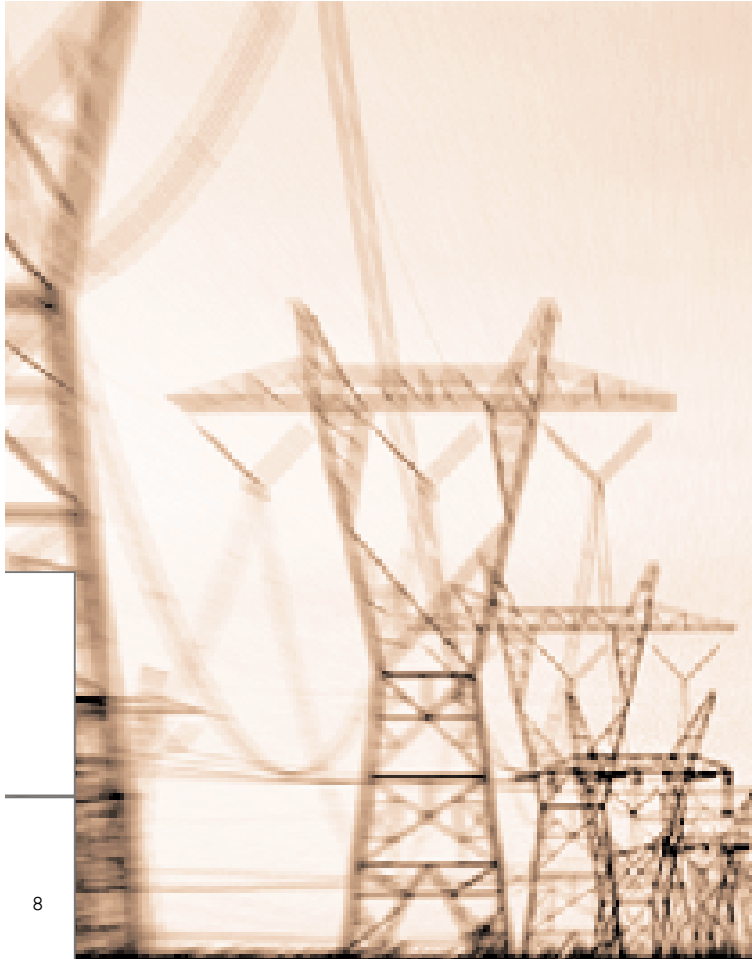
Cattle produce methane as they digest grass and feed. In fact, they are the main source of this greenhouse gas. The Strategy envisages reducing methane from cattle by the equivalent of a 10% reduction in the projected herd size. This will be achieved by a balance between reductions in the herd size and measures such as feeding regimes that

reduce emissions and earlier finishing of animals. The Strategy also sees farmers making greater use of agricultural waste and biomass (plants grown specifically for burning) for energy production. In addition the Strategy sees farmers using less nitrogen-based fertilisers to reduce nitrous oxide emissions from the soil.

Working with industry

There will be a range of measures aimed at helping industry reduce greenhouse gas emissions. These will include negotiated agreements with industry where companies will earn tax benefits for compliance. Industry supports will be reassessed to ensure that they favour energy efficient firms. The Irish Energy Centre will expand its programmes geared towards promoting more efficient energy use in industries and commercial and services sectors.

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Delivering the strategy

Government and State agencies have already begun work aimed at implementing this Strategy and delivering the necessary reductions in emissions. The Minister for the Environment and Local Government will assess progress regularly with intensive reviews every two years.

The Strategy sees the local authorities as key to achieving the target reductions set. Their waste management plans will ensure that those generating waste pay the full cost of waste collection, treatment and disposal. The strategy encourages local authorities to use their pivotal, local position to act as an agent for change in their areas.

Ultimately, we all share the responsibility to reduce the levels of greenhouse gases produced. Our choices as consumers, commuters, companies, workers, farmers or foresters can make a difference.



Finding out more

Copies of the Strategy have been sent to all libraries in the country. It can be purchased from the Government Sales Office, Sun Alliance House, Molesworth Street, Dublin 2, price £10.

The Executive Summary can be obtained free of charge from the Department of the Environment and Local Government, Air/Climate Section, Custom House, Dublin 1, Tel: 8882000, LoCall: 1890 202021 or from the offices of ENFO, 17 St Andrew's Street, Dublin 2, Tel: 8882001, LoCall: 1890 200191

The Strategy is also on the internet at the Department of the Environment and Local Government website: www.environ.ie

The address for the Strategy is
<http://www.environ.ie/climatechange.html>
and it can be downloaded for free.