

Stop Climate Chaos briefing for supporters – General Election 2011

In 2010 we made significant progress in Irish climate policy and we want to make sure that progress is built on as a result of the General Election. 86 of the 183 TDs who were in the Dáil last year signed the Stop Climate Chaos “Climate Commitment” supporting a strong climate law and a plan to make Ireland’s financial contribution to addressing climate change separate and additional to overseas aid. By the end of the year the Government had decided that 2010’s climate money would be mostly additional to overseas aid, but they made no decision about this year or beyond. Moreover, two climate Bills had been published, one stress-tested by the civil service and agreed by the Cabinet and the other drafted by an Oireachtas committee with all-party support. With the dissolution of the Dáil there wasn’t adequate time for either Bill to be properly debated or become law. Now we have to make sure that the momentum isn’t lost because of the Election and that the new Government and Dáil move quickly to pass a strong climate law and also enshrine best practice on climate finance for good. Politicians only tend to think that issues are important if they get asked about them on the doorsteps. Make sure they are reminded how important climate change is by hearing about it from you. Help us make sure everyone running for election to the Dáil commits in writing to these policies by asking canvassers and candidates who call to the door the following:

Ask candidates and canvassers on your doorstep three simple questions

- 1. Will they and their party seek and support the passing of a fair and effective climate change law this year?**
- 2. Will they and their party seek and support a plan ensuring that Ireland’s financial contribution to addressing climate change is separate from and additional to the overseas development aid (ODA) budget?**
- 3. Will they sign the Stop Climate Chaos “Candidate Commitment” to show they are serious on the issue?**

The Candidate Commitment, www.stopclimatechaos.ie/download/pdf/candidate_commitment_2011.pdf, has four key points. The background and content of each point is outlined below.

1. The climate law will provide for the setting of legally-binding 5-year targets in the form of carbon budgets, to put Ireland on the path to reduce our emissions by at least 80% by 2050

The European Union says that “developed countries will need to have cut their emissions by 80-95% by 2050”¹ if we are to contain climate change. This is based on the scientific findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. An 80% reduction target for developed countries was agreed by the G8 in 2009². A legally binding 80% reduction target for 2050 is enshrined in the UK Climate Change Act, and was included in the draft laws (Bills) published by both the Fianna Fail / Green Party Government and the all-party Oireachtas committee on climate change late last year. To be effective any climate law must provide for interim targets to focus the mind of every Government along the way and drive them to introduce innovate and effective policies to reduce emissions. The maximum Government term is 5 years so the interim targets should be no more than 5 years apart. The best way to express these targets is as 5-year carbon budgets in the same way our Kyoto target is expressed for the five years 2008-2012 as “total allowable emissions of 314.18 Mt CO₂eq”³

¹ “Roadmap for a low carbon economy by 2050” http://ec.europa.eu/clima/consultations/0005/background_info_en.pdf

² <http://www.america.gov/st/peacesec-english/2009/July/20090709153615esnamfuak0.3577082.html>

³ Page 7 of http://www.epa.ie/downloads/pubs/air/airemissions/GHG_1990-2009_Provisional_2011.pdf

2. These targets to be met domestically without buying offset credits overseas

- The Stop Climate Chaos 2010 “Climate Commitment” signed by 86 TDs from all parties contained this commitment. The Government Bill published in December was notable for the fact that it did not allow the use of overseas offsets to meet the targets in the Bill.
- Buying offset credits overseas means we are not investing sufficiently in emission reductions here and are therefore not investing enough in the greener economy that we can all benefit from.
- Credits bought overseas do not ensure credible emissions reductions. This is because it is almost impossible to prove that most offsetting projects would not have happened anyway without the offset finance- i.e. that they are “additional”. Without this guarantee the net effect is that greenhouse gas emissions will continue to increase- because the credit allows the developed country to continue polluting. Even if a project achieved truly additional carbon savings, it is often impossible to calculate accurately how much carbon a project is saving. This is because credits are calculated by judging action against hypothetical futures- a guess of how much carbon would have been emitted without the extra finance. Because it is so difficult to know if they are achieving any real savings, unlimited access to credits would therefore fatally undermine the achievement of any emission reduction target.
- It is questionable whether credits bought overseas make a positive contribution to sustainable development in the developing countries in which they are purchased. In many cases offsetting is not helping developing countries take a low-carbon path. In fact, perversely, a large proportion of offset revenues are subsidising carbon-intensive industries, or projects building fossil-fuel power stations. Offsetting can create financial incentives for developing countries not to implement strong climate policies. This is because only projects that are not required by regulation are supposed to qualify as offsetting projects: with the effect that the offsetting market actually provides a financial *disincentive* to governments passing progressive legislation.

3. An independent climate change commission to advise Government, with the power to publish its own reports.

- The Stop Climate Chaos 2010 “Climate Commitment” signed by 86 TDs from all parties contained this commitment. However, in the recent Government Bill the publication of the advisory reports was subject to the consent of the Government and to how and when the Government decided to publish them.
- Making the advice and recommendations of the Commission publicly available by the Commission itself, rather than kept secret at the whim of a minister, will ensure greater transparency and accountability in government decisions relating to climate change actions.

4. The candidate will support a plan ensuring that Ireland’s financial contribution to addressing climate change is separate from and additional to the overseas development aid (ODA) budget.

- The new Government should make a clear and firm commitment to ensuring our climate finance contributions are completely separate and additional to our overseas aid commitments of 0.7% of national income. 70% of what the outgoing Government made available in 2010 was new and additional money. It came from the Environment Fund in the Department of the Environment.
- Vulnerable people should not have to choose between health and education on the one hand or protecting themselves against climate change on the other. Rich countries bear historical responsibility for causing climate change. We therefore have a duty to provide climate finance in addition to our overseas aid commitments.