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Holding Government & Society to Account for Climate Action

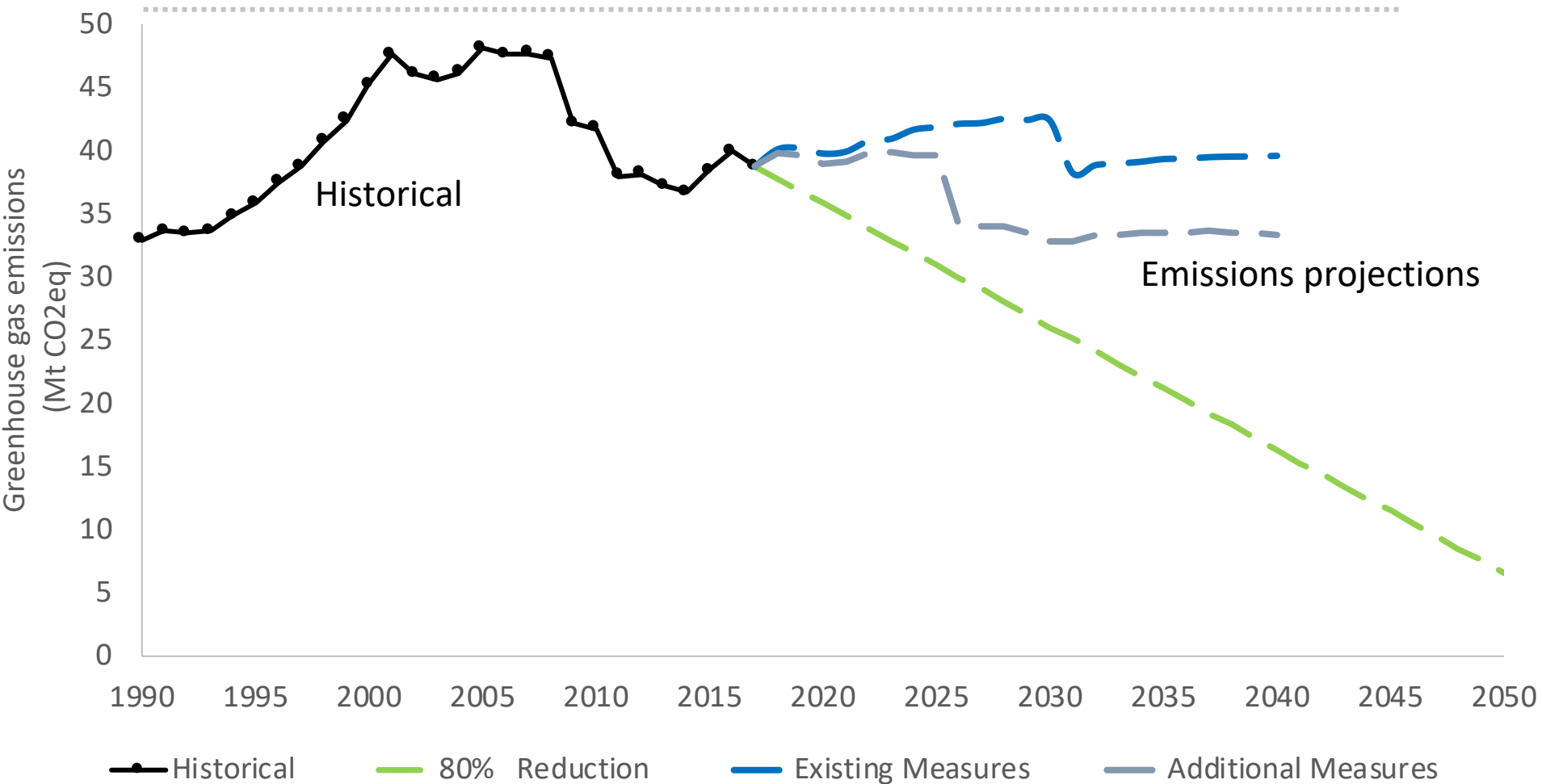
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Background

Council's Role:

- Review and advise government on how to make Ireland a low-carbon, climate-resilient and environmentally-sustainable economy and society by 2050
- Looking for least cost solutions

Progress Against Targets



Some Significant Progress

1. Glass half full rather than half empty

- Climate Action Plan
- Oireachtas Committee Report
- Commitment to rising carbon tax
- Improved governance & commitment

2. Still a long way to go:

- Emissions are rising
- Must reduce emissions by 40% by 2030
- Need to be carbon neutral by 2050
- All of this needs policies and implementation
- Major challenge for next government
- All sectors must take action

Climate Change – the Challenge

- **Dramatic changes because of human behaviour**
 - Changes are happening now
 - More will take decades to play out
 - Safe stopping distance is very long
- **Impact more severe as century progresses**
 - The burden will fall more heavily on coming generations
 - Reason for taking action – altruism, avoid impacts.
 - However there will also be immediate benefits for us today – air quality, better insulated homes etc.

Climate Change – the Challenge

- Challenge for policy
 - For other policy challenges - can form coalition of beneficiaries
 - Take action on climate change today – many of the biggest beneficiaries are not yet born and have no votes
- Climate change is a moral/ethical question
 - Action is required for benefits which may not be immediate - significant costs now to avoid higher costs in future

Communicating Climate Change Challenge

- The Science is well understood, but complex
- No simple answer
 - No “silver bullet”, but urgent action needed
- Many distractions
 - Brexit, Housing shortages, beef prices etc.
 - Politicians are human and can only work 24 hours a day. Getting necessary attention is difficult.
- How to communicate
 - Human behaviour – complex response to information
 - Ability of people to absorb information
 - Moment of inspiration does not necessarily produce lifetime of action
 - The role of the market as a simple signal vital
 - However, the market is always imperfect. Many other approaches needed.

Distributional Effects

1. Essential if going to get buy-in
2. A focus in recycling carbon tax
3. Consider effects on some workers & sectors
4. International issue – “Just Transition”

Agriculture & Land Use

1. Agriculture accounts for over a third of emissions so agriculture must change
2. Objective of Council recommendations:
 - Enhance farm incomes and security, while substantially reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the sector: a win-win
3. Considerable opportunities exist in the Agriculture & Land Use sectors to address climate change
 - Will provide multiple co-benefits to society and safeguard farm income

Agriculture & Land Use

1. Teagasc: implement their menu of measures
 - Further scientific developments may help
2. Need more by 2030: must reduce cattle numbers
 - The current trend of rising cattle numbers is unsustainable. A reduction in the national herd is necessary to reduce absolute emissions from Agriculture: reduce herd by between 0.5 million and 1.5 million animals, reducing dependence on beef.
3. Appropriate land use absorbs carbon
 - By using the land for other purposes this would enhance the level and security of farm incomes

Agriculture & Land Use

1. The ongoing drainage of peat for extraction and other land use is unsustainable.
 - Incentives to encourage the appropriate management of degraded peatlands are required - CAP reform
2. Social implications of actions should be addressed to ensure a just transition.
 - Farming and rural communities should benefit

Verification

- There are a range of measures that can make a difference
 - In agricultural production - Teagasc
 - In alternative land use to capture carbon
- To be counted as a reduction in net emissions:
 - Must be scientifically proven
 - Must be verified

Getting the Price Right

1. Carbon Tax is a vital instrument

- Signals to us all that we should consume and emit less
- Easy to understand

2. Government gets the revenue

- To compensate vulnerable & invest in reducing emissions
- If used to reduce other damaging taxes – GNI higher

3. Sends a message for investment and R&D

- Companies profit if they invent carbon free technologies
- Likely high price of carbon (tax) drives research
- Electric cars, solar electricity, wind, etc.

Impact of change on rural Ireland

1. Beef farming is not profitable and prospects poor

- A change in land use can raise farm income and capture carbon

2. Carbon tax

- Affects commuters to cities.
- However, over next few years commuters will have a choice
- Otherwise effects not very different in urban and rural areas

3. Changing land use

- Research shows forestry and farming have similar employment footprints

Adaptation

1. Ireland has experienced several extreme weather events in recent years which have shown the vulnerabilities of our society and economy
2. Investment in adaptation requires partnership between government and the private sector – much of the adaptation must be done by companies and households
3. Decisions must consider a range of global warming scenarios, including even higher warming than 2°

Adaptation

4. Sectoral adaptation plans and local authority adaptation strategies will play a key role in increasing climate resilience.
 - However, key areas, including our coasts, housing and building standards and planning are not being addressed
5. Government must raise the profile of adaptation and incorporate it into coherent policy on investment
 - How to prioritise across public investment – e.g. flood protection
 - Example: storm in October 2017 knocked out water – an issue for electricity as well as water utilities

Conclusions

- Ireland remains off course to address climate change
- Adaptation to the impacts of climate change essential by ALL sectors
- Opportunities exist in the Agriculture and Land Use sectors, but urgent action is required. Appropriate policies can simultaneously substantially reduce emissions and enhance farm incomes
- The Carbon Tax must increase to provide the necessary signal to enable transition
- Integrating a just transition into climate policy can add depth and assure public support for action