

Climate Action & Low Carbon Development Bill

The draft text of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill was published on the 7th October 2020.

The key element of the Bill includes:

- (i) Establishes a legally binding carbon neutral target by 2050.
- (ii) Annually revised Climate Action Plan.
- (iii) Strengthens the role of the Climate Change Advisory Council including proposing carbon budgets commencing 1st January 2021, every 5 years.
- (iv) Local Authorities are required to prepare individual Climate Action Plans.
- (v) National Long-Term Climate Action Strategy to be prepared at least every decade.
- (vi) Gives stronger oversight and accountability to the Oireachtas through a new Climate Action Committee.

To read the full Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill click [here](#).

What is carbon neutrality?

Carbon neutrality refers to achieving net zero carbon dioxide emissions, by balancing carbon dioxide emissions with carbon removal. In order to achieve net zero emissions, all Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions have to be counterbalanced by carbon sequestration.

The agriculture sector is required to reduce emissions by between 10% and 15% by 2030. There are no additional sector specific targets in the Bill. However, the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine are required to develop a plan to contribute to the climate neutral target.

To achieve the objective of carbon neutrality the Bill explicitly references Article 2 of the Paris Agreement which states, in part, that the increasing climate resilience and lower greenhouse gas emissions must be done in a manner that does not threaten food production.

Factors relevant to farming

The Bill lists a number of factors that must be considered when achieving carbon neutrality. The factors most relevance to farming are:

- (i) Requirement for flexibility to take advantage of new opportunities in innovation, emerging technologies and evolving science.
- (ii) The risk of substantial and unreasonable **carbon leakage** as a consequence of measures introduced, whereby business is transferred due to cost of climate compliance to a country with less restrictive policies with regard to greenhouse gas emissions.
- (iii) The special economic and social role of agriculture to be considered.

- (iv) The distinct characteristics of biogenic methane will be fully recognized.

Carbon budgets

The Climate Change Advisory Council (CCAC) shall propose a carbon budget to be approved by Government for a period of 5 years commencing on 1st January 2021 and ending 31st December 2025. A revised carbon budget will be prepared for each subsequent 5-year period.

The carbon budgets will include all greenhouse gases and will allocate emission ceilings for agriculture, this is referred to as a decarbonisation target range.

The decarbonisation target range will provide a clear signal and pathways to drive future investment in the sustainable agricultural, as well as stimulating investment in renewable energy, the circular economy, green and blue infrastructure, and the bio-economy.

Climate Action Plan & Strategies

The Bill puts into law a commitment for net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, however the sector specific actions will be contained in the following:

Climate Action Plan will set out a roadmap including sector specific actions that should be taken up to remain within the carbon budget and decarbonisation target. The existing Climate Action Plan is required to be revised annually.

Long Term Climate Action Strategy will set out projected sector specific greenhouse gas emissions reductions and the enhancement of sinks. A national strategy must be developed at least every ten years.

Local Authority Climate Action Plan each local authority is required to make a 5-year plan for their area. The plan will include both mitigation and adaptation measures.

National Adaptation Framework is to be prepared for each sector to take appropriate action to prevent or minimise the damage they can be caused by the adverse effects of climate change.

What next?

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill is draft legislation. Before the Bill can be enacted, it must be passed by both Dáil Éireann and the Seanad Éireann. In order to be passed, a Bill must go through several distinct Stages and be debated in each House.