

***The Future We Need* Submission on The Heads of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Bill**

30 April, 2013

Introduction:

The inter-congregational group of religious, *The Future We Need*, was set up in Ireland to promote education and advocacy on sustainable development issues locally and globally. The group consists of the Sisters of Mercy, Presentation Sisters, Franciscan Friars, UNANIMA and the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) and was formed after the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) that took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 2012. Together, with our Associates, we represent approximately 11,000 people in Ireland and approximately 80,000 people worldwide. Members of our group belong to congregations with Special Consultative Status at the Economic and Social Council at the United Nations (UN) which informs our work at national level.

We recently sent a submission to the Irish Government based on the impending creation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The purpose of the SDGs is to address the universal challenges of poverty eradication, environmental protection and sustainable consumption and production. We also sent a submission to the Environmental Protection Agency recently in relation to the proposed Hydraulic Fracturing (fracking) or Unconventional Gas Exploration and Extraction (UGEE) in certain counties of Ireland. Many of our members live and work in these counties and have serious concerns about the detrimental effects the industry could have on their physical surroundings, the climate and subsequently their lives. We are also aware of the many problems that have arisen as a result of fracking in Canada and North America.

Climate change is also a serious concern of ours; many of our members, both here and abroad, are disturbed by the impacts of climate change on people's livelihoods. There is now a great body of evidence clearly indicating that climate change is a very real and urgent issue that cannot be ignored. Emissions from human activity, particularly burning fossil fuels for energy, are increasing the carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere and creating changes in the earth's climate. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the reality of the situation is that in order to avoid dangerous climate change, *global* emissions would need to peak before 2015 and be reduced by 50-85% of 2000 levels by 2050. This requires stringent measures to be put in place without delay to reduce the atmospheric carbon dioxide concentration. We are concerned about how climate change impacts Ireland and the rest of the world environmentally, socially and economically and are particularly concerned with climate justice issues.

This submission, for the Joint Committee on Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht, is the group's contribution to the creation of a Climate Bill. It has been created in response to the Heads of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Bill that was published earlier this year. While the *Future We Need* group has welcomed the publication of the heads of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Bill, we are disappointed that the Government published a very weak document.

Executive Summary:

In this submission, we outline the recommendations that we think are important to include in Irelands Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Bill. The Climate Bill is about mapping out a strong and sustainable future for Ireland. It is also about ensuring that Ireland lives up to its *global* responsibilities. The Bill should put in place a clear framework that includes explicit targets. We need a strong Bill that will provide certainty and accountability. This is vital if we are to build a sustainable Ireland, and ultimately a sustainable world. The Bill, as currently proposed, will not provide this certainty.

Recommendations:

The Future We Need group recommend the following:

- A **target** of at least an 80% cut in emissions (from the 1990 baseline) by 2050. Cutting emissions by 80% on 1990 levels by 2050 is now a known EU objective. The UK has already signed an 80% target into law.
- Set targets for 2020, 2025, 2030, 2035, 2040 and 2045 to achieve the 2050 target: Low carbon roadmaps should be drawn up every 5 years and should contain carbon budgets.
- To realise these targets, Ireland must actively shift away from carbon based fuels (oil, coal and natural gas) and invest in **renewable energy** such as wind, wave and solar energy. This should be prioritised in the Climate Bill.
- The creation of an independent, respected and strong **Expert Advisory Body** that will ensure **accountability**: This body should have an independent role and should have the power to publish yearly reports.
- Insert the principle of **climate justice** into the Bill. The Climate Bill is about mapping out a strong and sustainable future for Ireland but it is also about ensuring that Ireland lives up to its *global* responsibilities. It is the poorest citizens in the poorest nations who suffer most from the often devastating impacts of climate change. As a nation that has benefited from our own development to date, we need to act responsibly and do our fair share.

Submission:

Targets:

We believe that the inclusion of targets in our Climate Bill is extremely valuable and that the main weakness of the proposed Bill is the lack of clear targets. A 2050 target of at least an 80% cut in emissions (from the 1990 baseline) should be an essential part of our Climate Bill. We feel that there is no justification for omitting this solid scientifically based objective. Especially since this target is an EU objective and our closest neighbour, the UK, has already signed an 80% target into law.

The transition to a low-carbon Ireland is a long-term goal and emission reduction targets should be on a phased basis. Low carbon roadmaps should be drawn up every 5 years and should contain carbon budgets. Without these targets and strict carbon budgets, underperformance is highly likely. Quantifiable targets are the only way to ensure accountability. They act as a clear benchmark against which to measure progress.

In short, leaving targets out of the climate change bill threatens to undermine the fundamental role of this critical piece of legislation.

Investment in Renewable Energy:

The changes in the earth's climate, and indeed Ireland's climate, are predominantly a result of burning fossil fuels for energy. The only way that Ireland can reach its targets is by shifting away from fossil fuels to renewable energy such as wind, wave and solar energy. Investment in renewable energy should be prioritised in the Climate Bill. In addition, it is important to note that although oil and coal burning discharges more carbon dioxide emissions than natural gas, shale gas extraction should not be presented as a low carbon strategy or as a bridge to achieving a low carbon future. One urgent and definitive action must be to place a moratorium on the introduction of natural shale gas as an energy policy and solution for Ireland. It is a scientifically proven fact that the shale gas extraction process of hydraulic fracturing will have a critical and negative climate impact. The main component of natural gas, methane gas, is highly potent and is proven to be much more destructive to the atmosphere than carbon dioxide.

Expert Advisory Body:

The Expert Advisory Body should play a key role in terms of accountability and transparency. It is crucial that the Expert Advisory Body is an *independent* body and has the power to publish its own reports. The Bill in its current formulation leaves the publication of reports to the government's discretion. In order for this legislation to be effective, the Expert Advisory Body must have the power to publish its own reports.

Climate Justice:

The Climate Bill is about mapping out a strong and sustainable future for Ireland. It is also about ensuring that Ireland lives up to its *global* responsibilities. It is the poorest citizens in the poorest nations who suffer most from the often devastating impacts of climate change. As a nation that has benefited from our own development to date, we need to act responsibly and do our fair share. A strong Climate Bill provides the foundation for making this happen. For many poor countries, their geographical position, dependence on rain-fed agriculture and underdeveloped physical and socio-economic infrastructure leaves them particularly vulnerable to increasingly frequent and intense weather events and slow onset changes such as increases in temperature. In the interest of global citizenship and Ireland's strong track record in international development, the bill should contain the principle of climate justice. This recognises Ireland's obligation to mitigation, as well as acknowledging our contribution to global climate change and supporting adaptation in developing countries.

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