



[Sent via email]

Deputy Leddin, TD
Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action,
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2.

Coalition 2030
Macro Centre
1 Green Street
Dublin 7

16 November 2020

RE Sustainable Development in Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill 2020

Dear Deputy Leddin,

We write to you on behalf of the 77 civil society organisations and networks that make up Coalition 2030.¹ These organisations come from the international development, environment, social inclusion/anti-poverty, trade union and academic sectors. Our members are committed to upholding Ireland's commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at home in Ireland and in over 50 countries by 2030.

Coalition 2030 would like to make the following submission on the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill 2020 for the consideration of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action. Our recommendations are limited to references to sustainability and sustainable development in the Bill.

1) Sustainable Development in Section 3

- The Bill includes in section 3(3)(k) a reference to sustainable development which is also present in the 2015 Act. It notes "*the need to promote sustainable development*" as one of 25 items that the Minister and Government "shall have regard to" in delivering mitigation and adaptation functions.

- A duty to merely "*have regard to*" these criteria leaves the efficacy of this section open to question. We wish to underline that the formulation in 3(3)(k) suffers from two main weaknesses:

a) A requirement to merely "*promote*" sustainable development **does not align with international obligations and commitments**. The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development involves a commitment by states to implement and achieve sustainable development through the Sustainable Development Goals.² As part of the 2030 Agenda, states also pledged to ensure "no one will be left behind" and to "endeavour to reach the furthest behind first".³ Obligations to "*support*", "*foster*" and "*contribute to*" sustainable development, in addition to "*promote*", are also noted in the Paris Agreement.⁴

b) "*Sustainable development*" **is not defined**, nor is it noted that the Government has made commitments in the area under the 2018 National Implementation Plan on the Sustainable Development Goals⁵. This term "*sustainable development*" should be changed to "the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", and "sustainable development" should itself be defined in more detail, as per the Minerals Development Act 2017 (section 84(c))⁶.

¹ See <https://www.ireland2030.org/coalition-2030-members>

² UN Resolution A/RES/70/1, Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda For Sustainable Development, 25 Sept 2015

³ See

http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Sustainable%20Development/2030%20Agenda/Discussion_Paper_LN_OB_EN_Ires.pdf and <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/11809.pdf>

⁴ See Articles 6(4) and 7 of the Paris Agreement, 2015.

⁵ See <https://assets.gov.ie/19344/32f9bdd2aae2464caae37760edd1da04.pdf>

⁶ Minerals Development Act 2017 84. ...(c) *sustainable development, being development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*



- Scotland's 2009 Climate Act (as amended in 2019) includes an obligation on Ministers and the advisory body in exercising functions to “*take into account the need to do so in a way that **contributes to the achievement of sustainable development, including the achievement of the United Nations sustainable development goals***” (emphasis added).⁷

2) Duties on Government in respect of sustainable development

- Scotland's Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019 requires climate action plans developed under the Act to set out “*how the implementation of the plan is expected to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, including the achievement of the United Nations sustainable development goals*” (S.35(20)). It provides that target-setting criteria must be put in place as part of any modification of mitigation targets. These criteria include impacts on sustainable development and the SDGs, as well as environmental and biodiversity impacts.⁸ We **recommend that such an obligation is similarly included in section 4(6) or 4(7) on the long-term climate strategy.**

- We recommend that a new obligation is inserted into the proposed Section 11 (“Climate reporting”) for Ministers to report annually on progress towards achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals, as well on how the state is respecting the principles to ensure “no one will be left behind” and to “endeavour to reach the furthest behind first”⁹, as part of their reporting on climate mitigation and adaptation measures.

- The Bill should provide a legislative basis for the planned Climate Action Mandate for all public bodies and introduce a requirement for public bodies to perform their functions in a manner that respects national and international commitments, including with regard to sustainable development. In section 12, **all public bodies**, and not only local authorities, should be obliged to produce climate action plans and also address progress towards achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

3) Definition of ‘climate neutral economy’

- The term ‘climate neutral economy’ (which is present in the new section 3(1), as well as 3(3)(g) and (l)) is defined as ‘*a **sustainable** economy, where greenhouse gas emissions are balanced or exceeded by the removal of greenhouse gases*’ (emphasis added). It is not appropriate for this definition, and by extension the primary objective of the Act, to be limited to an economic context.

- This wording lends itself to an interpretation that economic interests are to take precedence or constitute the primary lens in planning and assessing the impacts of actions to meet the target of climate neutrality by 2050.

- It ignores that sustainable development, as addressed in state commitments under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, encompasses environmental, societal and economic objectives. It also fails to address the core SDG principles to ensure “no one will be left behind” and to “endeavour to reach the furthest behind first”. While economic competitiveness is important, it should be considered in the context of a framework for sustainable development which gives equal consideration to the environmental, social and economic pillars.

- Dr Andrew Jackson, UCD, highlighted how the reference in the original 2015 Climate Act to “*environmentally sustainable economy*” had been diminished to only a “sustainable” economy through the elimination of this in the main objective and the narrower definition of a carbon neutral economy.¹⁰

⁷ See section 92 of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 as amended. The term ‘sustainable development goals’ is further defined in section 28 (11).

⁸ See section 5 of the 2019 Act which inserts a new section 2B in the 2009 Act. Further examples of state approaches to SDG implementation in legislation are addressed in 2020 [research](#) by Friends of the Earth on public bodies.

⁹ See

http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Sustainable%20Development/2030%20Agenda/Discussion_Paper_LN_OB_EN_Ires.pdf and <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/11809.pdf>

¹⁰ See https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_climate_action/2020-10-21/speech/6/



- Dr Jeanne Moore from NESCC emphasised that a key “*overarching question is how we meet the net zero target in a way that contributes to delivering the sustainable development goals. That is a longer perspective. There are urgent questions about costs now but we need to have our eye on the multitude of transitions that we are facing and how we can bring those two factors into alignment.*”¹¹
- Professor Kevin Anderson noted that “*The SDGs are a useful backdrop against which we must test our climate change policies but recognise that sometimes there will be conflicts between them. Wherever we can, we should find synergy between the SDGs and their responses to climate change.*”¹²
- Dr Yvonne Buckley, TCD, highlighted the need for associated definitions in respect of nature based solutions and biodiversity be included in section 1 of the Act¹³.
- We **recommend** that the reference to an ‘environmentally sustainable economy’ present in the objective of the 2015 Act and the 2019 heads of Bill should at least be reinserted.
- A **more detailed definition of ‘climate neutral economy’**” should be considered, such as - ‘*an environmentally sustainable economy, which supports sustainable development, inclusive economic growth and seeks to reach the furthest behind first, and where greenhouse gas emissions are balanced or exceeded by the removal of greenhouse gases*’. The State’s response in this regard must equally respect Ireland’s fair share effort required under the Paris Agreement.

Many thanks in advance for your consideration of these recommendations and we would be happy to discuss further where necessary.

Is sinne le mórmheas

The Steering Committee of Coalition 2030:

Seamus Boland	Irish Rural Link
Oisín Coghlan	Friends of the Earth
Ivan Cooper	The Wheel
Michael Doorly	Concern Worldwide
Niamh Garvey	Trócaire
Niall McGuirk	ICTU Global Solidarity Committee
Elaine Nevin	ECO-UNESCO
Yvonne O’Callaghan	SIPTU
Diarmuid Torney	Dublin City University

¹¹ See https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_climate_action/2020-11-04/speech/19/

¹² See https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_climate_action/2020-11-04/speech/46/

¹³ See https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_climate_action/2020-10-29/speech/2/