

YOUNG Friends of the Earth

Submission to the Citizens' Assembly

'Making Ireland a Leader on Climate Change'

Who are we?

Young Friends of the Earth are a voluntary activist group working to advance global climate justice by mobilising and inspiring people to join the movement in Ireland. They recognise the need for an alternative vision for society which puts people and the natural environment at the core of political decision-making. Climate action in Ireland will affect the youth of today, and as our organisation is comprised mainly between those aged from 17 to 40 years old, we understand the need for a climate action which takes into consideration the needs of this demographic. We imagine an Ireland where human and natural well-being are at the heart of local and national actions at all levels, and that these are what make economies flourish.

Young Friends of the Earth and Intergenerational Justice

'[Intergenerational Justice is] the basic concept is that all generations are partners caring for and using the Earth. The present generation must pass the Earth and our natural and cultural resources on in at least as good condition as it received them so they can meet their own needs.'

Edith Brown Weiss, Professor of International Law at Georgetown University

In its simplest form intergenerational justice can be understood as fairness between generations. [Major international work has been done](#) in this area by former President of Ireland, Mary Robinson.

On 18 July 2017, the [journal *Earth System Dynamics*](#) stated that ["if massive emissions reductions do not begin soon, the burden placed on young people to extract CO₂ emitted by prior generations may become implausibly difficult and costly"](#). Climate change will also result in younger people suffering more conflict and violent unrest, harming child rights [according to UNICEF](#). In the context of Ireland, where more and more young people are facing the reality of never having the security of a home or full-time job as previous generations - such equity issues are of serious concern.

Citizen's lawsuits taken by children on the basis of intergenerational justice is also a [growing trend](#) in international law. For example, the [Young People's Trust Lawsuit](#) filed in 2015 by 21 young people against Obama (now Trump).

Intergenerational justice is a major part of climate change policy that must be outlined clearly in the Government's approach to the transition. Changes that could benefit this is including young people's voices in decision-making and examining [current unique pressures in Ireland today](#), faced by young people.

Energy

How can Ireland be a leader on non-polluting Energy?

We believe that our country can thrive in an ecologically sustainable way, allowing us to prepare for the oncoming effects of climate change, mitigate its impact, while also meeting our energy needs.

Currently Ireland imports nearly 90% of its energy needs making it one of most import reliant countries in the EU. It requires the transformation of our energy sector from one predominantly based on imported fossil fuel to indigenous renewable energy. Peer reviewed studies state that Ireland can be transformed from its current energy system to be 100% renewable by 2050 while creating 100,000 extra jobs and not increasing the cost of energy. We can no longer afford to invest in any new fossil fuel infrastructure projects that lock us into a fossil fuel future. The new Iron Law of energy development is if you don't want it in your backyard, then it does not belong in anybody's backyard. We need to be brave and create a sunset policy for all fossil fuels in Ireland. There must be a recognition that there is no silver bullet in meeting our energy needs, it will take a suite of technologies to achieve 100% renewable energy by 2050.

1. Solar

Ireland has 80% the solar potential of Spain. This opportunity needs to be grasped if we as a country are to meet our 2050 targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions (90% reduction from 2005 levels). Communities should be part of this process and be given the agency to generate their own renewable energy for their homes via solar panels on the roofs of their homes, businesses, community centres, etc. At present no financial incentive is given to individuals to install solar panels and on average it takes between 10 and 15 years to earn back the initial investment. Good planning would reduce this time and the installation of solar panels could be incentivised by introducing a **feed-in tariff** for microgeneration of solar energy. A 2015 KPMG report on the solar industry in Ireland stated that for every one euro in policy support for the industry it will return three euro of gross added value to the economy.

Recommendation:

- Allow communities to be part of the transition to a fossil fuel free society by introducing a fair price for excess solar electricity generated on the roofs of people's homes, schools, community centres etc.

2. Energy reduction

This is some of the most "low hanging fruit". Engineers Ireland have stated that retrofitting homes and businesses in Ireland would go a long way to meeting our energy and carbon emission targets. It would also create more local jobs, for example replacing the work of those who currently work in the uneconomic, inefficient and unethical peat burning power stations. According to the SEAI, the public services have a 33% reduction in energy usage, which has not been met. There are a whole plethora of initiatives that the public sector could target, by aggressively ramping up retrofitting of public buildings, and replacing the transport fleets with electric vehicles. Carrying out such initiatives would not only help Ireland get closer to our energy and carbon emission commitments, but the

public sector could be a shining example here, leading the way for the domestic, transport, agriculture and industry sectors to follow.

Recommendations:

- Replace transport fleet with electric vehicles.
- Retrofit public buildings
- Roll out educational scheme for companies; hospitals, corporations, cafés to save energy.

3. Wave / Tidal

Ireland is on the cutting edge of R&D with wave & tidal. We would encourage a continuation of such efforts and indeed an increase in funding. Ireland has the opportunity within this sector to become the 'Denmark of Ocean energy'. There is massive potential to not only develop further the R&D efforts currently taking place in Ireland, but to develop other related areas such as manufacture of such technology.

Recommendation:

- Increase funding to [wave and tidal R&D](#). Become world leaders in these emerging technologies.

4. Bio energy

Due to its massive advantages across a multitude of applications, as well as a ecological and economical replacement for many current raw materials, growers ought to be encouraged to grow hemp. . Another interesting and worthwhile form of bioenergy is thoughtfully manufactured biochar, along with biogas and bio-oil in the process. These products are made from 'waste' biomass and, when done correctly, can result in a carbon negative life cycle.

Recommendation:

- Provide incentives for farmers to grow hemp and biochar to use as biomass.

4. Bio Solar and Green roof

Implementat to address climate change mitigation and adaption, storm water management, sustainable drainage and improved water quality, biodiversity, air quality and amenities. Combining green infrastructure and ecosystems services to address resilience in flooding and town and city planning towards our climate change adaptation EU requirements. Bio Solar rooftops provide power and biodiversity combined solutions to meet EU Habitat directives in an era of rise in EU power price trends

Recommendation for Bio Solar and Green roofing:

- That the government implement a national policy to ensure green roofs and bio-solar roofs are part of national planning in line with the EU Green Infrastructure and Ecosystem services strategy

6. Leave fossil fuels in the ground

A. Divest from fossil fuels

- Divest the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund from fossil fuels
- Provide green instruments for citizens to invest in

B. End all new oil and gas exploration in Irish waters. Searching for new fossil fuel reserves to burn is incompatible with any serious attempt to meet the Paris Agreement temperature targets.

In their 2014 report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concluded that the total amount of climate pollution we could emit while giving ourselves a decent chance of staying under 2C of global warming was 1,000 Gigatonnes (One trillion tonnes). This report was signed off on by almost 200 governments before its publication. Proven reserves of fossil fuels would produce 2,860 Gigatonnes of CO₂ if they were burned. If our total "carbon budget" is only 1,000 Gt then we can burn little more than one third of all the fossil fuels that have already been discovered and are on the books of companies and states around the world. This analysis has been done repeatedly and in detail by a group called Carbon Tracker in a series of reports since 2011. The central conclusion of these reports has been endorsed by the International Energy Agency in its World Energy Outlook, which stated "No more than one-third of proven reserves of fossil fuels can be consumed prior to 2050 if the world is to achieve the 2 °C goal" and frequently endorsed by our own Mary Robinson.

In circumstances where only one third of existing fossil fuel reserves can be extracted and burned, it makes no sense to be prospecting and exploring for more. Most governments have yet to grasp this contradiction and are living in a state of denial or hypocrisy, continuing to issue exploration licenses. It is an issue where Ireland really could take a leadership position. Just this year the Dáil and Seanad passed a law to ban onshore fracking for oil and gas. Now it is time to end the issuing of licenses for offshore exploration for fossil fuels. This 2015 [report by Oil Change International](#) found that the carbon contained in all oil and gas fields and coal mines already in production contain enough carbon to carry us past the two degree mark. Therefore every single new extraction site that is opened threatens the Paris Agreement.

c. Ensure a Just Transition to a Fossil-Fuel Free Economy

The global transition to a low carbon economy is now underway. Already in 2017, more Governments have passed climate related legislation in the past year than ever before. In 20 years time Ireland will be facing ever more stringent cuts to carbon emissions under the Paris Agreement and accompanying EU legislation. Ireland will engage in what Naomi Klein calls 'Growing the Caring Economy, Shrinking the Careless One' - this necessitates not only an economy based on low-carbon jobs – but protecting people working in the high-carbon economy and ensuring their needs and concerns are met.

The term "Just Transition" in the Preamble of the United Nation Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Paris Agreement recognizes that workers are at the interface between society and nature in the statement of recognition for "the imperative of a just transition of the workforce and

the creation of decent work and quality jobs in accordance with nationally defined development priorities". Past economic transitions, such as moving from post-war consensus to deregulation under Margaret Thatcher, resulted in the devastation of communities and worker's rights. Those in poverty have the most to lose when it comes to climate change: their health, their safety and in the inevitable shift to a low carbon economy their jobs will be the first to go.

This issue of 'just transition' will become ever more important as more and more communities face being left behind in the transition to a low-carbon economy. Resentment and anger will build and social cohesion and progress threatened. To avoid this, a just transition for all towards an environmentally sustainable economy needs to be well managed and contribute to the goals of decent work for all, social inclusion and the eradication of poverty.

In our view, a stakeholder approach to climate change policy response, where all views are considered and where policies are designed and implemented with the participation and agreement of workers and employers, the Government, and civil society actors, follows a more transparent and comprehensive process. This process results in a more informed policy response, providing greater benefit to society at large.

Recommendations on the Just Transition

- Confirm now that Ireland will stop burning peat for electricity in 2020 and immediately set up an inter-agency task force to ensure training and employment opportunities for those employed in supplying and operating Ireland's 3 peat-fired stations and for impacted communities. This station currently provides 25% of Ireland's electricity and is an inefficient method of producing electricity. (The Government was first advised to stop burning peat for electricity in 1998)
- Confirm now that Ireland will stop burning coal for electricity in 2022 and immediately set up an inter-agency task force to ensure training and employment opportunities for those employed in Moneypoint coal-burning power station. Peat provides 9% of our electricity but 22% of our climate pollution. (The Government was first advised to stop burning coal for electricity in 1998)

Additional recommendations on energy:

- Increase funding to organisations working to mitigate and prevent climate change.
- Implement policies that encourage corporations to save energy.
- Ensure every business has a climate policy and a sustainability committee.
- Establish a benchmark for green procurement - for example a green flag system for companies.
- Increase carbon tax, incrementally higher for highest CO2 intensive materials and activities. Use money gained from this tax for climate adaptation and mitigation efforts.
- Increase interconnectors between [Ireland and the EU](#).
- Expand roll out of renewable energy coops similar to that on the [Aran Islands](#)
- Increase or introduce new postgraduate funding into alternative energy in universities.

Transport

How can Ireland be a leader on climate-friendly Transport?

1. National services - Rail, light rail (LUAS) and Bus

Public transport is inextricably linked to environmental sustainability. A full standard bus can take more than 50 cars off the road while a full train can take 600 cars off the road. A recent EPA report found that an estimated 380,000 people living in rural areas do not have access to the transport services they require. We need to lower prices, expand services, and not allow the degradation of services to occur as a result of privatisation.

Increase bike space on Bus Éireann, Dublin Bus, Irish rail and DART services. The situation of not allowing bikes at certain times on commuter rail services is not a 21st century, climate smart option. There needs to be space set aside for bikes. Vancouver public buses 15 and most trains on the continent are a good example

2. Increase the walkability of cities

The criteria for a walkable city are that the areas where people walk are safe, comfortable and interesting. Studies have shown that walking can support local shops and businesses, as pedestrians have the freedom to 'pop-in' to pick up goods. What's more, increasing the walkability of our cities would ease pressure on our health services as walking is one of the easiest and most effective exercises we can do to combat the problem of increasing levels of obesity in our country.

3. Cycling

At present less than 2% of our transport budget goes to cycling, whereas the UN recommends that it be 20%. We need parking protected bike lanes, and segregated cycle lanes for our most congested areas. Cycling infrastructure is one of the highest return investments a country can make. Study after study continues to pile up the evidence that increasing the uptake of utilitarian cycling increases air quality, has positive effects on all-cause mortality of a population, is easily accessible and therefore equitable, as well having a host of other co-benefits. The benefits are seen from rural cycleways to urban bike-shares and bicycle corridors. *"A bicycle path is a social statement that a person with a \$40 bicycle is as important as anyone with a \$40,000 car"*- Enrique Peñalosa. True sustainability has ecological, social and economic elements. Cycling brings all of these strands together.

Additional recommendations on transport:

- Increase subsidies for renewable energy, cycling, walking, and public transport.
- Have a dedicated cycle lane on the quays. Emulate the system of the Netherlands and Denmark, which denotes International best practice.
- Extend cycle lanes out to the suburbs of Irish cities.
- Allocate adequate funding for cycling, walking and public transport. 10% of the national transport should be allocated at a minimum. [The UN recommends 20%](#)
- Ban all petrol and diesel cars by 2040, [similar to the UK](#) and France.

- Provide facilities to charge electric cars, have ports at each petrol station. [A survey shows](#) drivers want to switch to EV's, but want more charge stations.
- Begin transition of all public transport and semi-state vehicles to renewable powered.

Waste

How can Ireland be a leader on waste?

- Implement a deposit return scheme for plastic bottles nationwide, [similar to that of Germany](#) and many other countries.
- Insist that restaurants and food establishments stop using plastic packaging
- Insist that packaging is clearer on what can and cannot be recycled (for example, using a larger font or warning label on packaging which is not readily recyclable)
- Ban single use non recyclable plastic
- Implement consistent 3 bin systems (i.e., food, recyclable, other and/or segregated recycling - cans, paper, plastic) throughout the cities. Ensure that labelling is clear on how to segregate waste.
- Provide education to the general public about the processes involved in waste disposal and recycling in Ireland. This education should ideally also address the damage caused to the environment by the continued purchase and use of plastic packaging and information on how to correctly segregate waste.
- Roll out educational scheme for companies; hospitals, corporations, cafés to encourage recycling and the better management of waste.
- Support initiatives such as [Food Cloud](#) to ensure minimal wastage of food

Food Waste

- Reduce food waste. According to the UN, if food waste was a country, it would be the 3rd highest global greenhouse gas emitter. Methane is 10 times more potent than CO₂, and when food goes to landfill mixed in with other materials it produces methane because of the absence of oxygen. Over 1 million tonnes of food waste is discarded in Ireland annually.

The disposal of food waste has a direct impact on climate change, and the Irish Government needs to address this urgently by adopting and enforcing policy that encourages the reduction of food waste all along the food chain and directing surplus food for redistribution and food waste to compost instead of landfill. Policy recommendations regarding food waste:

- On average we throw away one third of the food we buy, equating to approx. €700 per year per Irish family. We as a small nation generate two tonnes of food waste every minute, yet one person in every eight go hungry, and land 200 times the size of Ireland is used to grow food that is just thrown away. We should instate city-wide

composting schemes so that any food waste can be put back into our agricultural system. France has forbidden food waste in Supermarkets - Ireland needs a similar scheme. We also need a brown bin for every home, and small brown bin 'caddies' for the inside of each home.

- Compost bins to be mandatory in all residential dwellings, with the option of communal or community composting for those living in high density urban areas
- Support and provide information on local recycling/waste centres which will accept organic waste without charge
- Support communities who would like to set up a community fridge to share their surplus edible food with those in need in their community while avoiding unnecessary food disposal.
- Supermarkets should be mandated to have an 'ugly fruit / veg' section, to avoid the practice of ugly fruit / veg being rejected from wholesalers / farmers and often ultimately being wasted.
- Support should be given towards 'free food' or 'donation based' supermarkets, whereby perfectly healthy food, which is passed its sell by date can be available for people to purchase on a 'pay as you feel basis', thereby tackling food waste and food poverty. 20 Any legislative barriers should be removed, where this food is perfectly healthy, and a system of inspections should be established to promote public confidence in these enterprises.

Circular Economy - ReUse, Repair, and Repurpose Materials

Ireland needs to follow the lead of countries like Scotland who are promoting and transitioning to a more 'circular economy'. A [circular economy](#) is an alternative to a traditional linear economy (make, use, dispose) in which we keep resources in use for as long as possible, extract the maximum value from them whilst in use, then recover and regenerate products and materials at the end of each service life. A circular economy promotes recycling over landfill and incineration and reduces the production of raw materials, putting less strain on our natural resources while reducing emissions, which will help us reach our Paris Agreement target.

In addition to recycling and correct waste disposal, we believe that greater efforts should be made to encourage and support the reuse of items.

- Grants should be awarded for the setup of [Repair cafés](#) and/or a [Library of Things](#) (which could be implemented in existing libraries) across the country. These efforts will reduce waste and emissions as well as moving towards a more equal society.
- We would like to introduce tax breaks on repairs to tackle our throw-away-economy mentality and to encourage rational economic behaviour to repair household goods. We would like to implement a similar system to that of Sweden – who have slashed the VAT rate on repairs to bicycles, clothes and shoes from 25% to 12%. They've also allowed citizens to claim back from income tax half of the labour cost on repairs to appliances such as fridges, ovens, dishwashers and washing machines. Although many people may not think about investing in fixing a jean hole or a broken shoe, the point is to promote a longer term strategy for sustainable consumption: Fewer, quality items is better than many cheap and short-lived ones. The tax cuts could also create a new industry in home repairs.

How waste contributes to climate change

Plastic

By encouraging the collection, recycling and use of secondary materials, we reduce the extraction of virgin materials. For example, by reducing the amount of new plastic we are eliminating the need for the exploration and extraction of oil, of which around 8-10% of the world's supply is used to make plastic. The vast majority of plastics (excluding those made from renewable biomass sources) are made from fossil fuels such as oil and natural gas, which release toxic emissions when extracted from the earth. Drilling puts pollutants such as carbon monoxide, hydrogen sulfide, benzene, ozone and others into the air. Methane can leak during production, and as it traps up to 100 times more heat in the atmosphere than carbon dioxide within a 5 year period, and 72 times more in a 20 year period, it is far more damaging than carbon dioxide in terms of global warming potential.

International climate experts state that 80% of the known fossil fuels have to stay in the ground if we want to avoid going over the safe 2 degrees limit of global warming.

In addition to our above recommendations regarding plastic waste we would also strongly encourage:

- Follow the UK's lead and ban [microbeads](#)
- Ensure greater levels of education and information outlining the link between plastic waste and ocean pollution
- Implement policies which favour the use of soft plastic rather than hard plastic whenever possible (e.g. in Canada they use milk bags instead of plastic cartons)

Deforestation

Likewise, when we reduce the amount of virgin paper and wood, we eliminate the need for further deforestation. Forests play a huge role in the carbon cycle on our planet. When forests are cut down, not only does carbon absorption cease, but also the carbon stored in the trees is released into the atmosphere as CO₂.

Agriculture

How can Ireland be a leader on agriculture?

We need to radically change our relationship to food to ensure that it is compatible with a socially just, sustainable, and low carbon future. Currently far too much of our food production relies heavily on fossil fuels. On average, 1 calorie of food requires 10 calories of fossil fuels to produce it. Our highly mechanised farming methods, export oriented production, and long supply chains are not compatible with combatting climate change or peak oil (the maximum rate of petroleum extraction before entering a terminal decline). Also, our intensive farming methods, which use large amounts of artificial fertiliser and other inputs, is destroying our soils. If this continues, we may find it difficult to feed ourselves by the end of the century. We must practice restorative agriculture, which can ensure that people can work the land sustainably for generations to come, while allowing wildlife to flourish. We must argue for more socially conscious world agricultural and trade policies which can ensure fair and equitable livelihoods for farmers across the globe, end subsidies which

disproportionately benefit the already large and wealthy farms, and avoid the distortion of traditional farming practices and markets in the global south. The value we place on food is skewed too heavily towards food being a tradeable commodity, rather than a necessary public good vital for survival and good health, as well as having cultural and societal values attached to it, such as traditional recipes and the sharing of food. First and foremost, food and agriculture should be seen as a public good, and its tradeable dimensions should be reduced as much as possible, ensuring that all citizens, regardless of their income levels have access to healthy food.

Recommendation for achieving this are:

- Create a constitutional right to access to food
- Diversify our farming policy, specifically prioritising organic farming as well as polycultural holdings, instead of continuing with our intensification of beef and dairy for export. We can feed the world in a way that can employ more people than the beef and dairy industries, in line with local eating habits and farming methods.
- Legislate for a ban on below cost selling as this jeopardises farmers and producers' ability to make a fair living
- Via local authorities, and in co-operation with producers and local communities, provide for farmers markets (at least once weekly) in every town and community around the country
- Supports must be given to farmers so they can transition to smart and circular economy agriculture, such as agroecology - linking these programmes to global examples of innovative farming and land use
- Support Community Supported Agriculture schemes

Additional recommendations

In addition to tackling the pressing issues of energy, transport, waste, and agriculture we believe that for Ireland to become a leader of climate action legislation, policy must be implemented which addresses the use of chemicals which have been proven to be damaging to the environment. We also stress that greater funding and planning be directed towards climate change mitigation and the protection of the natural world.

Chemicals

- The use of glyphosate (a popular herbicide which has been linked in a report by the World Health Organisation to a number of illnesses and environmental damage) and neonicotinoids (an insecticide included in some pesticides which has been linked to [diminishing bee populations](#)) should be banned

Government, local authorities & project funding

- Increase power and funding to local authorities to implement climate change mitigation and especially adaptation measures.
- Ensure timely implementation of climate action officers within all local authorities (as per proposal #9 in [National Mitigation Plan](#)).
- Double the [LA21 funding](#) available from the government
- Develop [flood risk plans](#) for every county
- Facilitate innovation & removing barriers to participation:
- Roll out 'Innovation cafés', government-supported initiatives which encourage citizens to participate in the transition to a fossil fuel free economy. They bring people together to share knowledge and motivate one another to solve and carry out effective pilot projects across the country which will work together to tackle climate change.
- Recognise volunteering for its economic and long term social values and barriers to it must be removed, such as the legal option to replace up to 10 work hours with volunteer hours
- Deregulate ecological and participatory housing developments, such as in Wales.

Natural World

- Increase funding for forestry programmes. Extend time and funds to [agro-forestry programme](#).
- Develop [rain gardens](#) to reduce flooding
- Implement soft engineering options to reduce flooding risks.
- [Retain natural hedgerows and scrublands](#) to ensure they can continue to provide the many vital ecosystem services
- Support Conservation Farming, [similar to that of the BurrenLIVE](#) programme..
- [Rewet our bogs](#) to ensure they continue to sequester carbon.

ⁱ Innovation Cafés

- Provide grants for projects which will contribute to a society which is transformed from one based on fossil fuels and constant growth to one that is sustainable, socially, economically and environmentally and is based on community participation.
- The State must guarantee millions annually to be used freely by these democratically run hubs. A review process will only be present to ensure funds are not squandered. But since anyone can become a member of these hubs, local people will have the power to ensure fair allocation of funds.
- Perhaps an open model of rotation allows anyone local from 16 years plus to sit on the board
- Space for advertising, billboards, town squares, radio, TV, etc. must be provided to cater for civil dialogue so that people of all backgrounds and positions, powerful or precarious, may recognise our common struggle
- Fás & other training and employment programmes could outsource activities to these hubs