

IPH Submission to Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government Climate Change Response Bill 2010

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The main purpose of the Climate Change Bill is to provide for the adoption of a national policy for reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions; to support this through the making of mitigation and adaptation action plans; and to make provision for emission reduction targets to support the objective of transition to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy.

Access the full consultation document [here](#) and the IPH response below:

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The Institute of Public Health in Ireland

The remit of the Institute of Public Health in Ireland (IPH) is to promote cooperation for public health between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in the areas of research and information, capacity building and policy advice. Our approach is to support Departments of Health and their agencies in both jurisdictions, and maximise the benefits of all-island cooperation to achieve practical benefits for people in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

IPH has a keen interest in the effects of climate change on health. In September 2010 the IPH published a paper – Climate Change and Health: A platform for action - to inform policy-makers and the public about the health benefits in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This paper followed a seminar with international speakers, opened by Minister Gormley, on the same topic in February 2010.

Key points

- IPH welcomes the Climate Change Response Bill 2010 introduced by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government which demonstrates a clear commitment to international targets and agreements. It also demonstrates a proactive, rather than a reactive approach in addressing an issue that may remain unapparent in Ireland until it is too late.

- Though scientists may differ on the extent, it is generally accepted that human activity is at least one cause of climate change. The status quo is unsustainable and we must alter our behaviour patterns.
- The Lancet Commissions identifies climate change as “the biggest global health threat of the 21st century” (1). Climate change affects the fundamental requirements for health; clean air, safe drinking water, sufficient food and secure shelter (2). It is estimated that between the 1970s and 2004 global warming caused over 140,000 excess deaths annually (3), and the extreme weather events and their effects recently experienced in Ireland has made it apparent that we are being directly impacted through severe cold weather and flooding.
- In the Republic of Ireland agriculture is the single largest contributor to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (27.3%), in Northern Ireland this figure is 21%. The agriculture sector has been involved in extensive lobbying against this Bill. However, if climate change is not addressed that sector will be significantly affected.
- This Bill should be seen as an opportunity to create more jobs; for example, in terms of developing alternative ‘green’ technologies or bio-fuel production. In the latter case, this should not be at the expense of food security.
- This Bill could also be an opportunity to address unsustainable growth and consumption of food, transport, waste and energy in this country.
- Improving our economy and use of resources would have knock-on health benefits, while a reduction in GHG emissions would also positively affect the Exchequer in terms of reduction in respiratory illnesses and the associated costs to the Health Service Executive.
- The 2.5% target for lowering GHG emissions is lower than the UK’s which is disappointing, but the IPH hopes that in other respects this is a genuine target, not one that will be achieved due to cut backs in emissions attributable to the recession. The long-term nature of this commitment up to 2050 is reassuring in this regard.
- IPH recommends that the Bill is linked to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (2010) publication Food Harvest (4) whereby a greater emphasis would be placed on the benefits of reducing GHG emissions in the context of food security for health. In addition, reducing GHG emissions links with the policy direction of developing Ireland’s ‘green’ brand in the food and drinks sector (5).

- IPH recommends that the Regulatory Impact Assessment is amended to acknowledge that enacting such legislation will have an impact on socially excluded and vulnerable groups. It is the most socially excluded people who are most effected by climate change and therefore adjustments in our greenhouse gas emissions should have a positive health effect.
- IPH recommends that a Health Impact Assessment of the Climate Change Response Bill 2010 is undertaken alongside the RIA to assist in the evaluation process. This process could also assist the proposed National Climate Change Expert Advisory Body in their duties of ongoing monitoring and evaluation by providing baseline data.
- A climate change and health group has been established in Northern Ireland, chaired by the Deputy Chief Medical Officer. IPH recommends that a similar group be established in the Republic of Ireland and that links are made between the groups to develop a synergetic response to a problem that affects everybody on the island.

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References

- (1) Vol. 373, No. 9676:1693
- (2) World Health Organisation (Geneva: 2009) Global Health risks: mortality and burden of disease attributable to selected major risks
- (3) WHO Factsheet No. 266 (January 2010)
[<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs266/en/index.html#> Accessed 21st January 2011]
- (4) Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (2010) Food Harvest: A vision for Irish agri-food and fisheries 2020 [<http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/agri-foodindustry/foodharv...> Accessed 25th January 2011]
- (5) For further information, see Wilde, Jane Food Security on the Island of Ireland: Are we sleepwalking into a crisis? Journal of Cross Border Studies, Centre for Cross Border Studies (2011) forthcoming.