



THE HEAT IS ON FOR NORTHERN IRELAND TO TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE

This briefing document summarises key recommendations made by the Institute of Public Health on proposed legislation, Climate Change (No.2) Bill, sponsored by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) in Northern Ireland.

What is this proposed legislation about?

The Northern Ireland (NI) Executive has committed to introducing legislation and targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions 'in line with the Paris Climate Change Accord'.

This commitment, under the 'New Decade, New Approach' agreement, led to the introduction of two climate change Bills. The first was a non-executive Climate Change Bill sponsored by the Green Party and introduced in March 2021, and second was the Climate Change (No.2) Bill sponsored by DAERA and introduced in July 2021.

As part of a consultation process, the Institute of Public Health (IPH) made a submission on the No.2 Bill to the Northern Ireland Assembly's Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (AERA) in September 2021.



Climate Change and Health

Climate change is widely considered to be a public health emergency, with far-reaching negative impacts on health and health inequalities.

The evidence supporting the health harms caused by climate change is overwhelming. For example, the number of heat-related deaths in older adults (over 65) worldwide increased to a record high of approximately 345,000 deaths in 2019.

The health effects of climate change are broad, including dehydration, loss of kidney function, skin cancer, infectious diseases, worsening mental health, complications in pregnancy, cardiovascular disease, pulmonary disease and death.

These health harms disproportionately affect those who are more vulnerable, including children, older people and those with underlying health problems, and developing countries that have contributed least to the problem and are least able to mitigate the harms.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that the health gain from climate action is double the cost of mitigation policies at a global level. The consensus is that there is no 'safe' rise in global temperatures.

This has led to health professionals around the world to call for tougher action to limit global temperature increases and protect health.

“Climate change is a major threat to the health and well-being of populations”

International Association of National Public Health Institutes (IANPHI)



Key IPH Recommendations

Climate change is a public health emergency which requires an urgent whole of society, cross-departmental and cross-border approach. IPH endorses recommendations from the WHO and the United Nation's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) to take urgent action to reach 'net zero' greenhouse gas emissions as quickly as possible, before 2050, and limit global warming to 1.5°C. On that basis, the Institute found that the proposed objectives laid out in the Climate Change (No.2) Bill require more ambition.



Emissions Targets

Based on current scientific evidence, the emissions target proposed in the Bill of 'at least an 82% reduction' in total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2050 is insufficient. The Institute recommends urgent action to reach 'net zero' as quickly as possible, before 2050, to limit global warming to 1.5°C.



Strategy & Implementation

IPH recommends the establishment of a separate Department for Climate and Environment to provide independent oversight of government strategy. This strategy will require strategic leadership, robust governance structures, and could adopt the WHO recommended 'Climate in all Policies' approach.



Independent Oversight

The Institute would welcome the establishment of an independent Environmental Protection Agency to provide independent oversight of the Bill. This body could assimilate high-quality scientific evidence on a regular basis to inform recommendations to the Northern Ireland Assembly (NIA).



Strengthen Engagement

IPH has also recommended strengthening engagement with public health professionals and the health community as well as climate change experts and researchers to reduce the health impact of climate change.



Public Bodies

The Institute has highlighted the opportunity for a public sector implementation body to ensure a standardised approach to climate action across the public sector and to provide oversight and governance of reporting.



Transboundary Cooperation

IPH recommends an all-island collaborative response, with consistent and ambitious emissions targets. The environment is an agreed area of cooperation under the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and greater co-operation through existing frameworks, such as the North South Ministerial Council, is opportune.



Further information

To read a recent blog on the connection between climate change and public health [click here](#).

For more information visit www.publichealth.ie.