

WRITTEN EVIDENCE TO THE COMMITTEE FOR THE SCRUTINY OF THE FIRST MINISTER: The Welsh Government's Climate Change Strategy

The Climate Change Context

The recent reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) have highlighted the overwhelming scientific consensus for human induced climate change and the impact that it is already having. In doing so, they have underlined and strengthened the business case for action, highlighting the escalating costs – economic, social and environmental – that we face if we do not take action.

As the past winter again illustrated, severe weather already has a marked impact on Wales' economy and communities. Climate change is therefore not simply a global issue or an issue that impacts future generations; it has very real implications here and now in Wales for us all and in particular our most vulnerable. Action on climate change is therefore essential not only to avoid future dangerous levels of climate change but also to adapt to the climate change we are already locked into. Equally, it is fundamental to our future prosperity and presents significant opportunities.

As a government, we fully accept the findings of the IPCC reports and believe that the focus of the debate should be on how best we can drive forward delivery. Moreover, we are equally focused on the significant green growth opportunities associated with the global decarbonisation and the transition to low carbon.

Welsh Government's Climate Change Strategy

Our action as a Government sits within the wider UN, EU and UK framework. The Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) put in place a binding obligation for industrialised countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through the setting of targets. Consequentially, the EU committed to reducing overall greenhouse gas emissions by 20 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020 and by 80% by 2050. It is also poised to further strengthen the commitment by agreeing an additional interim target of 40% by 2030 and thereby setting a clear pathway to decarbonisation.

In the UK, further legislative commitments are set out within the Climate Change Act 2008, which includes the commitment for the net UK carbon account for the year 2050 to be at least 80% lower than the 1990 baseline. Within this framework, our overarching commitments to Climate Change action are set out in the Programme for Government. This sets out our headline commitments to a low carbon economy, implementing the climate change strategy to reduce greenhouse gases and drive effective adaptation to climate change. Set against our overarching commitment are two headline emissions targets guiding our action – a 3% annual reduction in emissions in devolved areas and a 40% reduction in overall emissions by 2020. As well as these headline commitments, there are also other key actions on climate change woven throughout the Programme for Government that relate to our delivery of key policies as well as our commitment to leadership and playing our part at a global level. The Climate Change Strategy sits within this framework and focuses on both reducing emissions and driving a comprehensive package of practical measures to respond to the consequences of climate change. As well as Welsh Government actions, the Strategy also highlights the wider contribution of others towards our targets – action by businesses, local government, the wider public sector, the third sector, communities and individuals all being critical to successful delivery.

As a Government, we recognise that climate change requires the collective action of all portfolios and our annual reporting process therefore updates on the actions taken across departments to tackle the causes and consequences of climate change. The Department for Natural Resources and Food oversee this process of reporting (under the Climate Change Act 2008) and also lead on climate change policy on behalf of the Welsh Government. Supporting the delivery of the Climate Change Strategy is an indicator framework to measure our progress, which is included in the technical annex to the Annual Report. In addition, the Climate Change Commission for Wales has assessed the progress the Welsh Government is making and the UK Committee on Climate Change has also twice reported on progress in Wales. This reporting framework complements the related processes for both the Programme for Government and on Sustainable Development.

Progress to date

Our reports have highlighted significant progress in delivering against the objectives of our Climate Change Strategy. Given the breadth of the work undertaken the examples are too numerous to list but include:

- Progress in driving down emissions from waste and increasing recycling;
- The success of the Welsh Government's strategic energy scheme, *arbed* along with our boiler scrappage scheme and the home energy efficiency programme;
- The development of the Sustainable Travel Centre initiative in delivering better integrated transport networks whilst promoting health and well-being;
- The ongoing support and advice to businesses on energy efficiency and low carbon opportunities for SMEs, and its work to lead action across the public sector to reduce emissions;
- The publication of guidance for public bodies in Wales on adapting to climate change and a national strategy on flood management; and
- Our work to integrate mitigation and adaptation to climate change into the effective management of our natural resources.

In addition, our last report drew out the latest information from the UK Climate Change Risk Assessment in relation to each sector and highlighted the action being taken on adaptation that is vital to Wales' long term resilience and prosperity.

In terms of progress against our headline targets, our report in 2013 was the first time that we were able to report against the 3% target in devolved areas and it showed that in 2011 emissions were 29.26MtCO₂e, which equates to a decrease from the baseline of 10.1%. For the wider 40% target by 2020, the report highlighted significant progress in that emissions have decreased 20.6% against the baseline. However, although this is positive progress, as we recognised in the report the current trend would not meet our aim of a 40% reduction by 2020.

The break down of progress by key sector against our 3% target highlights that most sectors have shown reductions in their emissions. In particular, there has also been good progress in the Waste Sector (8.8%), Business Sector (13.3%), Residential Sector (16.5%) and Transport Sector (6.8% reduction). The good progress that has been seen in the Public Sector in achieving a reduction of 18.7% was also very positive. Emissions in the Agriculture and Land-use Sector have however slightly increased by 1.2% in 2011, although the historical legacy of aging forestry in Wales was a contributing factor. Overall, 77% of emission reduction indicators show an improving or stable trend.

We have therefore made some positive progress in terms of emission reduction, but the economic downturn and a return to milder winter temperatures are of course significant factors. We therefore recognise that in order to continue to deliver against the 3% target and to be on track to meet the 40% target, significant further action is required. This evaluation was echoed by the independent commentary provided by the Climate Change Commission for Wales, who welcomed the reduction in carbon emissions against the baseline, the focus on the links between poverty and climate change and our recognition of the need to refocus efforts to address the shortfall against the 40% target.

Next Steps

As announced by the Minister for Natural Resources and Food at the time of the publication of the Annual Report in December, we are refreshing our climate change policy. This exercise is currently ongoing and an announcement is scheduled to be made by the Minister in July. The climate change refresh is however only one aspect of our delivery going forward and this is complemented by the emphasis we are placing as a Cabinet on Green Growth and the Minister for Natural Resources and Food will also be publishing a green growth prospectus – *Investing in the Future*. The prospectus will set out how the sustainable use of our natural resources can create a new economic model for Wales that will deliver wealth creation and economic growth both today and in to the future.