Ireland’s Policy Response to Climate Change: An Historical Overview

Diarmuid Torney

INTRODUCTION

Ireland’s policy response to climate change stands at a crossroad. On the one hand, the state has been regarded for some time as a climate laggard, repeatedly ranked among the lowest performing European Union (EU) member states in the annual Climate Change Performance Index (Burck et al. 2017, 2018) and on track to miss EU climate targets by a considerable margin (EPA 2019a). Although there has been progress in some areas, most notably deployment of renewable electricity, Ireland’s progress in responding to climate change has been hindered by a failure to tackle emissions from key sectors including agriculture and transport. On the other hand, the period since late 2017 has witnessed a wave of institutional and policy innovations, including surprisingly far-reaching recommendations by the Citizens’ Assembly on climate change published in March 2018 (Citizens’ Assembly 2018), an influential and, in many
respects, radical report published in March 2019 by a parliamentary committee established to consider the Assembly’s recommendations (Houses of the Oireachtas 2019), and a landmark Climate Action Plan published in June 2019 (DCCAE 2019).

A limited amount of academic and policy research has focused on Ireland’s response to climate change, though a broader body of research has examined environmental politics in Ireland (Barry 2009; Curtis and Lyons 2011; Flynn 2003, 2006; Laflan and O’Mahony 2008; O’Mahony and Keohane 2011; Taylor 1998; Taylor and Horan 2001). Earlier research on Ireland’s response to climate change focused on how international and domestic factors shaped Ireland’s response to climate change (Coghlan 2007), cross-cutting studies of policy choices facing Ireland (Brennan and Curtin 2008; NESC 2012), analyses of the institutional context shaping Ireland’s response to climate change (Kirby 2013; McGloughlin and Sweeney 2011; Ó’Broin and Kirby 2015), studies of the adoption of a carbon tax (Convery et al. 2013; Harrison 2010), as well as analyses of extreme weather events and projections of future climate impacts (Cunningham 2008; Hickey 2008, 2010).

More recently, the literature has expanded to include studies of the development of Ireland’s 2015 climate law (Torney 2017, 2019), climate change and party politics (Ladrech and Little 2019; Little 2017), Ireland’s climate change governance (NESC 2019), and the impact of EU membership on Ireland’s climate policy response (Torney and O’Gorman 2019). Meanwhile, sectoral studies have drawn attention to the opportunities for, and constraints on, low-carbon transition in energy (Torney 2018), agriculture (Curtin and Arnold 2016), and transport (Devaney and Torney 2019).

This chapter provides an overview of Ireland’s policy response as well as the drivers and constraints on climate action. The chapter traces the evolution of climate policy during four distinct historical phases. The first of these is the era of the so-called Celtic Tiger, which saw a rapid rise in emissions. The second was characterised by profound crisis of economy and polity, during which attention was diverted from climate policy but with a significant fall in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The third phase is the economic recovery, which in many ways was as unexpected in its speed and extent as the crash. During this period, Ireland’s emissions rebounded strongly, illustrating that Ireland’s emissions remain stubbornly coupled to economic growth. Fourth and finally, the chapter examines Irish climate policy since 2017, noting a range of innovative and progressive
developments including the Citizens’ Assembly, the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action, and the 2019 Climate Action Plan. This section addresses the question of whether Ireland has left its laggard status behind. Finally, the chapter reflects on the broader context that has shaped Ireland’s policy response to climate change, including economic structure and political and governance frameworks.

The Celtic Tiger

Ireland’s economic development occurred late by comparative European standards. A relatively poor economy for much of the period since independence in the 1920s, Ireland caught up with European average standards of living only in the 1990s (Barry et al. 1999). During the 1990s and early- to mid-2000s, Ireland’s so-called Celtic Tiger economy grew by double digit growth rates per annum during the period 1995–2000 and by high single figure growth rates per annum between 2000 and 2007 (CSO 2020). Under the Kyoto Protocol, the EU faced a GHG reduction target of 8 percent overall. Differentiated targets were given to the EU’s then 15 member states. Under this so-called burden-sharing agreement, Ireland was allocated a domestic target of limiting emissions growth to not more than 13 percent above 1990 levels. This target was designed to take account of the low starting point of the Irish economy and the catch-up Ireland was undertaking over the period in question relative to its European counterparts.

The profile of Ireland’s GHG emissions was strongly upwards during the 1990s. Emissions rose by nearly a quarter over the decade of the 1990s and peaked in 2001 at 27 percent above 1990 levels. Over the period 2001–2007, emissions were essentially flat, with a slight decrease of 3.5 percent over the period (EPA 2019b). The principal driver of emissions growth was the rapid increase in economic activity. A reduction in emissions intensity driven by efficiency gains accounts for the essentially flat emissions trajectory over the 2000s (O’Mahony 2013). Nonetheless, by 2007 Ireland’s emissions stood at 23 percent above 1990 levels, not far short of double Ireland’s Kyoto Protocol target of an increase of 13 percent.

In terms of domestic climate policy, the early- to mid-2000s were marked principally by the publication of two overarching climate change policy documents. The first of these, Ireland’s first National Climate Change Strategy, was published in 2000 (DELG 2000). It outlined a
range of measures intended to enable the state to meet Ireland’s target under the EU burden-sharing agreement to limit emissions growth to no more 13 percent above 1990 levels over the period 2008–2012.

Shortly before leaving office, the 2002–2007 Fianna Fáil-Progressive Democrats government published a second National Climate Change Strategy in April 2007 (DEHLG 2007). This aimed to set a pathway towards meeting Ireland’s EU emissions reduction target. Notably, this included significant recourse to purchasing of credits under the UN’s so-called Clean Development Mechanism, which entails financial transfers to developing countries to support emissions reductions instead of undertaking emissions reductions domestically. Another noteworthy policy document from this era was the Energy Policy Framework 2007–2020, Delivering a Sustainable Energy Future for Ireland. It framed Ireland’s response to energy challenges in terms of broader European and global trends and approaches, noting a “global and European context which has put energy security and climate change among the most urgent international challenges” (DCMNR 2007: 5).

The 1990s and 2000s saw the beginnings of a policy response to climate change. In the electricity sector, the first support schemes for renewable electricity in Ireland were developed during this period. The first of these, the Alternative Energy Requirement scheme, introduced in 1996, provided winning bidders with a 15-year power purchase agreement whereby the Electricity Supply Board (ESB) bought the electricity output of the winning facility at the bid price. This was followed by the REFIT 1 scheme, which opened in 2005 and provided long-term feed-in tariffs to encourage new capacity development of proven technologies and short-term feed-in tariffs to support the development of emerging ocean energy technologies. However, to a considerable extent, climate policy development in Ireland remained limited during the Celtic Tiger era.

**Economic Crisis**

Following a general election in June 2007, the Programme for Government of the incoming coalition government between Fianna Fáil, the Green Party and the Progressive Democrats included a pledge to reduce GHG emissions by 3 percent per year. However, negative economic circumstances soon intervened. Ireland was hit by profound economic crisis in the late 2000s, driven by a collapse of the property sector that precipitated a severe banking crisis. During the period 2007–2009, Irish Gross National
Income fell by over 11 percent. In November 2010, the Irish government was compelled to request international assistance from the EU and the International Monetary Fund in the form of a €85 billion bailout. While exacerbated by the broader global financial crisis, Ireland’s economic and banking crisis was primarily home-grown, brought about by inadequate risk management practices in Irish banks and a failure of regulatory oversight (O’Sullivan and Kennedy 2010).

The crisis had a pronounced effect on Ireland’s GHG emissions, which fell by 15 percent between 2007 and 2011, and by 8.5 percent in a single year, from 2008 to 2009 (EPA 2019b). This decline was driven for the most part by the precipitous fall in economic activity rather than by climate change mitigation policies. Nonetheless, the result was that the state managed, largely by accident, to achieve compliance with its Kyoto Protocol first commitment period (2008–2012) target to limit growth in emissions to not more than 13 percent above 1990 levels (EPA 2013).

In many respects, climate change disappeared from the policy agenda during the crisis years. Nonetheless, this period saw the elaboration of the EU’s climate and energy package for 2020, with corresponding obligations for Ireland. These included a reduction of GHG emissions in sectors outside of the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) of 20 percent relative to 2005 levels, and an overall renewable energy target of 16 percent, composed of a 40 percent target for electricity, a 12 percent target for heat, and a 10 percent target for transport (Government of Ireland 2010; see also chapter “Climate Law in Ireland: EU and National Dimensions” by O’Gorman, this volume).

A carbon tax was introduced in 2010, set initially at €15 per tonne on liquid fossil fuels outside the ETS and increased to €20 per tonne in 2012. It was extended to solid fossil fuels in 2013 at €10 per tonne, which was increased to €20 per tonne in 2014. Under the Fianna Fáil/Green Party government, a “carbon budget” was introduced, but not of the sort provided for in the UK Climate Change Act. Rather, this was a statement by the Minister for the Environment following the finance minister on each Budget Day on the state’s progress towards meeting emissions targets and actions undertaken.

The period also saw an unsuccessful attempt by Green Party environment minister John Gormley to introduce framework climate change legislation (Torney 2017). Gormley published an outline of the proposed legislation in December 2009 and draft legislation in December 2010. The Climate Change Response Bill would have legislated for annual
average reduction targets of 2.5 percent for the period from 2008 to 2020 as well as a 40 percent reduction target for 2030 and an 80 percent reduction target for 2050. However, in January 2011, the Green Party announced its decision to withdraw from government, and the legislation was never enacted.

Sectoral policy development and implementation was largely constrained also by the prevailing economic circumstances during this period. Nonetheless, there were some positive developments. The electricity sector saw significant deployment of renewable generation capacity, principally wind. This was underpinned by additional state support schemes. In 2012, the REFIT 2 and REFIT 3 schemes were launched. REFIT 2 provided feed-in tariff support for small and large onshore wind, small hydro, and biomass/landfill gas. The REFIT 3 scheme was designed to incentivise high efficiency combined heat and power, biomass combustion, and biomass co-firing, though biomass combustion and biomass co-firing with peat would become the subject of scrutiny and criticism on environmental grounds.

In the transport sector, *Smarter Travel—A Sustainable Transport Future* was published in 2009 and committed to reducing overall travel demand, maximising efficiency of the transport network, reducing reliance on fossil fuels, reducing transport emissions, and improving transport accessibility (DTTAS 2009). It was, in many ways, a visionary document, but the economic crisis, which was not fully foreseen at the time of publication of the strategy, severely constrained investment in the transport sector in the period since 2009, and the targets set out in *Smarter Travel* were for the most part not met.

**Return to Growth**

Just as unexpected as the severity of the economic crash was the speed and strength of the recovery from the early 2010s onwards, with Ireland registering the fastest economic growth rate in the EU for several years running. Greenhouse gas emissions rebounded broadly in line with economic recovery, with an increase of over 6 percent between 2011 and 2018, at a time when emissions were supposed to be declining in accordance with the EU 2020 climate and energy framework (EPA 2019b). However, this increase was uneven, with most of it occurring in the years 2014–2016. Moreover, the agriculture and transport sectors were the big drivers of the growth, both rising 9.6 percent during the period 2011–2018.
The government elected in 2011 and composed of Fine Gael and Labour committed in its programme for government to introduce framework climate legislation. However, it was not until December 2015 that the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act was enacted. This was preceded by agreement by cabinet in 2014 of a “National Policy Position on Climate Action and Low Carbon Development”. This latter document committed to an aggregate 80 percent reduction of emissions across the electricity generation, built environment, and transport sectors by 2050 and “an approach to carbon neutrality in the agriculture and land-use sector, including forestry, which does not compromise capacity for sustainable food production” (Government of Ireland 2014). The climate law passed in 2015 established a planning and reporting framework for climate change policy (see chapter “Climate Law in Ireland: EU and National Dimensions” by O’Gorman, this volume for further discussion). Most notably in an international context, the law did not set a quantified mitigation target even for 2050, making Ireland’s law unusual by international standards (Ecologic 2020).

The 2015 climate law also established an independent Climate Change Advisory Council with a remit to provide advice to government and to assess progress in achieving national policy goals. The Council has not shied away from critical commentary on the government’s response to climate change. For example, the Council’s 2018 Annual Review noted that “Ireland is completely off course in terms of achieving its 2020 and 2030 emissions reduction targets. Without urgent action that leads to tangible and substantial reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, Ireland is unlikely to deliver on national, EU and international obligations” (CCAC 2018: iii). The Council’s 2019 Annual Review struck a more positive note, welcoming publication of the government’s Climate Action Plan, though it expressed concern over the “continued failure to set out detailed pathways on the cost-effective route to decarbonising the Irish economy by 2050” (CCAC 2019: iv).

The first National Mitigation Plan (NMP), the publication of which was required under the climate law, was published by the government in July 2017 (DCCAE 2017). It detailed a range of existing and planned measures across the electricity generation, built environment, and transport sectors to reduce GHG emissions. When publishing the Plan, the government described it as a “living document” and acknowledged that it “does not provide a complete roadmap to achieve the 2050 objective, but begins the process of development of medium to long term mitigation
choices for the next and future decades” (DCCAE 2017). In a landmark judgement delivered in July 2020, the Supreme Court quashed the NMP. In a case taken by environmental NGO Friends of the Irish Environment, the court ruled that the NMP failed to comply with the requirements of the 2015 Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act (see chapter “Climate Litigation, Politics and Policy Change: Lessons from Urgenda and Climate Case Ireland” by O Neill and Alblas, this volume).

The deployment of renewable energy and related infrastructure, particularly wind but also grid development, has faced increasing opposition from communities (NESC 2014). This led to many proposed projects being challenged through the courts. Nonetheless, an Energy White Paper published in 2015 committed to transforming Ireland’s energy sector into a clean, low-carbon system by 2050, stating that “eventually, we will have to generate 100 percent of all our energy needs—not just electricity—from clean sources” (DCENR 2015).

In the agriculture sector, GHG emissions rose rapidly during the 2010s. Although only marginally above 1990 levels in 2018, GHG emissions from the agriculture sector increased by 15 percent between 2011 and 2018 (EPA 2019b). This was driven significantly by a substantial expansion of the beef and dairy sectors. This has been underpinned to a large extent by national policy signals, including the Food Harvest 2020 and Food Wise 2025 government strategies. These prioritised expansion of beef and milk exports in particular. Furthermore, the abolition of EU milk quotas in 2015 was another significant contributory factor.

Adaptation policy, long the poor relation of mitigation, gained some traction during the 2010s. In 2012, a National Climate Change Adaptation Framework was published by government to provide a framework for national and sectoral adaptation development (DECLG 2012). While it was non-statutory, it led to the development of sectoral adaptation plans for the agriculture and transport sectors developed. The 2015 climate law put adaptation policy on a firmer statutory basis. A first statutory National Adaptation Framework was published by government under the climate law in February 2018 (DCCAE 2018b). This was followed by guidelines developed by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Energy for the development of sectoral and local authority adaptation plans (DCCAE 2018a, c).
A New Dawn?

The period since 2017 has witnessed a new momentum in Ireland’s response to climate change. An important driver of this was the process and outcomes of the Citizens’ Assembly of 2016–2018, which considered, among other topics, the question of “How the state can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change” over two weekends in autumn 2017. Interestingly, climate change was not specified as a topic for the Assembly to consider in the draft resolution introduced in the Oireachtas in July 2016. However, as a result of a Green Party amendment, climate change was added to the agenda.

An exceptional experiment in democratic governance, the Citizens’ Assembly comprised 99 citizens drawn from all walks of life and afforded them the time, space, and structure to consider complex questions of public policy in a deliberative way. Climate change was one of five topics considered by the Assembly. The recommendations they agreed on the climate change topic were significantly more radical than many observers expected, with strong support (80 percent or higher in all cases) for all proposed actions, including paying higher taxes on carbon-intensive activities, taxing GHG emissions from agricultural produce, and phasing out support for peat extraction on a phased basis (Citizens’ Assembly 2018).

In the period following on from the conclusion of the Citizens’ Assembly’s deliberations on climate change, a number of other factors contributed to raising the profile of climate change on the national and international policy agenda. First, a landmark report on Global Warming of 1.5° published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC 2018) painted in stark terms the consequences of failing to address climate change and attracted unprecedented media and public attention. Second, on the day following the publication of the IPCC report, then Minister for Finance Pascal Donohoe deferred a highly anticipated decision to increase the rate of the carbon tax, generating significant negative commentary. Third, the school strikes movement, inspired by Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg, brought unprecedented numbers of people to the streets to protest for stronger government action on climate change (see chapter “The Changing Faces of the Climate Movement in Ireland” by Gold, this volume).

An all-party Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action (JOCCA) was set up in July 2018 to consider the Citizens’ Assembly’s recommendations on climate change. Its report, published in March 2019, set out over
40 priority recommendations that were similarly far-reaching and endorsed many of the citizens’ proposals (Houses of the Oireachtas 2019). Significant media attention focused on political disagreements over a proposed increase in the carbon tax. Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil, Labour, and the Green Party supported increasing the carbon tax, while Sinn Féin and People Before Profit opposed it.

Notwithstanding the very public political disagreement on carbon tax, there was cross-support for most of the JOCCA’s recommendations (see also chapter “The Party Politics of Climate Change in Ireland” by Little, this volume). These included a range of measures to deal with GHG emissions from the key sectors of agriculture, energy, transport, and buildings, as well as recommendations for a just transition, the role of citizens and communities, and provisions around climate change education and communication. Among the most important elements of the JOCCA report were its recommendations for a new framework for governing the response to climate change (see also chapter “Climate Law in Ireland: EU and National Dimensions” by O’Gorman, this volume).

In turn, the JOCCA report played a significant role in shaping an all-of-government Climate Action Plan to Tackle Climate Breakdown, published by Minister Richard Bruton in June 2019 (DCCAE 2019). Although some of the sectoral chapters—particularly those on agriculture and transport—could have been more ambitious, the provisions on governance mirrored closely the recommendations of the JOCCA report. Moreover, they were modelled closely on the 2008 UK Climate Change Act. This is particularly noteworthy given that the UK model was considered but rejected during the framing of the 2015 climate change law because of objections by political parties and interest groups (Torney 2017). On 8 January 2020, the government published draft heads of the Climate Action (Amendment) Bill (DCCAE 2020), but two days later Taoiseach Leo Varadkar called a general election and the draft did not proceed further through the legislative process. A new government, formed in June 2020 and comprising Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Green Party, committed to carrying forward this process by enacting a Climate Action (Amendment) Bill. It also committed to an average annual decarbonisation rate of 7% over the course of the decade 2021–2030 (Government of Ireland 2020).
THE CONTEXT SHAPING IRELAND’S RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

It is clear that Ireland’s policy response to climate change has been insufficient to date, though the period since 2017 has witnessed new momentum. As a small European state, Ireland faces conflicting pressures with respect to climate change (Carter et al. 2019; Little and Torney 2017). Ireland’s policy response to climate change has been shaped by a range of political, institutional, societal, and economic factors.

Politically, as Conor Little argues cogently in his contribution to this volume, climate change has been a low-priority issue for most Irish political parties. There have been exceptions, most notably the periods 2006–2007 and since 2019, both of which coincided with strong economic growth and low unemployment. Institutionally, Ireland is heavily centralised, with limited powers devolved to local authorities (see chapter “Responding to Climate Change: The Role of Local Government in Ireland” by Dekker, this volume). This can inhibit experimentation and the development of bespoke policy responses for regional and local circumstances, which can be important in developing responses to climate change (Devaney and Torney 2019). Attempts at community and societal engagement remain sporadic, notwithstanding important exceptions such as the Citizens’ Assembly and some of the initiatives discussed by Clare Watson and Peadar Kirby in their contributions to this volume.

In another respect, however, Ireland’s governance landscape is fragmented horizontally. Recent decades have witnessed a progressive “agen-cification” of the Irish state. Comparative research has found that, across sectors, regulatory agencies overall in Ireland enjoy the highest level of formal independence across 17 West European countries (Gilardi 2005). Moreover, agencies have been created in Ireland in a relatively ad hoc fashion, with a wide variety of accountability and reporting relationships with central government (MacCarthaigh 2011).

Where powers have been delegated to independent regulators, this effectively introduces new veto players over which central government has relatively little control (Lockwood et al. 2017). This is indeed the case in respect of both the energy and transport sectors in Ireland (Devaney and Torney 2019; Torney 2018). Such fragmented decision-making structures make the task of decarbonisation of key sectors of the economy all the harder.
The possibilities for, and constraints on, Ireland’s policy response to climate change have also been shaped in important ways by the structure of the economy, both in the present and historically. Ireland’s economy is dominated by services, which accounted for nearly 60 percent of gross value added in 2018. Industry accounted for 37 percent, while the primary sector accounted for just 1 percent of gross value added (OECD 2020). This is striking for a country the economy of which was historically dominated by agriculture. However, the broader agri-food sector accounted for 7 percent of gross value added in 2016 (Teagasc 2020). Nonetheless, the historical legacy of a predominantly agricultural society gives the farming sector a voice in national policymaking that arguably is disproportionate to its contemporary contribution to the national economy.

Ireland’s economic history matters for climate policy in other ways too. Because of its late industrialisation, Ireland does not have the same legacy of heavy industry that has characterised many other industrialised countries. As a result, Ireland’s emissions profile has not benefited to the same extent from trends towards de-industrialisation resulting in “offshoring” of heavy industry, which benefits the national emissions inventories of countries outsourcing heavy industry because of the production-based methods of carbon accounting.

Ireland’s dispersed pattern of spatial development and comparatively low population density by comparison with other industrialised countries also shapes the context for climate policy development. At 70 persons per square kilometre, Ireland’s population density is considerably below the EU28 average of 117.7 persons per square kilometre (Eurostat 2020). This includes significant development of “one-off housing”—houses built in rural areas in recent decades that are not in close proximity to existing houses. This reduces the viability of public transport and increases car dependency. A more dispersed rural population is one factor underpinning objections to wind farm developments, which have become increasingly prevalent in recent years. In February 2018, the government unveiled a new National Planning Framework with a 2040 time horizon as well as a ten-year capital expenditure programme. Combined under the heading “Project Ireland 2040”, it aimed to encourage the development of denser urban development and to limit suburban sprawl.

The broader European context has also been important, though it should not be overstated (see chapter “Climate Law in Ireland: EU and National Dimensions” by O’Gorman, this volume for a detailed
discussion). The Irish state has formally complied with a range of planning and reporting obligations under EU legislation, such as the elaboration of National Renewable Energy Action Plans and National Energy Efficiency Action Plans and periodic reporting of GHG emissions inventories and projections as well as climate change policies and measures. However, if we judge the impact of the EU’s impact in terms of delivery on Ireland’s substantive as opposed to procedural obligations, the picture is much more mixed. Indeed, perhaps what is most striking is how limited the impact of EU membership has been on constraining Ireland’s policy substantive response to climate change (Torney and O’Gorman 2019).

**Conclusion**

Long regarded a climate laggard, Ireland entered the third decade of the twenty-first century with surprising momentum. This is not before time. Progress has been made in decarbonising electricity generation, but reducing GHG emissions from other sectors has proved much more challenging. Reduction in emissions from electricity sector has been driven by deployment of renewables and fuel switching, and the 2019 Climate Action Plan committed to a target of 70 percent renewable electricity by 2030. The state has hardly begun to tackle the agriculture and transport sectors, and the residential and industrial sectors pose significant challenges as well.

Impossible to predict just a few short years ago, the chain of events leading from the Citizens’ Assembly through the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action to the 2019 Climate Action Plan transformed Ireland’s climate policy landscape. While some of the sectoral chapters of the Climate Action Plan could have been more ambitious, the governance provisions of the Plan in particular have the potential to be transformational. This will be required if the state is to meet even its existing commitments under the EU’s 2030 climate and energy framework. These commitments could be strengthened further in the context of the European Commission’s *European Green Deal* proposal published in December 2019 (European Commission 2019). What impact the Covid-19 pandemic will have on Irish, European and global climate action remains uncertain (see introduction to this volume for initial reflections on this theme).

The February 2020 general election upended Irish politics. For the first time in any election since 1918, Sinn Féin received the largest share of first
preference votes (24.5 percent). The outgoing governing party Fine Gael was relegated to third place (20.9 percent), while Fianna Fáil’s vote share declined by 2.1 percent to 22.2 percent. In terms of Dáil seats, the outcome was close to a three-way tie. Fianna Fáil ended up marginally the largest party with 38 seats, just one seat ahead of Sinn Féin on 37 seats. Fine Gael ended up with 35 seats. The Green Party quadrupled its seat share to 12.

After months of negotiations, a new government was formed in late June 2020 composed of Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Green Party. The Programme for Government agreed between the three parties, contained significant commitments on climate action, including a pledge to reduce GHG emissions by 51% over the course of the decade 2021–2030, a commitment to introduce a Climate Action (Amendment) Bill within the first 100 days of the government, and significant pledges on sustainable transport, renewable energy and retrofitting (Government of Ireland 2020). However, the new government’s agenda was criticised by many on the political left particularly for its approach to high-salience issues such as housing, homelessness and health. Indeed, data from opinion polls conducted during the campaign as well as from the exit polls showed clearly that general election 2020 did not turn out to be the climate election that some expected. The—for many, more immediate—concerns of housing and health dominated the election campaign. Whether the period from 2017 onwards represents a true transformation of Ireland’s approach to climate change or merely a short-term deviation from a longer term trajectory remains to be seen.

**Bibliography**

Assembly, Citizens’. 2018. *Third Report and Recommendations of the Citizens’ Assembly: How the State Can Make Ireland a Leader in Tackling Climate Change*. Citizens’ Assembly: Dublin.

Barry, J. 2009. “It Ain’t Easy Being Green”: Sustainable Development Between Environment and Economy in Northern Ireland. *Irish Political Studies* 24 (1): 45–66.

Barry, F., A. Hannan, and E.A. Strobl. 1999. The Real Convergence of the Irish Economy and the Sectoral Distribution of Employment Growth. In *Understanding Ireland’s Economic Growth*, ed. F. Barry. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
Brennan, P., and J. Curtin. 2008. The Climate Change Challenge: Strategic Issues, Options and Implications for Ireland. Dublin: Institute of International and European Affairs.

Burck, J., F. Marten, C. Bals, and N. Höhne. 2017. The Climate Change Performance Index: Results 2018. Berlin: Germanwatch.

Burck, J., et al. 2018. The Climate Change Performance Index: Results 2019. Berlin: Germanwatch.

Carter, N., C. Little, and D. Torney. 2019. Climate Politics in Small European States. Environmental Politics 28 (6): 981–996.

CCAC. 2018. Annual Review 2018. Dublin: Climate Change Advisory Council.

———. 2019. Annual Review 2019. Dublin: Climate Change Advisory Council.

Coghlan, O. 2007. Irish Climate-Change Policy from Kyoto to the Carbon Tax: A Two-Level Game Analysis of the Interplay of Knowledge and Power. Irish Studies in International Affairs 18: 131–153.

Convery, F.J., L. Dunne, and D. Joyce. 2013. Ireland’s Carbon Tax and the Fiscal Crisis: Issues in Fiscal Adjustment, Environmental Effectiveness, Competitiveness, Leakage and Equity Implications. OECD Environment Working Papers 59. Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

CSO. 2020. National Income and Expenditure Annual Results. Available at: https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/nationalaccounts/nationalincomeandexpenditureannualresults/. Accessed 25 Feb 2020.

Cunningham, P. 2008. Ireland’s Burning. Dublin: Poolbeg Press.

Curtin, J., and T. Arnold. 2016. A Climate-Smart Pathway for Irish Agricultural Development. Exploring the Leadership Opportunity. Dublin: Institute of International and European Affairs.

Curtis, J., and S. Lyons. 2011. Managing Household Waste in Ireland: Behavioural Parameters and Policy Options. Journal of Environmental Planning and Management 54 (2): 245–266.

DCCAE. 2017. National Mitigation Plan. Dublin: Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

———. 2018a. Local Authority Adaptation Strategy Development Guidelines. Dublin: Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

———. 2018b. National Adaptation Framework. Dublin: Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

———. 2018c. Sectoral Planning Guidelines for Climate Change Adaptation. Dublin: Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

———. 2019. Climate Action Plan to Tackle Climate Breakdown. Dublin: Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

———. 2020. General Scheme Climate Action Amendment Bill. Available at: https://dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/climate-action/legislation/Pages/General-Scheme-Climate-Action-Amendment-Bill.aspx. Accessed 25 Feb 2020.
DCENR. 2015. *Ireland’s Transition to a Low Carbon Energy Future, 2015–2030*. Dublin: Department of Communications, Energy & Natural Resources.

DCMNR. 2007. *Delivering a Sustainable Energy Future for Ireland*. Dublin: Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources.

DECLG. 2012. *National Climate Change Adaptation Framework*. Dublin: Department of Environment, Community and Local Government.

DEHLG. 2007. *National Climate Change Strategy 2007–2012*. Dublin: Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

DELG. 2000. *National Climate Change Strategy Ireland*. Dublin: Department of Environment and Local Government.

Devaney, L., and D. Torney. 2019. *Advancing the Low Carbon Transition in Irish Transport*. Dublin: National Economic and Social Council.

DTTAS. 2009. *Smarter Travel—A Sustainable Transport Future*. Dublin: Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport.

Ecologic. 2020. *Climate Laws in Europe: Good Practices in Net-Zero Management*. Berlin: Ecologic Institute.

EPA. 2013. *Ireland’s Greenhouse Gas Emissions in 2012*. Wexford: Environmental Protection Agency.

———. 2019a. *Ireland’s Greenhouse Gas Emissions Projections, 2018–2040*. Wexford: Environmental Protection Agency.

———. 2019b. *Ireland’s Provisional Greenhouse Gas Emissions, 1990–2018*. Wexford: Environmental Protection Agency.

European Commission. 2019. *Communication from the Commission: The European Green Deal*. Brussels: European Commission.

Eurostat. 2020. Population Density. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00003/default/table?lang=en. Accessed 25 Feb 2020.

Flynn, B. 2003. Much Talk but Little Action? ‘New’ Environmental Policy Instruments in Ireland. In *New’ Instruments of Environmental Governance? National Experiences and Prospect*, ed. A. Jordan, R.K. Wurzel, and A.R. Zito, 137–156. London: Frank Cass.

———. 2006. *The Blame Game: Rethinking Ireland’s Sustainable Development and Environmental Performance*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press.

Gilardi, F. 2005. The Formal Independence of Regulators: A Comparison of 17 Countries and 7 Sectors. *Swiss Political Science Review* 11 (4): 139–167.

Government of Ireland. 2010. *National Renewable Energy Action Plan—Ireland*. Dublin: Government of Ireland.

———. 2014. *Climate Action and Low-Carbon Development: National Policy Position Ireland*. Dublin: Government of Ireland.

———. 2020. *Programme for Government: Our Shared Future*. https://www.finegael.ie/app/uploads/2020/06/ProgrammeforGovernment_Final_16.06.20-1.pdf.
Harrison, K. 2010. The Comparative Politics of Carbon Taxation. *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 6 (1): 507–529.

Hickey, K. 2008. *Five Minutes to Midnight? Ireland and Climate Change*. Belfast: White Row Press.

———. 2010. *Deluge: Ireland’s Weather Disasters 2009–2010*. Dublin: Open Air.

Houses of the Oireachtas. 2019. *Report of the Joint Committee on Climate Action. Climate Change: A Cross-Party Consensus for Action*. Dublin: Houses of the Oireachtas.

IPCC. 2018. *Global Warming of 1.5 °C*. Geneva: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Kirby, P. 2013. Policy Optimism: NESC, Climate Change and Achieving Decarbonisation. *Administration* 61 (2): 75–90.

Ladrech, R., and C. Little. 2019. Drivers of Political Parties’ Climate Policy Preferences: Lessons from Denmark and Ireland. *Environmental Politics* 28 (6): 1017–1038.

Laffan, B., and J. O’Mahony. 2008. Bringing Politics Back In’. Domestic Conflict and the Negotiated Implementation of EU – Nature Conservation Legislation in Ireland. *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning* 10 (2): 175–197.

Little, C. 2017. Intra-Party Policy Entrepreneurship and Party Goals: The Case of Political Parties’ Climate Policy Preferences in Ireland. *Irish Political Studies* 32 (2): 199–223.

Little, C., and D. Torney. 2017. The Politics of Climate Change in Ireland: Symposium Introduction. *Irish Political Studies* 32 (2): 191–198.

Lockwood, M., C. Kuzemko, C. Mitchell, and R. Hoggett. 2017. Historical Institutionalism and the Politics of Sustainable Energy Transitions: A Research Agenda. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* 35 (2): 312–333.

MacCarthaigh, M. 2011. Politics, Policy Preferences and the Evolution of Irish Bureaucracy: A Framework for Analysis. *Irish Political Studies* 27 (1): 23–47.

McGloughlin, J.S., and J. Sweeney. 2011. Multi-Level Climate Policies in Ireland. *Irish Geography* 44 (1): 137–150.

NESC. 2012. *Ireland and the Climate Change Challenge: Connecting ‘How Much’ with ‘How To’*. Dublin: National Economic and Social Council.

———. 2014. *Wind Energy in Ireland: Building Community Engagement and Social Support*. Dublin: National Economic and Social Council.

———. 2019. *Climate-Change Policy: Getting the Process Right*. Dublin: National Economic and Social Council.

Ó’Broin, D., and P. Kirby. 2015. *Adapting to Climate Change: Governance Challenges*. Dublin: Glasnevin Publishing.

O’Mahony, T. 2013. Decomposition of Ireland’s Carbon Emissions from 1990 to 2010: An Extended Kaya Identity. *Energy Policy* 59: 573–581.

O’Mahony, P., and K. Keohane. 2011. *Irish Environmental Politics After the Communicative Turn*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
O’Sullivan, K.P.V., and T. Kennedy. 2010. What Caused the Irish Banking Crisis? *Journal of Financial Regulation and Compliance* 18 (3): 224–242.
OECD. 2020. OECD Data: Value Added by Activity – Ireland. Available at: https://data.oecd.org/natincome/value-added-by-activity.htm. Accessed 25 Feb 2020.
Taylor, G. 1998. Conserving the Emerald Tiger: The Politics of Environmental Regulation in Ireland. *Environmental Politics* 7 (4): 53–74.
Taylor, G., and A. Horan. 2001. From Cats, Dogs, Parks and Playgrounds to IPC Licensing: Policy Learning and the Evolution of Environmental Policy in Ireland. *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations* 3 (3): 369–392.
Teagasc. 2020. Agriculture in Ireland. Available at: https://www.teagasc.ie/rural-economy/rural-economy/agri-food-business/agriculture-in-ireland/. Accessed 26 Feb 2020.
Torney, D. 2017. If at First You Don’t Succeed: The Development of Climate Change Legislation in Ireland. *Irish Political Studies* 32 (2): 247–267.
———. 2018. *Enabling Decarbonisation: A Study of Energy Sector Governance in Ireland*. Wexford: Environmental Protection Agency.
———. 2019. Climate Laws in Small European States: Symbolic Legislation and Limits of Diffusion in Ireland and Finland. *Environmental Politics* 28 (6): 1124–1144.
Torney, D., and R. O’Gorman. 2019. A Laggard in Good Times and Bad? The Limited Impact of EU Membership on Ireland’s Climate Change and Environmental Policy. *Irish Political Studies* 34 (4): 575–594.