



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Agriculture, Environment and
Rural Affairs

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Climate Change Bill: Department of
Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

18 March 2021

We all understand that Northern Ireland must do its bit to tackle climate change and that our emissions must be significantly reduced. Therefore, any climate change legislation must set out a legally binding framework to reduce those emissions to an ambitious, achievable and acceptable level in a timely manner. It must also complement Northern Ireland's ongoing climate change requirements under the legislation that currently exists in the form of the UK Climate Change Act 2008.

The consultation closed on 1 February. We worked at pace with the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) on the stage 1 quantitative analysis of the consultation, which we have provided you with. A second stage is ongoing, in the first instance, to develop a qualitative data analysis. That is being undertaken but is not yet complete. We took the decision that, owing to the importance of introducing the Bill within the current mandate, it was not feasible to complete the full analysis before briefing you. However, we have looked at the responses, and we plan to provide you with a much more detailed update at a later date.

On stage 1 analysis, we received 269 discrete responses with quantitative information. Of the respondents, 48% wanted a Bill that required Northern Ireland to contribute fairly to the UK net zero target by 2050. This was the preferred option, as 39.8% of respondents wanted a Bill that would require Northern Ireland to have net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, and 12.3% said that they did not know or were not sure which they preferred. Another point of note is that 83% of respondents wanted flexibility built into the Bill to allow consideration of updates to evidence, science and understanding in respect of climate change. Some 87% of respondents wanted provision in the Bill for public bodies to report on adaptation to climate change, and 77% wanted the Bill to include provision for an independent Northern Ireland advisory body on climate change.

As I mentioned, we have done some analysis of the qualitative data to ensure that we are not missing anything major. That early analysis identified four top themes, which were brought forward by around 100 or more respondents. Those four themes were the need for reporting by public bodies; the need for an independent advisory body; a net zero target by 2050; and a need for reporting by non-public bodies. I will not go into more detail on those now, but I can provide more detail during the questioning if anything is of particular interest.

Moving on, I will outline the draft policy proposals that Minister Poots will shortly seek Executive agreement on, and on which I will seek your opinion and, hopefully, your endorsement of today. The proposals have been informed by the expert advice of the Climate Change Committee (CCC) and a detailed legislative review that my team and I undertook to identify the main essential elements of effective climate change legislation — we looked at legislation from around the UK, Scotland, Wales, the Republic of Ireland and a range of other countries around the world, and we took into account the findings from the consultation so far. That led us to come up with the following policy proposals, which have been agreed with Minister Poots.

The first aspect of the Bill would concern emissions reduction targets. It is proposed to include a headline long-term net greenhouse gas emissions target to 2050, which will be set at least 82% lower than 1990 levels, with further interim reduction targets of 48% lower by 2030 and 69% lower by 2040. Those are in line with the CCC advice and the outcome of the stage 1 analysis of the consultation.

I fully appreciate that some may question our level of ambition on those proposed targets, but to help to explain it, I will use the analogy of an Olympic high jump competitor. He or she will set the bar at a level that is challenging but is based on track record, experience and all the available data on performance. If the bar is set much too high, he or she will simply run up to it and spectacularly sail under it. No doubt, that would be a very deflating experience. Of course, as the competitor improves, he or she can raise that bar and strive for ever-higher goals. Just like that competitor, we are using the up-to-date and relevant information and analysis of what is realistically achievable for Northern Ireland to set the emissions target bar at the right level so that we can truly stretch ourselves while aiming for credible achievements. Just as in my analogy, as we progress, we can continually review and update those targets. In my experience, it is important to ensure the targets are not just ambitious but realistic to get maximum buy-in from everyone. Unachievable targets can often have the opposite effect to that which we are aiming for and demotivate people or lead to a feeling of, "It is impossible, so why even bother trying?". I would aim to avoid that if possible.

The other aspects of the Bill that are being proposed are as follows. Five-yearly carbon budgets will be set that would set a cap on greenhouse gas emissions for Northern Ireland for each five-year period. There will be minimum reporting requirements, including carbon budget implementation reports, which would lay out what we would do to meet a budget. Final carbon budget statement reports would be completed, which would lay out how well we met our completed budget. Statements for interim target

years on the long-term 2050 target would be completed, together with shortfall reports, which would lay out how we would address any shortfalls if we were to fail to meet a budget. There would also be a requirement to carry out interim and end-of-programme progress reporting to the Assembly on carbon budgets and a requirement to obtain independent but non-binding review of progress on meeting emission reduction targets, carbon budgets and implementation of adaptation programs, which would supplement the adaptation reporting requirements that already exist in the UK Climate Change Act. Those are suggested to be at a frequency of end-of-term progress reviews for carbon budgets and interim progress reviews for adaptation programs. Finally, we have proposed to include enabling provisions to give powers, through secondary legislation, to require climate change reporting by public bodies. Again, that is something that I can explain in more detail during the questioning.

Before I close, I want to give a few thoughts of my own. The most recent Northern Ireland greenhouse gas projections report states:

"Emissions are expected to decrease year-on-year until 2025 when they level off. The downward trend is mainly driven by the energy supply sector with Kilroot power station closing in 2024 contributing to the decrease between 2018 and 2025 before levelling off as no further policy savings are included."

The report also states that a lack of policy direction in the later years of the projections results in a decline in the decrease, causing greenhouse gas emissions to level off. The projections estimate that we would meet the original CCC's target of 39% emissions reduction by 2030 for Northern Ireland. However, the latest CCC advice and our Bill proposals are that we should aim for a reduction of at least 48% by 2030. Currently, with those projections, we are not going to meet that.

Furthermore, the CCC said that to meet the challenging 2040 and 2050 targets, policy needs to be developed and implemented now throughout the 2020s and early 2030s, and that any levelling off at this stage could have major long-term consequences. That is another reason why a Bill is crucial in this mandate to give a strong focus on targets and to put in place a legal framework for action upon which policy-makers can build.

Should the Bill not complete its legislative passage in this mandate, one of the most likely scenarios for risk of failure, in my assessment, would be that we would be aiming to include the whole range of extra policy provisions in that primary legislation to help to deliver particular policy objectives but which would not be essential for effective climate change legislation. If that were the case, I estimate that a climate change Bill would be unlikely before 2026, which I certainly do not want to think about. I am basing that on the likelihood that there would need to be engagement with so many parties to see what extra policy areas they would prefer to be in that much wider Bill. That would then have to be followed by a further consultation process, commencement of a new development process and the legislative passage for the new Bill.

In relation to climate change, the Green Alliance said recently that failure is not an option. I feel similarly about this Bill, so my team and I have been working long hours to deliver this, but it needs the support of this Committee, the Executive and the Assembly to make it a reality. For that reason, I hope that you can endorse the policy proposals for the Bill.

Thank you, and I am ready for your questions.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Thank you for that, Colin. A number of members want to ask questions.

We had an interesting exchange with the CCC a number of weeks ago. Philip, the Deputy Chair, and I had a good exchange with the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) Committee this week as well in relation to the COP26 and the UN climate summit.

We need this legislation because, apart from our commitments to the climate change agenda, the fact that we are the only region in these two islands that does not have a climate change Act is sending out the wrong message. It is wrong that we send a message to the rest of the world that this region is not committed to sustainable practices, particularly in agriculture, when, in actual fact, we are world-beating when it comes to the food that we produce and our practices.

When we met BEIS, I made the point that, given the fact that we are a strong food-producing region — we produce enough food for 10 million people, whereas Britain is only 58% self-sufficient — it is

important that, in any legislation, there is a just transition so that, for example, our agri-food producers are supported and facilitated to make that transition.

There also needs to be a recognition that a lot of the emissions produced by the farming community are circular. There is a balance between what is produced and what is sequestered, and given the fact that our farmers maintain the landscape, boglands, peatlands and carbon sinks, it is important that that is factored in when we are working out targets. A climate change Act is vital. If we do not have that, companies around the world will judge us on that benchmark and could vote with their feet. It is a global benchmark. It is important that we go down that road, but it is really important that the Department and the Governments, on this island and in Britain, enable and support that just transition as well, Colin.

Mr Breen: Yes, we really want to lead by example. I do not think that it is any shock that we do not have a climate change Act and are the worst performers on reducing emissions in the UK. To quote my permanent secretary, from a meeting that I was at with him recently, "We do not want to be left behind". We are doing lots of the right things, but we want to show that we are doing lots of the right things. This legislation will help us to do that.

I completely agree with your point about supporting a just transition, and the CCC has recognised that. I really welcome its advice and recognition of the good work that Northern Ireland does in agri-food production. It is not attacking that and saying that we need to get to net zero at all costs. It made it quite clear in its letter — Minister Poots wrote a follow-up letter — that, to achieve net zero, we would simply be moving that food production elsewhere. That does not make a lot of sense as we do it so well.

On the emissions balance, we need to do more to sequester carbon. Agricultural land and land use policy, in general, is probably the best way to do that.

I fully recognise all those points and agree with every one of them.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Thank you, Colin.

Mr McGuigan: Thank you very much, Colin. I liked your Olympic high jump analogy, but if sport were predictable, there would be no point in it. Over the years, whether in the Olympics, World Cups or All-Irelands, there is unpredictability and many unfancied teams were able to achieve great success with hard work.

There is a lack of ambition in this. I think that some of the questions in the consultation were probably deliberately misleading and framed things, in particular with things like expert advice and non-expert advice. There are other organisations and groups out there whose opinions and advice as equally as expert as the CCC, and they think that it is eminently achievable for the North to achieve net zero by 2050 — indeed, by 2045. In fact, in its report, the CCC states that there is no technical reason why net zero is not possible. Some of the questions were misleading. For example:

"long term target does not consider expert climate change advice"

And

"long term target considers expert climate change advice"

were put into some of the questions. That was misleading.

I have another couple of brief points to make. There is very little of an all-island nature. I do not think we can work towards net zero, or any kind of carbon reduction in the North, without being cognisant of the fact and reality that we live on an island. There needs to be something more on that.

I know that there was a significant response to the consultation in the form of Ulster Wildlife's e-action and e-petition from its members who were in favour of a Bill with a net zero target of 2045. I could not see it in the paper, but how many people supported that e-petition and e-action respectively? Can you confirm whether the majority of respondents to the consultation were in favour of achieving net zero by 2045?

Mr Breen: OK. First, I fully accept that sport is unpredictable. I used that analogy.

The target in the Bill is at least 82%. That gives some level of realism, but we are certainly not trying to limit the ambition to go much further. We also have many provisions in the Bill that would allow us to update those targets as new advice comes in. I picked the high jump in particular because, if you are doing a two-metre high jump, you are not suddenly going to do a three-metre high jump. We need what we thought was the right amount of realism with ambition. At least 82% does not prevent anybody from going much further much faster. It is around getting that balance between the two, and that was our aim.

I know that Minister Poots sent another letter on there being no purely technical reason. While the Climate Change Committee says that there is no purely technical reason, it does give a couple of pages of reasons, the main reasons being that we would have to significantly reduce livestock numbers in Northern Ireland, which would have a major impact on the agri-food and the farming community. It would also only serve to move that food production elsewhere. The other reason was that we could aim for net zero if significantly more of the carbon capture and storage technologies were moved to Northern Ireland. They would be located in suboptimal areas if that were the case. It would be extra cost for no extra benefit for UK net zero.

I suppose it is really a question of whether we are aiming for UK net zero or for Northern Ireland net zero. As we are governed by the UK Climate Change Act, overall, we are still aiming for UK net zero. It seems that there are enough reasons that we should start at 82%. To give the example of Wales, it did start at a lower level, and, as things began to progress, it realised that it could do more, and it has legislated for more. There is nothing to prevent us from doing the same, but I think that it is important to set a realistic target and get the legislation in place. We are further behind than all the other UK jurisdictions, so *[Inaudible due to poor sound quality]* we really do need to *[Inaudible due to poor sound quality.]*

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): You were cutting out there, Colin.

Mr Breen: Sorry. Where did you get me?

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): It was intermittent for the past minute or so.

Mr Breen: I do not know why that is. I was talking about there being no purely technical reason but the fact of the carbon capture and storage facilities and the offshoring of agri-food production. Did you get all that?

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Yes.

Mr Breen: The next thing is to talk about the all-island nature. There is nothing in the Bill to exclude us from cooperating on an all-island basis; it is more about a global challenge and collaborating widely with everyone. We do collaborate through adaptation around the British-Irish Council, and we certainly will not stop collaborating. It is not something that would necessarily need to be legislated for, although, of course, I am quite happy to take on board the comments about that.

On the responses from Ulster Wildlife to the consultation, I do not have the exact numbers, and perhaps Arlene can dig them out while I am talking and then come in. As is standard practice with a campaign response, where people are largely just forwarding on an email and not putting in their own thoughts or opinions, that is taken as a single campaign response. That was taken as one response, and it was basically that Ulster Wildlife wanted to go for net zero. If Arlene is on now, perhaps she can give the figures on the number of Ulster Wildlife responses.

Ms Arlene McGowan (Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): Yes, Colin, thank you. There were 430 responses from Ulster Wildlife that were all very similar. They were a standard email response.

Mr McGuigan: The Department has taken those 430 as one response.

Mr Breen: Yes, that is the standard way to avoid a consultation being skewed by a number of emails being sent from different people with one agenda. It would be the same no matter what the answer was. They were on a standard email template, and it was quite clear that they were all coming in the form of the Ulster Wildlife response.

Mr McGuigan: I take it that the majority of those responses were in favour of net zero by 2045.

Mr Breen: Was it 2045 or 2050, Arlene?

Ms McGowan: It was 2050.

Mr McGuigan: OK. If you add those 430 responses to the figures, that totally changes the figures that have been presented this morning.

Mr Breen: Yes. That is why we weight consultation responses; to avoid a skewing of responses by a particularly active campaign. That has happened in many consultations that I have been involved in, both positively and negatively. It is the way to inform good consultation. Otherwise, you can have companies with vested interests — I am not saying that it is so in this case — just paying people to respond with a similar email. We have had it in other consultations. For example, with regard to waste, where people do not want a particular outcome, they will push lots of people, or even lots of social media bots and things like that, to just keep answering and almost spam the consultation with one answer. However, it does not —

Mr McGuigan: I am sorry to interrupt. I understand that, Colin. However, given the importance of this, and with regard to promoting the consultation, what engagement did the Department have with the local environmental sector or local policy experts in the climate community prior to and during the consultation?

Mr Breen: Arlene, do you want to come in on this one?

Ms McGowan: I am sorry, my screen stalled. Philip, can you repeat the question?

Mr McGuigan: I am just making the point that those 430 responses are deemed as one. That being the case, how much consultation was done with the environmental sector or policy groups here in the North in coming to a decision on net zero, 82% or even the time frame in relation to that?

Ms McGowan: The consultation was circulated widely on media platforms and promoted through our press office, MyNI etc. There was also a press release statement from the Minister. That was our avenue to engage with folk across Northern Ireland.

Mr Breen: A lot of the environmental NGOs would have attended the Climate Change Committee briefings that were in and around the same time as the consultation. I spoke to a number of them personally to discuss issues. They were from not only the environmental sector but a much wider range of all sorts of sectors — anybody who wanted to talk about it — to try to get the views of many.

There is certainly an ambition to go much further and be seen to be a leader. However, we also have to accept the fact that getting to 82% is, by no means, a cop-out or easy. It is still incredibly challenging. Between 1990 and 2018, we reduced by 20%. In the next 30 years, we have to reduce by 82%. We have a long way to go. As evidence and science emerge, we can, by all means, increase those targets, but it is important to realise the effect that this will have. As the Chair has said, we need a just transition. That is the advice that we have to achieve a just transition.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): OK. Happy enough, Philip? Philip, you are muted.

Mr McGuigan: I would not say that I am happy enough, but I do not want to hog the meeting, Chair. I will allow others to come in.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): OK. Thanks. No problem.

Mr Blair: Thanks, Colin and Arlene for presenting this to us. I want to pick up more broadly on the challenges around reaching that 82% target. I will try to do that in stages and relate it to the policy proposals. Thus far, there has been a great emphasis on agriculture. That is perfectly understandable, given the figures that we know for emissions contributions. However, I want to draw that out slightly to incorporate the Department's overarching responsibility for the environment. I will probably break this into two separate questions, if you do not mind. If we start with the policy proposals and the requirement for public bodies to report, how do we drill down further than that if we are to address

those challenges? What targeting and what interaction will there be with the business sector, small and large, and with the agriculture sector, small and large? For example, Northern Ireland has over 26,000 family farms that support over 29,000 households and employ or support over 107,000 people. First of all, how do we drill down to individual contributors to the problem? Will you reflect on that, particularly on how it relates to businesses and farms individually?

Mr Breen: Thanks, John. I will start with agriculture. There is obviously a challenge. The CCC has identified some things for that sector and for businesses on just transition, but there needs to be sectoral targets, which will be developed by Departments — they do not form part of the legislation — and there needs to be plans on how each sector will reduce. Every sector needs to do its bit. No sector is getting a free run by any means. Businesses, agriculture waste, energy, transport all have to do an awful lot very quickly. One of the delivery vehicles will be the green growth strategy. That will look at different sectors and at how we can reduce emissions while still protecting the economy.

There are already some responsibilities on businesses to report through the Companies Order, I believe. I actually have a note here, because I can never seem to remember the exact title of the legislation. Yes, it is the UK Companies Act 2006 and relevant subordinate legislation, so companies have to have climate-related financial disclosures. There is some onus on them already. We will also have various engagements with businesses as part of behaviour change campaigns and information sharing. Obviously, some of the onus is also on the Department for the Economy to assist with that, so it is really a cross-departmental challenge to engage further. Every single sector needs to do more, and it is up to all of us and the Executive to ensure that more is done. To get that journey started, we really need the legislation in place to give that focus on the targets, John.

Mr Blair: Yes, Colin, I am getting that, but what I am trying to achieve with the questions is a commitment to make that happen. The interdepartmental responsibility is very clear. For example, the contributory figures from the transport sector or the residential sector highlight, not that this needs to be highlighted, the interdepartmental responsibilities and the problems across sectors. Should that not mean, therefore, that in the legislation or, at the very least, in the policy proposals that we have at this stage, there should be very specific targets for those individual sectors and those individual Departments so that it is all tied together to make it able to contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions?

Mr Breen: The simple answer is that legislation around the world generally does not have sector-specific targets. You have an overall target that the whole Executive have to buy in to, and then we work to develop exactly what the best path for that will be. That is because, first, we do not have the budget to do absolutely everything, and, secondly, as things change, one sector may do more and another sector may end up doing less. The whole aim is to get this collective challenge embedded into Northern Ireland government and into Northern Ireland Departments. Then —

Mr Blair: I am sorry to cut across you, but on the point about DAERA's responsibility to do absolutely everything, is that cross-departmental commitment not one of the mechanisms for trying to address budget limitation, because all Departments, other sectors and their representative bodies, for example, could also contribute to the budgetary requirements?

Mr Breen: Yes, and they should. Essentially, the legislation will have DAERA in a coordination role, but the onus, the ambition and the need to meet targets will be placed equally on all Northern Ireland Departments, so, ultimately, on the Executive. Everything will not be placed on DAERA to do. Waste and agriculture are the two main sectors that DAERA has to develop policy proposals for, but each and every Department will have to develop policy proposals for their areas and work collectively to develop budgets in order to start to tackle the challenge.

The answer is that it is by no means DAERA's challenge and by no means DAERA's responsibility. The legislation is our responsibility, and the development of secondary regulations will be our coordinating responsibility, but meeting the targets is not a DAERA responsibility and will not be in the legislation as such. The responsibility will be very much on all Northern Ireland Departments.

That is a flavour of Northern Ireland legislation. The responsibility is placed on the Departments and ultimately rests with the Minister for that Department, whereas, in GB, it is usually with the Scottish or Welsh Ministers. From what I am told, that is just how legislation is written here. It will be on every one of the Departments and Ministers equally.

Mr Blair: OK. I do not want to hog the seat, but, finally, so that I am clear, I will go back to the inter-sectoral, or interdepartmental, responsibilities. Can it be built into the policy proposals at this stage that the Departments — plural — will be able to advise the various sectors, be they business or agriculture, and all the business units and individuals in those sectors on the available advice and technologies? I think that there is a need to start building that in at this stage.

Mr Breen: I am not sure that you would necessarily legislate for that, but it should be part of any plan to meet emissions reduction targets. Two of the big, important factors in meeting any target are behaviour change and awareness raising. You need to educate everybody about how they can do things.

Take waste, for example, which is something that I have been involved with. We need to educate people about how to recycle more. We have run a lot of behaviour change campaigns, which have moved us to massive increases in recycling over the last decade. It is the same with every other sector. It is just good practice on the part of a Department. I cannot imagine that any Department would start on a plan to reduce emissions and not let people know what it is doing, why it is doing it and how people can help.

To answer your question, John, we would not necessarily put that into the legislation because it would be very hard to define in legislative terms. However, what you suggest certainly needs to be done, and I cannot imagine any Department not doing it.

Mr Blair: OK. Thank you.

Mr Harvey: Thank you, Colin and Arlene.

Colin, how will the Bill that is drafted from the policy proposals compare with Climate Change Acts in GB and ROI?

Mr Breen: Thank you very much, Harry. As I said, we undertook a very detailed legislative review. Basically, all legislation worldwide has four common provisions or four common aspects. The main ones are targets, budgets, reporting requirements and an advisory body. Ours will have those, but the proposed advisory body is the Climate Change Committee.

Various Acts have all sorts of other hook-on provisions that are not really standard for climate change legislation. There may be something about waste or land use, for example, but that is really about getting other things into primary legislation. We considered those, but, given the time frame and the need to get it done in this mandate, if you include one, where would you stop? That is the basic question. Our Bill is very focused, covering what is needed to operate climate change legislation. We will need to bring forward at pace all the other policy proposals from DAERA and the other Departments as soon as this is enacted.

Mr Harvey: Have you found that anything has been left out or not been covered in the proposals? Do you feel that you have covered it all?

Mr Breen: I feel that we have covered everything that is essential for well-functioning climate change legislation. In an ideal world, I would love the Bill to be several hundred pages long, covering every sector and dealing with all the land use issues, waste issues and all the other things so that we do not have to develop lots of other pieces of primary legislation. Balancing that against the fact that we need the legislation, that the NDNA is committed to it and that we have only a year left in this mandate, we needed a focused piece of legislation to set a legally binding framework for climate change so that we could start reducing our emissions for that major challenge.

Mr Harvey: Given all the proposals, how long will it take to see the desired changes so that we know that what we are doing is worth it?

Mr Breen: By dealing with a number of cross-departmental and strategic oversight groups, a lot of Departments are already working on climate action plans. As noted in the last greenhouse gas projections, however, if we do not start getting new policies soon, we are going to level off very quickly. If we get the legislation in place, I can see major changes over the next few years, if there is the will for that.

Mr Harvey: Could we produce our present levels of agri-foods by being more innovative rather than cutting our produce?

Mr Breen: I would not like to talk about the specifics of agriculture other than to talk about what the CCC recommended in a just transition. It suggested, and I think that it briefed you on this, that there is a behaviour change element with the result that less meat is used, so possibly some of the agri-food sector here would move to other crops, for example, or would maybe use land for other things.

That is down to future agricultural policy. The Bill is just setting what target would be sensible for that just transition. A lot of work still needs to be done to decide exactly how that will come about. We need to start somewhere, and this is the first step on a very long journey.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): I take your point, Colin, that it is important that future agricultural policy really needs to be very much aligned with climate change. In areas out in the hills where I live, for example, there are very few alternative land uses for the grassland and heather that we have. That is an important point.

Mr McGlone: Thank you, Colin, for that. John was talking about how individual Departments would set in place monitoring procedures and how those might work. What thoughts have you given to how performance would be measured and benchmarked and to how that might be rolled out departmentally?

Mr Breen: We already have monitoring and measuring in place through the greenhouse gas inventory. That focuses on sectors, so some of those sectors will cut across Departments. The green growth strategy may also set sector-specific targets, although that has not been decided yet. Departmental climate action plans may also set targets.

The monitoring and measuring are well established, Patsy. I have no concerns about monitoring and measuring; my concerns are about delivery.

Mr McGlone: Treat me as a blank sheet. How is that monitoring and measuring done?

Mr Breen: The statisticians measure the greenhouse gas emissions. The most recent report was in 2018. That measurement gives an indication, although some figures are modelled, of what the greenhouse gas emissions for Northern Ireland were for a particular year — as I say, 2018 — and what that reduction was against the baseline year, which is 1990, for a series of greenhouse gases.

At the minute, we are at a 20% reduction compared with 1990 levels as at 2018. I will give some indication of where other jurisdictions are. The UK as a whole has reduced emissions by 43% since 1990. England has done best with a 46% reduction. Scotland is almost as good at 45%, and Wales has had a 31% reduction. I do not think that it is any coincidence that they all have well-functioning pieces of legislation. The Republic of Ireland's emissions have increased by slightly over 10% from 1990 levels, according to their 2019 figures. That is where we are on a UK basis.

Mr McGlone: Sorry; that is the outcome. You are measuring the outcome. I am talking about a mechanism being put in place to establish how that is being done in each Department. It is about the measures that have been taken individually by Departments or, indeed, their arm's-length bodies in order to fulfil those outcomes.

Mr Breen: Sorry; I misunderstood your question. I apologise, Patsy. A lot of it will be to do with the carbon budget reporting, and I think that Arlene is probably best placed to explain how all the different reporting will work and how the Executive Committee etc will look at that. Arlene, do you want to talk a little bit about the different reporting requirements that we have? *[Pause.]* I think that you are on mute, Arlene. *[Pause.]* Have we lost Arlene?

Ms McGowan: No. Can you hear me?

Mr Breen: Yes.

Ms McGowan: Hi. Sorry about that.

The carbon budgets are five-yearly, and, in that time, there will be an interim monitoring stage. The interim monitoring stage — that is like the halfway stage — will look at how well we are delivering on our policies and our implementation reports for a carbon budget. As Colin said, we will use the greenhouse gas inventory to assess, at the end of our carbon budget, how successful we have been in meeting that. As Colin alluded to, the greenhouse gas inventory is published every year, but it is two years behind.

The greenhouse gas inventory is produced annually by Ricardo Energy and Environment on behalf of the Scottish Government, the UK and DAERA, on behalf of all our Departments. It contains data detailing greenhouse gas emissions from 1990 to the latest reporting year, which, as I said, is two years behind the present year. It is basically a subset of the UK greenhouse gas inventory, and it is produced to fulfil, for example, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) reporting requirements and requirements under the Kyoto protocol. It is compiled in line with international guidance and looks at different greenhouse gases — there are seven all together — including methane and carbon dioxide etc.

Mr Breen: Sorry, Arlene. Patsy was actually looking for an explanation of the reporting requirements in the Bill.

Ms McGowan: In the Bill?

Mr Breen: I have it here now, Patsy. Various types of reports will have to be laid in the Assembly. Arlene can correct me if I am wrong on any of them. There will be an implementation report, a progress report on how we are reducing emissions for the carbon budget and a final closing statement to say whether we have met that budget. If we have not, there will have to be a shortfall report. There will be quite a clear focus on meeting those carbon budgets and a clear focus on any sector that has not. For the sectors that have not, the Department or Departments responsible will have to explain why those budgets were not met and create another report to say what they will do in order to meet that shortfall in the next carbon budget period. There is a strong emphasis on reporting, which will shine a spotlight on what we are doing well, and if there is anybody not doing well, it will equally shine a spotlight on that and ask how they will do more. Having to report and to say whether you have met the carbon budgets gives you that impetus and drive to do a bit more to meet them.

Similarly, there will be reports on the emissions reduction targets. For the interim years of 2030, 2040 and 2050, we will have to report on whether we have met those targets, and, if we have not, we will have to say why not. I believe that that will be a good stage to look at whether we can be more ambitious in the targets. We and a number of Departments already report on climate change adaptation programmes. The legislation adds to that by having midterm reporting on it, so it is not just a matter of saying, "You have got to the end of your term. How have you done?" Is there anything that I have left out on reporting, Arlene?

Ms McGowan: I do not know whether you want to touch on the fact that we will also be required to have reporting from an independent review of progress. That role will fall to the CCC. There is an element of government self-reporting, but there is also an element with independent reviews of progress of carbon budgets and of the implementation of our adaptation programmes. That is supplementary to the adaptation reporting that is already required under the UK Climate Change Act.

Mr McGlone: Specifically on that, I just want to nail something down, Colin. Is the onus on individual Departments to do that, or is DAERA the one lead Department that kick-starts other Departments to do it?

Mr Breen: The responsibility lies equally on all Northern Ireland Departments and will ultimately rest with the Executive. DAERA will obviously be the coordinating Department for it because of its role, but the responsibility will lie equally on everybody and the reports will be provided by everyone. The legislation is needed in order to ensure collaboration, and we must ensure that everybody complies with the legislation. It is a very strong driver.

Ms McGowan: At the stage of the carbon budget implementation reports, it will be for all Departments to set out their policies, proposals and plans for meeting the carbon budget, and that implementation report will have to be agreed by the Executive before it is laid in the Assembly. Colin is correct in saying that DAERA will have a coordination role in that, but all Departments will have to feed into it and clearly state what they will do to meet the carbon budget for that five-year period.

Mr McGlone: OK. That is grand. Thank you both.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Will you elaborate on the watchdog? What happens if Departments are in default?

Ms McGowan: Do you mean if we do not meet a carbon budget?

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Yes.

Ms McGowan: There will be a requirement for what we are terming shortfall reports. If a carbon budget has not been met, a report will have to be developed that will set out proposals and policies to compensate for the excess emissions in later budgetary periods. That is quite a similar approach to those taken elsewhere in the UK. I think that Wales has applied a similar approach. There will be a mechanism to tackle and to, for want of a better term, claw back any shortfalls. They can be carried over to other budgetary periods, so when a new carbon budget is developed, that carbon budget will have to take consideration of the recommendations or commitments in the shortfall reports.

It will depend on the timing. It is more likely due to five-year carbon budgets. As I say, it will be open to — although this may not be the case in the next consecutive carbon budget — potentially being taken on board in the carbon budget after the next, or it could be split between two carbon budgets, but there is definitely a mechanism to make up for any shortfalls.

Mr M Bradley: Colin, you mentioned carbon storing. What are the main proposals on carbon capture and storage? What plans are in place to repair the damage that has been done to existing peatlands and wetlands by extraction and draining? What plans are in place to create more forest, peatlands and wetlands throughout Northern Ireland? I think that we are one of the least-populated areas in terms of trees in the whole of Europe. What other measures are being explored to create areas of carbon capture, which would also benefit wildlife?

Mr Breen: I will not claim to be an expert in some of those things — I will probably have to refer you to other colleagues for other briefings — but the main types of carbon capture and storage that are being investigated are those at energy plants, where carbon is captured and then stored underground or under the sea etc. I do not have a massive understanding of that; I just know what the projections are. More natural means of carbon storage have always been looked at, but there is now a lot more hope for technological means of capturing carbon and storing it. I probably could not give you a whole lot more on that.

Where repairing peatlands is concerned, I know that the peatland strategy is due to be launched soon. You will probably want to get a briefing on that, and I think that you requested an update on it in your letter last week.

We certainly have a very low forest cover at the minute. Just over a year ago, I was in Cookstown helping to plant 1,000 trees. We had 500 children there; I cannot imagine such a situation any more. The Forests for Our Future programme aims to do a lot more on that. There are certainly issues with peatlands, but they provide one of the big opportunities for Northern Ireland. We have a lot of peatland here. It can sequester a lot of carbon. We should see that not as a challenge but as a real positive opportunity to create green jobs and restore our peatlands, sequester carbon and show all the good work that the agriculture and land-use sector can do, as the Chair mentioned, in order to sequester carbon and allow us to still have emissions from the excellent agri-food production.

I think that I covered all your questions. I am sorry that I was not overly technical on some of them.

Mr M Bradley: You are all right; you covered them well, Colin. You omitted to mention the benefit to wildlife by doing all that, but that will come naturally.

How do the proposals in the climate change Bill compare with what happens in the rest of the UK and, indeed, in the EU? I would prefer Northern Ireland to have its own targets that would preferably be more enhanced, but, as we are aware, Northern Ireland remains under EU law through the emissions trading system (ETS) etc. What impact will the Northern Ireland protocol have on any proposed climate change Bill in Northern Ireland?

Mr Breen: My understanding is that it will not have an impact. We are bound to meet the Paris Accord, but that happens on a UK basis. Our target of at least 82% allows us, as the UK, to meet that Paris commitment. My understanding is that it would not have any impact; if I am wrong, Arlene or Anthony can shout at me very quickly.

Mr M Bradley: Transport has been identified as being a major contributor to greenhouse gas, and it is increasing. What possible plans have been discussed with other Departments to move from road haulage to the greater use of rail transport between major ports and towns? Our rail infrastructure is not developed enough to move goods between major destinations by rail. Has that been looked at as part of the Bill?

Mr Breen: No, it has not. As I said, in an ideal world, when you develop a very large piece of primary legislation over a four- or five-year period, you would have those sorts of provisions, but the Bill is very focused on setting the framework for climate change legislation and letting all Departments — rail infrastructure would be for the Department for Infrastructure — develop their own policies. The kick-starter for that is legislation with strong targets. There will be real reputational damage if we do not start to introduce policies to meet those targets.

Mr M Bradley: I have one final question, with your indulgence, Chairman; thanks for your patience. Has any cost been estimated for to what a Northern Ireland climate change Bill could cost?

Mr Breen: So far, we have the general details from the Climate Change Committee, which has identified that, on a UK basis, there is a significant economic benefit rather than cost. It said that costs of around 0.5% of GDP per annum would give benefits of around 3% of UK GDP per annum and that it would create up to 300,000 green jobs in the UK. That is all very positive. We are currently working with the Climate Change Committee to investigate Northern Ireland costs, particularly for the enhanced reporting requirements and the enhanced work that the CCC would need to do for us. The main thing to note, however, is that the costs or benefits to Northern Ireland depend on the exact policies that are chosen for the just transition.

There is more than one way to skin a cat, but it is about us deciding exactly what we do to meet that just transition. There are lots of different pathways that can lead us to at least an 82% reduction. There are some big-ticket items. Electrification is probably the main one in the CCC's recommendation, particularly electrification of transport and electrification of heating. There are so many other options, but I see the very fact of a just transition only as a positive. If electrification of heating is done properly, it will move so many people out of fuel poverty. Electrification of transport improves air quality significantly. If we do this right, all that I see are opportunities. I am no expert in a lot of these *[Inaudible due to poor sound quality]*, but I enjoy reading *[Inaudible due to poor sound quality]* and reading their evidence and the evidence from lots of other people and engaging with lots of other jurisdictions. That is my takeaway: it is about benefits not costs.

Mr M Bradley: I agree, Colin, that the benefits outweigh any costs. Thanks very much for your answers.

Mrs Barton: You will be aware that, over the past week, there was a headline in one of the agriculture papers that read:

"Climate law to cap stock numbers".

I am sure that you are aware of that headline, Colin.

Mr Breen: Yes.

Mrs Barton: Colin, what reassurance can you give to farmers who are outward-looking and forward-looking? We talk about passing on our family farms to sons, daughters etc and for them to progress them further. What reassurance can you give to farmers on the back of that headline?

Mr Breen: I have the article, and I have responded to it. The main thing to say is that it is very hard to comment. We do not have any agricultural policy at the moment to determine what effects livestock numbers will have etc. There have certainly been suggestions that moving some land to other uses may be beneficial for tackling climate change, but I would not really like to comment on any specifics such as livestock numbers, because we simply do not know. It is really about everybody playing their

part. Capping stock numbers would not impact on the farmland itself, but it might involve some new working practices. For example, the Climate Change Committee's sectoral plan for agriculture contains a lot of very positive steps, including low-carbon farming. It is therefore about being part of the just transition.

I do not think that such headlines are helpful. We have never got to that level of detail. The Climate Change Committee did suggest that there would be a 20% reduction in the eating of red meat as part of its transition, and that is from behaviour change. At its presentation on what this means for Northern Ireland, the Climate Change Committee said that it might mean that livestock numbers naturally reduce. As I said, the future agricultural policy will have more to say about that than I ever could. With the Bill, we are trying to set the framework to get things started and then let sectors discuss how they can reduce emissions.

Mrs Barton: That headline has caused quite a bit of unease in the farming and agriculture community.

Arlene, you said that, if Departments are not meeting their targets, that there is a mechanism to catch up within the following five years. Would it not be more helpful for Departments to be assessed perhaps every two years, rather than after five years, to try to put right what they have not been doing?

Mr Breen: There will be a constant ongoing assessment, with the greenhouse gas inventory being produced every year. When we were looking at reporting requirements, we had to strike a balance. We have spoken to a number of other jurisdictions. One goes with reporting as often as yearly. If you do that, however, you then spend your whole time preparing, producing and discussing reports, and not enough time is spent on actual action. There is therefore a balance to be struck. Every year, there will be a focus on how we are doing on reductions. The formal reporting, however, will be done on a slightly more stretched-out basis in order to give time for us really to consider and work on things. Policy implementation takes time as well. It is about getting that drive to get started. That is really what we need: that kick-start.

Mrs Barton: OK. Thank you. I will not take up any more time.

Mr Breen: Thank you, Rosemary.

(The Deputy Chairperson [Mr McGuigan] in the Chair)

The Deputy Chairperson (Mr McGuigan): I am taking over the Chair briefly. William, you are next.

Mr Irwin: Thank you, Mr Deputy Chairman, and thanks to Colin and Arlene for the presentation. The target of 82% by 2050 is a big challenge. It is important that we set targets that are achievable. I have been a farmer all my life. I am fully aware of how important our agri-food sector is to the Northern Ireland economy. It employs up to 100,000 people here. We have been told by the Climate Change Committee that to reduce carbon emissions to zero by 2050 will mean a substantial reduction in output from the livestock farming sector in Northern Ireland. For me, that would be foolhardy, because that food production would possibly be replaced by that from some other country that, in fact, contributes much more to global warming and the carbon footprint than we do. Do you accept that that would be the case? I am sure that you said earlier, in response to a question from Rosemary that, although we are told that there would have to be a substantial reduction in livestock production, you have no idea what "substantial" means at this stage. "Substantial" means a considerable amount. We therefore need to be very careful. I support the 82% reduction. Farmers will want to play their part, but we need to be sensible and, as you said earlier, do what is achievable. Do you accept that to reduce production in Northern Ireland and import from countries that contribute more global warming and the carbon footprint does not seem very sensible?

Mr Breen: One of the reasons that we are suggesting a target of at least 82% is because of the ramifications of going for the net zero target. Although, as the CCC says, there is no purely technical reason for it, there are a lot of very good economic reasons. We have a good food sector, good food standards and good animal welfare standards here. We produce food for other regions of the UK. It is a UK and a global challenge. That is why we are suggesting that target. We do not want there to be major negative impacts on the economy. We want positive impacts on the environment, but people still need the pound in their pocket at the end of the day. That is why the target of at least 82% has the right level of ambition while also respecting the role that Northern Ireland plays in agri-food production.

The target of at least 82% is not just about agri-food production, I should say. The CCC highlighted that as well. Even if the agricultural element of emissions reductions was removed, Northern Ireland would still be able to achieve only a 93% reduction in emissions. A lot of that is to do with the fact that we are further behind and have other unique challenges. We have far fewer properties that are connected to the *[Inaudible due to poor sound quality.]* We have quite a lot of older houses, such as rubble masonry-type houses, which are harder to retrofit with good insulation and heat pumps, for example. There are therefore a lot of challenges. Again, I will say that the legislation will help us start to address some of those challenges in a way that is achievable. As you said, William, we want something that is achievable and gets everybody's buy-in. As I said in my initial comments, there is no point in having a target about which people feel, "We will never achieve that, so why even bother?".

Mr Irwin: Absolutely. I agree wholeheartedly. Thank you.

(The Chairperson [Mr McAleer] in the Chair)

Ms Bailey: Thanks, Colin and Arlene. I completely agree. It is very exciting to hear the plans. So much opportunity lies within them. I will follow on from issues that Philip raised about the number of respondents being counted. I want to put on record that the consultation was put out over the Christmas holidays — during lockdown Christmas holidays, in particular — and came about very quickly. What consideration was given to it before that? Given that the consultation on the Department's environment strategy last year resulted in over 2,000 responses, I believe that limiting responses to this consultation to 400 or 500 respondents as a result of its timing should be noted.

I want to come back to the 82% reduction, which is an absolutely key issue. I know that that is based on Northern Ireland's fair share, as it has been assessed in the UK Bill. I will link that to what you said, Colin, about what we are seeing in the Republic of Ireland, where emissions have increased. If we are seeing increases in the Republic and if we are looking at Northern Ireland going to 82%, that leaves us in a bit of a carbon black hole for the future. We are lagging behind, and the trajectory does not look great for 2050. We know that the Executive have already signed up to introducing legislation and targets to reduce carbon emissions in line with the Paris Accord, the spirit of which calls always for increased ambition to limit climate breakdown to 2°C warming but to aim for 1.5°C. How do you think that the current situation, with increases in the Republic and us heading for 82%, fits in with the spirit of the accord?

Mr Breen: Thank you, Clare. Yes, I share your opinion that this is a very exciting time to get this Bill through finally, hopefully. Although the number of respondents was small, it was fairly representative. All the main organisations responded. We would perhaps have liked a longer consultation period, but the main focus was on developing the Bill, and a longer consultation — even another four weeks — would have meant that we would not be briefing the Committee until early April, and that would leave a very short time frame. On balance, the respondents were largely in favour of the evidence-based-type target, but it was quite close. What we are trying to achieve here is, as I have said several times, a level of ambition. We are not trying to limit ambition. A target of at least 82% does not mean that we could not get to net zero by 2045 with huge ambition and major changes in technology, but I would like to think that, if that were happening, we would amend the Bill accordingly at a later date. The Bill is future-proofed to allow for those sorts of amendments.

You mentioned 82% being Northern Ireland's fair share. The UK was the first major place to suggest a net zero target by 2050. Setting politics aside, we are part of the UK, so our share of that is 82%. Take a large farming region in GB. I do not know one offhand, but, on its own, it will probably not get to net zero, but another part of GB will do way more, particularly Scotland, which is doing much more because it has the land mass.

Ms Bailey: I understand. The Department asked the Climate Change Committee for Northern Ireland's fair share, but did it ask for a road map for, or advice on, how we get to net zero or just how we achieve the fair share? That is my concern.

Mr Breen: I believe that we previously asked whether net zero is possible, so the question to ask, as all the jurisdictions have done, is this: what can we do? There is no point in saying, "We want to do this. How do we do it?". The Climate Change Committee has outlined how we could do it, but the project of us bringing carbon capture and storage here is a vanity project and would be overly challenging and overly detrimental to Northern Ireland. The main thing to say is that it is a global challenge. I want us to do as much as we can — we all do — but there needs to be an element of

realism and buy-in. We will constantly review and update the legislation: it is not a one-and-done. The Bill is a good place to start, so let us get it in place.

Ms Bailey: I wholeheartedly agree with that, but it has to be the right legislation if it is going to build a framework for the future as well. Are the detrimental impacts to Northern Ireland solely in the area of agri-food production? Where will the detriments be seen?

Mr Breen: There is a detriment to the agri-food sector, which makes up the difference between 82% and 93%. Dealing with some of the other issues would involve excessive costs. There is a percentage of emissions separate to those from agriculture. Offshoring food production for the sake of getting to 82% does not seem to make a lot of sense, and the CCC has said that. That was not led by the Department [*Inaudible due to poor sound quality.*]

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Colin, you have gone silent. We cannot hear you. [*Pause.*]

Mr Breen: Sorry. Did I lose you there?

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): [*Inaudible due to poor sound quality*] or so.

Mr Breen: Sorry, I do not know —.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): We are getting a bit of background interference as well.

Mr Breen: Sorry. I was hearing myself and nobody else there for a minute.

There is a range of detrimental impacts, none of which we led the CCC to give us. We simply asked it what we could do, and it gave us its advice. I fully recognise the role that the agri-food sector plays in Northern Ireland and the fact that, at the minute, there are too many emissions from it, which we need to tackle. The Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU) response to the consultation was clear in recognising that as well.

I mentioned some of the other challenges earlier, such as our heavier reliance on heating oil, the fact that a lot of our houses are more poorly insulated and are harder to retrofit with insulation, and the fact that we rely more heavily on transport because of our proportion of rural dwellers. There are so many factors in play, but this is a good starting point for addressing them. I would love to be appearing in front of you very soon saying, "We've reviewed all of this, and we can go further once we have started to implement it", but I would love to have your endorsement of this Bill. It does have the main aspects of effective climate change legislation.

Ms Bailey: Is the 82% going to be a legal obligation in the Bill?

Mr Breen: It is placed in legislation, which makes it a legally binding target.

Ms Bailey: On the interim and five-year reporting, to where do those reports go? [*Inaudible due to poor sound quality.*]

Mr Breen: They are laid in the Assembly. I will let Arlene speak about the specifics.

Ms McGowan: Any progress reporting is coordinated by DAERA, with input from all other Departments. The report then has to be agreed by the Executive, and it is subsequently laid in the Assembly. When we get an independent progress report from the CCC, it will be publicly available, and all Departments will be required to develop a report in response. Those reports are also required to be laid in the Assembly.

Ms Bailey: Is there any level of independent scrutiny or monitoring in the plans for the Bill?

Ms McGowan: Yes. That is what I was referring to earlier. The CCC will have a role to play under the legislation to carry out [*Inaudible due to poor sound quality*] progress reviews of how we have met our carbon budgets. That will happen at the end of a carbon budget period. It will put in each review advice and recommendations on that. There will also be an independent review by the CCC of

adaptation programmes, which will be done at a midterm stage, and *[Inaudible due to poor sound quality]* that stage to inform the next five-year adaptation programme.

Ms Bailey: OK. The only level of independence will therefore be the interim reporting to the CCC.

Mr Breen: Clare, you will also have Committee scrutiny of many of those things and that of everybody in Northern Ireland and rest of the UK, if they do not feel that we are doing enough. There will be no shortage of scrutiny by people.

Ms Bailey: Yes. I would like to ask one more question if possible, please, Chair. We seem to be wedded to the idea that if we cut our agri-emissions here from food production, they will simply be produced elsewhere. What studies have been done on the risk of that type of carbon leakage supporting the stance that strict climate legislation here will result in emissions being outsourced to other countries? Take dairy. Very few countries could fill that gap in the market. New Zealand is one of the main ones, but it already has climate legislation, so the risk of carbon leakage there will be on a scale of really quite small to not happening. Other countries signed up to the Paris Accord and have legislation to help them meet its terms. From where are you getting that information? Where are the studies that show that happening?

Mr Breen: I suppose —.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Hang on, Colin. Can all members who are not speaking please mute their microphone? We are getting interference here, which is affecting the audio.

Colin and Arlene, do you want to pick up on Clare's questions?

Mr Breen: I do not have a report to hand, but the simple fact is that people still need to eat, and there is still a demand for meat and dairy. Where that demand is in place, economics suggest that there will still be a supply. For example, there is significant beef supply from Brazil, where rainforests are being cut down to continue that supply. That is certainly not something that I want to promote. We have been shown to have very good levels of carbon footprint in our agri-production. Of course, we could do better.

The targets will mean some impacts on agriculture. There will inevitably be some impacts on every sector, but I do not have a study that states that, other than what the CCC has advised. I do not have one to hand.

Ms Bailey: OK. Thanks. I have one more. Sorry, Chair. I promise that this is my last one.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Go ahead.

Ms Bailey: We are looking very heavily at carbon targets and at carbon emissions and reductions in the Bill. What else are we looking at? What biodiversity targets, nitrogen targets and just-transition mechanisms will be included? We know that ammonia is neither a greenhouse gas nor a carbon, yet, year after year, we do not do very well with it. What are the plans in the Bill to meet those types of targets?

Mr Breen: There is none. This legislation focuses on climate change and other aspects to set a legally binding framework for climate change. Lots of plans are in place for other legislation to address the other areas. As I asked in my introduction, if we started to add in all of those, where would we stop with this primary legislation? If a Bill is not focused, every Department will be asking for all sorts of other hook-on provisions. You are talking about a four- or five-year development period for a Bill to capture everything that every Department would want in a piece of primary legislation.

Ms Bailey: OK. Thank you very much. Cheers, Colin.

Mr Breen: Thank you, Clare.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Colin and Arlene, there has been a wide-ranging series of questions and answers.

No other member wishes to ask a question, but, just before I finish, I want to go back to something that Philip mentioned, which is the cross-border aspect. Colin, I know that you said that this is a global issue, but it is important to remind ourselves that, in areas such as County Tyrone and County Fermanagh, where Rosemary is from, there are farms where the border runs straight through fields, so it would make absolute sense for the legislation to have a cross-border aspect to it. If you are setting transition targets, there will need to be a harmonisation element.

Moreover, what we are clearly hearing from what you are saying is that land use and agriculture production across the island of Ireland has more similarities than it does with across the water in Britain, where the UK Government are driving down agriculture production and very much taking the public money for public goods approach. They seem to be driving down food production, which will make their greenhouse gas emission targets look good. At the same time, Ireland is effectively feeding Britain, because we overproduce whilst it underproduces. In Britain, too, there is a larger area per head of population with the like of Scotland, as well as access to the North Sea for carbon storage. Is there any global calculator whereby we can look at that in the round? When you look at emissions in Britain, you have to take into account that it is driving down its food production and reducing its emissions but, at the same time, importing from here and other parts of the world.

Mr Breen: Emissions are calculated on a production basis in the country of production. In essence, there has been a recognition of what Northern Ireland does in agri-food, so the production emissions reduction targets have been set on that basis.

GB as a whole recognises the role of Northern Ireland in producing more, so Scotland, let us say, which has more land, will do more to get to UK net zero than we can, because GB is getting the benefit of our producing more food for it. I think that that has been fully appreciated and taken into account.

Nobody is pointing the finger at us and saying, "You're not doing enough". What is being said is, "You're doing lots of other things for us, so we can take a bigger share of reductions, as long as you keep doing those things for us".

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): What about the cross-border dimension? The absence of one would be felt acutely on farms, many of which straddle the border, with an invisible line running through their fields.

Mr Breen: We will have extensive cross-border cooperation through the British-Irish Council, for example, and on adaptation. That island challenge is very real on adaptation, because the agriculture and land use sector is probably be one of the ones impacted on most by climate change and the need to adapt to it. It will probably be up to sector-specific plans to gauge just how wide that engagement and cooperation is and how much of it there is. For agriculture, I imagine that it will be very wide.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): That is great. Thanks very much, Colin, Arlene and Anthony. Your responses were very helpful and detailed, as always. Thank you for your attendance this morning. I wish you all the best, and we will no doubt be in contact in the days and weeks ahead.

Mr Breen: Thank you. We are always happy to chat with you.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Thank you very much. You are always welcome. Take care.

Mr Breen: Bye. Thanks, everyone.