



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Agriculture, Environment and
Rural Affairs

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Climate Change (No. 2) Bill: Climate Change
Committee

21 October 2021

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Declan McAleer (Chairperson)
Mr Philip McGuigan (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Clare Bailey
Mrs Rosemary Barton
Mr William Irwin
Mr Patsy McGlone

Witnesses:

Lord John Deben	Climate Change Committee
Mr Chris Stark	Climate Change Committee

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): We now have oral evidence on the Climate Change (No. 2 Bill) from the UK Climate Change Committee (CCC). I welcome Lord Deben, chairperson of the Climate Change Committee, and David Joffe, head of carbon budgets.

It is great to see you again so soon.

Lord Deben (Climate Change Committee): It is a privilege.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Thank you for coming back to the Committee to speak to us about another climate change Bill. We very much welcome your continued engagement and advice on the matter. I invite you, Lord Deben, to brief the Committee on the Climate Change (No. 2) Bill, and then members will want to ask some questions.

Lord Deben: Thank you very much. I am very pleased to be with you again. As you know, the Climate Change Committee produced the 'Sixth Carbon Budget', which showed the various lines that we have to go along if the United Kingdom is going to reach net zero by 2050. Even if you take the most favourable mechanism, in none of those is it possible to say that Northern Ireland can reach net zero by 2050. There is no doubt that, in practical terms, that is not going to be possible. The United Kingdom as a whole can do it, because there are other parts that can do it more quickly than in 2050. For example, we believe, and the Scots also believe, that Scotland can reach it by 2045.

My job is to offer every part of the United Kingdom a doable target. That is not easy. I do not want you to think for one moment that the concept of reaching something about 84% by 2050 is easy; not at all. However, it is possible. Indeed, it is more than possible; it can and will be done. I am not prepared, therefore, to propose or support something that I know you cannot do, because all that will happen will

be that, in the next couple of years, someone will say, "We can't do it, so there is no point in even trying." We really do have to have a credible end policy, and that is why we suggested to the Government in the North of Ireland the sort of figure that we are talking about. The way that it was calibrated, it was 81%, but it will reach 84% under the new information that we have. Obviously, it is possible that, as one goes on, there could be a huge change or a new thing that none of us knows about, and then we could make a change and tighten things up. However, at this moment, that is what we have proposed.

Of course, it is for the North of Ireland to make its own decisions about legislation. It is not our job to tell you that this or that bit of a Bill is right or wrong. All that we can do is give you scientific advice about what you can do. We can also tell you that that is exactly what you have got to do and keep your feet to the fire in doing that. That is our job, and I hope we are doing that correctly.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Thank you, Lord Deben. Members will come in for questions.

As recently as 2017, the CCC recommended a reduction target of 80% in emissions for Wales, but that was revised upwards to 95%, and now it is 100%. What happened in Wales that made those changes possible, and why is that not possible here?

Lord Deben: Each part of the United Kingdom is very different. Wales had a particular problem in that it had some very heavy industry and generation in south Wales. At that particular point, remember, we did not have a net zero target. The first thing was that we had a lower target; it was 80% at that time. In suggesting 80% for Wales then, we were in line with the target around the United Kingdom. It is also true that Wales has a different problem from that in the North of Ireland. In the North of Ireland, your problem is that the economy has a much bigger dependence than other parts of the United Kingdom upon agriculture and, indeed, upon raising animals, whereas the problem in Wales was its manufacturing area in the south of Wales, which runs, as you know, from Newport across to Swansea and includes Port Talbot with its steel industry. What Wales has done is to close, I think, its coal-fired power stations, but it has, in fact, found alternative uses. That has meant that it can meet the net zero target, and that is why we upgraded it to that. Its problem was entirely different. It had a problem that it has, in fact, been able to meet, between the point at which 80% was the target and the point at which the target becomes net zero, which, of course, is a decision for Parliament.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Lord Deben, when your committee was developing the recommendations for the North, did you work with your counterparts in the South of Ireland, given the fact that we live on a single island? We are a single epidemiological island, and farming patterns are the same across the island. Did you engage with the southern part of the island when developing those proposals?

Lord Deben: Of course, we do not have any advisory position as far as the South is concerned. We have very good relationships with them. I myself went to Dublin some time ago to confer with them. I am certainly willing to do anything that I can to help you. You are, if you like, our customer. You are the people with whom we work, and we will have to take advice from you, because we recognise the particular difficulties on the island of Ireland.

We are also trying to do our best to recognise the fact that you have a common energy system, which, in itself, is one of the reasons why it is difficult if the two parts of the island have different targets. The difference is that you are producing a programme that will reach that target. The South does not yet have a programme. Until the South has a programme, merely saying, "We're going to have net zero by 2050" is not, in fact, the same kind of decision as you are making with the No. 2 Bill. With that Bill, you are actually deciding upon a mechanism to reach that and a commitment and a determination to do it, stage by stage, through the period with, I hope, our advice.

I am very happy to do anything that helps you in the relationships that you need to have with the South, but it has to be driven by you, because you are, after all, the people whom we are supposed to, and are happy to, advise. We would like to take your advice on how best to relate to the South and what you think is suitable and proper in the present circumstances and in any future circumstances as things develop.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Lord Deben, you mentioned two parts of the island having different targets. Do you envisage any issue with that? Given that agri-food is produced right across the island of Ireland, if we did not meet the net zero target like the rest of the island, would that have any implications for us? Would we be seen, potentially, as a laggard across the rest of the EU?

Lord Deben: We have to say very clearly to everybody that the United Kingdom as a whole is not a laggard. The United Kingdom as a whole is, in fact, a leader in these areas. What the United Kingdom is expecting to do is better than what the European Union is proposing at the moment. You know my view that it is a mistake not to be a member of the European Union — I have been absolutely clear about that — but that is what the United Kingdom has decided upon. No one, though, can claim that we are laggards. The difference between the North and the South on this issue is that the North is preparing a programme to reach the target, so that, when it says that it will reach 84%, it really means that and has a proper programme to do so. No doubt, the South will be developing a programme to reach its end. There will certainly be no difficulties at the beginning at all, because you all have to do the same things. Indeed, if the South is trying to do more than the North, and doing it on its own without some kind of bubble effect with the rest of the European Union, the two parts of the island will be able to work together. I hope that the more that we can coexist on this, the better, because, as you rightly say, the economic bases of the two parts of the island are very similar, and the problems for the South are the problems for the North. Furthermore, as you have such an integrated economy, which is one of the problems of the protocol and such like, it is obviously going to be much better organised if we can work closely together. I cannot solve the political relationships. My job is to do everything that I can, with your support and guidance, to make sure that we get as near to a common view on these matters as we can.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Thank you, Lord Deben. I will not hog it any longer. A number of members want to ask questions.

Mrs Barton: Good morning, Lord Deben. It is good to see you again. Do you foresee a situation whereby emission targets across the UK will be revised as we make progress in relation to machinery and find other ways of becoming more carbon-neutral? Do you foresee a way in which the UK targets could be revised in the next five years to, perhaps, become slightly more aggressive?

Lord Deben: I wish I did. We have based our whole programme on a very, very tough target for everybody. There is no elbow room in it. I do not believe that it is likely that that will change in the next five years. Over the years, there may be breakthroughs that may make a difference. For example, there are a whole series of things in agriculture that we hope will happen — breeding and a whole range of things — but I do not see any sign that we are going to make any major difference in the next five years. I am not prepared to look very far beyond that, because you never know what will happen. I think it is a very tough target for the United Kingdom as a whole, but it is one that we can reach with our present knowledge.

Mrs Barton: At the moment, the Climate Change (No. 2) Bill says that an interim progress report will be made at the end of every third year of each carbon budget and that a further compliance statement will be made within 24 months of the end of a carbon budget period. Is that frequent enough?

Lord Deben: It depends on the in-between part. The Climate Change Committee will hope to be providing you with regular updates as to how far we think you are reaching your targets. It seems to me that, within the context of the Bill, that may well work. However, it is for you, not me, to make that decision, frankly. My job is to say, "This is what the target is. We will monitor that on your behalf, independently." It seems to me, if I may put it like this, that your job is to decide how best, in parliamentary terms, to control the Executive and ensure that they are doing what they ought to do. I think that you may have got the balance right, but it will be for you to make that decision. All that I will say is that we will do our best to give you the information to enable you to keep the Executive's feet to the fire, because that is what we have to do: keep Government's feet to the fire and make sure that they do what they promised to do.

Mrs Barton: What will your thoughts be if the targets are not reached?

Lord Deben: The law is very interesting. The law will be that you will have a statutory requirement. That will be true. If we do not reach that statutory target and you are clearly not going to, there is recourse for others under the law, because you are not obeying the law. That is not for us to do, although one of the reasons why I hope that it will not happen is that I fear that I might be first witness for the prosecution in those circumstances, which is not something that I view with any great cheer.
[Laughter.]

Ms Bailey: Good morning, Lord Deben and Mr Stark, who I see there as well. Apologies that I missed you on your last visit. It is good to see you on screen.

With regard to target setting in Bill No. 2, would you like to see the ambition of the CCC's tailwinds scenario, where you set out a 95% reduction by 2050, enshrined in some form in the Bill?

Lord Deben: Frankly, no. I am direct about that. It will be really tough for the North of Ireland to meet what we have proposed. The tailwinds scenario is one of a series of scenarios that we put there. It is quite important to point out that, even if everything goes right — I have been in politics for a long time, and retired from it for 10 years, and all that I have to say is that I have never known everything to go right — you are still not going to reach net zero. It is 95%. It is a mistake to include that. The important thing is to say, "This is the target, we are going to reach it, we can reach it, and we are not going to have any nonsense about that".

During my visit to the North of Ireland recently, I made that absolutely clear to some people who seemed to me to be pretending that, somehow or other, this is an easier thing, and so they would go along with that, and it looked to me as though some of them intended not to do the things that they had to do. I am absolutely clear that it is a very tough target. I think that you should concentrate on that. As I have said, if, over the next years, you and we can see that you can do better, then the Climate Change Committee will, in fact, with you, increase what should be the target, and then you can take the necessary statutory measures. However, at the moment, I would stick to that target and really fight for it. If I may say so to you personally, I think that you will find it tough to ensure that people do what they have got to do, because it ain't easy.

Ms Bailey: Thank you very much for that. Obviously you will be aware that, for a long time, we have been taking substantial evidence from a number of stakeholders on the climate Bills.

Lord Deben: Yes.

Ms Bailey: We have heard from a range of experts, some of whom come from climate law and science. It has been raised with us by one particular expert that, in their judgement, the view on the 82% target that was articulated by you in the letter to Minister Poots and in your 'Sixth Carbon Budget':

"underscore not that NI should cement a position as a UK climate laggard in law but that the UK Government and the national institutions should recognise some of the very particular challenges faced by NI ... and which potentially provide a greater degree of support or assistance, as required."

What is your view on that?

Lord Deben: If I may put it delicately, that is to confuse two things. I had not heard that before, but I think that it confuses two things. One is the perfectly proper argument that the special problems of the North of Ireland will need special treatment and that the relationship between the United Kingdom Government and the Northern Irish Executive will be crucial to that. No doubt, in the effective way that you have in the North to insist on funds from the United Kingdom Government, you will put your case very strongly. That is one issue. The issue that we are talking about is a different issue, which is what is the target that is the best that you can do and still say to people, "This can be achieved without disruption and in a way that everybody knows from the beginning, so that nobody can write it off". That is a different decision, and I think that that is a confusion of two different things.

Ms Bailey: OK. At the start, you mentioned that you and the Scottish Government now believe that Scotland can be net zero by 2045; that is what they have enshrined in law as well. However, that was not their original target; am I right?

Lord Deben: No, it was not the original target. We have worked on that because, of course, we did not have a lot of the information that we have now. We have spent a very long time doing the work. I think that what we have done is the most respected work in the world, both in preparing the advice to the United Kingdom Government about net zero — whether we could reach it, what the costs would be and suchlike — and the work that we did on the 'Sixth Carbon Budget'. It is the result of that work and, indeed, discussions with the Scottish Government, that we were able to fix that target. Of course, we have done the same as far as Wales is concerned and, in a sense, we have done the same as far as England is concerned. This is the last of the discussions, because the North of Ireland, for reasons that we all understand, has been slower in producing its legislation, whereas Wales and Scotland have already got theirs.

Ms Bailey: To follow on from that, we can see that financial support streams are flooding into Aberdeen, for example, which is the hub city for North Sea oil and gas. That is generally to help them with their green energy transition. Could the same not happen for Northern Ireland? Why is it that Scotland is considered worth decarbonising, with those funding streams in place, but maybe not Northern Ireland? Any thoughts?

Lord Deben: Again, we have got to talk about the differences. That support is not going into Scotland because it is Scotland. It is going in because the Government have rightly decided that a just transition is one where you recognise that some jobs will cease to exist and some areas where, specifically, those jobs will cease to exist. Therefore, the Government are seeking to find a better way of dealing with that change than we have done in the past. In the North of Ireland, I am not supposing that jobs will cease to exist; I think that the opposite will be true: there will be new jobs. The thing that we are talking about is that there is an inherent emissions figure for agriculture that is very much more difficult to reduce. It has to be done in an incremental way by every farmer. Of course, it will be necessary to have the policies that help agriculture to do that, and those policies will be necessary throughout the United Kingdom. However, there will be a concentration of their effect in those parts of the United Kingdom where agriculture is a major player in the economic structure. I see there being particular help for Welsh hill farmers on the need to plant more trees. I had that discussion with the Welsh Minister only yesterday. There will be specific areas across the whole United Kingdom where, because of the particular issue of agriculture, there will be particular help and support.

That is not the same thing as saying, "Here is an industry where there will not be jobs". If we are not going to use gas, we will not have jobs for people working on gas in the North Sea. We will only use such gas as is necessary for chemical reasons and the such like. As the Government have said clearly, there will be no gas in generation after 2035. We have to prepare for that, and that is exactly what the Government are initially starting, and what, no doubt, they will do around the country. That does not apply, as far as I can see, to the North of Ireland. In the North of Ireland, it is a different issue; it is about agriculture.

Ms Bailey: Given that Scotland has missed its emissions reductions targets yet again, do you think that you will be called as a witness for the prosecution?

Lord Deben: *[Laughter.]* Thank you for picking that up. I am impressed by the way that the Scottish Government have approached this. The North of Ireland should take real courage from the fact that Scotland and Wales have used their devolved status to take a very tough view on these matters. I spend some time telling United Kingdom Ministers that they ought to learn from the devolved Administrations. I very much hope that, once the North of Ireland decides what it wants to do on this, you will become an exemplar. That is how you should look at agriculture. You should look at agriculture and ask, "What can we do to set the example for not only the rest of the United Kingdom but the European Union and the rest of Europe?".

Ms Bailey: Absolutely. Thank you.

Mr McGuigan: Thank you, Lord Deben. Your last point is a good place for me to begin. You said that the North should learn from how the Scottish and Welsh Governments use devolution. We should certainly do that.

I am an Irish republican, so I think, ideologically, that a question such as this should be framed in the context of this island, obviously taking a look at our neighbouring islands. The question that you have been asked to provide advice on is not on the basis of the effects of climate change on this island but on the UK. If you were asked a different question, you would provide a different answer. If the Welsh and Scottish Governments had initially followed the advice of the CCC and not, as you said, shown example and forged forward with ambitious targets, perhaps the advice that you would have given them and their legislation would have been less ambitious than it currently is.

Lord Deben: Absolutely not. First, the original question confused two things. In 2017, we did not have a net zero target; in 2017, we had an 80% target. Therefore, to say to the Welsh, "You can reach 80%", was the target. There was no reason to do more than that. We have not changed our advice as to what can be done since we have had a net zero target. What we have done is work with the devolved Administrations to think about some of the problems that are raised by the targets that they have.

There was a fundamental change to the Scots' own decisions on the economy and about a particular closure, which made a difference to the mechanisms by which one measured the future. I do not believe that any such change can happen in Northern Ireland. If you were to ask me, "In a perfect world, how would you do this?", I would say that, in a perfect world, on an island that has a common energy system and many similarities between the North and the South, you would be able to operate all of that together and they would get the advice from the same people, but we do not live in a perfect world. Whatever you may hope will happen — and no one will draw from me what I think about that — we have to deal with the world as we see it at the moment. In the world as we see it, I have the position of advising you in the North of Ireland and I do not have that position in the South. I am happy to be as helpful as possible across the border, but it has to be your political advice that enables me to do that. Otherwise, I shall tread into areas that, for many years, I have been very careful not to tread into.

Mr McGuigan: Hopefully, as politicians, we are all striving for that perfect world both politically and, indeed, in this instance, environmentally. There is no reason why the population of citizens in the North should not strive for perfect clean air, perfect soil and perfect rivers. That is why we are trying to tease this out.

Scotland has oil and gas, and, as you mentioned, Wales has a particular focus on heavy industry and manufacturing. In the North, it is probably about agriculture. I do not think that there is any nation or jurisdiction that does not have a specific industry or factor that adds difficulties in striving towards net zero. On the point that Clare was making about a just transition across these islands, we have had evidence that, if there are particular difficulties here in the North, help in overcoming those would be greatly enhanced by increased resources. That may be an argument that you could be making. Instead of us saying, "We cannot do this. We will have less carbon capture and storage technology here. We will have less investment", with the just transition principles across these islands, there should be more investment to allow us to help.

Finally, have you any concerns about not being able to help our agricultural industry here in the North as best you could on climate change because the rug is being pulled from under our feet by the British Government's making of trade deals that will potentially cause agriculture greater harm? An announcement was made yesterday of a trade deal with New Zealand, and we are well aware of the trade deal with Australia. Those things could have a greater detrimental impact on our agricultural industry here. Are you advising the British Government about that potential and on putting stuff about carbon leakage into climate change legislation?

Lord Deben: I am entirely opposed to the decision of the British Government to agree to the Australian deal. It is unacceptable to undermine British agriculture by having an agreement that will mean that, in 15 years' time, a country that is not meeting our health standards, does not meet our standards of animal welfare and does not meet our standards of climate change remediation will be able to compete with the British farmer. I am absolutely clear about that. We have said before — and it seems to me a very proper thing for the Climate Change Committee to say — that you cannot ask of British farmers what we have to ask in order to meet net zero and then allow them to face competition that does not meet those standards. The Government promised that they would not make such agreements, and, in fact, those agreements appear to have been made. I say "appear" because, no doubt, somebody will explain to me that it is somehow or other not what we understand, but, as far as I know, it is exactly as you put it, and it is not acceptable. We have to make it clear that that is not an acceptable part of the climate change policy that will reach net zero.

The answer to the other part of your question is slightly different. We have certainly said that the Government need to make the kind of arrangements for agriculture — for example, the DEFRA arrangements — that mean that farmers can, in fact, meet the targets that they will be set. The structure of a post-CAP support system needs to be of that kind, but that is for the whole of the United Kingdom. Altogether, it needs to be of that kind.

The reason that agriculture is different from many other activities is that, as a matter of fact, there is no way that that sector can reach zero. As human beings, we put out emissions, and animals also put out emissions. We can reduce those emissions by feeding differently, breeding differently and doing all sorts of things, but we will not get to zero, so the "net" bit of net zero becomes very important. The Government, knowing that agriculture will not reach zero, need to have a policy that helps people all over the United Kingdom to reduce their emissions. At the same time, the Government have to think of ways in which we can encourage the agricultural world to do those things so that it can continue, on behalf of all of us, to take out the carbon that is in the atmosphere.

Historically, there have always been emissions. The world used to be balanced: we took out carbon and emitted carbon. However, 200 years ago in the Industrial Revolution and, increasingly, year by year, we emitted more carbon than we took out. Therefore, we reversed the original effect that the coming of trees and plants had; when they came, they took the carbon out of the atmosphere and made the world cool enough, first for mammals and then for human beings. We reversed that process. We have to get that balance back. Agriculture will play a real part in that by renovating the soil to make it more able to take in carbon, by planting trees and by a whole range of things of that sort. Those will be things that, at the same time, the Government will have to promote in all of this, and they are things, with the powers that you have in the North of Ireland, that you will need to do. The Bill, as I see it, is the first step in that direction.

Mr McGuigan: Thank you very much.

Mr Irwin: I thank Lord Deben for being with us. You are very welcome. I appreciate your advice and, hopefully, the Committee does.

What would be the consequences of Northern Ireland not taking the advice of the Climate Change Committee and setting a target of net zero?

Lord Deben: The fundamental consequence would be that people in the North of Ireland would know that you have set a target that the best advice and science says that you cannot reach. The result of that would be that people who would otherwise stretch themselves to try to help to reach a target that they could reach would be much more likely to say, "There is no point in doing that, because we are not going to be able to do it". It is exactly like any other circumstance. If you are running a business — as I am sure that you know, Mr Irwin — you set people targets that are this side of the impossible. You do not set people targets on the other side of the impossible, because your managers and the like will not want to do it. They will say, "This is asking me to do something that is, frankly, impossible".

I feel passionate about this, because it is essential that the North of Ireland does its best. Otherwise, the United Kingdom will not be able to meet net zero. If you are going to do your best, you have to give people a realistic, real target that they know that, by stretching themselves and doing everything that they can, they can reach. Otherwise, they will not stretch themselves and not do everything that they can, and the people whom you represent will be the first to say, "Oh, well. This is all nonsense". I am not prepared to go along with nonsense.

Mr Irwin: I entirely agree with your assessment. Thank you very much.

Mr McGlone: It is great to see you again, Lord Deben. Your thoughts are always very stimulating. I will start off on a point that Philip touched on. I just cannot rationalise in my head the trade deal that has been done with New Zealand for 35,000 tonnes of lamb, tariff-free in the first four years, rising to 50,000 tonnes of lamb tariff-free and, then, all lamb exports going tariff-free. I think of the shipping costs involved in over 14,000 miles of nautical transportation and of all the fumes that will go into the air from that — and that is aside from the impact on local trade. I just cannot rationalise in my head the challenge that that sets you, as a Climate Change Committee. The Government are conducting negotiations on policies and trade deals that, to my mind, will create and exacerbate climate change problems. I would appreciate your views on that.

Secondly, I come back to the issue of electric vehicles and charging points for them, about which there were some more announcements through the week. Has the Climate Change Committee looked at that? We often talk about fuel poverty, but I am genuinely concerned about mobility poverty. Given the cost of those vehicles, the average person who is currently driving about in a diesel or petrol car that they bought second-hand could have difficulties with accessibility and mobility.

Finally, just to tease this out a bit further — it will be for the Committee to decide on it, and I am glad that Lord Deben has expressed his willingness to cooperate with us on whatever route we choose — I think that it will be very important that we collaborate or liaise on these issues with the Committee on Environment and Climate Action in the Republic. There is such commonality of economies, transport, rivers and water quality, air quality and all those things on the island, and we need to collaborate more on them.

Thanks again, Lord Deben. I would appreciate your thoughts on those particular issues, which are taxing my brain at the moment.

Lord Deben: There is no reason, Mr McGlone, why you should find an answer to the first question, because it is not answerable. The Government promised that they would not make such agreements, and they have made such an agreement. It is not acceptable as far as the net zero determination is concerned. We have made that absolutely clear, and I am not popular for saying it. The Government have got themselves caught in a position in which it is necessary, politically, for them to show that they can sign those agreements, but they have to be tough.

The toughness should be clear. We are a country that is committed to net zero. That means that we cannot allow carbon leakage. One of the ways to stop carbon leakage is to say that other people can export on fair terms. The terms of that deal are not fair, nor is the removal from the Australian agreement of the detailed reference to the Paris agreement — after all, we have signed it; we have an international agreement in Paris. I do not see how you put the two together, which is why I, as Chairman of the Climate Change Committee, have been clear about it. As you know, and as I showed you earlier, I am careful not to step into political issues that are not things that I have a duty to do under the law. That is why I am very careful about the difference between North and South, trying to say that I will be as helpful as possible, but that you have to lead me on it. However, this is a climate change issue. We cannot have this and expect other people to do the job at home, unfairly competed with.

I am biased as far as electric cars are concerned, because I have an electric car. Once you have an electric car, you never want to go back to anything else; it is remarkable. We have looked at this very carefully. Rather like offshore wind, you start off at a high price. I remember when offshore wind cost 200 units; it is now down to something like 60 units. That is what has happened; it is the most amazing trend. Looking at the next generation of electric cars, you see that there have already been very significant reductions.

Having been critical of the Government on other things, I have to say that they did the right thing on electric cars, which is to say that, from 2030, you will not be able to buy a new car that is not electric or equivalent. Of course, people will still have older cars. We know that there is a problem, particularly among the poorest and those in the countryside. I am a countryman, so I absolutely understand that you cannot do without a motor car there. Therefore, people very often have motor cars with very nasty emissions. That is because they have very old ones or buy very old ones because that is the only thing that they can afford. It seems to me that there will come a point at which we will have to work out how to get rid of that tail, which is referred to as "the car park". We have to think about how to do that, but that initial step is right.

The second step is to make sure that we overcome people's dislike of electric cars. You never have these dislikes if you have an electric car. The first thing is how you can make sure that people can always plug in, so that they are not frightened about that. The second is range. As you know, an enormous change has taken place in the range. I have a car that has a 340-mile range, which means that I never feel worried about it. I admit that I cannot win this battle because, if I did not have an electric car, a journalist would ask, "Why don't you have one?". I have an electric car, so what do they say? They say, "Well, you're rich". I mean, I am not, but that is not the point; that is what they say. The point is that the prices are coming down all the time. Quite a number of electric cars are already available to people. It will not work, however, unless the Executive speed up the increase in the number of charging points. There is a difficulty in the North of Ireland in that you are behind in your number of charging points. I very much hope that you will be one of those that presses the point.

The last thing that you talked about was North/South cooperation. I wonder whether it is helpful to say this: the great advantage of trying to deal with climate change is that it is an issue that you have not had to deal with before, so you do not carry anything like the baggage with it that you do with so many issues. You cannot say, "Well, we had that row in 1937". You cannot go back; this can be seen as a new chapter on which it must be much easier to cooperate, because you are not carrying the whole burden of history on both sides. I hope that people will look at it in that light: that this is a moment at which one can think of ways of working together. The point that was made in one of the earlier questions is absolutely true: climate change does not have any idea of borders. A lot of other people have a lot of ideas about borders, but climate change does not. Therefore, whatever you do about borders, you at least have to find a way to cooperate on climate change.

Mr McGlone: Thank you. On that point, Chair, I think that we need to formally put on our agenda a discussion about how we work with our respective Committee in the South.

Lord Deben, to follow up on your point about transportation and electrified vehicles, I am looking at the people who simply cannot afford a vehicle at £20,000 or £30,000. To acquire some of those higher-

end vehicles new is a pipe dream for them, and, of course, there is a limited number of second-hand electric vehicles about. Will there have to be some form of incentivisation by the Government to ensure that people start to acquire electric vehicles? On the one hand, there is a hammer that says, "You will not be able to drive those vehicles". That is grand, but people still have to move about. We do not want to have a situation of haves and have-nots; God knows society has enough of that. How can we encourage and incentivise people? To my mind, there will have to be some sort of financial incentivisation.

Lord Deben: The Government have got it in the right order. First, people have been told that there is a date after which they will not be able to buy a new car. Since the Government did that, the car industry has said, "Our cars will be zero from 2027 or 2028". We knew that that would happen. Industry is like that: if you tell it what is going to happen, it can build towards that. Then, everyone who buys a new car will begin a trail system. They will sell that car as a second-hand car, and you begin to get the same situation as you have now. It is the tail that is the difficulty.

You are quite right. If we moved to a situation where you were not allowed to have a diesel or petrol car, which is, of course, not the same thing at all, you would have to have a mechanism to help those who could not otherwise have transportation. In between those two, there is an opportunity to ask whether we can speed the process up. There are various ways to do that, but that is a later stage in some years' time. It seems to me that it will have to be a United Kingdom system because the same problems obtain in every part of the United Kingdom. However, that is not a decision for now.

Mr McGlone: OK. Thanks very much, Lord Deben. It is good to see you again.

Lord Deben: It is good to see you.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Lord Deben, on the emissions targets and what you believe is achievable for the North, the 'Sixth Carbon Budget' recommended that, as part of reaching the target of at least 82% by 2050, there should be a net zero CO2 position and that biogenic methane should not be excluded from the emissions reduction. Can you expand on that a little bit?

Lord Deben: A problem with methane is that people confuse two things. I am sure that you do not but there are people who do, and it is worth defending yourself against that. It is perfectly true that methane is a less long-lasting gas in the atmosphere. However, if you are putting the same amount of methane into the atmosphere, although it is a different bit of methane that is affecting the climate, you still have the same body of methane. Actually, methane has some qualities — if that is the right word — that are more damaging. Methane has to be included in this because it is very much affecting the climate.

It is perfectly true that the difficulties of reducing methane are very considerable, but there are things that we can do. I hope that your Committee will be able to give people real confidence that they can do it. I was pleased with my meeting with the Ulster Farmers' Union. It has grasped the fact that, if you go in for better breeding and use gene editing, the number of animals that you need to have can be reduced because you can reduce their illness. If we could get rid of mastitis, for example, that would make a huge difference to the number of animals that you need to have to produce the same amount of milk. If you can deal with some of the porcine problems, you can change the mix that you have to have. There are real things that we can do on breeding and feeding. The North of Ireland can contribute considerably to the work that is being done in that regard. You have some very important research being done, which is very helpful indeed. We can also do a good deal about the other elements of farm use, which we need to think seriously about. It is about reduction in the use of diesel and, when the time comes, replacement of equipment so that you are using much more modern equipment that does not have the same level of emissions. We can do a whole range of things.

I want you to be able to say to people that the target that we have proposed gives them a real chance of doing the things that they ought to do; that those things will make a real difference; that they can be optimistic about meeting the target; and, what is more, that, along the way, it will create a whole lot of green jobs that will be really important for the economy of the North of Ireland.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Are you aware of any accurate carbon calculators that farmers could use to give them a sense of what their baseline is at the moment and what they would need to do? Is there a definitive or an accurate carbon calculator, here or internationally, that lets people work out where they sit?

Lord Deben: You have put your finger on a really difficult issue. When we started our work in agriculture, at the very earliest point that I was chairman of the Climate Change Committee, I refused to publish the material that it was producing because I did not think that we had a baseline. DEFRA has produced baselines on a very simple basis. You have to have baselines of a very simple kind to start off with; that is the first thing. That enables us to make some proper estimate of emissions from farms and to measure the reduction in those emissions.

What we do not have, as DEFRA admits, is a proper measurement for carbon in the soil — I think that an "agreed" measurement is the right word, in fact, because there is proper measurement of what carbon there is in the soil. Having established that measurement, you have a baseline so that you can see whether you improve or not. We have not agreed that, which is the nub of the argument on the Environment Bill at the moment. Although it does not entirely cover the North of Ireland, it will, in fact, have a big influence. There are those of us who have tried to change the Environment Bill and will continue to do so. It has very clear dates and targets for air and water pollution but not for soil pollution. We want to put soil alongside those.

The Government are right to say that they cannot have the same dates on that because they have not yet agreed the method of measurement. That is partly because it is quite difficult, partly because there is a real disagreement about it and partly because they have to go out to consultation before they can fix that. As you rightly say, we need to have an agreed measure. I hope that you will use your influence to say that it is better to have a measure that, although maybe not perfect in detail, is truthful and we have all agreed on, than to have no measure at all and keep on talking about it. Until we have that measure, the farmers in the North of Ireland, like those in the rest of the United Kingdom, cannot decide on how to use their power of sequestration. If we have that measure, farmers will be able to say, "Well, I can do this, that and the other. I will, therefore, sequester significant amounts of carbon". There may be a market, or it may be that DEFRA will pay towards that work. However, you cannot pay towards that work or make a market work unless you can be sure that you are measuring something and that you are right in that measurement.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Farmers are being told they have to make all these livestock cuts, but how can that be said with any accuracy if we do not have an agreed measure, which is clearly the case, to work out where farmers sit on the net zero baseline?

Lord Deben: We have an agreed measure on the emissions from livestock and on the emissions from farms in general. The one measure that we do not have is a measure of the carbon in the soil itself. That additional measure, if we had it, would enable farmers to take seriously the question of how they improve their soil in such a way as to sequester more carbon — which is, as a matter of fact, better for the soil — and, at the same time, provide some real sequestration, in addition to the planting of trees and such like. There may be a market for sequestration offsets, and the Government may have a system of payment for it. Until you measure it, you cannot deal with that bit. We can, however, deal with all the other bits, because we know about the emissions from animals, diesel and farm activities in general. We have all those figures. I am very interested in that particular one, soil, because the sequestration of soil will make a huge difference to our ability to meet net zero.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Thank you, Lord Deben.

Ms Bailey: This is a wee quick one. I want to be sure of this in my head, Lord Deben. The 82% target that you recommended has been provided for in the No. 2 Bill. Do you believe that that should be enshrined as an immovable floor, or is how it is drafted in the Bill best? As the Bill is drafted, that target can be lowered.

Lord Deben: One has to be absolutely clear: there are no conceivable circumstances in which it would be reasonable to lower that target. This is what you can do, and it is, therefore, the target that you should have. If it is possible for the United Kingdom to do better and to get to net zero more rapidly, that target should be able to be raised. If it turns out that it is easier to reach 82% to 84%, depending on how you measure it, we have to do that, do it easier and do it all together so that we get there quicker. This is a battle of time. It is so urgent that we could not possibly have an idea that you can reduce the target. If the target becomes more accessible, you should meet it and do more. I cannot conceive of any circumstances in which it would be reasonable to lower the target.

Ms Bailey: Great. So you agree that it should be enshrined as non-negotiable and that we cannot regress from 82%, as it is in the Bill at the minute?

Lord Deben: I am trying very hard not to step beyond what is my remit. Let me put it this way: we are asking people who would like us to have a higher aspirational target to accept that it is better to have a practical target that we can reach. In those circumstances, it is very helpful if you can assure the people who would like to have a higher aspirational target that this is the minimum and that, should there be opportunities for tightening the target, those will be taken. If you want to do that, it is necessary to say very clearly that there is no question of lowering the target.

What I have been concerned about all the way along is that people will not screw themselves up to the starting point unless they are absolutely clear on two things: first, that they can do it; and secondly, that there is no alternative and no going back. Climate change says that there is no alternative and no going back. I care about my family and my grandchildren. If I do not force this, fight for this and work for this, as I have done for so many years, the person whom I will be letting down is Wilfred, my seven-year-old grandson, because he will not be able to live in the world that we are creating. It is always worth saying to people that nothing that human beings have achieved has ever been achieved in the climate that we are going to have. This is a totally different world, and we have to take the toughest measures possible to deal with that. We also have to say to people that the world that we will then create will be a cleaner, greener and kinder one. Therefore, there is a real positive reason for doing this as well as the absolute necessity of fighting climate change.

Ms Bailey: Another wee one. This whole conversation has, again, shown the unique circumstances of Northern Ireland, not just politically but geographically. In the No. 2 Bill as drafted, the CCC is the sole means of independent oversight. How do you feel about the potential to provide for local oversight and advice bodies that are based in Northern Ireland and are unique to our circumstances?

Lord Deben: Well, I hope that you will have —

Ms Bailey: Sorry. By the way, I mean absolutely no slight on the CCC or your expertise.

Lord Deben: No, I am sure. I hope that you have seen that we have taken very careful consideration of the local circumstances. You have to be careful about having different people giving advice, because the advice always ends up being on different bases, and people who want to undermine what you are doing as a Committee will, quite frankly, use that. The most important thing for you to establish in the Bill is the parliamentary oversight, which enables you to keep the Government's feet to the fire. The Climate Change Committee will be able to give you the advice that you need.

It is also important for that to be seen in the context of the United Kingdom, because that is the nature of Northern Ireland. There are many people who would like to see something different, but that is not where we are now. If Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom, it is important for the advice to come from people who are advising the whole of the United Kingdom. It is notable that the Scots, who have a Scottish nationalist Government, are very determined to use our advice. Indeed, they have announced that we will have an office in Scotland. They think that the nature of climate change means that the overall advice is really important, and they respect the fact that we have given that advice in the Scottish context.

The big issue for you is how you make sure that the Bill becomes really powerful law, because that will mean that your Assembly is able to keep the Executive's feet to the fire and keep the United Kingdom Government providing the resources of all kinds that are as necessary for you as they are for the rest of the country.

Ms Bailey: Thank you.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): OK, Lord Deben. That was great. The discussion was very wide-ranging; there were a lot of questions and a great bit of exchange. It was great to see you again so soon. Thank you very much for coming back to the Committee to speak to us about the Bill. We very much welcome your continued engagement on the matter.

Lord Deben: Thank you very much, and thank you for the kindness and politeness of the questions.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): OK. See you again, Lord Deben.