



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Agriculture, Environment and
Rural Affairs

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Climate Change (No. 2) Bill: Chartered Institution of
Wastes Management; Federation of Small
Businesses; Sustainable NI; Ulster Wildlife

11 November 2021

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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 John Blair
Mr Thomas Buchanan
Mr Harry Harvey
Mr William Irwin

Witnesses:

Mr Ray Parmenter	Chartered Institution of Wastes Management
Dr Tim Walker	Chartered Institution of Wastes Management
Mr Neil Hutcheson	Federation of Small Businesses
Ms Nichola Hughes	Sustainable NI
Dr Annika Clements	Ulster Wildlife

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): I welcome, via StarLeaf, Mr Neil Hutcheson from the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB); Mr Ray Parmenter, Mr Neil McCauley and Dr Tim Walker from the Chartered Institution of Wastes Management (CIWM); Dr Annika Clements from Ulster Wildlife; and Ms Nichola Hughes from Sustainable NI. You are all very welcome to the Committee. We very much welcome your engagement and support on the Bill. It greatly helps our scrutinising of it.

We will work the session as follows. One representative from each organisation will provide a short summary of its view on the Climate Change (No. 2) Bill for, say, three or four minutes. I propose that we start with Neil Hutcheson and move on to Ray, Annika and Nicola in turn. After we hear opening statements from all the groups, we will open the session to questions from Committee members. Do you want to kick off, Neil?

Mr Neil Hutcheson (Federation of Small Businesses): Yes. Thank you very much, Chair.

Good morning, Committee members and staff. Thank you very much for having the FSB here as part of this group presentation. The guidance states that we should speak for a maximum of five minutes and endeavour not to repeat anything from previous sessions or submissions. Although that is a big enough challenge, I will try to respect it in full and get right to the point.

From the FSB's perspective, small businesses need to adapt and change their behaviour in order to help reach any of the net zero emissions targets that may make their way to the House and be passed into law. Small businesses consistently tell us that they want to play their part. That is a given by now. The FSB therefore fully supports the need to act on climate change, and we have increasingly engaged on the issue proactively over the past number of years. We conducted research recently and released an FSB report last week on this exact area. We therefore know what those in small businesses think, what they are experiencing and what they need, and, accordingly, we have made a series of recommendations.

The FSB is in a key position to ensure that SMEs successfully make the changes that they need to make. We are trying to work collaboratively and positively with colleagues, members and policymakers to ensure that SMEs can understand, contribute to and potentially, in some cases, benefit from the opportunities that will come with the NI or the entire UK's transition to net zero. Despite a plethora of strategies, one of which you discussed in the previous session today — the draft environment strategy — and some good engagement, environmental policy in NI is still a real patchwork, however. I am sure that Committee members will agree. That is really concerning, for all sorts of reasons, and that is why we have engaged with and responded to both climate change Bills. We did so with the simple aim of ensuring that the small and micro business impact test (SAMBIT) is integrated into the legislation by way of amendment. Committee members will be aware that we gave a comprehensive overview of SAMBIT in September and suggested amendments to the Climate Change Bill. That is our primary recommendation for this Bill as well.

We sent our proposed amendments to the Climate Change (No. 2) Bill to the Committee in our consultation response at the end of September, so I will not go into the detail of that, given the parameters of the meeting. By way of a very quick recap, however, we referenced Scotland and Fiji in our previous evidence session. Today, it will be England, which uses small and micro business assessments (SaMBAs) in its policy development process. In practice, what that means is that officials who are tasked with, say, developing a new climate action plan or strategy will engage with small businesses and microbusinesses as part of any process. They will carry out an impact assessment of the potential plans, ideas and what they think may happen and publish that as part of any consultation. It is that simple. It is not designed to alter the outcome or the target in particular. Rather, it is there to ensure that a mandatory and effective form of engagement and thinking takes place, thus maximising the chances of good policy coming out the other end. That approach is used not only in countries that surround us but around the world. We therefore call on members of the Committee to maximise the level of environmental policy development by adopting the SAMBIT amendment. It is key that it be in the Bill.

Although this Bill takes a different approach, the same principle of engagement applies. Depending on what comments or questions arise today, we will follow up with the Committee in writing on any targeted points, as I am particularly conscious of time.

As is outlined in our written and oral evidence to date, the FSB's aim is simply to ensure that the legislation and in particular the future policy development is fit for purpose and that, whether it be called a climate action plan or something equivalent, it helps to engage, enable and encourage small businesses to play their part in the journey towards net zero. Crucially, if the amendments proposed, or something to their effect, are not made, it is our duty to note to members that there is an increased risk of the legislation and future policy being unfit for purpose and of associated negative ramifications from that.

I will stop there. Thank you for listening. I hope to take some questions.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Thanks very much, Neil. We are going to move to Ray.

Mr Ray Parmenter (Chartered Institution of Wastes Management): Tim is going to lead on our bit.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Whatever suits.

Dr Tim Walker (Chartered Institution of Wastes Management): Thank you for the opportunity to present to the Committee again. As you know, we previously gave evidence to the Committee on the Climate Change Bill. As some of you may know, the Chartered Institution of Wastes Management is the leading professional body for the resources and waste management sector. We represent about 6,000 individuals across the UK and Ireland and have been around for over 100 years.

On waste management, the big thing, and it received a lot of airplay recently at the twenty-sixth UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26), is methane. The amount of methane produced is a real concern for us as a sector. It is largely generated at landfill sites and comes from biogenic sources, such as paper, card and timber. The big issue for us is to find a way in which to work with the supply chains to make sure that waste of that nature is diverted. To where can it be diverted? For the UK, how to move that type of waste away from landfill is one of the key challenges.

Methane has huge global warming potential — 85 times greater than that of carbon dioxide — so it is crucial that its effects be mitigated or minimised. In Northern Ireland, the greenhouse gas statistics show that we are generating close to 0.7 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent in the waste sector. It is therefore a key area in which we can get a quick win.

We said previously that methane emissions from landfill sites, both operational and closed, need to be brought under control. There are various ways in which that can be done — through the retrospective installation of landfill wells and stuff like that — but doing so is very awkward. The easiest thing to do is to turn off the tap at source and not allow the materials to get into the landfill waste stream from the outset.

We saw the world leaders at COP26 pledge to cut methane emissions by 30% by 2030. As I said, the methane comes from the anaerobic decomposition of biogenic wood-type materials in landfill. The landfill capture rates are at a certain level of efficiency, but 'The Sixth Carbon Budget' report that the Climate Change Committee (CCC) produced showed that we need to increase the capture from landfill sites by up to 80% by 2050 and reduce emissions quite significantly from that source. The two principal ways in which to do that are to ban biogenic waste from going to landfill and to capture and utilise more from the methane that is produced. That can be done by directly injecting it into the gas grid after a bit of cleaning or by using it to generate electrical energy.

Carbon dioxide is one of the key areas of work on which the Bill focuses. Our big carbon dioxide emissions come, in many ways, from logistics and transport. The average bin lorry uses a substantial amount of fuel in driving around the place. Those emissions tend to be captured as part of transport, and much of the waste sector's emissions are embedded in those of other sectors. Some of the work that Neil referenced on SaMBA is a classic example. We are seeing some shift under the provisions of the Environment Act 2021 through how councils should provide a better service of collection on a micro or medium-sized scale to local businesses, and there are discussions under way through the extended producer responsibility (EPR) legislation, of which I am sure you are aware. Across Northern Ireland, from transport emissions from waste, we are generating somewhere in the region of 150,000 tons of carbon dioxide equivalent. That is substantial. As we move forward into the circular economy, resource efficiency becomes a key aspect, and the idea would be that, as with methane, waste must be moved up the waste hierarchy. We need to valorise, as much as possible, the waste that is discarded — the residual waste — in order to reduce CO₂ emissions. If that were fully done by adopting resource efficiency throughout the value chain, moving waste up the hierarchy and valorising residual waste, we could, based on a recent circular economy report from the Netherlands, reduce CO₂ emissions by something in the order of 39%.

Finally, as I said, the main issue for us is largely waste transport emissions. There are significant emissions from refuse collection vehicles (RCVs). Diesel-powered RCVs generate a sizeable footprint. There are a lot of them out there, and if we are going to look at alternative sources of fuel, such as electric power, that will be expensive. There has to be recognition in the mix that, when we move down the road towards having hybrid/electric/hydrogen fuel RCVs, there will be a significant cost to be paid, much of which will be in the public sector. There needs to be some consideration given to how that can be funded or supported, because everything in the public sector comes at a cost, and that cost is not directly attributable to and recoverable from consumers. There therefore needs to be some recognition and discussion between this Committee and other Committees to see from where sources of funding could be gained to spur that development. There have been some very welcome developments recently around things such as electric buses.

There is also the question of how we can use the likes of CO₂ and methane through advanced chemical processes to generate hydrogen to produce the likes of green hydrogen. There is work under way in a number of universities to see how that can be progressed.

I will stop there, bar to say that, in Northern Ireland, we have a lack of waste management infrastructure. There is a lack of infrastructure to meet recycling requirements. There is a lack of infrastructure to deal with residual waste requirements. There is a lack of infrastructure to deal with

some of these anaerobic digestion (AD) and in-vessel composting-type arrangements that are coming down the pipeline towards us. We have a fundamental lack of infrastructure.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Thank you, Tim. I turn now to Annika.

Dr Annika Clements (Ulster Wildlife): Thank you for inviting Ulster Wildlife today. I will also do my best to keep my presentation to five minutes and avoid repeating anything that has been said before. My focus will be on nature-based solutions. I know that you have had other presentations to the Committee on that theme, but I will try to put a slightly different spin on it.

Nature-based solutions can provide a really significant contribution to emissions reductions in reaching any targets that are set in the Bill. They can also have the added benefit of reducing risk from climate change-related extreme weather events, such as flooding, coastal erosion, heatwaves and wildfire risk. That is well recognised in the UK Climate Change Committee's recommendations on how nature-based solutions should be used. Having heard a bit of the discussion on the environment strategy, those targets and recommendations are exactly what we want to see implemented in Northern Ireland.

To make the most of nature-based solutions, we really need a sound platform in the legislation that can then facilitate the necessary action. As such, we propose a nature-based solutions amendment to the Bill. We echo what our RSPB Northern Ireland colleagues have recommended to the Committee on the potential clause wording options. The options draw on similar clauses in the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019 and the Republic of Ireland's Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021.

The proposed amendment seeks to put in place a legislative framework that supports nature-based projects that seek to reduce, or to increase the removal of, greenhouse gas emissions and that seek to support climate resilience. That is really important. It is therefore both the mitigation message and the adaptation message for nature-based solutions that we want to get out. Furthermore, we want to see those solutions being able to enhance biodiversity and tackle the biodiversity crisis, and we believe that well-designed nature-based solutions can do exactly that.

I quickly want to highlight a couple of examples, including a lesser-known nature-based solution, which is blue carbon. As a marine biologist, it is a pet favourite of mine, and I want to highlight a role of the oceans that is so often forgotten. It is estimated that the oceans are capable of taking care of one fifth of the carbon that we need to tackle in order to achieve global emissions reductions in line with the Paris agreement. Globally, the oceans have already absorbed 90% of the energy that is caused by greenhouse gas emissions. That has really minimised the temperature rises that the globe is experiencing. Annually, the oceans absorb around one third of human-related carbon dioxide emissions, but, to continue to have that capacity, they need to be kept healthy, and certain habitats must be protected and restored, as they play a significant role in locking away carbon. Those habitats are known as blue-carbon habitats. Locally, we have a range of blue-carbon habitats. Around our coasts, habitats with salt marshes, seagrass and shell fisheries play a really vital role in not only locking away carbon but protecting our coastlines from rising sea levels, storms related to climate change, flooding and erosion. They also maintain and improve water quality, as well as being vital for biodiversity.

A great example that came up just yesterday on how managing those habitats can have multiple benefits is the salt marsh restoration work that is being undertaken in the Thames estuary. Part of the Thames estuary was declared a dead zone in 1957, but it is now beginning to thrive, which includes the return of seahorses, as a result of active habitat protection and restoration. In Northern Ireland, more than half of our estimated current extent of coastal blue-carbon habitats occurs in our marine protected area (MPA) network. That means that, if management is put in place, there is a huge opportunity to protect those carbon sinks effectively. There is also the potential to triple the estimated blue-carbon sequestration rate of our MPA network through active habitat restoration and recreation.

Before I move on to my next nature-based solution example, I will emphasise that there is a great range of nature-based solutions available to us. We all know quite a bit about planting forests, woodlands, trees and hedgerows, and we have also heard about how we manage soils for carbon. I know that that is particularly important for the Agriculture Committee. Furthermore, species-rich grasslands, which we have in abundance in Northern Ireland, are vital for locking away carbon. The protection, restoration and management of those must be deployed at scale, however. They all require long-term, significant investment in order to yield the maximum benefits as a climate action and as a biodiversity action. They can also be deployed in urban as well as rural environments. Nature-based

solutions are not just countryside issues or ocean issues. They are also about how we plan our cities and put in place green infrastructure, such as infrastructure to minimise the impacts of flooding.

My final example is fairly well known to the Committee and was mentioned in the discussion about the environment strategy: the role of peatlands. In Northern Ireland, around 45 years' worth of our current annual greenhouse gas emissions are locked away in peat. Healthy peatlands are absolutely crucial to the ability of our land to sequester and store carbon, but, as the Committee is probably well aware, around 80% of our peatlands are degraded and are currently emitting 6% of total Northern Ireland greenhouse gas emissions annually. If those degraded peatlands could be restored, it would be a huge opportunity to reduce our emissions and start to lock away carbon. We are currently involved in a project in partnership with DAERA to map the peat depth and condition across Northern Ireland in order to help target effective restoration and really ramp up the restoration effort. There has been a lot of successful partnership working in Northern Ireland and cross-border projects that have delivered really successful peatland restoration, so we have learnt how to do that. We know how to restore peatlands. We now need that to be accelerated and deployed at scale, however. Crucially, we have to work with the landowners, because, in large part, peatland is on private property. Doing that needs to go hand in hand with land-use approaches. As with many nature-based solutions, it could be enabled through future agrienvironment schemes.

To summarise, we very strongly advocate a sound legislative platform to make the most of nature-based solutions. There is an opportunity through the Climate Change (No. 2) Bill to do that. This is the right time to do it. It will also support the green growth strategy through creating jobs and developing skills that can be deployed across Northern Ireland in rural and urban environments.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Thank you very much, Annika. I ask Nichola Hughes from Sustainable NI to present.

Ms Nichola Hughes (Sustainable NI): Good morning.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Good morning, Nichola.

Ms Hughes: Thanks, Chair, for the opportunity to speak. Our unique perspective is sustainable development. We have analysed the Bill through that lens. Sustainability is all about taking a long-term, holistic approach to balancing economic, social and environmental needs. It is about how this generation can thrive without compromising future generations' ability to thrive. The golden rules are that we need to put environmental and social needs on a par with economic needs and to put future generations' needs on a par with those of our generation. Those rules are what sustainable development centres on.

Overall, we are extremely concerned that, in fact, no Bill may be passed. We would like to see the amalgamation of the Climate Change Bill and the Climate Change (No. 2) Bill into a single, comprehensive Bill underpinned by an ambitious net zero target. If we do not do that, it will be a major failure of this Government.

I compared the Bill with a strong net zero Bill and looked at it from a sustainability point of view. We think that the Climate Change (No.2) Bill is not in the best interests of society or the environment and that, contrary to what the Bill's sponsor says, it is not in the best interests of the economy in the long term, with "long term" being the key words.

We are concerned that the Bill underestimates the level of risk that climate change presents. This week, Sir Patrick Vallance, the Government's Chief Scientific Adviser, said that climate change is a much bigger and potentially deadlier problem than COVID-19. He said that more people will die from climate change than from coronavirus if we fail to act. At COP26 yesterday, Mary Robinson said that the Governments that are not setting a target of net zero by 2050 are not in "crisis mode". In other words, they are not viewing climate change as a crisis.

We encourage policymakers to look at the whole economy and not just at individual sectors. The Climate Change Committee (CCC) has said that, although some sectors may require tough measures, net zero will deliver a boost to the economy overall. Policymakers need to look at the big picture and take a long-term approach. They need to think of the measures as an investment. We remind the Government that their primary duty is to protect citizens, not to grow the economy at all costs.

If I may say so, we want to see a few things strengthened in the Bill. We want, of course, to see a net zero target for greenhouse gas emissions, preferably by 2045 or earlier but no later than 2050. There needs to be a requirement for an overarching climate action plan and for carbon budgets for all sectors, with sectoral targets, to make sure that there is not just a dash for carbon and that some sectors are given a free pass while others have to pick up the burden. That will make sure that there is fairness in how carbon budgets are administered. There needs to be a mechanism for independent scrutiny — an independent commissioner and a climate office or equivalent — so that the Government are not just assessing performance themselves. The Bill makes no mention of a just transition or of just transition principles. It needs to include such provision in order to guide sectors in the way in which they move to net zero.

We are pleased to see the introduction of a climate change duty on public authorities in the Bill, but we would like it to be equivalent to that in the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019. We could strengthen the provision by including adaptation in the reporting requirement on public bodies, because, at the minute, there is no requirement for public bodies or councils to report on climate change adaptation.

We need a dedicated Minister and a new Department for climate and energy transition in order to ensure effective coordination across government. We need a delivery body to oversee and support that climate and energy transition. We also need annual statistics, at least, on Northern Ireland's overseas consumption carbon footprint.

The economic argument for the 82% target is challengeable. The Climate Change Committee says that the cost of the 82% cut will be less than 1% of GDP a year. Net zero will cost slightly more, but there will be a net boost overall through operational savings. Conversely, we know from the Stern report that climate change will cost us 5% of GDP a year every year. We have not, however, seen the economic analysis of the costs and benefits to the Northern Irish economy of 82% versus the impacts of climate change and doing nothing. It would therefore be prudent for the Government to commission an independent economic study to give policymakers the confidence that they need to move forward with a net zero target.

We are also worried that, with the 82% target, this is going to be seen as a weak Bill, and the growth of the green economy in Northern Ireland might be restricted. Currently, businesses are operating to the net zero UK target. This Bill would actually weaken the ambition in the private sector, and investors in renewables might get cold feet about investing in Northern Ireland because of a perceived lack of Government commitment.

Finally, there is a lack of public support for this Bill. Overall, the public want stronger action on climate change. A recent poll by Kantar Public showed that 76% of people would accept stricter environmental rules and regulations. We know that, when change is proposed, it is often the minority that shout the loudest, and those with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo often get into the ear of politicians. If this Bill is passed, it will almost certainly need to be amended to net zero due to growing public demand. We have seen that the Republic of Ireland's Bill and the UK Government Bill had to be amended to net zero, having previously set weaker targets.

In conclusion, it comes down to risk management, or risk mismanagement. If climate change is the biggest economic risk in the world right now, why are we not throwing everything at it to stop the problem? I was trying to think of a good analogy of where risk is badly managed or where people perceive a threat to be smaller than it is. Imagine a scenario in which your house is burning down: you run into the house to get your suitcase with all your life savings from under the bed, even though everyone is telling you not to run in to get it, but you think that it will be OK and that it is worth getting it. You have assessed the risk to be lower than it is. However, it is reckless, greedy, selfish and short-sighted. It is better to be cautious when there is so much on the line. I am happy to take questions.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Thanks to all the contributors. I will go straight to questions.

Mr Harvey: Thank you all for attending. My first question is directed towards Neil from FSB. How much of an impact on small businesses would Ms Bailey's Bill have, compared with the No. 2 Bill? Could you manage that impact?

Mr Hutcheson: The thing about both Bills, as referenced by Nichola, is that we have not seen an independent economic analysis across the piece. It is a good point. It is difficult to perceive the impact from a small business perspective when we are talking at such a high legislative stage. The climate is

not an area that we are experts in; we are experts in business. When there is disagreement on evidence from committees and various stakeholders, it can be confusing from a small business perspective. That is the number-one reason why we advocate economic and independent impact assessments. It is also the reason why we have proposed the SAMBIT amendments. Regardless of how this gets passed, it is likely to be, let us say, a political decision, and it will be officials who sit down and work out how we are going to get to whatever target we set. It is really important from that perspective that the engagement is effective and that the proper analysis is done at that point.

Mr Harvey: The idea would be to preserve all small businesses while helping them achieve new targets. That is what you are aiming for. Is that right?

Mr Hutcheson: It would be lovely to protect small businesses and get to where we need to get to. I do not think that I said this in my first piece, but it is worth stating that it is essential that we get legislation passed. That is key. There will be small businesses that will spawn out of the green growth side of the journey towards net zero. I hear what you are saying. It is delicate, in many ways. We speak on behalf of small businesses, and we think that, the more we engage and talk through the detail and use independent scrutiny and analysis, the higher the chance that whatever we decide to do will be fit for purpose. From our perspective, there is a distinct lack of independent scrutiny and assessment.

Mr Harvey: That is OK. Thank you. I have wee question for Nichola from Sustainable NI. Achieving what you want on climate action in the time that you wish to achieve it would mean major hardship for those who rely on the agri-food sector for their livelihoods in Northern Ireland. What support do you propose be given to those who would face hardship or lose their livelihoods?

Ms Hughes: Thanks for the question. It is hard, because we need the figures. Where is the modelling of the agriculture sector that shows what the alternative looks like? At the moment, we have industrial agriculture, and we need to move to sustainable agriculture. It is hard to describe what that looks like and how it can be profitable without actually doing it and showing that it is possible. We need to reduce our livestock numbers, but there should be a way for farmers to prosper through paying them for conservation measures and giving them a fair price for their products, and also some sort of more regulation of the export market so that exporters pass more of the profit on to producers.

If you say to a farmer, "You need to reduce your herd size by 50%, but you will get the same amount of money through an alternative, sustainable pathway", of course they will say, "That is fine. We will sign up to that". It is unfair to say that there will be financial hardship without doing the assessments and the modelling of what an alternative pathway looks like. I always say that "can't do" is an attitude and a state of mind. There is always an alternative. There is the kind of Darwinian theory that you adapt to survive; you adapt and thrive. Climate change will put immense environmental pressure on farmers. Ironically. They are at the front line, and they will have to adapt to new seasonal weather patterns: drier summers, wetter winters and springs. There will be a squeeze on fodder production and livestock numbers in general. Farmers will have to adapt anyway. The agri-food system is broken. It is not financially sustainable, and everyone knows that. Let us paint a picture of what an alternative looks like. Let us put some economic figures on what the opportunity is, instead of following the narrative that it will all be negative.

Mr Harvey: Your written evidence contains the wee line:

"Being a responsible global citizen involves eating less red meat and dairy."

A logical conclusion from that statement is that an individual who eats meats and dairy is not a responsible citizen. Is that not a bit strong?

Ms Hughes: Being a responsible global citizen is thinking about the whole, not you as in individual. It is you not putting yourself first. In the example of running into a burning house, you think of your family; you do not just think of yourself. If everyone in the world ate meat — I consume meat, but I try to eat it only every other day — the way that I do, millions of people would go hungry. It is the least sustainable way of feeding people, so it is unfair. There is a moral and ethical argument that it is unfair, but no one is going to put that on you. It is for individuals to choose, and we cannot control that.

There is a trend of younger people being more aware of that kind of injustice in the world and sharing our resources. They are stepping up and moving towards more plant-based diets. No one will force anyone to do it, but it is one thing that we can all do. It does not mean that we all have to become vegetarian or vegan, just use resources a bit more sensibly.

Mr Harvey: Thank you very much for your answers, Nichola. Thank you too, Neil. That will do me, Chair. Thank you.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Thanks, Harry. William? *[Long Pause.]*

The Committee Clerk: Ask him to unmute, Chair.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): William, can you unmute there?

Mr Irwin: I have got it now.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): We can hear you now.

Mr Irwin: Thank you all for your presentations. My first question is to Neil and is about the proposed SAMBIT amendment that he wants to see in both Bills. Are there any Bills in other regions of the UK that include SAMBIT?

Mr Hutcheson: It is slightly different. In other parts of the UK, SaMBA, as they call it in England, is not directly related to the climate change legislation that is in place there but is done across all policymaking across various Departments. We see that as a really good thing. As it is only best practice in all the Departments in NI, it is dependent on the official or their team or on whatever way the wind is blowing, let us say. It is very dependent on that and perhaps a little inconsistent. They do not need SaMBA integrated into legislation in other parts of the UK, because it is the default way that they do things. The answer to your question is no, and I hope that that outlines the reason for that.

Mr Irwin: OK, thank you.

You do not agree with the target of 82% by 2050, Nichola. Do you accept the Climate Change Committee's recommendation that Northern Ireland is a food-producing region that feeds 10 million or 15 million people in mainland UK and that, therefore, going further than 82% would seriously damage the agri-food sector? Given that we produce so much food for the mainland, Northern Ireland reaching 82% would ensure that the whole of the UK reaches net zero, so Northern Ireland, as part of the UK, would actually reach net zero by 2050. Do you accept that?

Ms Hughes: It comes down to what a fair-share contribution is. If you look at it as what our fair share is as a region of the UK, that is fine, because you are looking at it as a contribution to the UK. If we have the competency to set our own targets, however, and we are therefore treating ourselves as a country, an 82% reduction by 2050 is not a fair share of the global carbon reduction burden. If every country copied Northern Ireland, we would be up more than 2°C of warming and would not be aligned to the Paris agreement. That is what I mean. That is not a science-based target, and that means that we are not on par with the UN Paris agreement. It depends on whether we treat Northern Ireland as a region in the context of the UK only and therefore not as a global economy, or we treat it as a country — a part of the world — and show leadership to other countries. If everyone followed us in setting a weak target of 82%, it would be game over: global disaster. It is about the principle of the thing.

The other issue that I have with the modelling is that the recommendation of the CCC outlined a variety of scenarios. They choose which policy parameters go into the model, so the option of going beyond a 50% cut in livestock numbers was more or less off the table; it was just about in there. You construe or constrain the scenarios based on the parameters. Politicians choose the parameters. It is all about choice. We do not have to produce food for nine million people. We do not have to do that. The Government have encouraged that for years, but we do not have to do it. Meat and dairy are not part of a staple diet. They are a luxury part of our diet. That is not core food. I have a problem with that target, which is basically that we are not doing our fair share. Ultimately, climate change is a global issue. It is not a UK issue and it is not a local issue; it is a global issue. Every country has to work together. If we do not work together and align our ambitions, we will never make any progress.

Mr Irwin: Surely there is a danger in what you say. We produce enough food for 10 or 15 million people in the UK. The UK would just import that from some other country that creates much greater amounts of emissions than us, given that some other countries, like Argentina and Brazil, are cutting down rainforests to produce more food to export. Whether we like it or not, we are a region in the UK, and, for me, it is a sensible attitude to take. Other regions in the UK have followed the UK Climate Change Committee's recommendations; why should we not?

Ms Hughes: I will give an analogy. It is a more extreme analogy, but, just because there is a demand for ivory in China, it does not mean that Governments in Africa should allow poaching. Do you see what I mean? Just because there is a demand for opium, it does not mean that Northern Ireland should start producing opium. I am not saying that it is the same thing. Meat and dairy are luxury items, and we need to reduce them.

We need to pay our own farmers, feed our own people and encourage shorter food supply chains. There is an underlying *[Inaudible owing to poor sound quality.]* Ultimately, the export model has all been about growth, growth, growth, but there has been a huge environmental toll on Northern Ireland, so we should not be that proud of feeding 10 million people. It is not actually a good thing, because there is a huge ammonia crisis, all our lakes are polluted and there are major problems for the local people of Northern Ireland. From a social and environmental point of view, it is really concerning. Northern Ireland is kind of the dirty corner of the UK. It is not a good thing. It has all been for growth, and the majority of the wealth that has been created from that model has gone to the agri-food processors and exporters. Farmers are hanging on by a thread when it comes to the money in their pockets. A better distribution of the wealth needs to be created. We are not calling for the decimation of the economy, but we want to rein it in, regulate it a bit more and find better ways of rewarding farmers.

Mr Irwin: I will finish by saying this: as I said, we produce a sizeable amount of food that is exported to the UK mainland, which is very close. The amount of carbon miles that it takes to import food from other countries is a much greater environmental issue than exporting food a few miles across the sea to the UK. It is a mistake to export that to another country across Europe or further afield, when we can reach net zero as a region of the UK. That is my view. It makes no sense. In Northern Ireland, 100,000 jobs depend on the agri-food sector. Cutting that sector by 50% will bring massive job losses. There will be big issues in Northern Ireland if that happens. Thank you.

Mr Blair: I thank the panellists. I have two questions. I will start by being frank. I have heard some of the questions and conversations before, and I am sure that my colleagues feel the same way, so I will try, if I may, to take a slightly different slant. There is an understandable fixation with dates and years in respect of targets, and we know that short, sharp messaging makes headlines and gets attention quicker than longer, more detailed conversations.

I do not mind which panel member takes this question. Do the panellists agree that, in general, every day that we spend talking about the date or target, whatever it may be, is another day without a legislative framework to work towards that date, and that the most effort will have to be made in the next few years? Whether the target is 2030, 2040, 2050 or beyond, the most effort will be required from 2021 onwards in order to halt the serious slide that we are already on. Is there general agreement that the prioritisation of action, rather than eventual dates, should be the issue?

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Does any member of the panel want to take that?

Mr Parmenter: From our point of view, it is now the time to stop talking and start doing. We need to get on with this now, as John said. It is almost one minute before midnight. It is time to get on with it.

Dr Clements: I echo what Ray said. The concern is that we still do not have an Act. Without that, all the subsequent sector plans and policies cannot flow. Until we have an Act in place, that is going to impede what we can do. Over the next few years, we need to plan budgets, and we cannot do any of that without the legislation. I very much agree with John about the need to fast-track action. Many of the solutions will not come to full fruition for at least a decade or two. Therefore, if we do not invest now, we will suffer the consequences from not doing that in a far worse capacity.

It is vital that we try to front-load the action. We recognise that we cannot do that without legislation. In some ways, getting caught between the different targets of 2045 or 2050 just delays getting this in place. Ulster Wildlife is part of the Climate Coalition, as are many other environmental NGOs such as the National Trust, the Woodland Trust and the RSPB. We all agree that by far the most important thing is just getting a climate change Act. I very much echo that that is the priority, rather than the toing and froing between the resulting emissions targets.

Mr Blair: Chair, I am grateful for those responses in relation to refocusing efforts here. My second question is more directed at the Chartered Institute of Wastes Management. Today, and on previous occasions, there has been much talk about the waste issue, recycling, the circular economy and relating all that to green energy and better outcomes. I will ask a very direct question. To what extent

has the abject failure to deliver consistent recycling across Northern Ireland contributed to the current crisis? How soon can we start to deal with that at a regional and local level?

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

Mr Parmenter: Tim, do you want to take that one?

Dr Walker: Sorry, Ray. Do you want to go first?

Mr Parmenter: No. You go ahead. It is a local issue. You have more experience of that one.

Dr Walker: Thanks. John, I welcome your recognition that there is a crisis, and it is important to state that. Waste tends to get overlooked in many of those conversations because it is the back end of all those upstream processes. As such, we are very much the Cinderella sector and have been for years. The issue for me, as you know, is that we do not have enough infrastructure to deal with the amount of material that we are generating in Northern Ireland. You are talking about the interface between the consumer, the treatment technologies and the way that the waste is collected. There are a lot of conversations and discussions going on nationally about the best way to collect it. We risk running down a rabbit hole by merely focusing on the collection element. Collection is important, and councils are doing much to discuss and debate how to collect, what to collect and when to collect. It is a very active conversation with the Department. The Department could be clearer about what it is seeking to achieve and how that could contribute directly to the circular economy. It tends to be more suggestive than directive about what needs to be done. The Department needs to recognise that if it is going to seek significant change, as I mentioned in my earlier comments, it needs to put money where its mouth is to pay for some of that change.

Earlier, Ray said something that was really strongly reflected at a conference that we held last month: the desire for this sector to actively step up and drive the agenda is legion. The whole sector wants to do more. I am afraid, as has been said by a few of us here, and as has been so well articulated by Greta Thunberg, we as a sector are hearing far too much blah, blah, blah. We need action. Much of what is coming down the pipeline may well be transitory while we move from where we are today to where we need to be in 20 or 30 years' time. The long and short of it is that there is far too much talk going on and far too little action being taken to pass legislation to enact things going forward.

You are right to say that there needs to be overhaul of how we are doing things, but that needs to be done at pace. Instead, we get endless equivocation and delay, and we get review upon review and assessment upon assessment, and nothing changes. That is wrong. It is wrong for the people who are working in the sector, it is wrong for the environment and it is wrong across the piste. All the time, things gradually deteriorate and degenerate until they happen faster.

Mr Blair: Tim, I appreciate your frankness on that. To press this a little further, do you agree that the number of structures involved in delivery across Northern Ireland is a contributory factor to the delay and, of course, by the very nature of having numerous structures, they are an additional drain on resources, financial and otherwise?

Dr Walker: John, I am going to ask you to be more clear. When you talk about additional structures, what structures are you referring to specifically? There are not that many structures involved.

Mr Blair: There are a number of agencies and waste management structures, and, for a population of this size, that number is greater than in other regions.

Dr Walker: The councils are involved. There are two subregional groupings, and then we have the Department and the regulator. If you are proposing something along the lines of what went on in Britain in the 1990s, when waste collection authorities and waste disposal authorities were combined to create unitary authorities and consideration was given to whether that could be done at subregional level, that is one way of doing it. We have never had that development in Northern Ireland. We have had more of a unitary-based structure, where that collection/disposal authority has been combined at council level from the get-go. Alternatively, the Southern Irish model talks about having subregional groupings, of which there were originally six or seven. That reverted to three and has now gone down to one in, I think, the past year. That has been solely around the messaging, and it has not controlled in any way the contracting or waste collection arrangements.

I think that what you are talking about needs clarity, and, ultimately, what would the expected endgame be? Would it be a structure based on a Northern Ireland company, the likes of Northern Ireland Water? Would it be something based on a joint committee with council ownership? How do you see this actually landing? At the minute, it is fine to say that there are too many structures. I say that there are not too many structures but that the structures are not being given the impetus or the ability to perform to their optimum because we are stuck in a political hiatus. There is a lack of decision-making.

Mr Blair: I appreciate that, Tim.

The Deputy Chairperson (Mr McGuigan): John, before you come in —

Mr Blair: I agree that it requires a legislative directive anyway to bring the consistency. I think that we have reached agreement on that.

The Deputy Chairperson (Mr McGuigan): As interesting as this conversation is, we should keep the questions and answers strictly to the Climate Change (No. 2) Bill. Have you finished John?

Mr Blair: Yes.

Mrs Barton: Nichola, I was a little concerned at your referring to Northern Ireland as the "dirty corner of the UK". Northern Ireland is a beautiful country. We have beautiful forests, beautiful lakes and beautiful rivers. Indeed, it is very popular as a tourist destination. I do feel that you do it a great injustice by referring to it as the "dirty corner of the UK".

You said that the 82% target that we are discussing in the Climate Change (No. 2) Bill may restrict the growth of businesses in Northern Ireland. It does not say 82%. It is 82% or better, I think that you have to understand. So, there is a chance that we may even be better than the 82%. Can you give me an idea of how it will restrict the growth of businesses in Northern Ireland, given that we are going to have issues, perhaps regarding our agricultural economy from the loss of jobs there, the reduction in animals and so on?

Ms Hughes: Thank you, Rosemary. That does not apply to all businesses. There is the likes of the renewable energy industry. So, for example, there are big companies like Causeway Energy, which are really interested in geothermal energy production and have eyed Northern Ireland as a big opportunity. Also, Northern Ireland has a tremendous opportunity in offshore wind, when we get the policy in place for it. There is a major opportunity for investment for Northern Ireland, and it will help to solve some of our energy and fuel poverty issues. Generally, in terms of our huge manufacturing base, we have produced the parts for wind turbines. That has reduced. It is about investors having the confidence that the Government are completely committed to the net zero target. That will give them the confidence to invest in these burgeoning, zero and low carbon industries.

This is the whole point about the advice of the Climate Change Committee on economics. Whilst there may be some short- or long-term sacrifices in some sectors, overall there will be a net boost by 2050. There will be a net gain from transitioning to a zero carbon economy. So we have to keep the long-term prize in mind, rather than focusing on smaller sectors.

On the "dirty corner" remark. Sorry, I appreciate that that language is a bit extreme, but look at the figures and the environmental indicators. Look at carbon: we have the highest per capita carbon emissions in the UK, at 11.2 tons of CO₂ per head of population. We are hugely carbon-intensive, and that is because of our land use. The way that we use our land has to change. We are the least wooded part of Europe. A couple of hundred years ago, there would have been woodland everywhere and biodiversity: deer, boars etc. That has all gone and there is, essentially, a monoculture of grass with very little biodiversity or forest. We produce 14% of the UK's ammonia, even though we have only 2% or 3% of the population. Ammonia is an invisible poisonous gas. Only one of our 20 major lakes is in good condition; so 19 of our lakes are either in poor or very poor condition. Those are just a few of the statistics. Northern Ireland might look green but, relative to the rest of the UK and the rest of the world, we are not, statistically, as green as we might think.

Mrs Barton: Yes. OK. You might produce those statistics, but I invite you to come to Fermanagh any weekend and sample our countryside.

Ms Hughes: It is beautiful.

Mrs Barton: I want to move on to infrastructure. As you know, in the west, we have more wind and yet, in our efforts to produce electricity, our infrastructure is unable to cope. There is a problem there. We have concentrated on agriculture, but we need to look at other infrastructures that are not up to speed either. This is an opportunity that we are missing to produce electricity.

Ms Hughes: Is that question for me?

Mrs Barton: Yes, Nichola.

Ms Hughes: Yes. I agree with your comments. We need strong policy and legislation to see strong investment in infrastructure, whether in decarbonisation of the grid, which will be really good for society in general, or decarbonising our transport sector, which will be brilliant in helping public health through cleaner air. We are well behind on public infrastructure for EV chargers. I agree with Tim that we need rapid change.

Where there is low-hanging fruit, a win-win-win situation for economy, society and planet, we need to get on and do the things that make sense. Those are investments in our future. Generally, you will always find that there are what we call positive co-benefits in tackling things like fuel poverty, cleaning the air and giving people a better standard of life. Unfortunately, agriculture, which is what we call a hard-to-abate sector, dominates the debate and is a distraction, because the majority of our greenhouse gas emissions are from carbon dioxide, which is more of a problem than methane. There is so much that we can do to start bringing that down, so we need to get on with it.

Mrs Barton: We need a lot more investment in infrastructure. I do not have a problem with electric cars, but when we are all plugging them in at night, will the infrastructure be there to cope with that? It is the question of the future.

Ms Bailey: Thanks to the witnesses. I want to thank you for the comments that are really trying to get us to focus on the devastating and unprecedented climate and biodiversity emergency that is here and is upon us and that we are starting to live through. We fully acknowledge that our time is up, so it is really unfortunate that people who, historically, were climate deniers have now become climate delayers. I assure you that the vast majority of MLAs, if not all of them, want to see legislation passed in this mandate. It will not be a catch-all and cover all things for all people, but it will provide the building blocks and the foundation from which we can begin to move forward in a sustainable way to mitigate the devastation that we are facing. I needed to put that into context.

While scientific measures will be needed, and political decisions will need to be taken to deliver those, I want to come back to the economics behind it. Neil, you talked about SAMBIT. We are looking at that, and you have raised it with us before. What would be the financial impact on your members if Northern Ireland were to set in legislation anything other than net zero? Has there been a discussion with your members about future financial investment in their existing businesses or the potential for trade connections in their businesses?

Tim, you mentioned — I think that I noted this down correctly, but please correct me if I am wrong — that, as the curricular economy begins to develop, it could lead to a 39% reduction in CO2. I want you to come back to that one and explain to us the economic opportunities that are there if we get the legislation right and begin to build the foundations that can lead us into the future.

Annika, you talked about nature-based solutions, blue carbon in our oceans, marine protected areas and peatland absorption. There is a lot of cross-border working going on. How can we further strengthen the legislation in front of us to make sure that, as we move forward, we capitalise on those natural solutions as much as possible?

Dr Clements: Neil, do you want to go first?

Mr Hutcheson: Yes, sure. We will answer those in the order in which they were asked, if that is OK. I will do that. Thank you very much, Annika, and thank you, Clare, for the question.

I have three points in response. First, I totally agree that we need the legislation, and our members are starting to tell us more and more that we need to get it right. Investors, interestingly, have talked to us

about that certainty and uncertainty notion that Nichola and you, Clare, mentioned. The point is not what the target is but what is the target so that we can invest knowing what the return might be etc. A business owner during the pandemic said to us, "We almost don't care what the guidance is. We just don't like the indecision around what it is. So, tell us what it is, and we will do what we need to do". The same principle per se applies here: the sooner we can get a framework and have something to aim towards, the quicker the rest will fall into place. That is not me generalising and taking one view or the other. That is a premise that we hear all the time across various issues from multiple members and business owners. It is really important to reiterate that.

The third point to make about investment is that it is clear that not now but in time, you will likely only get investment into your business if you are demonstrating your environmental, social and governance indicators, if you are sustainable, and if you are doing x, y, and z. It is also clear that, in time, you will likely only be able to bid for government contracts if you are meeting a certain threshold and so on and so forth. Small business know that now and the ones that are pushing ahead are getting themselves in order and are using that as a window of opportunity and advantage ahead of those that are not. I hope that that answers your questions.

Ms Bailey: Yes, thank you.

Tim, I want to come back to you to talk about the circular economy and its ability to be a lever in carbon reduction. I think you that mentioned a figure of 39%; how has that been developed and where did that figure come from? Has it been mapped, and it is based just on Northern Ireland, or is it island-wide or islands-wide? Can you give us a wee bit more detail?

Dr Walker: It is a great question; thank you, Clare. The 39% figure was produced by Circle Economy, which is a Netherlands-based consultancy. It was looking at global emissions arising from CO2 and what could be achieved by the circular economy. It was asking the question: if we were to manage materials better in the supply chain, how could we better minimise carbon dioxide emissions?

The key area that it focused on was resource efficiency. That is to do with stuff like kaizen blitz and six sigma, where you are minimising the discard that occurs in the production cycle. You improve design and functionality, and that has a profound impact. Something in the order of 80% of the impact of a product is embedded in that product at the design stage.

Secondly, it is saying that we should move material up the waste hierarchy. Take it from landfill and move it to waste-to-energy. Take it from waste-to-energy and move it to recycling. Take it from recycling and move it to reuse. Move stuff up the waste hierarchy, away from the lower level.

The third thing is that whatever stuff you are left with, make sure that you maximise what you can do with it. Make sure that you use it to the max. That aligns with what the Ellen McArthur Foundation said a dozen years ago, which was, ultimately, that you want stuff to last for as long as possible. You want to make sure that the stuff that you have is not going to damage the environment. You are looking to detoxify it and minimise pollution. Ultimately, when you are discarding stuff, you are making sure that it either regenerates nature or that you maximise its value as much as possible and you valorise the materials.

Ms Bailey: I understand that.

Dr Walker: I am getting a lots of calls from a number of sectors about this kind of stuff, because I have been talking about it for a while. Many of them are saying that they have not got their head around what it means.

Work is going on in the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland. The Circular Economy Network is looking specifically at that. The Circle Economy consultancy is working with the Department for the Economy to look at what that means directly for Northern Ireland. The 39% figure was designed to feed into the COP26 discussions. That is interesting, because waste was not really discussed at COP26. When you consider waste, it only generates about 4% or 5% of the overall carbon dioxide emissions, but that is just treatment and disposal. Waste is generated throughout the system. One of the first things that you would have seen as you walked into COP26 was a stall about textile waste. As you will know, Clare, textile waste is a phenomenally wasteful process, as is food manufacturing. However, now is not the time for those conversations.

If anyone is interested in that report and that figure, I can make it available to the Committee.

Ms Bailey: Thank you, I would appreciate it if you could do that.

Looking at peatlands, blue carbon and our oceans, Annika, those issues are ongoing, regardless of what you think politically. Northern Ireland cannot deal with those issues on its own. Our neighbours in the Republic, Scotland, England and Wales are facing issues to do with the oceans, marine matters and peatlands as well.

I want to return to the issue of cross-border working. If we do not get this legislation right and set ourselves on a different path from Scotland, England, Wales and the South of Ireland, do you foresee that level of working being a problem?

Dr Clements: There have already been a lot of cross-border learnings through things like the Collaborative Action for the Natura Network project, which was INTERREG funded, and spans Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. There are six special areas of conservation in Northern Ireland that are benefiting from that project. That has allowed shared learning of how to restore peatlands and make sure that we are able to embed those skills and knowledge in multiple regions. That INTERREG programme will cover many cases in the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland and Scotland.

There has been a lot of collaboration more widely in the UK and in Ireland on how to restore and manage these habitats. However, if we end up with very different funding mechanisms and approaches, there will be significant disparity to that approach across borders. There is also now a great deal of expertise dotted around that we want to be able to continue to draw on. There is a new all-island academic research network that aims to harness that expertise for biodiversity and climate research.

We have learned a lot through collaborative projects, and we want to make sure that we continue do that. Fundamentally, however, there need to be similar approaches and levels of investment. As was mentioned earlier in your discussion on the environment strategy, there are clear guidelines and advice given by the Climate Change Committee on what our targets should be for peatland restoration and, similarly, for woodland planting.

The only thing that is not yet in there is blue carbon, because that is at a slightly earlier stage. We do not yet have restoration projects in Northern Ireland. There are lots of blue-carbon restoration projects in the rest of the UK, and a few are starting in the Republic of Ireland, so we are keen that we start to pick up the pace and get blue-carbon restoration going as well. All these things take a while to yield results, and they need significant long-term investment to do so.

Ms Bailey: Thanks very much. Nicola, I am going to leave you alone because you got a lot of questions, but thank you very much for pointing out exactly why and how, with the stats, Northern Ireland is absolutely a climate laggard. It might look beautiful, but be careful with the air that you breathe and the water that you swim in.

The Deputy Chairperson (Mr McGuigan): Thank you, Clare. I have a couple of questions. Dr Clements, you laboured on nature-based solutions. You suggested that we should follow the approach of the South and Scotland, which have that in their legislation. Are they coming at it from the same angle or is there a difference in approach with regard to a nature-based solution?

Dr Clements: The interesting thing is literally in the wording. In the Republic of Ireland, they have called them nature-based projects because sometimes the term "nature-based solution" makes it sound as if you can reach an end point, job done, walk away, whereas they are using the term "nature-based projects", and have very much embedded the biodiversity outcomes as well as the climate outcomes and not just mitigations. It is not just about locking away the carbon but about adaptation, so is about supporting climate resilience.

The terminology "nature-based projects" that is used in the Republic of Ireland legislation is, potentially, a good fit. However, the Scottish one is also a good approach. The main thing is there is wording available. I understand that the RSPB briefing before its oral evidence last month included potential clause wording and got experts to look at what might be best here.

The Deputy Chairperson (Mr McGuigan): OK, thanks. Neil, anybody drafting a Bill would like to ensure that there is adequate consultation, particularly in a region where small and medium-sized

enterprises are primary in the economy. Are you sensing or suggesting that any direction of just transition in the Bill is not going to be sufficient to deal with that issue?

Just for clarity, you raised the issue of SAMBIT. That is a responsibility of the Department for the Economy, so you are trying to get it included in the climate change legislation because the Department for the Economy is essentially not doing what it is supposed to be doing. Am I correct in that?

Mr Hutcheson: I am not sure that I fully understand the first question, so I will answer the second one, and, then, if you can clarify the first one, it would be really useful.

The Department for the Economy is the host site, as it were, and the host or lead Department, but it is cross-Executive by way of best practice guidance. That is the first thing to clarify. Secondly, we are concerned that it is being inconsistently used, and we realise and understand from officials that that is, pretty much, because it does not have a statutory footing. So, when you are told that by officials and you represent small businesses right across NI, it seems that one of the biggest areas in which we, perhaps, are going to see a shift, the impacts of which we do not know, is climate change. So, we thought that that would be the best thing to propose for both climate change Bills, on the basis that, without it, the same thing that happened in other policymaking strands would happen on this one. That is the basic premise.

We do not seek to change or shift any of the targets in any way. All that we aim to do with it is to maximise the quality of the policymaking process that stems from any legislative target. Hopefully, that is part two answered. Will you clarify part one around the just transition?

The Deputy Chairperson (Mr McGuigan): I probably asked it very clumsily. If there were a consultation period in the Bill and proper just transition principles, would either of those, or the two combined, satisfy what it is that you are looking for without the specific mention of SAMBIT? That is essentially what I am trying to get to.

Mr Hutcheson: That is absent from the Bill, but if it were in place, and there was something mandated around consultation and best practice, it would bring it closer, and, perhaps, if the explanatory memorandum talked a bit about what you should be doing, that would help. However, I do not think that we have 100% confidence that that will be written in, as we have suggested in our consultation response around how that can be done. If that were not done, I am not sure that we could stand over it and be confident that engagement would take place to the right level.

The Deputy Chairperson (Mr McGuigan): OK. Thank you very much, Neil. Nobody else has indicated that they want to speak, so, just before the Chair takes his seat and resumes chairing the meeting, I thank all of you for coming along today and giving evidence. It is much appreciated. I know that it is your second time with us. We really appreciate the time that you are giving us and the evidence that you are providing to the Committee. Thank you all.