



## **EcoQuakers Ireland**

### **Submission to the Citizens Assembly**

**August 2017**

EcoQuakers Ireland is a Committee of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Ireland. Our purpose is to support Quakers, as individuals and in their Meetings (congregations) in their efforts to answer the call to live peacefully and sustainably. Care for the environment is an integral part of the Quaker tradition and links closely with the Quaker testimonies – peace, simplicity, truth and equality. For Quakers, care for the environment is a spiritual issue.

Responding to the challenge of climate change is urgent; the science confirms that without action now to radically reduce the emission of greenhouse gases, global climate will be severely affected causing dire consequences for us all. In making our submission, we assume the science of climate change will be available and will be explained to the Citizen's Assembly.

Through the Paris Agreement and European decisions, Ireland committed to reduce carbon emissions; these commitments must be acted upon with integrity. All future decisions, especially those concerning energy, transport, industry, agriculture and housing, should be informed by our carbon-reduction commitments. Despite the inevitability of Ireland failing to meet the 2020 carbon reduction targets, we must focus on transitioning to a low carbon energy future. This means we must act only in ways that lead to a carbon neutral future – essentially all decisions should be 'carbon proof'. Government has a duty to take a lead in this area but all of us have responsibilities to act.

For Ireland to become a leader in moving to a low carbon future, Government must set out a clear road map to carbon neutrality – a "Zero Carbon Ireland" plan. Work to identify the steps and the budgets to achieve this should be commissioned now. The aim should be to meet targets in advance of our international commitments if Ireland is to be a visible leader.

Core components of such a plan for Ireland are already known:

- Reducing energy consumption
- Moving to an energy supply powered from renewable sources
- Reducing emissions from transport, manufacturing and agriculture

Within these components, improving housing insulation, decarbonising the generation of the electricity supply, moving to electric transport and tackling methane emissions from agriculture are priorities for action. We assume the Citizens Assembly will be given the facts about the present position in Ireland, current policies, and the details behind the fact that Ireland has the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest carbon emissions per capita in the EU.

Starting now, all Government decisions should be explicitly informed by the need to reduce carbon emissions. No legislation should be proposed or enacted without demonstrating that it will

contribute positively. No contracts should be agreed without requiring contractors to minimise carbon emissions.

Jobs will be created through these changes but there will be adverse impacts too - this must be explicitly recognised. Measures are needed to help those concerned, whether it be, for example, farmers converting to low carbon food production or owners insulating buildings – they will be doing this for the common good.

Government should partner with civil society to consult widely and to promote the benefits and necessity of a policy of rapid carbon emission reduction. The hearts and minds of our society must be won. A sustainable society can be a fairer, cleaner and more enjoyable place to live, with benefits for all if we go about our transition in the right way.

The increasing effects of climate change and the changes to mitigate it will impact on all our communities. What is needed is nothing less than a transformation in how Government responds. Actions are needed to help local communities to understand what is happening, to make decisions, and to act to adapt to climate change, rather than to experience climate change as helpless victims of climate events. Communities must be enabled to:

- engage creatively with how they can respond to climate change;
- build networks that can inform government decisions; and,
- design and engage in efforts to prevent potential conflict around climate change impacts.

This is only possible in communities that are resilient. Resilience must be actively nurtured where it is present and developed in communities where it is lacking.

As Quakers, we are called to work for the peaceable Kingdom of God on the whole Earth, in right sharing with all peoples. We recognise a moral duty to cherish our planet, not only for our own sake, but for the millions of people in other countries already affected by climate change, and for the sake of future generations. As we build sustainability in our Quaker communities, we hope to be part of the change where our local communities become places of mutual support, collaboration, challenge, laughter and celebration.

In 1772, the Quaker, John Woolman, wrote: “The produce of the Earth is a gift from our gracious creator to the inhabitants, and to impoverish the Earth now to support outward greatness appears to be an injury to the succeeding age”

Thank you for taking our views into consideration.

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