

January 2016



**friends of
the earth**
northern ireland

Response to the Department of the Environment's discussion paper – Proposals for taking forward NI climate change legislation.

The arguments in favour of a Northern Ireland Climate Change Bill are well rehearsed. Friends of the Earth has covered them [here¹](#), [here²](#), and [here³](#). Rather than reiterate well established arguments, in this response we will deal with developments since our previous response in 2013.

Scientific developments

Developments in our understanding of the science of climate change since the previous consultation in 2013 makes the case for a Northern Ireland Bill more urgent. The political situation has also changed considerably, leaving Northern Ireland even further out on the fringes of political opinion.

The science of climate change has advanced over the past few years. The paper '[Duality in climate science](#)', Anderson 2015⁴, suggests that, far from being exaggerated, climate science tends to down-play the severity of climate change and conform to, 'dominant political and economic sensibilities'. The paper concludes that an energy revolution is required to bring carbon emissions down fast enough.

The urgency for action was emphasised in the final months of 2015 when global temperatures rose above 1°C over pre-industrial levels for the first time on record. Under current emissions reductions plans temperatures are set to rise to 3°C above pre-industrial levels by the end of the century.

A paper published in [Science](#) found climate change was having a growing and varied impact on the environment leading to an accelerating risk of species extinction⁵.

¹ http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/consultation_responses/ni_cc_bill_2013_response.pdf

² http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/consultation_responses/ni_climate_change_bill_response_doe.pdf

³ http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/briefings/ni_climate_change_bill_mla.pdf

⁴ <http://kevinanderson.info/blog/duality-in-climate-science/>

⁵ <http://www.sciencemag.org/content/348/6234/571>

[A 2015 article in Nature](#) by Christophe McGlade and Paul Ekins strongly argued the case for keeping fossil fuels in the ground⁶. There is little room in our carbon budget for the exploitation of known fossil fuel reserves, never mind developing new fossil fuel reserves such as shale gas. If climate policy and legislation are to be based on the most up-to-date science, and good policy and legislation should be, then it is clear that the rapid transition away from fossil fuels must start immediately.

Politically, the situation has changed significantly. The Paris Agreement has raised people's hopes that we will step back from the brink of climate catastrophe. The Agreement says that each country's action must "*reflect its highest possible ambition*".

The economy

The economic case for introducing a Climate Change Bill has also strengthened. The cost of the recent flood across many parts of the UK is likely to be in excess of £5billion, according to accountancy firm [KPMG](#)⁷. The paper, '[Increasing stress on disaster-risk finance due to large floods](#)', Jongman et al 2014⁸, predicted that the cost of flooding would €23billion per year by 2050.

[A November 2015 report from the Met office](#) found that when weather comes from the tropical west Atlantic, extreme rainfall is now seven times more likely than in a world without human emissions of greenhouse gases⁹.

A 2015 paper from Burke et al, '[Global non-linear effect of temperature on economic production](#)'¹⁰, concluded that the predicted economic impacts of climate change have been under-estimated. The paper found that expected costs would be, '*2.5–100 times larger than prior estimates for 2°C warming, and at least 2.5 times larger for higher temperatures*'.

The projected adverse economic impacts of climate change were confirmed by a 2015 New York University School of Law [survey of climate economists](#)¹¹. The survey found that 90% of expert economists agree that climate change is already having an economic impact, or will do in the near future. 95% of respondents agreed that action to cut emissions was needed.

Renewable energy is [comparable in price](#) to fossil fuels, making investment in renewables an increasingly viable option. Onshore wind is now more cost effective than coal, oil, and gas¹². Solar is falling rapidly in price.

The fossil fuel divestment movement has grown significantly in recent months. Over \$3.4 trillion dollars has been divested from fossil fuels. The growing divestment trend will likely make fossil fuels less economically viable, and renewables increasingly attractive.

The oil price crash towards the end of 2014, and the current proxy conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran is an example of the inherent instability in the fossil fuel market. Renewables, in contrast, provide a stable, secure source of energy. A Climate Change Act will provide the legislative framework to enable the public and private sectors to move away from fossil fuels and invest in renewable technologies.

⁶ <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v517/n7533/full/nature14016.html>

⁷ <https://home.kpmg.com/uk/en/home/media/press-releases/2015/12/flooding-economic-impact-will-breach-5bn.html>

⁸ <http://www.nature.com/nclimate/journal/v4/n4/full/nclimate2124.html>

⁹ <http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/news/release/archive/2015/BAMS-report>

¹⁰ <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v527/n7577/full/nature15725.html>

¹¹ <http://policyintegrity.org/files/publications/ExpertConsensusReport.pdf>

¹² <http://about.bnef.com/press-releases/wind-solar-boost-cost-competitiveness-versus-fossil-fuels/>

Improving the energy efficiency of homes and public buildings offers the opportunity for some easy wins. [The Green New Deal](#)^{13 14} is a [programme of public works](#) that would create thousands of long-term quality jobs, reduce people's fuel bills and help to tackle fuel poverty, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Emissions reduction targets

Emissions reductions targets should be based on the most up-to-date scientific evidence, not practice in other jurisdictions. The UK Climate Change Act was ambitious and pioneering when it was introduced, but it is now out-of-date. The science, and the urgency, has moved on significantly. The targets in a Northern Ireland Climate Change Bill should reflect the current state of climate science, and should therefore be more stringent than those in the UK Act.

According to [Anderson 2015](#), we need a global reduction rate of around 10% per year from energy¹⁵. Global GDP would require a reduction in carbon intensity of around 13% per year.

The emissions reduction targets in the UK Climate Change Act are insufficient to deal with the threat of climate change. Tougher targets need to be introduced. Friends of the Earth recommends targets in the range of an 80% reduction by 2030, and a 90 - 95% reduction by 2050. These targets may not be considered politically realistic, but the physical reality of climate change demands them.

Conclusion

Climate change is the most important issue facing this, or any other, generation. It is imperative that politicians show strong leadership. The arguments in favour of a Northern Ireland Climate Change Bill are supported by the most up-to-date science, economics, and ethics. Strong climate legislation is good for people, good for the economy, and good for the planet. It is essential if Northern Ireland is to take advantage of the inevitable move to a low-carbon global economy.

Furthermore, a Northern Ireland Climate Change Bill has widespread support among the NGO sector, the business community, the Northern Ireland Assembly, and has been recommended by the UK Committee on Climate Change. Introducing a Northern Ireland Climate Change Bill, with strong greenhouse gas reduction targets, is the right thing to do.

¹³ http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/briefings/ni_green_new_deal.pdf

¹⁴ http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/briefings/ni_gnd_housing_package.pdf

¹⁵ <http://kevinanderson.info/blog/duality-in-climate-science/>