

November 3rd 2020

SUBMISSION from Clare Public Participation Network (PPN)

for the attention of the Climate Action Committee in its consideration of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Amendment Bill 2020

About Clare PPN: Clare PPN is a network of 296 community & voluntary, environmental and social inclusion groups from Clare. Clare PPN has three 'Colleges' which gather the member groups in terms of their interests and activities – these are the environmental college, social inclusion college and community and voluntary college. Clare PPN exists to facilitate the formal participation by the community sector in Clare County Council's decision making structures and to serve as a support and information sharing network for the Community and Voluntary Sector in Clare. It is funded jointly by the Department of Rural and Community Development and Clare County Council but is autonomous and its activities are directed by its members through an elected secretariat.

Clare PPN welcomes the opportunity to make the following submission in respect of the above named bill. At a meeting held on 2/11/2020 our Environmental College Members requested that we make this submission to the Committee. We would like the committee to consider our comments which relate to the capacity of Local Authorities in respect of the responsibilities they are allocated under this bill, public participation and engagement and the need for 'just transition' strategies to be expressly included.

1. (a) Art 12 of the Bill details the proposed role of Local Authorities in relation to this legislation. From our experiences as a rural PPN in engaging with the Climate Adaptation Strategy process in our county we have serious concerns about the capacity of Local Authorities to make and follow meaningful 5 Year Climate Action Plans. On foot of these concerns, earlier this year we engaged as a PPN with the Climate Adaptation Regional Office for our area and from those engagements our members are not of the opinion that the existing Local Authority structures as supported by CARO are sufficiently resourced to engage in serious, considered and effective climate adaptation and mitigation activities.

We would like to see this bill mandate the establishment of **Climate and Biodiversity Action Directorates** in each Local Authority. These would need to be resourced and staffed with people with the competencies to commission or carry out audits of land usage, marine area usage, biodiversity, soil, water & air quality, energy and emissions for each County and following these audits to consult widely in the county to draw up plans for the usage, conservation and/or development of each in line with this Climate Action Bill.

Our Local Authority correctly notes that Climate Change is a cross –cutting concern which is relevant to the work of all of its 4 existing directorates (Rural Development, Social Development, Economic Development, Physical Development), however our members note that this approach also means there is no dedicated directorate or staff team dedicated to climate action and the protection and restoration of biodiversity. Whilst our activities and analysis relate only to Clare County Council the level of responsibility being placed on Local Authorities to assist their communities to plan for and adapt to climate change in this legislation is considerable and we would recommend that such ‘directorates’ or departments should be established in all Local Authorities. We further request that they should be resourced and funded with ring fenced new funding which is not already part of the LA budgets. Our members note that at a minimum four full time staff would be needed to provide such a directorate in our Local Authority with one being at a minimum of a Local Authority Grade 8 (Senior Executive Officer).

Clare PPN further recommends that at least one full time person in these new directorates would be tasked with community engagement and with ensuring opportunities for effective and timely participation in environmental planning are promoted and supported

2. As a Public Participation network we are very concerned that this draft bill is extremely weak on public engagement and consultation and that it includes no commitments to a ‘Just Transition’. We note for example that at Art 12 which deals with Local Authority responsibilities under the new legislation that reference is only made to standard public consultation methods and that there is no mandate for the community to be engaged at the drafting stage for the Local Authority Climate Action Plans. We further note that there is little commitment elsewhere in the draft legislation to effective public participation. As a Rural PPN we are certain that effective climate action will not be possible to achieve without enlisting the skills, expertise and enthusiasm of our communities and without ensuring that we protect their livelihoods and wellbeing.

This Climate Action Bill is weak in this respect, we recommend that it is amended to include explicit commitments to a just transition including a definition of such, as well as firm and detailed commitments to effective public participation in all aspects of environmental planning and climate adaptation and mitigation action. We note that our colleagues in the Stop Climate Chaos Coalition have recommended the inclusion of an article on public participation taken from the Climate Change Scotland Act 2009 and we echo that call. The suggested wording from the Stop Climate Chaos Coalition is as follows

- (1) The Minister shall prepare and publish a strategy (a “public engagement strategy”) setting out the steps they intend to take to—
 - (a) inform persons in Ireland about the targets specified by virtue of this Act;

- (b) encourage them to contribute to the achievement of those targets.
- (2) The public engagement strategy must, in particular, identify actions which persons in Ireland may take to contribute to the achievement of the climate neutrality objective set out in section 3.(3)(1) and the corresponding duties of public bodies towards public engagement
- (3) The public engagement strategy must be published no later than 31 December 2021

On the subject of a just transition we would also suggest the inclusion of an article relating the following

The Minister shall require all public bodies engaged in Climate Action Mitigation or Adaptation Actions to consult widely and publish an assessment of who will be affected by each proposal and to estimate the extent of these effects in monetary and other terms (loss of property, income, tradition, access etc). Following these assessments, the public body will seek funding or other methods of compensation for and mitigation of these effects and will make the availability of these avenues for redress known in advance of commencing the planned actions.

- 3. County Development Plans (CDPs). Clare PPN notes that many Local Authorities are currently in the pre-draft or drafting stage of their County Development Plan. We would like the Climate Action Committee to recommend that a detailed account of Local Authorities' responsibilities under this Bill will be made in each Local Authority's County Development Plan.

We thank you for your consideration of our submission and we welcome any enquiries in regard to it.

Yours sincerely,
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