

Evaluation of Ireland's climate change adaptation and resilience policies



Irish Climate
Policy Evaluation



1. Sectoral overview

Adaptation to climate change is a recent policy focus of government. Under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, government was required to produce a National Adaptation Framework, (NAF), which was released in February 2018. Under the Act, sectoral adaptation plans are required to be produced by relevant government ministers, which must have regard for the NAF. To assist in this process, the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Energy (DCCAE) provided sectoral adaptation guidelines. All relevant sectors had developed their draft plans by September 2019. Prior to the NAF, the non-statutory National Climate Change Adaptation Framework (NCCAF), published in 2012, was developed to enable climate change adaptation action to be undertaken. The electricity and gas networks, agriculture, flood risk, and transport sectors developed adaptation plans under the NCCAF framework. Local authorities also developed adaptation plans on the basis of DCCAE's local authority adaptation guidelines and with assistance from Climate Action Regional Offices (CAROs).

Emergency response plans pre-dated legislative requirements for adaptation plans. Under these emergency response plans, flood adaptation works have been undertaken by local authorities and the Office of Public Works (OPW) to respond to the impacts of climate change. Furthermore, biodiversity plans, river basin management plans and local authority development plans have considered climate change adaptation with measures such as sustainable urban drainage, tree planting, and green infrastructure.

1.1 Weather events in Ireland

Ireland has experienced a number of extreme weather events. In 2017 and 2018, Storms Ophelia and Emma and the 'Beast from the East' resulted in significant damage to water and energy infrastructure, while the heatwave and drought in summer 2018 saw the introduction of water restrictions and saw farmers

importing feed for herds. From research undertaken by *Climate Ireland*, it is anticipated that the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events will increase. Responding to these increased risks is the focus of adaptation planning and this is challenged by the constantly shifting baseline for climate risks.

1.2 National Adaptation Framework

The NAF is intended to compliment the National Mitigation Plan and align with the National Planning Framework (NPF/ Project Ireland 2040) and the Capital Investment Plan 2018-2027. The NAF sets out the national approach to adapting to current and future risks posed by climate change. Reducing the vulnerability of the environment, society and the economy are central to the framework, as is realising the opportunities inherent in adaptation for innovation and green growth.

1.3 Guidelines for adaptation

In order to support the development of adaptation plans by sectors and local authorities, DCCAE developed guidelines intended to provide the sectors with a coherent and consistent approach to adaptation planning by the key sectors identified in the NAF.

Under the NAF, local authorities are viewed as central to implementation of adaptation actions. To build the capacity of local authorities to respond to climate change, Local Authority Adaptation Guidelines were produced by DCCAE and *Climate Ireland*. These guidelines set out five steps for local authorities to follow as they develop their adaptation plans.

2. Plans in place

Adaptation is a new policy focus in Ireland and, as such, our analysis is limited to plans that have been developed to date. Four sectoral plans were developed under the NCCAF, while all ten have been developed under the NAF. All local authority climate adaptation plans were completed by September 2019.

3. Analysis of plans

A challenge with undertaking an evaluation of the plans currently in place is their relative newness. From the plans as they have been published, it is evident that consideration was given to the coherence and relevance of the plans to each other, as well as their coherence with other legislation and policies. Additionally, effective governance was a key criterion in the development of the plans, as demonstrated by the creation of the National Adaptation Steering Committee and the CAROs.

3.1 Progressing adaptation: NCCAF to NAF

The primary difference between the NCCAF and the NAF is that the latter is statutory. The NCCAF was developed in 2012 and established the call for the development of the climate information platform, *Climate Ireland*. It is expected that there would be differences between the NCCAF and NAF. One notable difference is the number of plans produced under each, as well as the sectoral categories. Under the NCCAF, only four out of eight plans were produced, while under the NAF all sectors have published draft plans at least. It is difficult to determine whether other factors influenced the capacity of government departments to develop plans under NCCAF.

It is possible that Ireland's economic recovery can explain differences between the NCCAF and NAP processes. The public sector was unable to hire new staff between 2008 and 2015, except in exceptional circumstances. The resources needed to develop baseline data and undertake research were potentially constrained both in terms of finances and human resources. This could be demonstrated by third level institutions being tasked with undertaking the research, under the NCCAF in partnership with the OPW, Teagasc, EPA and Met Eireann. Hiring resumed in the public sector by the time the NAF process was commenced. Nonetheless, the absence of adaptation targets at the EU level and other factors, most prominently Brexit other factors, most

prominently Brexit, have been prioritised in recent years and may therefore have constrained financing and human resources for climate change adaptation policy development. Future research could investigate the impacts of the economic downturn on the capacity of government to respond to climate change.

Another key difference is the governance structure. Under the Low Carbon Development Act 2015, there is a stronger governance structure than existed previously, which supports greater accountability for action to achieve national, EU and international targets. While the NCCAF called for adaptation guidelines to be developed, it was only under the NAF that official Sectoral Adaptation Planning Guidelines and Local Authority Adaptation Guidelines were provided.

4. Recommendations

Despite, the 'newness' of adaptation policy in Ireland, there are lessons and opportunities, namely with regards to the process and governance for adaptation planning, tools for collaboration and integration, and communication.

- **Governance:** Our review of each plan shows that requiring sectors to develop actions to respond to climate risk in isolation does not foster the collaboration and cooperation necessary for climate adaptation. It would be beneficial for DCCAE or the Climate Action Unit in the Department of the Taoiseach to be designated as the entity to facilitate collaboration across sectors to develop one national adaptation plan, or one climate action plan that addresses both adaptation and mitigation.
- **Workshops:** An adaptation plan consisting of actions that require collaboration across departments and with other stakeholders will need tools to support collaborative development. Well-designed workshops are one tool that enable policy makers to come together and discuss issues and potential solutions.

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