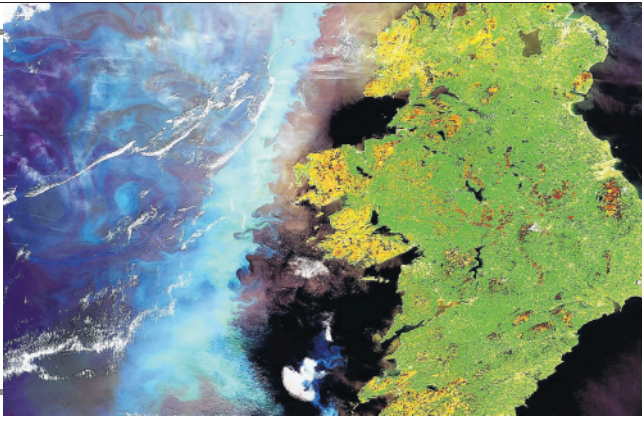


Opinion & Analysis



MARGINAL NOTES

IRELAND'S NATIONAL CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY

Ireland's first National Climate Change Strategy was published a decade ago this month. Under the Kyoto protocol the EU had committed to reducing emissions by 8 per cent by 2012 and the strategy outlined how Ireland would meet its share of the target



By JOSEPH CURTIN

Ireland's emissions rose rapidly and peaked at 26 per cent above 1990 levels in 2005, plateauing thereafter. A sum of €270 million was then designated for the purchase of carbon credits to bridge the anticipated distance to target. The onset of the deepest recession in Irish history dramatically reduced last year's emissions to near +13 per cent on 1990 levels, and recourse to international carbon markets will therefore not be as extensive as expected.

As part of the EU target, Ireland has agreed to limit the growth in greenhouse gas emissions by 13 per cent above 1990 levels.



The promised CO₂ tax – the most cost-effective approach to reducing emissions – fell foul of lobbying from employers' body Ibec and the Irish Farmers' Association. Mary Harney, the then minister for enterprise, trade and employment, was the most vociferous opponent of the tax, claiming that the competitiveness of Irish industry would be undermined. The Department of Agriculture was also opposed to the tax. Then minister for finance Charlie McCreery bowed to the pressure and officially abandoned plans to introduce the tax in 2004, announcing instead "the purchase of additional carbon emission allowances on the international market". When finally introduced in Budget 2009, it received a cautious welcome from Ibec, but the farming lobby made an unsuccessful attempt to secure an exemption for on-farm fuel usage. Given that emissions from cattle and soil are not covered, however, less than 5 per cent of total agricultural emissions are covered by the tax.

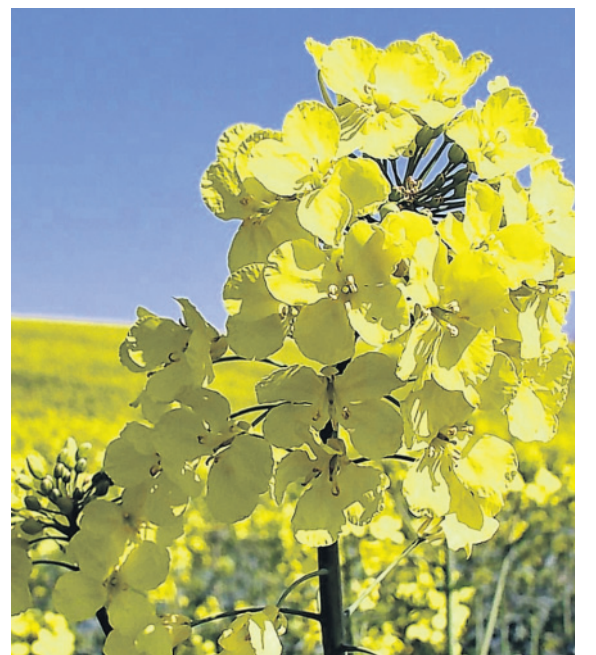
Appropriate tax measures, prioritising CO₂ emissions, will be introduced from 2002 on a phased, incremental basis across a broad range of sectors of greenhouse gas emissions.

In the built environment and residential sector: Improved spatial and energy use planning (Residential Density Guidelines, the National Spatial Strategy, Strategic Planning Guidelines); More efficient new buildings – building regulations will be reviewed to reduce energy use in new housing by up to 20 per cent in 2002, with further reductions in 2005.



Moneypoint (above) continues to emit almost four million tonnes of emissions annually. On the other hand, a rapid expansion of renewables has been achieved – total installed wind capacity has trebled since 2005, and Ireland is on track to generate 15 per cent of power from renewables in 2010. The promised demand-side management programmes under the Irish Energy Centre (now Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, SEAI) have also been delivered, albeit belatedly – 100,000 homes will have received a retro-fit under the Home Energy Saving scheme alone in 2009 and 2010.

In the energy sector (selected commitments): Measures supportive of ceasing of coal use at Moneypoint by 2008 and fuel switching towards less carbon intensive fuels; an expansion of renewable energy; and an enhanced demand side management programme under the Irish Energy Centre reduction.



Although emissions have fallen marginally since 2000, reductions have arisen due to external factors such as Common Agricultural Policy (Cap) reform, and the sector remains Ireland's largest source of emissions. Some belated progress has been made in developing a research programme which focuses on GHG mitigation in Teagasc, yet the appropriate advice, information and incentives to enable reduced on-farm greenhouse intensity has not been delivered. Biomass cultivation is restricted to 3,000 hectares, and anaerobic digestion is restricted to a handful of plants.

In the transport sector: further rebalancing of vehicle registration tax and annual motor tax to favour more fuel-efficient cars.



The promised rebalancing of vehicle registration tax (VRT) was finally introduced in the summer of 2007 after seven years of procrastination, in a move which was widely recognised as "the way to go" by the majority of the motor industry at the time. According to SEAI statistics, the share of motorists purchasing cleaner cars rose from 43 per cent to 73 per cent after the reform, reducing energy imports and emissions, while saving money for motorists on fuel bills. Subsequent well-publicised arguments from high-profile car dealers that the reforms suddenly destroyed the car industry do not hold up to scrutiny – statistics from the European Automobile Manufacturers Association show that, for example, passenger car sales fell faster in Spain than they did in Ireland in 2008, despite a more severe economic contraction here.

In the agriculture sector: a prioritised research programme (including feeding programmes, additives, probiotics, engineering and finishing cattle at a younger age) to identify means of reducing emissions per animal; best practice guidelines will be developed to encourage changing farming practices; development of short-rotation biomass and anaerobic digestion of animal wastes for energy generation.

Photograph: Minister for Natural Resources Eamon Ryan, with ESB chief executive Padraig McManus and e-cars managing director Paul Mulvaney, at the unveiling of the country's first electric vehicle charge points in Fitzwilliam Street, Dublin, earlier this year.

Implementation of the strategy: Government and relevant State agencies will immediately undertake the necessary work to implement the measures; the strategy will be subject to biennial review.



The biennial review process was dropped after the first review was conducted. Dick Roche published a second National Climate Change Strategy in 2007, which was silent on the failure to implement many of the commitments from the first strategy.

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