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Consultation on Carbon Budgets

Submission from Carbon Removals Action Group



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Carbon Removals Action Group

The Carbon Removals Action Group (CRAG) is a group that has grown out of repeated frustrations in relation to the fact that farming organisations are not up to speed with nor driving the agenda in relation to the potential of carbon trading to reduce a farm's carbon footprint. We believe that there is massive potential to both incentivise environmentally friendly farming practices alongside the potential that carbon trading has to make those practices economically viable.

There is a legal and constitutionally protected basis for the exercise of privately held property rights and we intend to support farmers in every sector of the industry to exercise those rights, with legal actions brought before the courts if necessary. We are a group of people with considerable agricultural, business and legal expertise and we fully intend to bring every part of that expertise to bear in building a vision of the future of Irish agriculture that is commercially viable, sustainable and environmentally friendly.

Our group is committed absolutely to the removal of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. But it must be done on the basis of:

- 1) Accurate science
- 2) Fairness and equal treatment
- 3) Within the bounds of and with respect for the law
- 4) Pragmatism

In relation to agriculture, the manner in which the current carbon situation has evolved, been communicated to the agricultural community and organised does not meet any of those requirements to date.

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Private Property Rights:

In today's Farming Independent, an unnamed spokesperson for the Department of Environment is quoted as saying "*There is no inherent private property right to greenhouse gas emissions or removals from forests, grasslands or hedgerows.*"

This claim comes on foot on multiple such claims from Minister Charlie McConalogue and Deputy Andrew Doyle. Can I respectfully ask the Department of Environment and indeed the Government representatives to cite their source for this claim?

A key difference that remains unaddressed at any level between the sectors proposed to have carbon budgets applied is that of private property rights. In all other sectors, capital assets are business-owned and regulated on this basis. The same does not apply to the agricultural sector. Some of the assets (such as livestock) may or may not be owned by a business or company but the principle asset is privately owned and as such is subject to constitutional private property rights.

The law on ownership of private property is well established and what that ownership means is summarised in the Principles of Irish Property Law by Clarus Press:

*"In simple (and somewhat simplified) terms, ownership is control: the owner of something is the person who acquires the right to control the thing that is owned. This control is manifested through two relationships*the first is the owner's relationship with the thing owned; the second is the owner's relationship with the rest of the world in relation to the thing that is owned. This can be well illustrated by means of an example. Imagine that Patrick "owns" a pen and therefore enjoys two relationships of control in relation to it. The first is his control of the pen itself: he can take the pen with him, leave it at home, write with it, chew it, stand on it, throw it away, etc. He can, in essence, do whatever he wants with the pen.²⁰ The second relationship of control is between Patrick and the rest of the world in relation to this pen: Patrick can decide to allow another person to use the pen, to sell it to someone, to give it away to someone for free, etc.²¹ The control Patrick holds over this pen is limited to a certain extent,*

Private Property Rights:

however, as is the control all owners hold over the thing(s) they own. The general law interacts with property law to restrict one's exercise of control in fairly logical ways and in order to ensure that this control is not exercised in a reckless manner. For example, the criminal law recognises Patrick's control over the pen, but nevertheless does not allow him to hide cocaine inside it and transport the cocaine over national borders; nor does the law allow Patrick to use this pen to vandalise the property of another." (https://www.claruspress.ie/wp-content/uploads/pipl-ed2_sample.pdf)

They also provide a statutory definition of 'land':

"Reflecting these principles, the Land and Conveyancing Law Reform Act 2009 includes the following, non-exhaustive, definition of "land" for the purposes of the Act in s 3: "land" includes (a) any estate or interest in or over land, whether corporeal or incorporeal, (b) mines, minerals and other substances in the substratum below the surface, whether or not owned in horizontal, vertical or other layers apart from the surface of the land, (c) land covered by water, (d) buildings or structures of any kind on land and any part of them, whether the division is made horizontally, vertically or in any other way, (e) the airspace above the surface of land or above any building or structure on land which is capable of being or was previously occupied by a building or structure and any part of such airspace, whether the division is made horizontally, vertically or in any other way, (f) any part of land" (https://www.claruspress.ie/wp-content/uploads/pipl-ed2_sample.pdf)*

Given the law on ownership of private property and the statutory definition of 'land', how can it be that a 'landowner' has no inherent private property right to the removals of greenhouse gases performed by the private property that they own?

Private Property Rights:

As it stands, the government has directly interfered in the enjoyment of private property by not allowing a system by which farmers can monetise carbon sequestration, either on lands that have availed of grants and subsidies or not. Private property rights are not either 'allowed' or 'not allowed' by the State, they are provided for by the Constitution which declares that the State will vindicate the property rights of every citizen. The State guarantees to pass no law to abolish these rights.

The current approach flies directly in the face of the advice given by the Heritage Council (<https://www.esri.ie/system/files?file=media/file-uploads/2015-07/BKMNEXT23.pdf>) in 1999 "Related to the above, the best way of ensuring that payments do not encourage environmental damage is by giving positive incentives to farmers to manage their land in line with environmental objectives and phasing out incentives that encourage damage." It cannot be considered that stripping private property rights constitutes an incentive towards environmentally friendly land practices. The government didn't listen in 1999 and they are not listening today.

For the avoidance of any doubt, if the proposed 'supports' to assist farmers in making the transition to a lower-carbon include the erosion of private property rights, then those 'supports' will not be accepted by the farming community and they cannot be coerced into so doing without clear breaches of the laws of this State.

The State must give a clear legal undertaking to respect the private property rights and a statement on how any grants or subsidies given are intended to impact the private property rights of land owners and farmers must be empowered to to obtain independent legal advice before the implementation of carbon budgets or agreement to any incentives in circumstances where there is a high likelihood of loss of rights to property taken in an underhanded manner and any carbon budgets applied must be delayed until they have had an opportunity to do so.

Forestry:

Forestry will be a major part of Agriculture reaching carbon neutrality. For years now the government has talked about increasing forestry, and on the other hand, they create barriers to forestry, to such an extent that they have now succeeded in bringing forestry to a halt.

The government is confusing an AIM (planting 8,000Ha per annum) with a POLICY (actions which will encourage or discourage an aim).

They then regularly consult the public(the man in the street has been surveyed), the stakeholders(those employed in the industry), and the sawmills. All a talking shop and window dressing. It never dawns on them to ask the farmer why he won't plant trees.

HERE IS WHY FARMERS WON'T PLANT FORESTRY:

We started with the most regulated forestry industry in Europe, and then each year we added another layer of costs and bureaucracy. It is now a nightmare. No other European country has such a restrictive system. In other countries, when a farmer has a crop ready for harvesting, he goes ahead and harvests. In Ireland he has to employ a consultant to fill in the endless paperwork, and then wait years for "permission" to harvest his own crop.

At the moment there is an attempt to create another layer of bureaucracy. It's called "Certification". The idea is, that you pay someone a lot of money and he gives you a piece of paper saying that your timber is sustainably produced. This is ridiculous, as all Irish timber is automatically sustainable because:

- (A) The very rigorous scrutiny at the planting application stage.
- (B) There is an obligation to replant on harvesting, creating continuous forestry, and sustainable timber production.

Farmers are very wary of those (stakeholders) who wish to insert themselves between the landowner and the sawmill, and thereby create more cost. They seem to be the ones that are listened to by the government, and their views and needs catered for.

Forestry:

Prof. John Fitzgerald, when he was chairman of the Climate Change Advisory Council, pleaded with the Government to scrap the need for a felling licence (like other European countries). He was viewed as a heretic by our bureaucracy loving government and civil service. On top of all this, farmers will NEVER plant trees until such time that they are credited with the carbon removals of their forestry.

We, as an organisation strongly advise farmers against planting, under the present situation.

GETTING THE FORESTRY PROGRAM UP AND RUNNING AGAIN - This is what must happen

1. Every farm must have a CARBON BALANCE SHEET. All removals to be deducted from emissions. Once a farm is carbon neutral, surplus carbon credits can be sold.
2. Implicit in the act of planting is the right to harvest, as it is with any other crop, like wheat, potatoes, grass.
3. The rigorous scrutiny at planting application should uncover any possible reason why it should not be harvested on maturity. If such a reason comes to light planting permission should be refused.
4. The rigorous scrutiny at planting application and the obligation to replant, should bestow automatic certification.
5. The planting grants remain.
6. The premiums should be restored to 20yrs.
7. the contracts in relation to forestry must not erode ownership rights to private property

These 20 year premiums were introduced as an income support during the early years of a plantation. When they were reduced to 15yrs, the feeling among farmers was that when they ended at 15yrs they were too far away from a return.

Along with the others, as above, this might be the one that eventually kick starts the whole thing.

Methane considerations:

Our organisation would like to make the following points regarding the inclusion of methane from ruminants as a Greenhouse Gas(GHG). Our deductions are base on the Carbon Cycle (1st yr science), and the work of very many eminent scientists, including Prof. Myles Allen, Prof. Frank Mittlochner, Prof. Will Happer.

We will start with a quotation from Prof. Myles Allen of Oxford University, "Achieving climate neutrality in terms of metric-equivalent emissions could mean eliminating practises, such as ruminant agriculture, that are NOT ACTUALLY CAUSING GLOBAL WARMING".

The atmosphere has a permanent layer of CO₂ (0.04%) and a very tiny layer of methane(CH₄). Scientists tell us these layers, small and all as they are, are vital in preventing a permanent ice-age. The existing CO₂ and methane do not cause Global Warming, but adding to them does.

For a gas to be classified as a GHG it must have Global Warming Potential (GWP) e.g. methane and CO₂ . Crucially, it must also be additional, and permanent, e.g. methane from mining and CO₂ from cars.

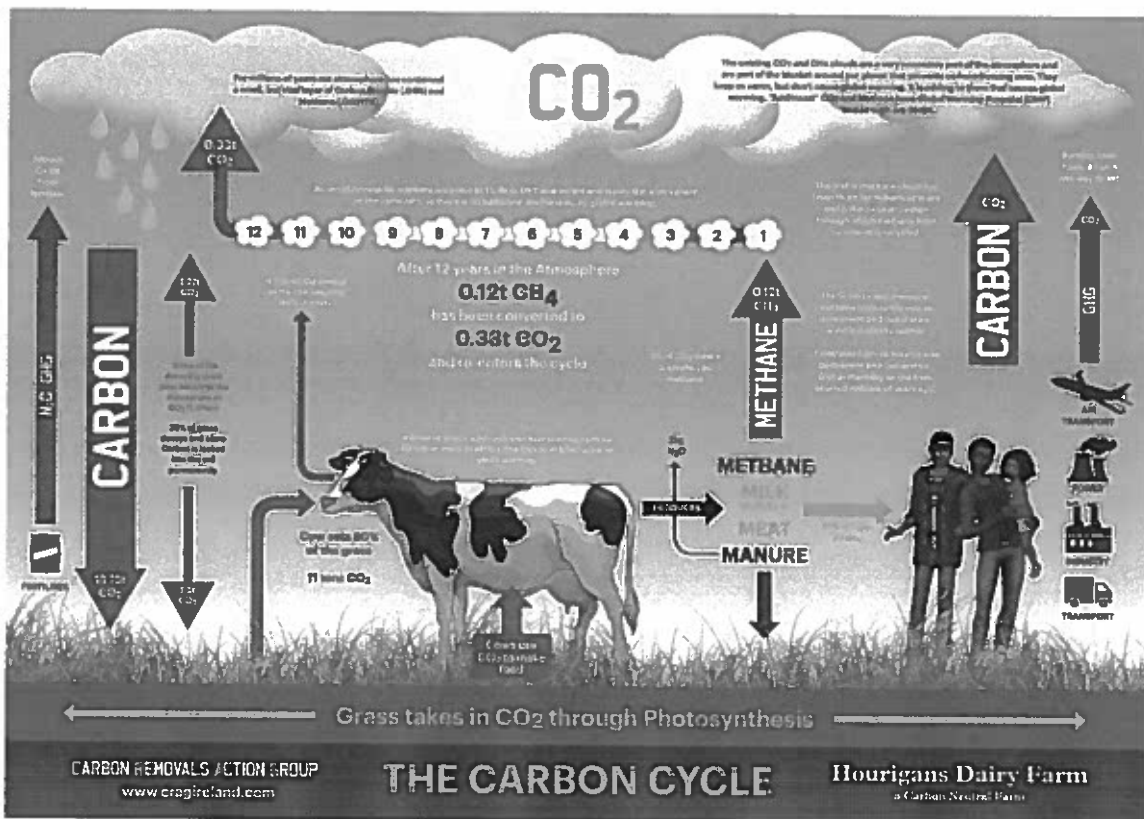
The Irish Gov. counts methane from ruminants (nowadays mostly livestock) in the same way as it counts methane from industry. It counts it as additional and permanent. IT IS NEITHER.

The Gov. is ignoring the very basic science of the Carbon Cycle. Carbon is the atom of life. It is in ourselves. It is in everything we eat. It comes from the atmosphere, and it returns to the atmosphere. It is never destroyed. It simply moves around.

A member of the Climate Change Advisory Council has publicly commented to say that there is no difference between methane produced by animals and that produced by industry. If he cannot see any difference between a gas produced as part of the natural cycle that has been present as long as there has been mammalian life on earth, which removes other greenhouse gases in its production and is critical to the production of food to sustain human life

Methane considerations:

and methane that is produced solely from industrial activity, has only come to be produced in the last century or so, is not part of a natural cycle, does not remove other greenhouse gases in its production and is not necessary to sustain human life then we are at a loss to know how to respond to that. These are 2 very different scenarios and at the most basic level - methane that removes carbon in its production and methane that does not cannot be fairly counted in the same way.



If we look at the attached diagram of the carbon cycle, we will see that the average ruminant emits on average 0.12 tons of methane per annum. Before any of this can happen, the cow must consume 6 tons of forage dry matter, which in turn takes 13.75 tons of CO_2 out of the atmosphere. (the 0.12t of methane comes from about 3% of the CO_2 that is used to feed it).

Methane considerations:

On a global scale, we have 1 billion livestock, which emits 120 million tons of methane(much quoted) annually, but before this can happen 13.75 billion tons of CO₂(never quoted) must be removed from the atmosphere. The reality is that both figures are irrelevant, as they are both part of a cycle, a closed loop, balanced, eco-system. Its nature's way, at its best. IT'S THE ULTIMATE IN SUSTAINABILITY.

Globally, every year, as the 120 million tons are released into the methane cloud, another 120 million tons leaves that methane cloud, and converts back to 330 million tons of CO₂, AND THEN RE-ENTERS THE CYCLE. The methane enters and leaves the methane cloud at the same rate, so the amount of methane in the atmosphere is constant (just 12yrs emissions) and has been there for millions of years. It acts as an exhaust system for the Carbon Cycle. There is no new or additional methane or CO₂, so how can it cause global warming?

Unfortunately, the detractors of livestock farming, have persuaded the Gov. to only count the methane, and to ignore everything else, including the science. Let's look at the global scene in the way the Irish Gov. sees it. The Irish Gov. counts methane from livestock as permanent and cumulative.

1 billion livestock have annual methane(CH₄) emissions of
120 million tons CH₄
Convert to CO₂ equivalent(multiply by 28 as they do for Irish livestock)....
3.36 billion tons CO₂e
300 years emissions (remember it is counted as permanent and cumulative)...
1.00 trillion tons CO₂e

Now this is enough CO₂e to cause sufficient global warming to fry the planet. So every 300 years the ruminants on the planet are capable of frying the planet, according to the metrics used by the Irish Gov.

This is based on there being 1 billion ruminants on the planet, both domesticated and wild. If there was only 0.5 billion ruminants, it would simply take twice as long, ie 600 yrs, which is nothing, as ruminants have been around for 40 million years.

Methane considerations:

That 40 million years constitutes a vast field trial. During that 40 million year long field trial, ruminants have never managed to cause global warming, as all the methane the produced was cyclical. It is hard to believe that some people suggest that they are going to start doing it now, as there is no evidence to suggest that the Carbon Cycle has stopped functioning.

Let's look at the numbers of ruminants on the planet.

Today there are 1 billion domesticated ruminants(livestock) on the planet and slightly less than 100 million wild ruminants. To see where things were 400 yrs ago let's look at the North American continent, which was practically virgin territory, with less than 0.5 million (there was well over 1 million in Ireland) livestock.

Today there are over 100 million livestock in North America, 30 million deer and about 1 million Elk, Moose and Caribou. Also today there is a tiny population of Bison of approx. 100,000.

In the year 1600, there were 0.5 million livestock, 70 million deer, 10 million Elk, 5 million Moose and Caribou. There was also over 60 million wild Bison. This means that, in terms of absolute numbers, there was about 15 million more ruminants on the North American continent, 400 years ago, than there is today.

It is a reasonable assumption that the same situation pertained on all the other continents, especially when one considers that most of the great grasslands of the world are no longer available to ruminants (whether wild or domesticated) as the are now devoted to that new, necessary, and unnatural, form of food production called grain growing. It is fairly evident that there were always a billion or more wild ruminants roaming the planet, as that is what it was capable of supporting.

What policy should Ireland pursue?:

Ireland should be to the forefront in supporting the science of the Carbon Cycle, acknowledge that it is totally unscientific to measure one tiny part (3%) of a cycle and ignore all the other parts, and demand that it be recognised that methane from ruminants is not a GHG.(unless the global ruminant population increases, and this is unlikely to happen, especially as the wild population keeps dropping).

Once that is achieved and the science is accepted, Irelands Agricultural emissions figures would fall by 65%, and Irelands national figures would fall by 23%

The remaining emissions can easily be dealt with by a mixture of improved agricultural practises, and forestry. Note; farmers will only plant more forestry , if their carbon removals are deductible from their carbon emissions.

Ireland should take its baseline livestock numbers as 7.67 million, the peak year of 1987(this gives us a stocking density of less than half the Dutch level).

Ireland can then aim to have its Agriculture carbon neutral in about 5 years.

We can then, genuinely and truthfully market our produce as carbon neutral and grass fed.

It is amazing and astonishing that there is such a vocal and determined minority that will resist such policies. A minority seem determined to deny the science, deny farmers the right to the carbon they remove and to continually demonise farmers.

There is a wish among some politicians to divert the blame for global warming away from fossil fuels and on to agriculture. They insist that methane from ruminants behaves the same as methane from industry, simply because it is the same chemical analysis, CH₄.

What policy should Ireland pursue?:

When Dr. Frank O Mara, now head of Teagasc, made a presentation on "Biogenic Methane", it was dismissed and ridiculed by Brian Leddin TD with the comment, "all methane is the same, methane is methane". This is both dishonest and disingenuous. Either he does not understand the science, or else he chooses to ignore. Either way he is failing in his obligations to the electorate.

The media and politicians who continually promote the idea of ruminants being a major driver of global warming, are in fact cheerleaders of the fossil fuel industry, as they divert attention away from the real cause of global warming, ie burning fossil fuels.

The way to address global warming is to address the causes of global warming, not the scapegoat.

If ruminants were capable causing global warming, they would have done so millions of years ago, and mankind would never have got here.

Independence of the Climate Change Advisory Council:

An article appearing in the Irish Times dated 17th October 2021 (<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/environment/climate-council-set-to-agree-economy-wide-carbon-ceiling-1.4703051>) raised concerns (and not for the first time) about the independence of the Climate Change Advisory Council. Dr Diarmuid Torney of DCU Centre for Climate and Society. The changes in legislation provided by the 2021 Act saw the Directors of Teagasc and the EPA retain their positions on the board.

The most cursory examination of the Council members (<https://www.climatecouncil.ie/aboutus/councilmembers/>) reveals that amongst the 14 members of the Council, only two have direct authority over any individual sector targeted for emissions reductions in Ireland and both of those relate to the agricultural sector. No other sectors have representatives on this Council that are Directors of public or semi-state bodies that are involved with shaping government policies and practices in any affected sector in Ireland, nor that have direct enforcement powers in relation to those sectors.

The conclusions drawn and contributions made by these two members cannot be considered to be in any way independent from governmental policy nor unbiased in terms of agricultural science presented for consideration.

The economy-wide carbon budgets proposed by this Climate Change Advisory Council in relation to the agricultural sector should be viewed with this inarguable bias in mind and to promote fair and just transition to a decarbonised economy, should be replaced by independent authorities in agricultural and environmental science.

Recognition of government control of the agricultural sector:

The agricultural sector stands alone as the only sector over which the government has unprecedented influence and control in terms of permitted activities, numbers, land use, stock numbers for decades. This influence and control has been largely leveraged through the use of grants and subsidies which have heavily influenced farmers in the activities and direction in which they shaped their agri-businesses.

In 2020, Teagasc (<https://www.teagasc.ie/publications/2020/cap-provides-important-funds-for-irish-farms.php>) revealed that subsidy payments make up 74% of the Family Farm Income on the average farm.

The average farmer in Ireland farms the way that they do today because government policies and subsidy offerings have led them to here.

The unsettled nature of the science relevant to the sector:

Across the sectors in which it is proposed to apply carbon budgets, the science of emissions and removals is broadly settled and accepted. While the solutions to those challenges might be infinitely more complex, the science behind what is emitted and when is settled and can be measured in a way in which everyone largely agrees.

The same can not be said for the agricultural community. There is no uniform and complete understanding of the science in relation to emissions, their impact, sequestrations, their impact nor the longer term impact of any activities on the land as a whole.

In a Farmer's Journal article (<https://www.farmersjournal.ie/need-to-be-mindful-of-leakage-as-carbon-removal-targets-are-set-675570>), Professor Gerry Boyle touches on just one aspect of the unsettled, or as yet undetermined science in relation to carbon budgets or the imposition of other measures on Irish family farms:

"We're doing research on the whole potential sequestration in our grasslands and counting the carbon in our hedgerows, but that's going to take time to become part of an agreement," he says. "Obviously, you need the evidence to be compiled, but that's going to take time.

"For the moment, and for the foreseeable future in my view, the carbon that is sequestered in our grassland isn't going to be counted as a removal because we don't have the evidence.

"That doesn't say it's ignored, it just means we have to build up the evidence that will allow it to be incorporated in future agreements."

Many thousands of papers could be provided here to illustrate that a lot of the climate science as it applies to the agricultural industry is not yet settled with sufficient evidence to adopt hardline positions. And even those theories that have much validity will not be accepted at a governmental level if it doesn't fit with commitments they have already made. A point beautifully illustrated by Professor Gerry Boyle in that same article:

The unsettled nature of the science relevant to the sector:

He says, “the leakage argument” holds no sway over the Government’s efforts to reduce the agri-food sectors carbon emissions over the coming decade.

“That argument really has not been accepted within inter-governmental level, it’s just not on the agenda.

“So I think we have to be pragmatic, we have to look at the nature of the agreements that we have entered into at EU and global level. We certainly can continue to make the argument about leakage, but we’re committed for the next 10 years to a particular regime and we have got to minimise the costs of applying that regime to our sector.

“These are multi-annual agreements that take years to negotiate, so they are not going to be unravelled quickly. I’m not saying that leakage is not going to feature as an argument in the background, but that is way into the future.”

The complexity of carbon budgeting on farms as opposed to other industries:

In addition to legal and financial issues, there is a complexity that surrounds carbon budgets as it applies to the agricultural sector that do not necessarily apply to the other sectors. In the letter from the Climate Change Advisory Council to the Minister on the 25th October 2021, they state:

“The carbon budgets proposed for 2021-2025 and 2026-2030 balance the urgency for era defining change and practical feasibility whilst also providing a 51% reduction in the total amount of greenhouse gas emissions from 2018 by 2030, including land use, land use change and forestry as required under the legislation. The LULUCF calculations are based on gross-net accounting in line with Regulation 531.2021. Because the regulation determining how LULUCF is to be treated in carbon budgets was only made on 12th October 2021, it has not been possible for the CCAC to fully research the implications of this regulation for the Budgets. Based on preliminary information, we have concluded our recommendations on the Budgets. However, the Department should undertake further analysis of the implications of a 51% target for LULUCF and the possible implications for the carbon budgets and sectoral emissions ceilings. The Council would be happy to support such further analysis. These carbon budgets exclude emissions from international aviation and shipping and are calculated using the Global Warming Potential evaluated over 100 years as published in the IPCC Fifth Assessment Report in line with future EU reporting requirements. The third carbon budget for the period 2031-2035 is a provisional estimate that will be refined and updated in line with the provisions of the Act.”

LULUCF refers to Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry. The Climate Change Advisory Council comprised as it is of many experts in economics and climate, considers that they have not had enough time to fully consider the potential implications of a LULUCF Regulation that was only made on 12th October 2021, how do you expect farmers to understand the implications of what that Regulation might mean to them today as preparations are underway to introduce carbon budgets for their sector?

The complexity of carbon budgeting on farms as opposed to other industries:

This is only one of a myriad of Regulations, commitments made by government, scientific positions being adopted and imposed, much of it done with little to no transparent communication with the agricultural community.

Any fair and just transition to a carbon neutral economy would have to take into account the relative complexity of applying budgets in the agricultural sector and the needs (and rights) of the people involved to understand what they are agreeing to before they sign on the dotted line.

Both the Council and Government should be aware that consent is an essential element of any legally binding contract - which will be required for the provision of supports necessary to offset losses to the agricultural industry due to the imposition of carbon budgets. There is already a demonstrated level of undue influence of the government in this sector.

Carbon budgets should not and cannot be imposed without clear information being provided to the agricultural community at large as to what will be measured, how it will be measured, what factors will apply and what will be calculated and how. As a singular example only and not intended to be exhaustive, it is our understanding (on which we happily accept correction) that it has not yet been decided whether methane emissions will be included in this or future carbon budgets. Professor Gerry Boyle (<https://www.farmersjournal.ie/need-to-be-mindful-of-leakage-as-carbon-removal-targets-are-set-675570>), then outgoing Director of Teagasc, in August 2021 stated in an article in the Farming Independent:

“Certainly in the previous council that I was a member of, we did recommend that there be a separate budget for methane, like the New Zealanders have done, on the grounds that it was a short-lived gas. But the [Climate] Bill as framed is quite different. It refers to a 51pc emissions target and argues simply that ‘account be taken’ of the scientific aspects of biogenic methane; it doesn’t at all signal that methane should be treated separately. But we’re not even at the point of determining the carbon budgets yet. The council’s job will be to propose a high-level target and then the Government’s job will be to allocate that to sector – and that’s where the fun will be.”

The complexity of carbon budgeting on farms as opposed to other industries:

Submissions have been sought in relation to this carbon budget proposal without any of these things being made clear. Even the outgoing Director of Teagasc and previous member of the Climate Change Advisory Council a mere 6 months ago was unable to identify what emissions from the agricultural will even be included. How are the farming community supposed to be empowered to respond when the 'experts' themselves are not clear on these issues at present? What could we possibly put forth that could be expected to have any impact? We can have no clear idea of what is really happening, what the impacts might be or what we should submit in order to have any influence on how this unfolds. This cannot be considered 'fair and just' by any manner or means.

Vulnerability of the Irish agricultural sector:

All of this manipulation of the agricultural industry in Ireland to meet the pressures of international policies and socio-economic needs means that a system of 'social welfare farming' has arisen that makes the agricultural sector dependent on the government. Alone amongst the sectors targeted for carbon budgets, farming does not operate in a free and fair market and the ability of farmers to control their costs and methods of production or the price they can achieve for their products is very limited.

Carbon budgets, imposed without more consultation than has been afforded to the sector will disproportionately punish farmers in the agricultural sector for following government incentives to meet the needs of the country over the past decades.

The question needs to be asked: Has farming or farmers ultimately benefited from simply going along with ever-changing government policy across the past decades? Have the government proven to be good custodians of the land and food production as a whole?

The answer is a straight no.

In 1998, the Irish Times (<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ifa-survey-reveals-27-000-farming-households-are-living-in-poverty-1.217963>) ran an article highlighting an IFA survey which illustrated that 27,000 farming households were living in poverty and that a total of 37,000 farm households urgently needed support to survive. The survey, carried out by Dr Phelan of UCD, found that 70,000 farmers were earning less than the statutory minimum wage for agricultural employees. At that stage, 3,000 farmers were leaving the industry annually.

You might hope that in the intervening 24 years, that the situation would have changed significantly. You would be wrong.

Vulnerability of the Irish agricultural sector:

In an article published by the Farming Independent in 2019 (<https://www.independent.ie/business/farming/news/farming-news/thousands-of-farmers-facing-serious-poverty-warns-teagasc-38175889.html>), the then Teagasc Director, Professor Gerry Boyle is quoted as saying "Farmers are in serious risk of poverty and isolation and many of these are single-person households and that's the reality." He was speaking at the launch of the Teagasc National Farm Survey of the time which found that up to 30,000 farms were classed as economically vulnerable. But that is only part of the picture. Between 1998, when 27,000 farming households were living in poverty and 2019 in which 30,000 farms were classified as economically vulnerable, more than 6,000 farms ceased operation.

Farm numbers in the State:

1855 - 419,500
1910 - 404,000
1955 - 313,300
1980 - 263,600
1991 - 170,000
2000 - 141,527
2010 - 139,860
2020 - 135,037

It should be noted that across the years, the definition of 'farm' has changed and altered significantly and most notably as we joined the EU. Nonetheless, the change even in more recent years is unsettling and with repeatedly surveys over a substantial period of time showing financial vulnerability and an industry in decline, the government has a responsibility to engage with this sector within a different framework that that simply and blankly applied to all sectors.

Vulnerability of the Irish agricultural sector:

Many farmers will find themselves with no option but to go along with whatever is proposed or go bankrupt, regardless of the losses and difficulties they might encounter as a result. Farmers can also be punished through reductions in subsidy payments without any due process of law. The financial vulnerability of the farming sector creates the kind of coercive control, that if it were to occur in a domestic setting, might be considered to be a criminal offence.

In addition, farming is the industry most vulnerable to losses from climate change and the imposition of harsh cuts to livestock numbers or other production limitations while farmers are allowed no control over how they adapt to minimise their risk, cannot be considered fair or just. In that same Farming Independent article ([link above](#)), it states: "Meanwhile, a senior ESRI analyst has cautioned that average farm incomes will never match those available in the services and industrial sectors, which averaged €39,000 last year.

ESRI research professor Kieran McQuinn told the Farming Independent that farm incomes will always bounce up and down as a result of variations in global commodity supplies and weather conditions.

"Farming by its nature will always have more volatile incomes, and because the Irish economy is so small, it is more exposed to shocks," he said.

"This means farming will find it hard to catch up with the average national wage."

The importance of food production to human survival:

It should go without saying that, again unlike the other sectors to whom carbon budgets are intended to apply, agriculture provides one of the 3 basic needs without which humans cannot survive. To take the action of simply applying carbon budgets without a clear and detailed plan of how our food supply will be protected is both juvenile and dangerous.

The continuing production and supply of food is a matter of public interest and the government should be required to demonstrate a clear multi-year, year on year plan for the challenges to food supply that will necessarily arise as a result of sudden demands and incentives to reduce carbon emissions on farms.

We in the agricultural sector have seen no clear plan for the implementation of these carbon budgets, the reduced yields that will result, how this will affect food supply and pricing and what the government intends to do about any of these things as they arise.

This plan, as a matter of public interest, should be a required component of any carbon budget proposed to be applied to the agricultural sector before a budget is applied.

Responsibility of government policies for environmental concerns in modern Irish agriculture:

A report from the Heritage Council in 1999 entitled "Impact of Agriculture Schemes and Payments on Aspects of Ireland's Heritage" makes clear the responsibility of the Irish government for the situation in which the Irish agriculture industry finds itself today. This report highlighted the effects that schemes and payments have on the industry and the environment and cautioned that the government approach was not doing enough.

In 1999, their advice to the government was: *"We suggest that decoupling all CAP compensatory payments partially or wholly from production should become a general principle. However, a move to area-based payments should not be regarded as a panacea. Related to the above, the best way of ensuring that payments do not encourage environmental damage is by giving positive incentives to farmers to manage their land in line with environmental objectives and phasing out incentives that encourage damage."* They also provided detailed suggestions for each sector which would encourage environmental improvements.

Many of the schemes that have been implemented have been intended to reverse the effects of earlier schemes and the report is clear that socio-structural issues beyond the industry of agriculture have had a strong influence, such as the Land Project which oversaw the drainage or improvement of 1,025 million hectares or about 14% of the country. This and later schemes, such as the Western Drainage Scheme, incentivised the draining of many wetlands which are now needing to be re-wetted under current proposed activities 50 years later.

Notably, the report states *"There was thus a recognition in the EEC that a two-tier system of agriculture was being created. By the end of the 1960s, agricultural decline and rural depopulation in Europe's disadvantaged areas was already evident, and farmers in favourable areas were able to benefit from new technology and generous EEC price and market supports to expand and intensify their operations. The 'Mansholt Plan' did not receive much support from Member States....."*

Responsibility of government policies for environmental concerns in modern Irish agriculture:

....It is mostly remembered without affection in Irish farming circles as a plan to retire 'inefficient' farmers. The Plan did include, as one of its measures, the first early retirement scheme (EEC, 1972b), as well as the Farm Modernisation Scheme (EEC, 1972a)."

This two-tier scheme is still in place today. The report further states: "From 1973 to 1989, state/EU EC grants invested in agriculture amounted to £941 million (11% of total investment). No environmental conditions were applied to agricultural schemes until the early 1980s, and this was only because a clause in the 'Western Package' stated that there must be 'an assurance that the actions undertaken are compatible with the protection of the environment'."

The influence of government policy developed in need of socio-economic concerns cannot be stated better than in this paragraph:

"The CAP reforms of 1992 represented the most significant shock to the Irish agricultural sector since EEC entry in 1973. The reforms are highly significant in the context of this study. Since the reforms came into effect, there has been a much greater emphasis on agriculture schemes and payments as instruments to support farm incomes. On the other hand, price and market supports began to be reduced.

By the 1980s, the EEC had become the world's second largest exporter of food, and around 70% of the EEC's budget was spent on disposing of surplus food. In addition, there was a growing divide between 'commercial' farms which had exploited the CAP supports and taken advantage of new technologies to develop, and 'marginal' farms in physically difficult regions which were increasingly unviable. The developments signalled by the 'Mansholt Plan' in 1968 and the Department of Agriculture Policy Review in 1990 had become a reality. Also, the environmental impacts of intensive agriculture, favoured by the CAP, could no longer be ignored.

Responsibility of government policies for environmental concerns in modern Irish agriculture:

In essence, the main stimuli behind the reform of the CAP were:

- *Pressure from countries outside the EC, through the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), to reduce barriers to food imports into the EC and to reduce subsidies on EC exports*
- *Pressure from within the EC to reduce the costs of supporting agriculture.*

Even though protection of the environment was listed as one of the reasons for the reforms, in reality trade and budgetary considerations dominated, and the main target was to cut production in the beef and arable sectors to restore a better market balance. Price supports were reduced and more generous compensatory payments introduced to make up the losses from lower prices."

The harsh reality is that for the past several decades, government policy has manipulated, in a short-sighted, quick fix manner, the agricultural industry to achieve socio-economic gains and meet European commitments and plans with little to no regard for the impacts on the Irish food industry, the land, the environment or the Irish people involved.

Now, faced finally with the need to create environmental sustainability, it seeks to impose 'carbon budgets' on Irish farms using the same metrics that apply to any other industry sectors with zero accountability to either Irish farmers or the Irish people as to how and why we got to here.

Unbalanced budgets:

Agriculture stands alone as the only industry which can remove carbon from our atmosphere. We certainly have not seen any proposals which even suggest that farmers will be allowed to offset their removals against their emissions.

How does this translate to a 'fair and just' transition to a carbon neutral economy?

Taking into account all of the points raised previously in this submission, this is the ultimate question that must be addressed in the creation of carbon budgets.

Either farmers own their own property or they don't. If they do own their own property and their efforts in relation to increasing trees and maintaining hedgerows (as examples) whether funded entirely by themselves or grant-assisted, remove carbon from the atmosphere to the free benefit of all, then they should properly have those removals offset against their emissions.

No fundamental reason why this should not be so has been provided by any government official other than to claim ownership of the carbon removals provided by private property by our government on multiple occasions.

Any carbon budgets applied which do not take into account carbon removals by the agricultural industry cannot be either fair or just and should be widely rejected by the agricultural community.

Several issues raised in this submission detail the very serious legal, scientific, educational and socio-economic concerns with the imposition of carbon budgets in the agricultural sector and we suggest that several legal and scientific elements are required to be put in place before a plan for the agricultural sector can be proposed.