

**Social
Democrats**

Greener and Fairer

***Hope for better.
Vote for better.
Vote Social Democrats.***

#VoteforBetter

#SocDems

CONTENTS

Introduction	2
Just Transition	4
Meeting our Clean Energy Needs	5
Phasing Out Fossil Fuels	6
Waste and Recycling	7
Transport.....	10
Agriculture, Rural Development, Fisheries	12
A Biodiversity Crisis Too.....	14

Introduction

The Climate Crisis is the **single biggest threat to our environment, to our standards of living and to our existence**. It is a fundamental issue facing our country and our planet and one of the greatest challenges of our time. The actions we take or fail to take now will affect our country and our planet for generations. Everybody must play their part in tackling it and preparing for its consequences.

The Social Democrats take the climate crisis extremely seriously and consider it to be a **matter of urgency for the next government**. We have never had a government in this country which has treated climate change or the environment as priority issues, and we will change this. **We will not be found wanting in relation to radical and meaningful climate action**.

In a motion, passed by the Dáil in June 2019, but ignored by the Government, we called for a significant revision of the National Planning Framework and the National Development Plan in the light of the declaration of a Climate Emergency by the Dáil. We would make it a priority to **revise these plans to prioritise actions which would deliver radical and meaningful responses to the climate emergency**. The Climate Crisis is a global issue which can only be tackled by every part of Government working together cohesively.

We want to guarantee our future environmental, social and economic health by implementing robust domestic emissions-reduction legislation with credible, incremental national and sectoral plans, based on ambitious but attainable goals. In line with European Commissions current proposals **we aim to more than halve our CO2 emissions by 2030**.

Our vision is for sustainable communities socially and environmentally. We must be **Green and Fair**. Creating a sustainable society requires everyone to play their part but at the same time we cannot and will not allow the financial burden of climate action to be unfairly foisted on the shoulders of ordinary and low-income households and communities which have already been underserved by generations of Irish governments.

We all have a big role to play and it is important that individuals and small businesses and our farming families are supported in changing their behaviours in a way that protects the environment. Even more importantly big industry and other major polluters and energy consumers must take on their full responsibility.

A Just Transition is key to how we combat the climate emergency.

Our priorities for a **Greener and Fairer Ireland** are;

- Establishment of a **Just Transition Task Force** to work with affected stakeholders in developing transition plans to ensure we maintain the **principles of fairness and proportionality** when reaching our climate action targets.
- Introduce a **frontloaded ‘pay as you save’ national retrofitting programme**, which would allow people to insulate their homes and pay the cost as they save on their energy bills over time
- **Phasing out fossil fuels and meeting our clean energy targets** as set out in the Paris Agreement, with investment in hydro, wind, solar and biogas.
- **Regulate waste management systems and support recycling initiatives**, such as the development of recycling centres close to every community.
- **Reduce demand and supply of single-use plastics**. We would introduce a levy on plastics which cannot be recycled in Ireland and work with producers to reduce plastic packaging.
- Plan, fund and deliver **ambitious nation-wide public transport** programmes, including high capacity green transport
- **Protect biodiversity and support a move away from monoculture and intensive farming**.

Just Transition

A just transition is central to our approach to the climate emergency. While we must all play a role in tackling the crisis, **we cannot allow the burden of doing so to fall disproportionately on the shoulders of those least responsible for the crisis.** For example, as part of our efforts to end the burning peat, coal and unsustainable biomass for electricity we will strive to ensure that **workers in carbon-intensive industries can transition** to new, quality employment and training opportunities in low-carbon sectors.

We will establish a **Just Transition Task Force** to work with affected stakeholders in develop transition plans to ensure the deliver our targets while maintaining the **principles of fairness and proportionality.**

While we **support the principle of a carbon tax**, it must be designed to incentivise people to change their behaviour towards the environment and it must be fair.

The Government's Budget 2020 failed to address compensating measures to offset the introduction of Carbon Tax and indeed the All-Party Oireachtas committee report on carbon tax was not poverty-proofed as had been promised. The simple fact is many people are not in a position to change how they keep their homes warm and how they travel. Supports need to be put in place to **give people real alternatives before a carbon tax can work** as it should.

We will ringfence the income from carbon taxes to **fund the retrofitting homes**, improving electric vehicle infrastructure, and other potential measures designed specifically to **increase the viability of a low carbon lifestyle to all people regardless of income.**

Meeting our Clean Energy Needs

Meeting most of our energy demand through renewable sources is not merely an aspiration, but a necessity.

We will:

- Fulfil our commitments under the **Paris Climate Agreement**.
- Fully **exploit our offshore wind potential** by establishing a new Offshore Wind Development Agency with a specific mandate to attract investment.
- We will invest in research and development to **make alternative renewable sources viable in Ireland**, specifically wave and other forms of blue energy, solar and biomass energy;
- Establish a **Marine Spatial Plan (MSP)** for territorial seas.
- **Grant aid small-hydro schemes**, particularly if associated with community projects.
- At household level, we would continue to support **grants for solar panel installation**. As technology improves, we would also commit to the exploration of the potential of solar power to offer some level of back-up generation on clear, calm days.
- Explore the building of more **biogas facilities** to generate energy from decomposing organic matter such as cow manure or brown bin contents.
- We would create a credible plan to achieve **full deployment of smart grid infrastructure**.
- Set down a **new environmental levy** on each tonne of sand, gravel, crushed stone and other aggregates extracted from the ground or lifted from the surface and used in construction to encourage the recycling of aggregates and the much more sustainable use of our natural resources.

Phasing Out Fossil Fuels

While offshore wind energy and other blue energy systems are being planned and built, there would be a need to continue the use of fossil fuels in the interim, and possibly in small amounts on very calm days in the future. The Social Democrats would do our best to handle this transition responsibly, in ways which minimise the effect on the environment and aren't punitive towards the less well-off.

We will:

- Uphold the **nationwide ban on fracking** and legislate to end the import of fracked gas from abroad.
- **Phase out offshore drilling for oil and gas** to protect our marine health and tourism and seafood industries
- **Reduce subsidies for non-renewable energy** over the next five years and incentivise renewable alternatives.
- Expand existing retrofitting grant schemes and **introduce a *pay-as-you save* home insulation loan scheme.**
- Introduce a **nationwide ban on smoky coal.**
- Legislate for a **new Clean Air and Water Act** to increase monitoring and enforcement of pollution and ensure our water quality is fit for purpose.
- Continue to **phase out peat-burning power stations**, and explore the possibility of converting some into power-generating biogas facilities or waste incinerators to maintain employment in those areas and reduce the amount of waste going to landfill.

Waste and Recycling

Ireland's waste system is a mess. The current system does not work for the consumer and does not work for the environment. In the past number of years, the Social Democrats have worked to highlight unscrupulous and unfair charging by the waste industry, the growing problems with plastic packaging, the need for transparency in the sector, and the urgent need for a regulator. The present Government has made little progress in tackling these issues.

Regulation and Competition

Ireland currently does not have a dedicated Regulator to protect consumer interests in the waste sector. This means that the State has very little control over what waste companies charge or how fairly they deal with their customers or how competitive the market is. The Social Democrats are demanding the **creation of a strong regulator** that will put environmental standards, strong competition and fair pricing at the heart of the waste industry. We are proposing that the **role of the Commission for the Regulation of Utilities should be expanded to incorporate waste.**

Reducing, Reusing and Recycling

- Establish **new targets for the percentage of domestic households and businesses that have recycling bin and compost bin services**, with a particular focus on apartments and rural areas.
- New **specific targets will also be introduced for recycling in places of employment.**
- Set new targets so that **food waste** generated by the cosmetic demands of supermarkets, for instance, the shape and size of vegetables, is very significantly curtailed. We would also ensure that large grocery chains and fast food outlets meet their responsibility of ensuring that all surplus edible food is offered to charities before entering the waste system.
- Establish a **fundamental review of the effectiveness of the Repak Scheme** and how we approach waste and the respective roles of producers, retailers and consumers. In particular, we need to re-examine responsibilities of

retailers in terms of reducing the amount of plastics used for the packaging of products, especially loose products.

- **Reinstate funding for the development of recycling centres** and ensure there is at least one civic amenity centre close to the population it serves.
- Charges for bringing disposable items to public facilities should be uniform across the country and should be pitched at a level that discourages dumping.
- Support the **creation of more social enterprises such as the Rediscovery Centre, Food Cloud, and Recreate Ireland**. We would also examine how the tax code or a preferential commercial

rates policy could help promote better second-hand markets and repair businesses.

- Provide **far better consumer information on recycling** – what can be recycled, where and what bin can it go in. Regulate to ensure that anything sold in this country with a recyclable label on it is actually recyclable here.
- **Improve education** on recycling, reducing and reusing in our schools.
- Explore through European institutions the **possibility of reduced VAT rates for the repair of goods** and how better regulation could ensure goods are longer lasting and repairable.

The Plastic Problem

Plastic has become endemic in our culture. It is now almost impossible to avoid purchasing daily necessities without also having to purchase some plastic packaging. In Ireland in 2018, only 34% of plastic packaging was recycled, while 39% was incinerated and 31% went to landfills.

The Social Democrats recognise that there is an urgent need to reduce the demand for and supply of plastics, and as well as supporting EU-wide initiatives in the area, we commit to the following measures:

- In the short term, we would impose a **levy on plastics that cannot be readily recycled** in Ireland (eg: many soft plastics, black plastics). In the medium term, we would put the onus back on large producers to recover plastics that they produce or stop using plastic in their production.

- We would seek to **ban microplastics** (found in some cosmetics, some synthetic clothing, and other products).
- We would introduce a **deposit return scheme for recyclable containers** (and other waste streams where possible) building on the excellent examples in Norway, Sweden and Germany.
- We would **strenuously promote the development of re-fill options in retail** to minimise the unnecessary production of more plastic containers and we will encourage more local authorities to provide refill water dispensers so that the demand for plastic bottles is reduced.

Disposal and Exploitation of Non-Recyclable Waste

- Resource the **proper enforcement of illegal dumping fines**.
- Strongly insist on the principle that **waste is treated/disposed of as close as possible to where it is generated**.
- **Reduce emissions** from the sector by creating a far bigger focus on re-using, recycling and preventing waste.
- **Exploit emissions from the sector**. One strong example of this is the proposal to use excess heat from the Poolbeg Waste Incinerator in Dublin to supply energy to homes and businesses that will be built on the nearby site of the former glass bottle factory. We would support further examination of district heating opportunities using waste heat.
- Insist on **transparent emissions monitoring** for all waste facilities. We believe current systems are inadequate, especially in respect of waste incinerators.
- Insist that the EPA and Local Authorities meet their responsibilities in terms of **only allowing waste operations on suitable sites and under strict and enforceable conditions**.
- **Introduce a levy on aggregates** such as sand, gravel, and crushed stone that are extracted from the ground and used in construction. Set at a level to encourage the recycling of construction and demolition waste and to reduce the amount of waste being landfilled. All proceeds would be set aside for the environmental fund.

Transport

Transport is a massive source of greenhouse gas emissions in Ireland, responsible for 20% of the country's total in 2018. Despite the growing urgency of the Climate Crisis, there has been an unacceptable trend of rising transport emissions since 2012.

It is clear what the solution is: **significant investment in nationwide public transport**

One of the starkest differences between Ireland and other European countries is its poor public transport system. Under successive Irish Governments, one abandoned or delayed public transport plan has followed another. The failure of successive Governments to properly plan, fund and deliver public transport programmes means that each of us live daily with the consequences.

We have no rural public transport to speak of. Our capital city is one of the most congested in the world, and many of our other towns and cities are not much better. We have severe urban sprawl with poorly planned car-dependent communities. Our rail network is sparse. Cycling is not safe. Pedestrians are only rarely considered. Air pollution is unacceptably high.

We incentivise the most environmentally damaging forms of transport and leave people with very few options to reduce their carbon footprint. This impacts every aspect of our lives from our economic competitiveness to the time we spend with our families.

The Social Democrats **support the public transport measures outlined in the National Development Plan** and we will honour each commitment made in it.

But we believe Ireland **can do so much better.**

Some of our proposals on public transport are crucial to measures to address climate change. These include

1. Give Public Transport greater priority in the National Development Plan
2. Ringfence Windfall gains for the DART Underground Project
3. Reduce Public Transport Fares

- 4. Invest in Safe Cycling**
- 5. Increase funding for Local Link to €100m**
- 6. No more Privatisation**
- 7. Active Travel to Schools**

For full details of our public transport manifesto, please see our main manifesto [InvestInBetter](#) and our Transport manifesto.

Agriculture, Rural Development, Fisheries

Agriculture is critical to our economy and is the lifeblood of rural communities across the country. Without sustainable and robust support from the state, the agricultural sector will suffer greatly, taking with it many rural communities and the heart of Irish society.

We do not need to choose between supporting our essential Agricultural sector and combating the climate crisis. Our farmers are guardians of the land and see the impact of the climate crisis every day. The Social Democrats are determined to work with our Agricultural communities to ensure a Just Transition towards greener and fairer Agricultural policy, which does not place farmers and fishers under further financial stress.

We must ensure that agriculture and agricultural policy considers three main priorities at all times:

- Farmers, big and small, and their local communities.
- Consumers of agricultural products, both at home and abroad.
- Our ecosystem, which is coming under increased threat from the climate crisis.

The following are our policy priorities to better support agriculture and rural development in our country:

- Acknowledge the **importance of agriculture to the economy and rural communities**, and so ensure that producers themselves receive a fair price for their produce.
- **Protect biodiversity and support a move away from monoculture and intensive farming.** Practical examples of these policies include wildflower borders on crop fields.
- **Further develop horticulture and organic farming**, which has less of a reliance of imports.
- Increase funding to farmers in **Areas of Natural Constraint and Special Areas of Conservation.**
- **Invest in agriculture education courses at all levels.** Support third level institutions in conducting innovative research which could improve farming

methods and increase yields sustainably.

- **Support apiculture** and explore the possibility of allowing beekeepers to use land in bogs. Introduce a ban on the use of neonicotinoids .
- **Support the growth and diversification of the forestry industry** especially in terms of energy production and biomass production. As per our biodiversity policy, we support the development of native woodlands.

Fisheries and Coastal

- Work to ensure more **sustainable fishing practices**. Introduce **marine protected areas** (MPAs) to cover certain nurseries for species which are still below maximum sustainable yield. There will be a total ban on fishing within MPAs.
- Work towards an **EU-wide ban on super-trawlers** and ensure current controls are strictly

- Reduce costs and emissions by using shared machinery through co-ops and **sustainable communal energy production such as wind, solar and blue energy**.

- **Formalise walking routes** through commonages in the uplands of Ireland with a full and transparent consultation process.

- **Complete and expand greenway programmes** with a comprehensive and open consultation process.

observed and adequately resourced.

- Explore and develop a **Blue Carbon Strategy** for coastal communities to protect and restore coastal ecosystems, increase protection from storm surges and sea level rise, provide better fisheries habitat and nature-based tourism .

A Biodiversity Crisis Too

Biodiversity loss is one of the climate challenges that Ireland faces. This is not a crisis that has just come upon us but has been years in the making.

In 2019, The Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Service (IPBES) published its global assessment on the state of the world's biodiversity and ecosystem services. The report shows that nature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history. Ireland is not immune from that grave assessment. One in every five of the species assessed in Ireland is threatened with extinction and the conservation status of one third of our protected habitats dis-improved between 2007 and 2013. We must meet this challenge head on.

The outcomes of not doing so will be quite catastrophic. But all is not lost. Nature, our environment and our wildlife are robust, as long as they are given the time and support to recover.

The Dail declaration in 2019 of a Climate and Biodiversity Crisis was very welcome. It must now be followed by action. There must also be the acknowledgement that the climate crisis and biodiversity loss are intrinsically linked and that both must be addressed in tandem. In fact, biodiversity improvements and nature-based solutions need to be a key tool to tackle climate change.

Farmers are guardians of much of our land in Ireland and often have connections going back centuries to that land. We need to work with farmers and farm families to ensure that our biodiversity is restored. Combined with political will to act, we can reverse the decline in our biodiversity.

To address the biodiversity crisis in our natural habitat and with our fauna, the Social Democrats propose:

- **A voluntary purchase scheme for unprofitable farmland, to be converted into protected native woodland.**
- Incentives for the practice of agroforestry, for example **silvopasture** (grazing livestock amongst woodland).

- Incentives for the **planting of native trees on private land**, and for sustainable felling and harvesting practices (reducing clear-cutting).
- A **doubling of the area of protected nature reserve** by 2040.
- The **promotion, and expansion, of wildlife** corridors across the country. This would recognise the potential of rivers, canals, and the road network as potential nature corridors.
- To require state bodies to first examine **upstream natural based solutions** when considering works required to deal with flood relief and protection.
- **Reintroduction of extirpated species** where research has established feasibility. This would include a compensation scheme for any agricultural losses, and harsh penalties for illegal killing of reintroduced animals.
- Significant state funding for the **conservation of endangered and vulnerable native species**.
- Fund Councils and Inland Fisheries to map and remediate barriers to fish migration within their riverine systems.
- National legislation to **significantly reduce or eliminate the nonagricultural use of pesticides and herbicides outdoors**, and continued review of agricultural practices relating to pesticides, herbicides and fertilisers.
- State funding for the monitoring and eradication of **invasive species**.
- Require Councils map areas of local environmental importance, in consultation and cooperation with the local community and include them in County Development Plans as areas to be protected.
- In urban areas, the government would work with local councils and An Bord Pleanála to prioritise the planting of trees and flowers in existing and new developments, and on streets. It is healthier for people (mentally and physically) and wildlife alike to have as much planting and green space as possible in urban and suburban areas.
- To fund Councils to undertake Trap, Neuter and Return programmes for feral cats.
- Encouraging local councils to create native **Woodland Walks and Wildflower Meadows** in existing and new parks.

- Making the creation of wild picnic bench spots in office developments and (where practical) the creation of rooftop gardens in offices and apartments a vital part of ABP urban planning regulation. This would reduce the prevalence of 'concrete deserts' and have amenity and quality of life benefits.
- Ensuring all local authorities and planning authorities have all **hedgerows** assessed while making planning decisions and that priority is given to maintaining and protecting existing hedgerows and trees. Where additional or replacement planting takes place native species should be used.
- To establish a **Wildlife Crime Unit** in an Garda Síochána to assist in the prevention and detection of wildlife crime.

See also our General Election Manifesto *Invest In Better* at www.socialdemocrats.ie/InvestInBetter and our Biodiversity manifesto www.socialdemocrats.ie/Biodiversity .

The background of the page is a complex, abstract pattern of overlapping triangles and polygons in various shades of purple, ranging from light lavender to deep, dark indigo. The shapes are irregular and create a sense of depth and movement.

www.socialdemocrats.ie

#VoteforBetter

#SocDems

A solid purple horizontal bar at the bottom of the page, featuring a subtle geometric pattern of overlapping triangles and polygons, similar to the main background, but in a uniform dark purple color.