



Briefing Note on the Green Party *Just Transition (Worker and Community Environmental Rights) Bill 2018*

What is a Just Transition?

There are no jobs on a dead planet and there is no green economy unless it is one that gives proper rewards for the communities and workers who make it happen. The Just Transition concept recognises that we need to transition from a fossil fuel economy to a climate-friendly one as fast as possible, in the fairest way possible.

Climate justice, a concept popularised by former Irish President Mary Robinson, is enshrined in section 3 of Ireland's primary climate change legislation, the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015. Government, however, paid no heed to climate justice in its recent mitigation plan, leaving our Midland communities to face a 'rust-belt' future.

On 12 December 2015, global leaders committed to the legally binding UN Paris Agreement on Climate Change to phase out fossil fuels and limit global warming to below 1.5 degrees Celsius. All 137 countries that signed up to the December 2015 Paris Agreement have to reduce their carbon emissions in line with the principle of 'Just Transition'.

Just Transition means countries must take into account the effect of climate action, or inaction, on those working in carbon-heavy industries and their communities. Those who work in fossil fuels should be transitioned into a new economy that has working conditions and pay at least as decent as what they left behind.

What Does the Just Transition Commission Do?

Without comprehensive and specially tailored policies, the low carbon transition risks a repeat of the injustices of past economic restructurings, such as those with the mining communities in Wales and the North of England, or the 'rust-belts' of the US. We cannot allow this to happen to our Midland communities who rely on the fossil fuel industry, even if the emergence of new clean industries

results in net benefits for the national economy. We are asking that existing employees and their communities are not left behind but up-skilled and brought along into the new economy.

We base our Just Transition Plan on [Bernie Sanders' Clean Energy Worker Just Transition Act 2015](#) and the [Just Transition Commission](#) recently announced by the Scottish Government. This legislation is based on the Just Transition Motion we presented to Dáil Éireann back in May 2017 [covered by the Irish Times](#).

The Green Party *Just Transition (Worker and Community Environmental Rights) Bill 2018* sets up a National Just Transition Commission which will:

- Bring together workers, communities, employers, ecological experts and Government in social dialogue to drive the plans, policies and investments needed for a fair and just transformation to a low carbon economy;
- Provide a mediation service to allow communities a forum to discuss, and place on a legal basis, their chosen transition paths;
- Facilitate the development of just transition plans which will encourage new sustainable jobs, infrastructure, up-skilling, training and development for areas reliant on carbon-intensive industry;
- Ensure Government actively considers employment issues when developing climate policies and designs low carbon infrastructure with the aim of creating decent high value work;
- Advise Government on securing a fair transition away from fossil fuels that ensures specific carbon intensive industries, the people they employ and the communities reliant on those industries can maximise the opportunities of a low carbon future;
- Provide advice to Government Departments in their decarbonisation plans, and how to deliver fair work and tackle inequalities through a sustainable and inclusive labour market;
- Assist State bodies in planning for and invest in a transition to environmentally and socially sustainable jobs.

Why is the Commission Needed?

Around 1,700 jobs are directly dependent on the peat industry in peat-plants, seasonal work in extracting peat, retail, professional, and briquette factories. A further 2,500 indirect jobs are dependent including Bord Na Móna support departments, external suppliers, and contractors (figures from SIPTU).

The announcement in [May 2017](#) of 124 Bord Na Móna job losses in Littleton and a [further 430 in October 2018](#) came as a complete surprise to the surrounding community and Bord na Móna workers, many of whom are third or fourth generation employees in the company. Workers, if losing their job in fossil fuel sectors, should be able to redeploy to new sectors and opportunities for retraining must be expanded.

Government and Bord na Móna's current stasis is a perfect example of how not to manage economic transition. Trade unions [SIPTU](#), [UNITE](#), [IMPACT](#) and the [Irish Congress of Trade Unions](#) have [all called for a just transition](#), setting out plans for their relevant sectors in [conferences](#) and [reports](#). Government and state bodies need to step up and provide a proper sustainable future for the area. Countries such as Germany, Australia, Czech Republic, Canada, Scotland and the US have started on this just transition to move employment and communities away from fossil fuels into clean economies – we're call on the Irish Government to do the same. The Public Service Obligation

levy must not be directed into the co-firing of peat with biomass, but instead re-directed into helping these communities transition into sustainable high quality employment.

Whole Economy Approach

Oncoming job losses in the peat industry are reflective of the wider situation for oil and gas employment in Ireland. In October 2016, [170 jobs were lost](#) at a Cameron plant in Co. Longford due to a downturn in the oil and gas industry. In October 2017 [500 job losses](#) in the oil and gas industry were announced in Northern Ireland. In February 2018 [300 job losses were indicated by Centrica which owns Bord Gáis Energy and 20 from Flogas](#) in August. Investment in the [industry is falling rapidly](#) due to reputational damage, the global divestment movement. Across the globe, the fossil fuel industry is suffering heavy losses and is becoming more and more reliant on government subsidies. In 2015/16 [around 120,000 jobs](#) were lost in the UK oil and gas sector alone, [with an estimated 441,371 jobs lost globally as of February 2017](#). In short, the industry is living on borrowed time. As outlined in [IMPACT's report A Just Transition to a Low-Carbon Economy](#) by Institute for International and European Affairs (IIEA) Senior Fellow Joseph Curtin, other vulnerable carbon-intensive sectors include the following:

- Coal and peat-powered generation and sales
- Peat harvesting and downstream activities
- Marginal beef farming and processing
- Oil importing and distribution
- Oil and gas exploration

The end is coming for fossil fuel employment. However, workers and communities who rely on that employment must not be left behind. Today, the Midlands have the [highest rate of unemployment in the country at 8%](#). Communities cannot be abandoned in the move to a low carbon economy - the transition must be fair and fast.

What does Just Transition mean for the Irish economy?

The International Labour Organisation ([ILO](#)), the [OECD](#) and [many others](#) state that a “double dividend” i.e both a reduction in greenhouse gases and improvements in the labour market are possible if climate policy is well designed and implemented promptly. As just one example, at least [58,500 people in Scotland](#) now have full-time jobs in the green economy. These new jobs, however, have to be balanced against the jobs that could be lost in carbon intensive sectors. International studies evaluating the net impact of job losses and job creation find that overall the low carbon transition globally will create [15-60 million additional jobs](#) (ILO).

While no comprehensive study has been undertaken of net creation from low-carbon transition in Ireland [IMPACT's report A Just Transition to a Low-Carbon Economy](#) suggests the following jobs are available if investment is implemented now:

- In the wind sector 10,000 to 40,000 jobs could be created
- In the smart-grid and associated sectors, up to 10,000 jobs could be created
- In building, retro-fit and low carbon buildings between 10,000 to 30,000 jobs could be created
- In climate-smart agriculture 8,000 jobs could be created

Infrastructural investment to tackle climate impacts such as flooding, protection of water will also create significant jobs. There are also significant opportunities for jobs in low carbon employment such as in journalism, the arts, health, care-work, education, local authorities, the community and voluntary sector.

By investing State funds cleverly, multiples of the employment that will be lost as peat-fired power plants are wound down could be created. Creating a 'Just Transition' process is pro-environment, pro-jobs, pro-workers and helps build healthy, sustainable, communities

How will the Green Party bring about a Just Transition?

Case Example - Retro-Fitting

Retro-fitting is just one example of where job opportunities lie if the State invests wisely. Ireland has [2,800 excess deaths a year](#) due to [fuel poverty](#). This particularly affects the elderly and single parent households in rental accommodation. If the circa [€100 million a year](#) that is currently spent on peat subsidies was instead diverted into retro-fitting homes across the midlands, 5,000 jobs could be created every year for over a decade in industry that benefits people, employment and the planet.

Retro-fitting homes creates jobs, makes housing more comfortable and energy efficient, reducing running costs for households too. The cost to the State is also lessened as it will reap the benefits of an indigenous, labour-intensive industry including income from VAT, income tax and vehicle tax. We're not proposing that the funding should be used for retro-fitting alone but it serves as one example of the positive alternatives that could be pursued.

Conclusion

It's time for a Just Transition in Ireland, moving to a modern low-carbon economy in a way that protects workers' livelihoods, creates decent low-carbon jobs and delivers a fairer economy. The need for action is urgent in order to avert the environmental and economic costs of climate change and to rebalance the economy to one which provides a fair and sustainable life for all. Ireland, with its wealth of renewable resources, has the opportunity and no excuse to miss it.