



## **Green Party response to the Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael joint framework document**

*23<sup>rd</sup> April 2020*

A chairde,

Many thanks for sending us your joint draft document to facilitate negotiations with other parties on a plan to recover, rebuild and renew Ireland after the Covid-19 emergency.

There is no doubt the next phase in the management of the Covid-19 crisis presents one of the greatest challenges in the history of our State. The new Government has a heavy responsibility to continue to protect the health and well-being of all our people while at the same time managing the recovery of our economy. We must do this in a way which restores full employment and invests in key public infrastructure, while changing the nature of our economy for the better.

Your document has a welcome focus on the need to look beyond current economic indicators towards new quality-of-life measures of individual and societal well-being and progress. Any programme for government should take this opportunity to set out specific economic, social and environmental indicators, which will shape our economic recovery in this way.

This recovery has to get us out of the immediate crisis and set us on the right long-term path. A 'Green New Deal' recovery will provide just such a strategic approach. It would allow us to build a new circular economy which is more secure and sustainable than the existing system. At the same time, it would allow us to forge a new social contract and address inequality for all our people. This approach requires commitment to working at every level, including with our European partners, to establish the conditions, including monetary and fiscal structures, which will drive a transition to a zero-carbon and resilient economy. It also requires the direct involvement of local communities and local government, so that change comes from the bottom up in a way which strengthens public confidence and engagement in our democracy.

We believe there is political consensus on the goals set out in your document around the urgent need for carbon emission reductions rooted in fairness and equality, a single-tier health system and the widespread provision of affordable public housing. While those stated ambitions are to be welcomed, the document is lacking in clarity and detail in many areas.

For the Green Party to participate in negotiations on a potential programme for government, there are key issues arising from the document that we feel need to be addressed as a matter of

urgency. We have set out below 17 questions under a number of headings and would appreciate an individual response to each in order to provide the necessary clarity before any formal negotiations might take place.

**Any potential Government formation involving the Green Party will need to set out clear and ambitious targets and timetables in relation to the reduction of carbon emissions.** This will require enormous changes in our approach to capital expenditure on transport, in our energy systems, in our agricultural practices, and in how we all live our lives. The target set out in January 2020 by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action of a minimum targeted reduction of 7%+ per annum, in accordance with the best available scientific advice and our commitments under the Paris Agreement, should be adhered to and exceeded.

1. **Will you commit to an average annual reduction in greenhouse gas emissions of at least 7%?**

**Any potential Government formation involving the Green Party will need to undertake radical action on energy efficiency and energy generation.** We know that to meet our emissions targets, we will need large-scale investment in how we generate electricity and manage demand, how we heat our homes and how we power our economy. We will need to commit to ambitious development of off-shore wind, the roll-out of rooftop solar and community energy schemes, a renovation wave for buildings and a significant upgrade of our grid and interconnector infrastructure. We will also need to acknowledge that adhering to ambitious emissions targets will necessitate a clear and decisive move away from the use of fossil fuels, including an end to the issuing of licences for oil and gas exploration and the importation and construction of LNG infrastructure. We must invest in future-proofed, sustainable energy systems and abandon antiquated carbon-emitting systems of the past.

2. **Will you commit to an ambitious programme of development of, and investment where necessary in, renewable energy infrastructure including off-shore wind, grid and interconnector upgrades and community energy projects?**
3. **Will you commit to ending the issue of exploration licences for offshore gas exploration?**
4. **Will you commit to ceasing the construction of new fossil fuel infrastructure, particularly LNG import terminals that could allow the entry of unconventional liquefied natural gas into the Irish energy mix?**

**Any potential Government formation involving the Green Party will need to tackle the housing and homelessness crisis head on, and to accept the responsibility of the State to appropriately house its people.** In line with our commitments on climate, we believe that in meeting the housing needs of our people, we must build the right homes in the right places. Following a 'Town Centre First' policy would allow us to revitalise our town and city centres, shortening commutes and providing transport, services and amenities within communities. With reference to your joint framework document, we have concerns about the emphasis on one type of tenure over others as

suggested therein, and the limited scope of ambition in rolling out a cost rental model. While we welcome the commitment to ‘reduce the cost of land to improve the affordability of housing, employing all measures up to and including referenda,’ we would need specific detail on what that entails and, in particular, what is the timeline for a possible referendum on this point. We also believe that the State must commit to an ambitious programme of deep retrofit of existing housing stock, beginning with social housing, thereby protecting our most vulnerable from fuel poverty.

5. **Will you commit to the exclusive provision of public housing, social housing and cost rental housing on public lands?**
6. **Will you commit to prioritising urban renewal in line with a 'Town Centre First' model?**
7. **Will you commit to a comprehensive deep retrofit programme as part of a programme for government?**

**Any potential Government formation involving the Green Party will need to place social justice at its very core.** We welcome the commitment in the joint framework document to developing a new social contract, and a related undertaking to develop a national economic plan, with input from employer and employee representative bodies. We believe that this needs to go further in scope and in ambition, to encompass a social dialogue as advocated by Social Justice Ireland, to include all sections of our communities in the development of this new social contract. We must commit to an anti-poverty based approach towards animating autonomous community and rural development underpinned by the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The fee and dividend carbon pricing policy is the most effective and fairest way to reduce carbon emissions. It is progressive, ensuring the vast majority of households will earn more than they will spend. As we recover from the COVID-19 Crisis, we must ensure that the most vulnerable in society are protected in any measures adopted. We must recognise that the Direct Provision system fails to fully respect the rights to privacy and human dignity of individuals placed in these centres. This new social contract must also reflect the scale of change required to meet our climate ambition and set out a framework for a Just Transition.

There needs to be a commitment to providing significantly improved supports for the most marginalised groups in our society, including the development of a whole of government migrant integration strategy and a national action plan against racism, and greater supports for the Traveller community in relation to health, employment, housing and education. Stronger measures are also needed for the advancement of gender equality, expanding access to women’s healthcare and valuing caring work in our society which will see real financial, employment and social supports for carers. Added protection is essential for the LGBTQ+ community through improved access to appropriate healthcare and more autonomy for transpeople in terms of healthcare decision-making. A commitment to enact robust hate–crime legislation is similarly essential.

We must also look beyond our own borders, to countries and communities in the global south that are suffering disproportionately from the effects of climate breakdown. We must give strong and specific commitments to grow our overseas development aid over the lifetime of the next Government.

8. **Will you commit to convening a social dialogue process representative of all key stakeholders with a view to developing of a new social contract?**

9. **Will you commit to working towards ending the Direct Provision system and replacing it with a not-for-profit system based on accommodation provided through existing or new approved housing bodies?**
10. **Will you commit to setting us on a clear and certain path to meeting our UN obligation to spend 0.7% of our national income on Overseas Development Aid?**

**Any potential Government formation involving the Green Party will need to undertake radical and ambitious action on biodiversity loss and the collapse of our ecosystems.** How we manage our agricultural lands, what foods we produce, where and what trees we plant, and which areas we rewet and re-wild – these will all determine the future fortunes of our biodiversity. The integration of our farming, rural and coastal communities into this new landscape will be vital as we embark on an ambitious programme to regenerate rural Ireland. A significant reform of Irish agri-food policy is needed, not only to meet our emissions targets and to improve our natural environment, but to help build resilient rural economies.

We must also acknowledge the role of our fishermen and women in the guardianship of our seas and oceans and support their ability to provide healthy food and create jobs in coastal communities. To protect their future, we need to reverse the effects of overfishing and manage climate change and marine pollution, by designating 50% of our territorial waters as 'Marine Protected Areas'. Central to meeting both our climate and biodiversity objectives will also be the establishment of a national land use plan. Such a plan will set out how rural communities can thrive in conjunction with the restoration of biodiversity, a reduction in emissions, improved water quality and flood protection, lower nitrogen and ammonia levels, a switch to closer-to-nature 'continuous cover' forestry and rebuilding a vibrant family farming sector. A Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity is a welcome initiative and would inform the development of such a land use plan. While we recognise the commitment in the joint framework document to increasing tree planting, we feel this falls short of what is necessary. In expanding our afforestation ambitions, we must also ensure that we not only support the forestry sector, but at the same time respect the wishes of our communities, and factor in the ecological and amenity value of our woodlands, by planting the right trees in the right places.

11. **Will you commit to the development of a national land use plan which will inform both the new national economic plan and the new social contract?**

**Any potential Government formation involving the Green Party will need to prioritise improving the quality of life for all our citizens.** This means promoting balanced growth between our regions, developing regional cities as hubs and building resilient rural economies around indigenous elements such as food, heritage, arts, culture and tourism. This means adhering to the goal of promoting concentrated development contained in the National Planning Framework and providing good quality public transport, investing in Rural Link services, and developing and expanding walking and cycling routes in our cities, towns and villages. This means underpinning the basic standard of welfare of our citizens by providing universal basic services, improving mental health services in our communities, establishing a living wage and examining in depth the possibilities afforded by a universal basic income.

- 12. Will you commit to rebalancing our transport infrastructure spend, dedicating at least 20% of infrastructure expenditure in transport to cycling and walking and ensuring that other public transport infrastructure investment is allocated at least two-thirds of the remaining infrastructure budget?**
- 13. Will you commit to establishing a trial of Universal Basic Income (UBI) within the lifetime of the next Government?**
- 14. Will you commit to the revision of the existing National Development Plan so that we can meet our New Social Contract goals and climate change targets?**

And finally, **any potential Government formation involving the Green Party will need to be fiscally responsible, and underpin commitments with a realistic assessment of budgetary realities in the aftermath of the Covid-19 Crisis.** We note a commitment in the joint framework document to increase Government borrowing for investment in public infrastructure while not increasing income taxes during the lifetime of the next Government. We note too an undertaking not to cut basic rates of social welfare and, while remaining mindful that there are many for whom their existing rates of social welfare payments are insufficient, this is welcome. We also note a promise to comply with the EU Fiscal Rules and the Stability and Growth Pact. Against the backdrop of a sudden, deep recession, we need clear and specific detail on how these four commitments, which seem mutually incompatible, may be met.

It is our view that the correct economic response to the crisis is to engage in a period of increased public borrowing, availing of funding from the European Green Deal and the European Investment Bank, to reverse the dramatic reduction in economic activity that has come with the social isolation measures required to fight Covid-19. Such borrowing should be used to invest in a universal healthcare system, active and sustainable transport modes, and education and housing infrastructure in a way that drives towards the decarbonisation of our economy. Supports for businesses that are in difficulty because of the Covid-19 crisis should not go to polluting industries and should target small and medium Irish enterprises. We should use this period of change to advance the next phase of our economic development which should involve the building of a larger and more sustainable domestic enterprise sector. All public investment should be subject to the implementation of Green Public Procurement (GPP), thereby lowering embedded energy and carbon emissions.

- 15. Will you commit to a review of the State's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, undertaken by the Oireachtas, to enable us to learn lessons for the future?**
- 16. Will you provide a clear and detailed analysis of how your Joint Framework Document is to be financed?**
- 17. Will you commit to publishing and implementing a Green Procurement Policy?**

Over the past 40 years the Green Party has campaigned to create a fairer society within a circular economy that protects the environment we all share. We believe that the next ten years are critical if we are to address the climate and biodiversity crisis which threatens our safety, security and

health. We presented to the electorate a comprehensive manifesto of policies and objectives to reshape our society and they gave us an unprecedented mandate to implement those policies.

We know that strong leadership is required in negotiating the unprecedented health challenge of the present and the consequent economic challenge that will follow in its aftermath. The threat of climate change and biodiversity loss requires similar urgent action with the same commitment, cooperation and ambition as any undertaken during the Covid-19 health crisis.

Notwithstanding our mandate to take our place in a Government, we seek clarity that any potential coalition partners share such an understanding and look forward to your written response to our questions.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Eamon Ryan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Eamon Ryan TD

Leader of the Green Party