

Ireland needs to take climate action and fast.

Now, before you completely freak out, let me explain why. This August the IPCC climate report was released and it is raising several alarms. It warned our governments that we need to incur rapid and large-scale reductions to our greenhouse gas emissions if we want to stay under a temperature increase of 2C. If we can't reduce our emissions by 2050, the results will be dire. The earth is experiencing a metaphorical organ failure. Elevated extinction rates and habitat loss will eventually leave to catastrophic events in the biodiversity of the planet.

Global leaders have ignored the advice of scientists and the cries of younger generations. They have allowed fossil fuel investors to dictate environmental policies all over the world, including Ireland, while simultaneously allowing themselves to exploit the planet to their hearts content. In the past 30 years our country has been a part of the UN it has hardly reached any of the agreed upon climate plans. In order to have any chance at reversing the effects of climate change, we must halve our emissions by 2030, embracing the idea of sustainability in replacement of economic growth, and no longer dictating our climate actions based on its economic effect.

Currently, our biggest opponents are the economic interests lobbying against scientific findings. This 'greenwashing' obscures and distorts climate science while also pushing certain technologies, deeming them eco-friendly even when they really are not. For example; hybrid cars, air travel and meat and dairy exportation. Another issue is that countries are not obliged to release information on their carbon emissions. This lack of information misleads the public into thinking they are choosing a low-carbon option.

Honesty is the best policy this is, especially true when it comes to our planet. Many groups fail us when it comes to telling the truth, especially the farming sector. The farming sector has repeatedly made false claims about the climate impact methane has. Methane makes up 30-50% of the recent rise in temperature and is one of the biggest contributions to global warming. Methane is released by cattle and sheep and is predicted to increase significantly by 2030 or only reduce by 10%. Agriculture is responsible for around a third of Ireland's emissions and the government's current policies won't be enough to reduce the climate impact as well as the farmland biodiversity and air and water pollution. One of Ireland's climate goals is to reduce emissions by 50% and the farming sector seems to be under the assumption that they're excluded from this target. A realisation must be made that in order combat rising temperatures, everyone must take action.

Ireland's performance of integrating renewable energy into our power grid is greatly outshone by the rapid appearance of data centers, massive warehouses containing servers that process data for tech companies. These warehouses are energy guzzlers, consuming 31 percent of all electricity in Ireland. The production of these centers was supported by the government as part of a strategic infrastructure however, the production of these buildings threatens the power grid's stability. Recently it was discovered that Cloud Infrastructure Ireland has already begun heavily lobbying against the decreased production of these centers

and is instead pushing the idea of on-site fossil fuel production which will cause Ireland's 2030 targets impossible to meet.

Transport policies also require reform. According to the IPCC, over the past 3 decades, our government has failed us when it comes to these policies which in turn has also severely damaged our environment. The sprawling suburbs and lack their lack of public transport and the ongoing development of new roads create an industry for cars. Glossy ads and poor urban planning draw us into purchasing these gas-guzzling machines, while also setting a stigma around the type of car someone has, where if it is not the newest model it is 'lower class' and just plain bad.

To add insult to injury, financial institutions promote loans for new car purchases which leads to unsustainable production of these cars. The infrastructure for public transport and transportation in general has let the public down, and also makes a new car all the more enticing. The government also fails to provide safe and accessible cycle lanes, a cheaper and environmentally friendly option in comparison to cars. Especially in cities, bikes are significantly more efficient and quicker however, they are the second choice as people see cycling as a dangerous or stressful activity in cities.

Ireland should introduce different modes of transport or simply a better option to cars. Ridesharing and public transport mean less cars will be on the road, providing a better biological environment and also a safer environment for cyclists and pedestrians which in turn will encourage more people to travel on foot or bike. Denmark proves just how simple it is. They are planning to build around 760 kilometers of pristine cycle lanes webbing out from the main city Copenhagen. Dublin is a relatively flat city which is perfect for cycling. Another option that has worked is the pedestrianization of certain streets. During Covid, this actually happened and it was amazing, everything was more accessible, aesthetically pleasing and overall, safer.

There are many simple steps that can be taken to help reduce our impact on this planet. Not all hope is lost as we still have 9 years to turn things around, and with constantly improving technology, we can adapt and overcome this crisis. Obviously, we all feel a bit hopeless about this situation but there are people making a difference and you can too! Organizations like OneFuture and Friends of the Earth are two groups fighting for change. Even the smallest things can help; eating more plant-based foods, walking, or cycling instead of driving, even being conscious of turning off appliances in the house. It mightn't seem like enough, but if all of us take these steps, it will make a difference.

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