

STOPPING THE CLIMATE CRISIS AND PROTECTING OUR ENVIRONMENT

Climate breakdown is the seismic global challenge facing this generation. Failure to take action now will result in significant changes to our global climate and weather patterns that will devastate developed and developing economies across the world, leaving millions destitute and homeless.

Global warming is happening and at a much faster rate than anticipated. Extraordinary action is required to keep global temperature increases below 1.5 degrees Celsius and avert irreversible damage to our climate.

Over the course of the last few years, millions of citizens across Europe and across the world have called on governments and the political establishment to take action on climate change. The expressions of this crisis, through protests in European capitals and school strikes on the streets of Northern Ireland, have their roots in social, economic, ecological and political upheaval. Interventions designed to tackle the climate emergency must be robust, equitable and contribute to social justice more broadly. We cannot create a society that offers tax cuts to the wealthy while introducing new levies that disproportionately target the poor.

Ecological and economic equality

We cannot decarbonise our economy without ensuring that clean energy is affordable energy. We cannot deliver income equality without a green economy that creates high quality jobs. We know that ecological transition and economic equality must go hand in hand.

Accepting and addressing the causes of the climate crisis is critical to avoiding irreversible damage to ecosystems and economies. The SDLP, as part of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, believes that protecting the environment is not an expensive political hobby horse. It is a moral, economic and health imperative that, if planned and implemented correctly, can benefit people, communities and businesses.

At its foundation, the EU's green transformation programme should be underpinned by a new Sustainable Development Pact with social and ecological targets to ensure that the interests of private business do not trump our environment. This pact will ensure the delivery of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and under a PES Commission President, each Commissioner will be responsible for delivery against the UN standard.

A Green transition

We understand the scale of the challenge facing developed economies. We can't step into an open, Green economy without a stable transition from where we are now.

We need to create low-carbon alternatives to high-carbon industries and a significant support package to those working in these industries. Our green transition will balance our duty to preserve, protect and enhance the environment with the social and economic rights of all workers.

The European Commission estimates that measures to achieve the current 2030 climate targets alone could create an additional 900,000 jobs. But first, we have to support carbon-intensive industries to make their processes more carbon neutral and resource efficient. We also have to support workers in these sectors to develop new skills that will allow us to lead emerging and transformed industries.

The SDLP, with the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, will establish a Just Transition Fund to support workers, industries and communities affected by environmental and technological transitions.

A model for climate action

The European Union is the perfect model for coordinating climate action across all member states.

Acting together with our European sister nations, we can more effectively coordinate emissions reduction targets, renewable energy uptake and decarbonisation plans.

The SDLP, as a member of the S&D group, supports a step change in the European Commission's approach to climate change mitigation and the implementation of the Paris Agreement. We support an increase in the greenhouse gas emissions reduction target from 40% to 55% and an aim for carbon-neutrality by 2050.

The European Commission's analysis shows that achieving net zero emissions by 2050 will deliver:

- A 2% increase in GDP compared with the baseline scenario
- A 0.9% increase in employment, representing 2.1 million new jobs
- A reduction in energy import dependence from 55% to 20%
- A reduction in the fossil fuel import bill by 70% (currently €266 billion)
- A saving of €200 billion per year on health spend associated with air pollution

Falling renewable energy prices make a compelling case for a transition from traditional energy sources. The SDLP believes that Northern Ireland can become a leader in developing new renewable technology. From the potential of geothermal spots on the North Coast to diversifying our fishing fleets to support sustainable off shore wind, renewable technology is an under-utilised resource.

The SDLP will continue to:

- Seek EU research and development funding for renewable technology under Horizon 2020.
- Argue for challenging emissions reductions targets and an overarching aim of carbon neutrality by 2050.
- Press for the introduction of climate crisis legislation in Northern Ireland with robust targets and indicators.
- Support green energy producers to remain competitive and expand their operations to create new high quality jobs.
- Maximise European Investment Bank funding for large green growth projects.