

Appendix

Observations and comments from XR Cymru Political Engagement group on the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee (CCEIC) meeting with the Minister for Climate Change and her officials on Thursday 25 November 2021, including public scrutiny of the Net Zero Wales Plan

In general:

- We were encouraged by the mutually supportive nature of the meeting.
- We are encouraged by the 2-monthly 4-nations meetings of ministers. We support the view expressed by the Minister that: “Wales must do the best we can do. That puts me in a stronger position to criticise or praise other nations as appropriate.”
- We are glad to see Wales joining more forward-thinking groups of states, regions and small countries, specifically the Under2 Coalition and the Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance.
- We agree with the Committee’s stated opinion, quoting Greta Thunberg, that “No-one is too small to make a difference.” Wales is small enough to achieve real change and large enough to have influence and leverage to influence the rest of the UK and the rest of the world. Recycling was referred to several times as a good example.

On emissions reductions:

- We support the Minister’s decision of “not fully following the recommendations of the UK Climate Change Committee” (CCC). However, we want to see the sum total of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reductions greater than that recommended by the CCC. We await the positive impact that the Welsh Government / Plaid Cymru Co-operation Agreement might have on this.
- We note Delyth Jewell's reference to XR Cymru’s observation that the aims of the Net Zero Wales Plan were not clear. We are not clear as to what an average reduction of 37% means as a target for carbon budget 2.
- Most importantly, we believe the Welsh Government’s targets for annual average reduction in CO2 levels are inconsistent with those identified by the UN Environment Programme’s 2019 Gap report, Executive Summary page 10, paragraph 5, as being necessary:

“Had serious climate action begun in 2010, the cuts required per year to meet the projected emissions levels for 2°C and 1.5°C would only have been 0.7 per cent and 3.3 per cent per year on average. However, since this did not happen, the required cuts in emissions are now 2.7 per cent per year from 2020 for the 2°C goal and 7.6 per cent per year on average for the 1.5°C goal. Evidently, greater cuts will be required the longer that action is delayed.”

This UN Statement was accompanied with the expectation that ‘rich countries’ should be much more ambitious in their GHG gas emissions reduction.

- We urge the Welsh Government to explain whether, and how, the targets for GHG gas emissions for Wales for this decade are consistent with the UN’s 2019 Gap Report. We wonder if more realistic and meaningful action can result from the recent Co-operation Agreement between the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru, where one of the agreed policies is to seek independent advice on the potential to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2035.
- We are very pleased to see the approach of not ‘exporting our emissions’ (consumption emissions) to countries with a much poorer record on GHG emissions. – E.g. steel production. However, we would like assurances that recycling of steel and other metals in Wales is being pushed to the maximum
- We note the difficult fact that the Emissions Trading Scheme has Wales as a net contributor.

On transport:

- We support progress being made on housing and green buses.
- We note, and share the concerns of the Welsh Government, that only 2% of the Welsh rail network is electrified, and that more progress on electrifying rail transport to and in Wales is being frustrated by decisions in Westminster. In particular, we are appalled that HS2 funding, spent entirely in England, and in environmentally destructive ways, includes money which should be rightly allocated to Wales.
- We support Huw Irranca-Davies' proposal for a frequent-fliers tax.
- We are concerned about the Minister’s references to ‘electric planes’. We believe these are impractical for mass transport. We are aware, however, that nitrogen-based fuels are seemingly feasible although an incredibly inefficient way of transporting goods or people. Additionally, the implications on biodiversity of any system would need to be fully assessed to ensure there are no unintended negative consequences.

On public engagement:

- We endorse the Minister's approach of focusing on behaviour change rather than on unproven technical and engineering approaches for reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions as advocated by the UK government.
- We support the Minister's view that the Welsh Government needs to bring the Welsh people with them on their journey to Net Zero Carbon emissions.
- We acknowledge the many stakeholders that are being involved in industry-specific and issue-specific ways. However, we remain deeply concerned about the lack of information and involvement being experienced by the public at large. The 3,000 plus people who logged on to Wales Climate Week is a tiny proportion of the population as a whole. We urge you to be explicit about how you will approach this significant gap.
- In the forthcoming Engagement Strategy we hope to see Wales building on its first Citizens Assembly of 2019, commissioned by the then National Assembly for Wales. That CA recommended, with a consensus of 92.4%, that CAs be used routinely by the National Assembly (now the Senedd) to engage Welsh citizens in its decision-making processes.