

General Election 2024 needs a dedicated debate on the Climate and Biodiversity Emergency

Open Letter to Political Leaders
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As the [29th international Conference of the Parties under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change](#) opens in Baku, Azerbaijan, we write urgently, as academics and citizens, to all Irish political leaders. We are desperately concerned about the rapidly unfolding Climate and Biodiversity Emergency (and the wider global [polycrisis](#) it represents) which is now unequivocally upon us. Within just the last few weeks, a group of leading climate scientists wrote ([in the journal Bioscience](#)): “We are on the brink of an irreversible climate disaster. This is a global emergency beyond any doubt. Much of the very fabric of life on Earth is imperiled... We find ourselves amid an abrupt climate upheaval, a dire situation never before encountered in the annals of human existence. We have now brought the planet into climatic conditions never witnessed by us or our prehistoric relatives within our genus, *Homo*.” We have already seen scenes of devastation arising directly from extreme weather events around the world, most recently including the [horrendous flooding in the Valencia region of Spain](#). Separate from such direct effects, climate disruption has long been recognised as a so-called [threat multiplier](#). Concretely, [UNICEF was warning already in 2022](#) of the contribution of climate change to food insecurity in Sudan. By October this year, [Trócaire reported](#) that “[s]ince large-scale conflict broke out in April of 2023, sparking a widespread humanitarian hunger and protection crisis across the country, rates of displacement, disease and hunger in Sudan have skyrocketed.” To date, Ireland’s relatively temperate climate regime has shielded us from some of the worst effects; but future decades are much more uncertain. As just one example, leading scientists have recently found that the risk of serious near term disruption of the key Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC) – a so-called climate “tipping point” – [has been greatly underestimated](#), and that this could have devastating and irreversible impacts across north western Europe, including Ireland, well within the lifetimes of children alive today.

Simultaneously, and closely coupled to the climate emergency, we are in the midst of an [unprecedented biodiversity crisis](#), with up to a million species facing extinction, threatening the lives and livelihoods of the billions of people who depend on them.

But despite this evidence of clear and present danger, the United Nations Environment Programme in its (fifteenth!) [annual “emissions gap report”](#) finds that, under current policy commitments, the

world is “... on course for a temperature increase of 2.6-3.1°C over the course of this century [which] would bring debilitating impacts to people, planet and economies.”

Critically, this climate and biodiversity emergency is entirely different from all other issues that may come to the fore in our coming general election campaign. It is global in scope, raising genuine existential risk for the stability of all human civilisation within the lifetime of young people already of voting age. It transcends and dwarfs the other “conventional” political issues: there can be no meaningful, enduring, solutions to housing, healthcare, education, emigration, economic development, peace or justice unless there is a successful response to the climate and biodiversity emergency. And for Ireland to play even its minimal fair share in such a global response would now require [fundamental and disruptive changes in current political priorities](#).

It is true that Ireland has made significant *symbolic* progress under the current government, through the establishment of a world-leading *framework* for national level climate action, specifically including the national Climate Action Plan and its annual updates. However: implementation has been consistently inadequate. Every expert that we are aware of, who has looked seriously at the latest version of the Irish Climate Action Plan ([CAP24](#)), specifically including assessments by the EPA and the Climate Change Advisory Council, is agreed that, in its current form, it does not provide a credible pathway for coming into compliance with our supposedly *legally binding* carbon budget programme. Not by 2025, not by 2030, and not even by 2035 (which is as far as the programme currently runs). Indeed, rather than converging to compliance, the current projections are for a progressively *increasing* gap (chasm) between statutory "commitment" and atmospheric reality. So: every party and every candidate must be challenged to say what *new and additional* actions you will put in place, over and above everything that is already in CAP24; being clear that the inadequate action to date means that we now need genuinely *emergency scale* measures, that will, by definition, be significantly disruptive. As [Greta Thunberg so eloquently put it, in her speech to the European Economic and Social Committee in February 2019](#):

“We need to focus every inch of our being on climate change. Because if we fail to do so, then all of our achievements and progress will be for nothing. And all that will remain of our political leaders’ legacy will be the greatest failure of human history. And they will be remembered as the greatest villains of all time because they have chosen not to listen and not to act.”

For all these reasons, we believe that it is utterly impossible to do justice to the climate and biodiversity emergency in the current election campaign without a full leaders’ debate devoted exclusively to it, and driven by an audience selected explicitly to represent future generations who are entirely reliant on the decisions being made now. We have invited all citizens who agree with this position to express that by signing an online petition now available at:

ge2024.postcarbonireland.org

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