

KYOTO: Russian Turnaround To Put Renewed Pressure On Irish Climate Change Action

BY FRANK COLES

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Until recently it seemed as if the Kyoto Protocol could have been forgotten about all together. Despite the European Union's ongoing implementation of the targets set out by the Treaty, the required 55% of signatory nations had still not signed up for the treaty. Memorably, three years ago, the US rejected the agreement claiming that it would burden their economy by restricting the use of still abundant fossil fuels. So uncertain was its future that in July, former EU Environment Commissioner Margot Wallstrom publicly complained that only five out of the 25 EU member states were ready to implement the protocol.

Then earlier this year on the 30th of September, after a significant amount of political manoeuvring Russia ratified the treaty bringing it within the 55% requirement and ushering in it's implementation within a 90 day time frame.

Ireland just happens to be one of the five EU nations whose emissions plans have been accepted to take part in 2005's EU carbon trading market. Under this scheme higher emitting industrial nations can trade emission credits with other less polluting countries in order to bring their emission levels within the protocols remit and therefore attempt to avoid the huge fines that this failure would bring. Ireland has an allocated emissions allowances of 32.7% of projected national emissions over the next three years, and trading will begin on the remaining 67.3% next year.

In practical terms what this means for Ireland is greenhouse gas emissions must be brought down to an average of 13% above 1990 levels during the period 2008-2012. Data from the EPA's second consultation on the National Allocation Plan reveals a drop in the emissions levels for the last two years but the figures are still high. 2002's figures were 129% above base year emissions and 2003's provisional estimates are at 125%.

Construct Ireland's Political Correspondent Frank Coles interviewed a selection of industry leaders and politicians to find out what this could mean



The Duma, Russia, where the Kyoto Protocol was effectively reborn in late October 2004.

for Ireland. The selection from Industry included: **Eddie O'Connor** [Airtricity], **Gilbert McCarthy**, [Kingspan Insulation] and from politics **Ciaran Cuffe** and **Eamon Gilmore** both shadow Environment Ministers and former MEP **Patricia McKenna**.

FC: What implications does the ratification of the treaty have for Ireland?

Patricia McKenna: If action is not taken immediately Ireland's Greenhouse gas emissions will exceed Kyoto limits by almost 40% in 2010. This will mean that Irish taxpayers will be paying the inevitable huge financial penalties.

Gilbert McCarthy: We are already so far behind the targets we initially committed to, hence the need for serious action in terms of minimising CO2 emissions where possible. The focus on buildings, both domestic and commercial, new and existing, is key.

Ciaran Cuffe: It requires positive Government action to reduce climate change emissions in all sectors including construction, agriculture and transportation.

Eddie O'Connor: Kyoto binds Ireland to becoming a contributing member of the International Community against global warming. There was more than a hint of

"Kyoto is dead" doing the rounds of the Irish establishment for the past five years. It is entirely appropriate that carbon taxes be introduced. This year the general population will be paying our carbon burden and this is unfair. Big business everywhere outside of America now has to find systematically less carbon intensive ways of using energy.

Eamon Gilmore: It means we'll definitely have to comply with our Kyoto commitments. There is a real problem that I think the government has put on the long finger. Not to implement the carbon tax was a decision made for political reasons. Although increases in price do not appear to be impacting on consumption, they didn't put anything else in its place.

FC: What actions should Ireland take to prevent our emissions levels from penalising our growth as a country?

CC: We should encourage investment in low energy use industry, improve thermal performance and introduce energy performance standards in the Building Regulations, provide greater incentives for low energy use vehicles; place more emphasis on land use and planning policies so that people can live closer to where they work.

EO'C: At a very basic level the Taoiseach has to spell out to the Irish people just as Tony Blair, Bill Clinton and Gerhard Schroeder have done, that it is no longer acceptable to gratuitously pollute the environment. This year 150,000 people are dying due to global warming. By the

middle of this century one million living species and three thousand million people could be gone due to global warming.

PM: We need to introduce carbon taxes straight away. We also need to ensure a massive increase of renewable energy supplies of at least 14%. Less than 2% of energy currently comes from renewable sources. Ireland is also the most car dependent country in the world.

EG: First I think that we have to comply with Kyoto. Secondly we have to make a shift to renewable energy, we have a lot of potential here. We would give the Eddie O'Connor's of the world their opportunity. I think if we're back in government after the next election that is one of the big changes you'll see.

Next, energy conservation; in the older housing stock I think there is still quite some work to be done. Finally, we have to face up to the single generation of electricity use left in fossil fuels that long term is just not sustainable.

GM: Awareness of the need to conserve energy has greatly improved over the last two to three years. However we still seem to focus on how to minimise cost through using less insulation [the minimum regulations will allow] as opposed to what levels of insulation are required to significantly reduce the consumption of fuel used to heat our buildings. We need to increasingly adopt a Life Cycle cost approach to construction, look at the medium to long-term payback from reduced fuel consumption versus initial investment required to minimise heat loss through our buildings

FC: What other measures could or should be taken?

EO'C: Ireland should build a great host of power stations that extract energy from the wind. The fuel is free and its exploitation would give Ireland competitive advantage. Exploiting wind energy will reduce our imports of expensive oil and gas and promoting wind in Ireland is the one thing the Government can do to promote industrial growth in Ireland.

GM: Refurbishment of old buildings in terms of energy performance represents an enormous opportunity to minimise our future CO2 emissions.

EG: It is difficult to argue with the climate change strategy. You can do a certain amount of tweaking and changing of targets and so on. I was disappointed with the emissions allocations particularly with some of the industrial sectors that appeared to do better, who were in fact the more polluting sectors, such as the cement industry. I think that is an area that needs to be revisited.

FC: In the recent reshuffle two ministers were appointed to key posts, Noel Dempsey as Communications, Marine and Natural Resources Minister and Dick Roche

as Environment, Heritage and Local Government Minister. What are their main responsibilities with regards to the Kyoto protocol and have their track records shown they are likely to take their responsibilities seriously?

CC: Their responsibilities are carbon pricing, implementation of the protocol, encouragement of energy reduction and promoting best practice. I would wait to see how they fit into their portfolios. I don't believe Dick Roche's predecessor had any great love for the Kyoto Protocol or for environmental issues. Dick Roche has had many run-ins with An Taisce, which does not bode well for him in his new position.

EO'C: Noel Dempsey, when he was Minister for the Environment actually signed Ireland up to the Kyoto protocol. He has now been given responsibility for delivering on that at his new ministry. Dick

“ At a very basic level the Taoiseach has to spell out to the Irish people just as Tony Blair, Bill Clinton and Gerhard Schroeder have done, that it is no longer acceptable to gratuitously pollute the environment. ”
Eddie O'Connor, Airtricity

Roche for his part will participate in any discussions at European or world level on extending the Kyoto Treaty to its next phase.

EG: Well, Dick Roche has only a short track record as a minister but, to be fair, it's an impressive one. I did mark Noel Dempsey when he was in Environment and he's a very able man, however he has a tendency to announce the grand event and then for it never to happen.

What has to be clarified is where the responsibility rests for driving the climate change strategy. It would appear that it rests officially with the Department of the Environment, however for it to be realised it's the Department of Transport that will have to make the biggest contribution to it, but I don't get the impression in the line departments, where the real contributions have to be made, that it's being taken seriously.

It's interesting now that the two ministers who are in charge, whose sectors will have to make the biggest contribution are former environment ministers, who professed themselves to be all for the NCCS.

FC: How important is it to implement higher building standards such as the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive?

CC: This area is crucial. There is little evidence of adequate enforcement on the existing Building Regulations, let alone any attempt to improve standards and introduce obligations in regard to energy performance.

EO'C: It is vital. Why waste energy? A policed standard can stop pouring 100,000 tonnes of oil down the drain each year.

GM: The Energy Performance Directive will not mean higher insulation standards. It will however create increased awareness of the need to better insulate through building energy certification. The directive places heavy emphasis on the use of renewables as a form of energy that correctly targets the carbon issue. However we need to continue to focus on how best to reduce energy use in the first place so as to minimise the use of renewable energy needed to heat our buildings. The only way we can do that is through tighter standards that are not incorporated in the energy Performance Directive.

FC: So what ultimately would you like to see happen?

CC: The creation of an advanced energy-efficient economy that has successfully decoupled increases in climate change emissions from economic development.

EO'C: I would like to see Ireland take a lead in renewable energy exploitation. I would like to see us become a net exporter of renewable energy, to become one of the providers of green electricity to a power hungry Europe. I can envisage 100,000 people being employed in renewables in Ireland and I can see the development of an industry with multi billion annual sales.

PM: Household energy demand is rising and consumption rose by at least 20% in the 90's. Energy consumption by the residential sector makes up 25% of our total energy consumption and most of this is met by gas and oil. Ireland is the seventh most oil dependant economy in the world – 60% comes from oil, but we are also very reliant on carbon intensive fuels such as coal, natural gas and petrol for our electricity, even though we could be world leaders in renewable energy.

EG: What I would like us to do is to implement the National Climate Change Strategy. In the longer term I think we have to say, "Right, let's believe that there are only about 30 years supply of oil out there and that the closer we get to the end of that 30 years the more scarce and expensive it will be. So let us as a country and as an economy plan on the basis that fossil fuel will not continue to be available and let's start doing the things that need to be done." s