



# Irish Independent

EDITORIAL

## CARBON TAX MUST RISE IN FACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE THREAT

**T**HEY say obstacles are seen as challenges for winners and excuses for losers.

Traditionally, budgets are also judged through the prism of winning and losing.

But deciding precisely who wins and who loses is within the gift of an increasingly narrower circle.

In the context of climate change we are all condemned to being losers without draconian action.

Unfortunately, the greater good seldom features when pitted against narrow political expediency or economic preferment.

The parking of a significant increase in our carbon taxes speaks to the priority of protecting rural party interests as a key prerogative of a Government whose principal aim is securing its power base.

Such a limited perspective circumscribes long-term decisions, favouring the short-term election cycle while obscuring the bigger picture.

Unless we raise our carbon taxes dramatically, we will turn nothing around in the context of meeting our global commitments.



*Time is up for procrastination. To paraphrase Kennedy: 'If not now, when; if not us, then who?'*

The latest climate change report frighteningly and forcefully hammers home a bitter truth that the immediate consequences are far graver than previously thought.

Leading climatologists insist that we are courting catastrophe with a heightened risk to the planet before 2040.

The landmark report zones in on the fading likelihood of our containing global warming to a 1.5C degree increase on pre-industrial levels.

Avoiding disaster now demands transform-

ing the world economy at a speed and scale that has "no documented historic precedent", the UN report states.

It starkly spells out how we have barely a dozen years to contain global warming at a maximum of 1.5C degrees.

After this point, even half a degree will significantly worsen the risks of drought, floods, extreme heat and poverty for hundreds of millions of people in the regions of the world least able to cope, and more importantly, least responsible for the imminent disaster that may be visited on them.

America may be out, but significantly China and India are still on board the Paris Agreement, which is still paramount.

The president of the World Bank, Jim Yong Kim, has appealed to leaders around the globe to wake up to the "fierce urgency of the now".

While Christine Lagarde, managing director of the IMF, has appealed for collective endeavour and collective accountability before it is too late.

She is right. Time is up for procrastination. To paraphrase John F Kennedy: "If not now, when; if not us, then who?"

## We've been warned – the cost of action is lower than inertia

**Diarmuid Torney**



**T**HE landmark climate change report published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) throws down the gauntlet to governments around the world.

In December 2015, 195 countries agreed in Paris to limit global warming to well below 2C above pre-industrial levels, and to pursue efforts to limit warming to 1.5C.

The IPCC was tasked with fleshing out what this 1.5C target means. The report is unequivocal. It spells out the risks of allowing warming to exceed 1.5C, including more extreme droughts and floods, as well as severe impacts on ecosystems and the communities that depend on them.

It is equally unequivocal in highlighting that we are currently on a very dangerous

path. The world has already warmed by approximately 1C, and we are currently headed for 3C.

To have a reasonable chance of making 1.5C, we need a radical change of direction that will bring us to zero net greenhouse gas emissions by mid-century. The costs of the transition will be significantly less than the costs of doing nothing.

Because of their greater responsibility for past pollution, as well as their greater resources, rich countries are expected to take on a greater share of the burden of transition, but under the Paris Agreement all countries are required to take action.

It's an immense task, and immensely important. The question is whether we are up to it. The current international political landscape for climate action provides a challenging backdrop.

In the US, Donald Trump pledged last year to withdraw from the Paris Agreement. As the world's largest economy and military superpower, the US's withdrawal was significant, but it had the effect of galvanising other countries to rally in support of the agreement. Indeed, America's allies seem increasingly to

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realise they can no longer rely on the US.

Last Sunday's first round election result suggests Jair Bolsonaro will likely be the next president of Brazil. He has pledged to withdraw his country from the Paris Agreement, though would need the support of Congress to do so. Brazil matters not least because what happens to the Amazon rainforest will have a significant bearing on the future climate system.

It will fall to other countries and regions to drive the transition to a low-carbon global economy and society. The EU has historically led international action to combat climate change. In recent years that role has been questioned. EU environment ministers meeting in Luxembourg today will be under pressure to deliver a strong response to the IPCC's report.

China, the world's largest emitter, has made much in recent years of its transition to an "ecological civilisation". It is the world's biggest investor in renewable energy, but recent evidence suggests renewed Chinese investment in coal-fired power, one of the most polluting forms of electricity. Time will tell how committed China is to cleaning up its economy.

India, meanwhile, has also committed strongly to climate action. With more poor people than all of sub-Saharan Africa, India will need space to grow and develop, but President Narendra Modi has pledged a lower-carbon development pathway.

Transition away from fossil fuels at the rate envisaged by the IPCC report will have profound implications for exporting countries such as oil-rich Middle Eastern states and gas-rich Russia.

Reports last week suggested Saudi Arabia was seeking to water down the IPCC report. That appears not to have come to pass, but the report does acknowledge the particular challenges faced by "regions with high dependency on fossil fuels for revenue and employment generation".

The IPCC has delivered a clarion call to the world. There is no historical precedent for a transition on the scale envisaged, but – as the report makes starkly clear – failure does not bear thinking about.

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