

OPEN LETTER TO MLAs ON THE CLIMATE CHANGE PRIVATE MEMBERS BILL

May 7, 2021

Dear MLAs

CLIMATE CHANGE LEGISLATION MUST BE EVIDENCE-BASED AND ITS IMPACTS FULLY UNDERSTOOD

The issue of climate change is one of the greatest issues of our age and we must get any legislation right.

On Monday the Assembly will debate the general principles of the Climate Change Private Members Bill sponsored by Clare Bailey MLA.

The NI agri-food industry is fully supportive of climate legislation and totally embraces the need to address global warming and reduce emissions locally, nationally and globally.

However, for climate legislation to be effective and achieve the outcomes we collectively seek, it must be based on the best available science and its impact understood. This Bill fails on both counts and will simply give rise to an economic emergency in one of the most sustainable, diverse and income generating private sectors within Northern Ireland.

There has been no rural needs or economic impact assessment conducted during the development of this Bill. There has been no formal consultation. This Bill carries significant and serious implications for farmers, agri-food processors and their employees in your constituency which ought to be urgently taken into consideration and not overlooked or, worse still, ignored.

For clarity and transparency, this Bill ignores the **independent evidence from the Climate Change Committee (CCC)** which was presented in the Assembly last month. **This assessment has indicated that even with a reduction in meat and dairy production in NI of 50%, NI would not reach net zero by 2050 and that it is not credible to set a net zero target for NI at this time. Why is this evidence being ignored?**

The Private Member's Bill has a net zero target for 2045. Therefore, based on the CCC assessment you must understand that this Bill would result in the decimation of our food industry and the loss of tens of thousands of jobs in the rural economy. As you can appreciate, we would urge you to really contemplate and fully grasp the cold, stark reality of that prospect, when considering how you will vote.

Given that agri-food is at the heart of the NI economy, the implications for NI and its economic viability are profound and substantial.

As a consequence of this Bill, consumer demand will instead be met by global food imports produced, in many cases, to lower environmental and animal health and welfare standards and with higher carbon emissions. Instead of the intended effect, this Bill will perversely lead to increased global emissions. Our industry will have been sacrificed for nothing.

Before voting for this Bill, ask yourself whether you support:

- the halving of our livestock industry, given the implications for employment, economy and exports;
- unprecedented job losses on a massive scale in farms, factories and across the entire economy, including veterinary practitioners, hauliers, public services and many other ancillary industries;
- replacing NI produce with that of our global competitors in national and international markets;
- a Bill that will mould NI for the next 30 years that is not based on scientific evidence, has not been subjected to consultation and has not been subjected to an economic impact or rural needs assessment.

The issue of climate change is far too important to have it driven by a Bill of this nature. We need a Bill that is based on robust scientific evidence and has been subjected to proper process of consultation, impact assessment and analysis. Decisions must be based on scientific evidence. The issue we invite and urge you to consider is whether addressing climate change in this way, which risks significantly damaging the core of the NI economy, and the very environment we are desperately trying to protect, is the right way to proceed.

The agri-food sector has demonstrated and continues to assert its commitment to mitigating the effects of climate change. Our farming businesses are family owned and have been passed from generation to generation, based on each generation working with nature to produce high quality food. Farmers are the custodians of the environment and we are willing partners who want to work with you to develop and implement a robust and effective Climate Change Bill.

We want to be part of the solution for dealing with climate change in NI. All we ask is that you give us a legislative framework that is based on robust scientific evidence and which encourages a partnership approach between Government, researchers and industry. We stand ready to play our part.

Signed

Ulster Farmers' Union	Livestock & Meat Commission for NI
NI Agricultural Producers' Association	NI Food and Drink Association
National Beef Association (NI)	NI Grain Trade Association
National Sheep Association	NI Meat Exporters Association
Dairy Council Northern Ireland	NI Pork and Bacon Forum