
RTÉ General Election / Climate

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To: BroadCastCompliance <BroadCastCompliance@rte.ie>

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Dear RTÉ Election Steering Group -

Thank you for your prompt consideration of our letter and petition, advocating for a TV/livestream Leaders' Debate dedicated exclusively to the Climate and Biodiversity Emergency during the current election campaign.

We note the specific opportunities that RTÉ has provided, or is providing, for coverage of this issue. We do appreciate this.

However: it is clear that this limited coverage (either in scope, audience, or both) does not engage in a meaningful way with the *emergency* situation we are facing. As we explained in our submission, this climate and biodiversity emergency is entirely different from the "conventional" political issues under discussion. It raises genuine existential risk for the stability of all human civilisation within the foreseeable future. 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 does not appear from your response that this categorical distinction of a clear and present *emergency* has been adequately taken into consideration. In particular, in the limited coverage to date, we do not consider that candidates or parties are being robustly challenged on any of the following critical questions (which themselves are by no means exhaustive):

1. Do they commit to take whatever *additional* emission reductions actions are necessary in your period of government to *comply* with the Irish legally binding carbon budgets for the overall period 2025-2030? (Or do they instead plan not to comply with the law?)
2. Based on EPA data, the *minimum* projected overshoot of the first carbon budget (2021-2025) is currently estimated as 14 MtCO_{2e}; so the maximum remaining budget for 2026-2030 is expected to be 186 MtCO_{2e}. But the current *sectoral* targets ("sectoral emissions ceilings") for 2026-2030 may add up to as much as 232 MtCO_{2e}: an excess of 46 MtCO_{2e}, or 25%! To deal with this "carbon budget hole", the incoming government will have to revise some or all sectoral targets downward (make them more stringent) as a matter of urgency. Which sectoral targets do parties propose to reduce, and by how much, in order to have a plan that will actually add up to compliance with the available budget?
3. There is a clear tension between rapidly reducing emissions in our energy system while continuing rapid growth of new, commercial, "Large Energy Users" (primarily data centres). Do parties commit to defer further growth in such new large scale energy use until it shown *unequivocally* to be consistent with meeting their (revised?) 2026-2030 sectoral ceiling for the electricity sector and/or the carbon budget as a whole?
4. Emissions from international aviation and shipping currently fall outside our domestic carbon budget system; but they self-evidently still contribute significantly to climate change, and are understood to be legally included within the scope of the Paris Agreement. What, if any, limit/ceiling will parties adopt for Ireland's contribution to such emissions over their term of government? What actions do they propose to achieve this?
5. Ireland, as a relatively small nation, is critically reliant on effective *global* action to secure a liveable climate future for all. The current international negotiations (COP29) in Baku are focussed on the difficult challenge of mobilising the large scale finance to support developing nations in the global south to deal with the climate damages already being imposed on them by wealthier countries (such as Ireland) in the global north, and to effectively address energy poverty *without* reliance on fossil fuels. Much of this finance could be raised through so called *global solidarity levies*, such as a financial transaction levy, a frequent flyer aviation levy or an international "billionaire tax". Will parties commit to supporting such solidarity levies, and, in particular, to immediately join the [Global Solidarity Levies Task Force](#)?

You also refer to the challenges of planning election coverage, and the engagement with political parties in advance of the campaign beginning. We sympathise with these genuine challenges. However, we note that there was apparently no opportunity for the *public* to be engaged in this planning. That being the case, we suggest that

that the significant public support indicated in our petition make a strong case for re-consideration, even in the face of practical challenges. The *public* service mandate of RTÉ should surely be of relevance here. We also note that, regardless of their position prior to the start of the campaign, the following (at least) have all now indicated their support for a dedicated debate on the climate and biodiversity emergency:

- Fianna Fáil
- Labour
- Green Party
- People before Profit – Solidarity
- Social Democrats

You raise concerns with our suggestion of a specific strategy in inviting an appropriate audience for such a debate. We agree that this requires care. We would argue, in fact, that an age profile that simply matches the (voting) population as a whole is specifically *inappropriate* in this particular case. Nonetheless, this is - relatively speaking - a secondary issue. It should certainly not stand as a reason for rejecting the holding of a dedicated debate altogether.

Given these various considerations, we ask that you again consider our original request; or propose alternative approaches to ensure the *substantive* questions we have outlined get adequately aired during the remainder of the campaign.

Kind regards -

Barry McMullin, DCU
Hannah Daly, UCC
John Sweeney, MU
Clare Kelly, TCD

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