

Sustainability Committee

Report on the Committee's scrutiny of the UK Climate Change Bill: implications for Wales

Introduction

1. The UK Climate Change Bill was introduced into the House of Lords on 14 November 2007. The Bill proposes to set a mandatory target of 26-32% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2020, and a reduction of 60% by 2050. It also contains provisions to establish carbon budgetary periods of five years, and create a Committee on Climate Change to advise the UK Government and devolved administrations, as requested, on aspects of climate change. The Bill will also enable trading schemes to be established in any of the UK countries.

2. The Bill contains provisions that directly affect Wales in a number of ways:

- Welsh Ministers must be consulted on any proposed changes to agreed carbon budgets or where UK policies have an impact on policy in Wales;
- The Committee on Climate Change must, if requested to do so, provide information to Welsh Ministers on aspects of climate change;
- Welsh Ministers are required to occasionally report on the Assembly Government's activities in tackling climate change; and
- Welsh local authorities must have regard to a 'climate change measures report' to be drafted by Welsh Ministers.

3. The Sustainability Committee agreed to invite the Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing to an evidence session on the UK Climate Change Bill to allow Members to seek clarification on the implications for Wales. A Policy Manager from the UK Climate Change Bill Team also attended the evidence session, which took place on Thursday 24 January 2008.

Issues raised in evidence

4. Rachel Solomon-Williams opened the evidence session by explaining the main aims of the UK Climate Change Bill and the provisions contained within it. She reported that Government amendments to the Bill would allow the Welsh Assembly Government to produce guidance for local authorities on 'adaptation' and to introduce reporting procedures for local authorities in this area.

5. The Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing then outlined the implications of the Bill for Wales and reported that ongoing discussions between the UK Government and the Welsh Assembly Government on provisions relating to Wales had been positive and constructive.

6. In taking evidence from the Minister, the Committee sought clarification and further details on the following issues:

- The ability to enforce sanctions under a Judicial Review if the “legally binding” targets for reducing carbon emissions were not met;
- The rationale behind the exclusion of international aviation and shipping from the scope of the Bill;
- A commitment to introduce a concordat on how the UK Government and the devolved administrations will work together to achieve the targets in the Bill;
- The reason for setting carbon budgetary periods at five-year intervals, rather than shorter timescales;
- The use of a percentage reduction, rather than a reduction in total cumulative emissions;
- Adequacy of the 60% target for reduction in carbon emissions by 2050, given that evidence was beginning to emerge that an 80% target was required;
- The establishment of trading schemes by any of the UK countries; and
- Ways in which the “express power to allow the purchase [of] offset credits” could be used in practice.

Recommendations

7. The Committee welcomes the introduction of the UK Climate Change Bill and broadly agrees with the aims and provisions contained within the Bill. The Committee also welcomes the constructive approach of the UK Government and Welsh Assembly Government to ensuring that the Bill fully reflects Welsh priorities and interests.

Recommendation 1: The Committee notes that the Bill does not include international aviation or international shipping at this stage because methodologies for measuring both international aviation and international shipping have yet to be agreed. **The Committee recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government asks the UK Government, to continue to press for this issue to be resolved with the European Union and others as a matter of urgency.**

Recommendation 2: The Committee expresses concern that the target for reducing greenhouse gases by 2020 is set at a range of between 26 and 32 percent, rather than at a specific figure. **The Committee believes that a specific target would achieve the optimum results required and recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government encourages the UK Government to use a specific target of 32 percent.**

Recommendation 3: The Committee welcomes the UK Government’s commitment to consider increasing the target contained in the Bill for reductions in greenhouse gases by 2050 from 60 to 80 percent, should there be sufficient evidence to support this measure. The Committee notes that there is increasing evidence from the Tyndall Centre and others that 60 percent will not be sufficient to meet the 2⁰C threshold. **The Committee therefore recommends that the Welsh**

Assembly Government presses the UK Government on this issue to ensure that an appropriate and evidence-based target is set.

Recommendation 4: The Committee expresses concern that, whilst the targets are described by the UK Government as “legally binding”, details of enforcement of the targets are not included on the face of the Bill and that any sanctions would appear to be at the discretion of the courts in the event of a judicial review. **The Committee therefore recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government urges the UK Government to put in place a robust enforcement mechanism to ensure that the targets are met.**

Mick Bates AM,
Chair, Sustainability Committee