

A Visible Force for Change



Women's Resource and Development Agency Evidence Submission and Endorsement to Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs on the Climate Change Bill

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1. Introduction

The Women's Resource and Development Agency ([WRDA](#)) is a membership organisation that supports women's groups and networks across Northern Ireland. Our members are a key part of WRDA, they keep us relevant and ensure we are working on the issues which really matter to grass roots women. We keep our members up to date with the latest developments in the wider women's sector and provide them with opportunities to publicise their own work.

We also act as an information hub for the women's sector, while also striving to raise the profile of women's issues in the wider media. WRDA carries out regular policy work and lobbies decision makers on behalf of women. We work to enhance how the women's sector and women on the ground are communicating with all levels of government, ensuring women have their rightful say in the policies affecting them, including the development of measures to tackle the climate crisis.

As part of our vision to make women a visible force for change in Northern Ireland, we are actively lobbying and campaigning on issues that affect women. Despite almost 50 years of equality legislation, women continue to face many barriers, we are disadvantaged in economic, political and social life and we are not adequately protected from gender-based violence and misogyny.

We work with politicians, policy makers and influencers to advocate for law and policy that promotes women's rights and equality and for services that meet women's needs. We take a participative, grassroots approach to this work – all women have the right to be involved in decision-making and we aim to amplify the voices of the women who engage with the women's sector. WRDA are also the lead partner in the [Raise Your Voice](#) campaign against sexual harassment. We also work on a range of initiatives relating to health, including breast, cervical and bowel screening awareness and the Maternal Advocacy and Support project.

WRDA is submitting a brief evidence submission on the Climate Change Bill as addressing the climate emergency through a gendered-lens in an increasing area of work for us and our members.

We work with women's organisations, LGBT+ organisations, trade unions, the human rights sector, individual women and the broader voluntary and community sector to ensure that women are a visible force for change. We also provide the secretariat for the [Women's Policy Group](#) which is a platform for women working in policy and advocacy roles in different organisations to share their work and speak with a collective voice on key issues.

WRDA were heavily involved in the development of the [WPG COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan](#), which was launched in July 2020 and provided a comprehensive overview of the economic, social and health impacts of the pandemic on women in Northern Ireland and

their civil, political, economic and social human rights; including a wide-ranging number of recommendations relating to the climate crisis and creating a caring economy.

We will, therefore, be submitting both a brief WRDA evidence submission and an endorsement of the Women's Policy Group response to this call for views by the Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee on the Climate Change Bill.

WRDA is also one of the seven established women's sector organisations in the [Women's Regional Consortium](#) (WRC). The WRC is committed to working in partnership with each other, government, statutory organisations and women's organisations, centres and groups in disadvantaged and rural areas, to ensure that organisations working for women are given the best possible support in the work they do in tackling disadvantage and social inclusion. We would, therefore, like to also fully endorse the response from WRC to this call for views by the Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee on the Climate Change Bill.

Any questions or queries relating to these responses or endorsements can be directed to Rachel Powell, Women's Sector Lobbyist, rachel.powell@wrda.net.

2. Endorsement of WPG and WRC Member Responses

As stated previously, WRDA is the Secretariat for the Women's Policy Group (WPG) as well as one of the partners in the Women's Regional Consortium (WRC). Therefore, we would like to express our full endorsement of both of the aforementioned evidence submissions being submitted to the Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee on the Climate Change Bill.

3. WRDA: Putting Women at the Heart of Public Consultations:

In the current political climate, there has been unprecedented numbers of public consultations, surveys to support private members bills and calls for evidence submissions to a range of committees in relation to various forms of legislation. The Women's Sector has faced funding challenges for many years, alongside additional challenges in working to support women throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. WRDA produced a guide for public authorities on 'Putting Women at the Heart of Public Consultations', and we would like to take this opportunity to share this resource again.

Women in Northern Ireland have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic; financially, socially and in terms of health. It is crucial that legislative processes on issues relating to women are accessible and open, as women's lived experience is crucial to tackling the Climate Crisis.

It is regrettable that more time was set aside for stakeholder engagement with women in relation to the Climate Change Bill. WRDA produced guidelines for public authorities on putting women at the heart of public consultation and would like to ensure that the Committee is aware of these for future engagement relating to crucial pieces of legislation such as the Climate Change Bill.

The full guidelines can be read [here](#).

4. General Comments

We welcome the opportunity to submit evidence to the Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee on the Climate Change Bill. We also welcome the extensive work that has been done for the Climate Change Bill to reach this committee stage.

This response on behalf of the WRDA would like to endorse the overview given in the WPG response on the range of work and recommendations we have been making in the women's sector relation to Climate Justice since July 2020, as well as a recommended amendment for the Bill to embed Gender Equality as an aim of the Bill, as this is an area we currently feel could be expanded upon. It is imperative that urgent action is taken in Northern Ireland to tackle the climate emergency that we all face.

When the WPG published the COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan in July 2020, this included several recommendations on the need to treat the care sector (including paid and unpaid care) as a part of our essential infrastructure, and for care to be prioritised in any action to address the Climate Crisis as it is a low-emission, green and essential sector¹. The WPG also endorsed several recommendations from the UK Women's Budget Group and Women's Environmental Network on creating a Feminist Green New Deal. WRDA would like to take this opportunity again to highlight these recommendations we made in relation to the Climate Crisis through both the WPG response to the DAERA Minister's Climate Change Discussion Document² and the WPG Feminist Recovery Plan DAERA Bespoke Report³.

WRDA support all recommendations made by both the WPG and WRC in ensuring gender equality is accounted for in the Climate Change Bill.

4.1 Comments on the Climate Change Bill

As is the case in the WPG submission, WRDA welcomes the declaration of a Climate Emergency in the Northern Ireland Assembly in February 2020 and the work that has since been done to ensure that this Climate Change Bill has now reached Committee stage in its legislative process.

Northern Ireland remains the only part of the UK or Ireland with no binding greenhouse gas reduction targets and this needs to change urgently. It is crucial that any targets set in a Northern Ireland Climate Change Bill are based on the most up-to-date scientific evidence available, rather than political opinion.

In the creation of NI legislation, it is important to make robust legislation that sets achievable targets. The UK target to be net zero by 2050 is inadequate, and research by Tyndall Centre for Climate Action shows that Northern Ireland could achieve net-zero by 2042⁴. More ambitious targets for NI should be created given the existential threat of the climate emergency.

¹ See Women's Policy Group NI COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan 2020, particularly section 1.9 A Feminist Green Economy, p.61: <https://bit.ly/3k1IOen>

² WPG Response to DAERA Minister Climate Change Discussion Document (February 2021): <https://bit.ly/3zRn2PJ>

³ WPG COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan Departmental Summary: DAERA Bespoke Report (February 2021): <https://bit.ly/3hEJ2oO>

⁴ Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research (Feb 2021), 'Setting Climate Commitments for Northern Ireland', *University of Manchester*, <https://bit.ly/3hGo16r>

This Climate Change Bill [hereafter ‘this Bill’] currently at Committee stage includes the ambitious and achievable target for greenhouse gas reductions of net-zero by 2045 and WRDA welcomes this. In particular, we note that this Bill includes provisions for 5-year carbon budgets and is progressing through the Assembly.

The Climate Change Bill has been developed by legal experts, scientists, academics and environmentalists, and this is a welcome approach. This bill would build on commitments in the ‘New Decade, New Approach’ agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and create the necessary legislative basis for multi-level climate action.

WRDA also agrees with the below policy objectives of the Bill:

- Enable the mitigation of the impact of climate change in Northern Ireland,
- Establish a legally binding net-zero carbon target for Northern Ireland,
- Provide for the establishment and powers of a Northern Ireland Climate Commissioner and a Northern Ireland Climate Office,
- Guaranteeing existing environmental and climate protections.

We agree with these policy objectives for the following reasons:

- Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK and Ireland with no legally binding greenhouse gas reduction targets, and this must be rectified as a matter of urgency,
- Northern Ireland has a poor track record of performance on climate issues as our reduced emissions have been stagnant compared to those within the rest of the UK,
- There needs to be robust oversight on mitigating the impacts of climate change and it is important to have an independent office that is adequately funded and afforded the necessary information and enforcement powers,
- There should be no regression from any existing climate related protections, duties, standards and limits,
- The NI Assembly should take measures to ensure that NI is meeting targets in line with additional commitments and recommendations set out in international mechanisms such as:
 - The Paris Agreement, where there is a requirement to ensure action on reducing greenhouse gas emissions takes into account the “imperatives of a just transition of the workforce and creation of decent work and quality jobs”⁵;
 - as well as the CEDAW Committee recommendation that the UK ensures the equal participation of rural women and girls in policy making processes on disaster mitigation and climate change, in line with general recommendation No.37 on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change⁶ and,
 - International Labour Organisation (ILO) arguments that without effective gender mainstreaming, sustainability in a green economy is inconceivable as “gender equality must be at the core of promoting green economies that are low-carbon, resilient and sustainable”⁷.

We would also like to echo additional evidence, comments and all recommendations made and highlighted in the WPG and WRC responses in relation to investing in care to reduce emissions and the rationale for Northern Ireland legislation.

⁵ Just Transition in the Paris Climate Agreement - <https://bit.ly/3xIX2dR>

⁶ General Recommendation No. 37 on Gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change, CEDAW/C/GC/37, February 2018
[CEDAW/C/GC/37 \(ohchr.org\)](https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/cedaw/crc/gc/37)

⁷ Gender Equality and Green Jobs, International Labour Organization Policy Brief, 2015
[wcms_360572.pdf \(ilo.org\)](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-/dgrepublications/-/wcms_360572.pdf)

4.2 Response to Section 12(1) of the Climate Change Bill Consultation - Suggested Amendment

In response to Section 12(1) of the Climate Change Bill Consultation - ‘Are there any other measures not included in the Bill that you think should be included?’, we would like to suggest the following additions/amendments are made to this Bill:

Suggested Amendment:

- Add “and to ensure the just transition takes action to eliminate gender inequality through gender proofing the implementation of each stage of this bill, including sectoral plans and any subsequent budgeting and investment, to ensure men and women benefit equally”.

Suggested measures to be included:

- Specific measures to be taken to recognise and include the care sector as a part of our essential infrastructure and integral to addressing the Climate Crisis as an existing, low-emission and green sector.

ENDS

For questions or queries regarding this submission, please contact Rachel Powell, Women’s Sector Lobbyist, Women’s Resource and Development Agency, rachel.powell@wrda.net.

For more information on the additional work ongoing in WRDA in relation to women defending the environment, please contact info@wrda.net.