

Proposal for a National Climate Dialogue

Introduction

In September 2025, the Just Transition Commission provided the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment with recommendations for the next iteration of the National Dialogue on Climate Action (NDCA).

These recommendations touched on the various components of the NDCA including Climate Conversations, the National Stakeholder Forum and the National Youth Assembly on Climate. In conjunction to these, the Commission also recommended the NDCA establish a structured dialogue with decision-makers on climate policy which would be similar to the National Economic Dialogue (NED). The Commission view the development of this structure with importance particularly as the Government finalises and adopts the next Climate Action Plan (CAP), which will be first CAP developed by this Government, and will need to lay out the detailed policies and measures to reduce emissions in line with the second Carbon Budget to 2030.

The following memo provides background context to the need for a National Climate Dialogue and outlines the Commission's perspective on how this dialogue could be structured.

As noted in the Commission's September 2025 communication, the Commission view their advice and recommendations as an iterative and co-operative process with the NDCA, and look forward to providing continued advice and support to the NDCA on the matter.

Background

The National Dialogue on Climate Action (NCDCA) has provided various opportunities for civil society to contribute and discuss climate action and policy. However, to ensure a shared understanding on climate action and the challenges arising from both mitigation actions and adaptation to a changing climate, structured dialogue between elected officials, senior government officials, senior representatives of the pillars of social dialogue and other stakeholders is needed.

The need for an ongoing structured high-level climate dialogue was first raised at the National Economic Forum 2019 and has been repeatedly supported by the five established pillars of social dialogue. This collective support was expressed again when the Just Transition Taskforce advised the Government on the formation and role of the Just Transition Commission in 2024¹. The Taskforce comprised of senior representatives from the five pillars, the National Economic and Social Council (NESCC) and key Government Departments, and recommended for the Government to consider expanding existing social dialogue structures to accommodate ongoing high-level engagement with representatives of the different social pillars to address identified challenges in specific sectors, including macro level national issues related to the climate transition.

It followed, and was welcomed, that the Just Transition Commission incorporated representatives of the five Pillars and was explicitly given a role advising on the National Dialogue on Climate Action.

¹ Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment (2024), Report on the Taskforce on Just Transition: <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-climate-energy-and-the-environment/publications/just-transition-taskforce/>

The need for such dialogue was discussed again at this year's NED Climate and Sustainability breakout session in June². The overall NED Chair's report includes the following from the official rapporteur of that session, under the heading "More Opportunities for Engagement Needed":

"A number of strong views were expressed that there are insufficient opportunities for engagement - the National Economic Dialogue is extremely welcome but it is not enough. The Just Transition Commission was cited as a good example of broad engagement and there was a call for more such opportunities.

"In particular, there was agreement on the need for a sectoral specific forum, such as a 'Sectoral National Economic Dialogue', specifically on climate in advance of the next Climate Action Plan. There was a general view expressed that the sectors have more in common than in disagreement and more opportunities for engagement are required to dismantle siloes. There are many processes which are frustrating individuals, businesses and sectors who want to do the right thing in relation to the climate and more opportunities for engagement are needed to identify challenges and work together on practical solutions. There was general agreement that a sectoral specific mini-NED should be a concrete action arising from this breakout session."

Furthermore, when Minister O'Brien met with the Just Transition Commission in September 2025, he stated his intention to hold a "Climate NED", which was welcomed by Commission members at the time.

Proposed format for the National Climate Dialogue (NCD)

To support the proposed development of a NCD, the Commission recommends a format mirroring the National Economic Dialogue (NED) be utilised.

The inaugural NCD could be chaired by the Just Transition Commission's chair, Ali Sheridan, with the NCD consisting of three components - an opening plenary followed by two sets of breakout sessions and a closing plenary.

The day itself and the Chair's report could be key inputs to the preparation of the Climate Action Plan, and therefore should take place in good time during the preparation and before the finalization of the next Climate Action Plan.

The opening plenary session

Similar to the NED, the opening plenary would consist of a "summit table" formation, and a wider selection of stakeholder representatives viewing from a theatre style setting.

The four sides of the summit table could represent the Government; other elected representatives; civil society; and economic interest groups, state agencies and other relevant bodies and experts.

As with the NED, to represent the Government, the opening plenary could be attended by the Taoiseach, Tánaiste, and cabinet Ministers that are responsible for a sectoral emission ceiling under the Climate Act. In the case of other elected representatives, the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate, Environment and Energy has a long track record of productive cross-party collaboration.

² Department of Finance (2025), Chair's Report – National Economic Dialogue 2025:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-finance/publications/chairs-report-national-economic-dialogue-2025/>

At the “summit table” representatives for civil society could include two representatives of (at least) the five pillars of social dialogue, and also youth. Economic interest groups, state agencies and other relevant bodies and experts could be represented by the Just Transition Commission, the Climate Change Advisory Council, the EPA, the SEAI, the ESRI, NESC, Teagasc, CRU and Creative Ireland.

As part of the opening plenary and following an opening address from the Taoiseach, a climate state of play could be provided by the EPA, the CCAC, the ESRI, and the Just Transition Commission.

The representatives viewing from the theatre style setting could include a broader representative of both civil society groups, relevant academic experts and state and economic actors. These groups would be able to participate in the opening plenary through a Q&A session and also in the breakout sessions.

To ensure adequate representation of seldom heard voices and vulnerable groups, the Just Transition Commission could work with relevant stakeholders to ensure a broadly representative list of invitees.

The breakout sessions

The second part of the day could consist of two sets of parallel thematic sessions each lasting 75 to 90 minutes. The proposal is that the first set of breakouts would align with the main sectoral emissions ceilings and relevant Departmental responsibilities:

- Agriculture, forestry and land use (AFOLU)
- Electricity
- Transport
- Buildings
- Industry

The second set of breakout sessions would capture key cross-cutting themes, such as:

- Financing the transition
- Fairness (social and intergenerational)
- Nature
- Public participation and communication
- Adaptation

As with the NED, the first breakout session could be chaired by the relevant cabinet minister.

To provide a review of the breakout discussions, relevant experts from academia, NESC, and in this case the Just Transition Commission, would form a Rapporteur Team, reporting to the Chair.

The Closing Plenary

Returning to the opening plenary format, the Chair, based on feedback from the rapporteurs, could provide a topline summary of the breakout sessions. With the Minister for Climate, Energy and the Environment providing a closing address.

Follow-up

As with the NED, a Chair’s report would be issued with more detailed reports on the areas of convergence and divergence in the breakout sessions.