

## Energy Security and Climate Change Bill 2012: Second Stage [Private Members]

I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Bill and I commend Deputy Catherine Murphy for bringing it to the House. The opportunity to bring forward legislation as a backbench Deputy or a Deputy who is not a member of a Government party is a great opportunity and should be recognised as such. When I had the opportunity to do so prior to Christmas I found it very exciting. All those who criticise Friday sittings should recognise them as an opportunity for people to bring forward legislation and have it properly debated with spokespersons from all of the parties and the Minister in attendance and get some proper work done. I would like to see more of it. We should increase the number of Bills taken on Fridays and increase the number of Friday sittings. It is positive for the work we do in the House.

There is a practice on Fridays which is quite welcome and I would like to see it done on other days. A Deputy wishing to speak in the debate on Friday must wait to be called based on the order of entry into the Chamber. On other days we apply for a speaking slot two days in advance, and this is when we come in to speak after which we leave. It is not constructive to positive debate as we do not listen to each other. It is no good to walk in here, give a speech and leave. It does not serve anything except putting something on the record.

Climate change is a huge area and from today's debate we see how it touches every aspect of what we do and the role a government has. It is important we work together with other countries and international organisations, but we should not set our pace for change by their watch because it can be slow. Anyone who has worked with an international organisation knows that moving at the pace of 27 countries or 180 countries can be slow. If we think we can move quicker and forge a better path then we should do so, cognisant of what is happening abroad and what other countries are trying to achieve. Why not be ambitious ourselves and go for it?

We must be smarter about energy in this country with regard to what we use and how we use it. Fighting to protect the environment, improve it and make our presence in it more sustainable has value, and while it is an end in itself it is also fundamental to many other aspects of our lives including reducing waste, reducing costs, becoming more efficient, improving our health and happiness and achieving food and water security which is crucial and will become more important in the coming decades. It is also important for increasing investment in our economy and job creation: if Dublin is to be a great capital it must be a green capital and we need to recognise this. We should be pursuing this agenda for selfish reasons as well as for the greater good.

I have limited previous experience in this area having worked for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organisation in Vienna which aims to end nuclear weapons testing with a view to improving security in the world by abolishing nuclear weapons. It also recognises the great poison nuclear weapons tests were to the world. In hundreds of tests over the past 70 years we have released poison into the atmosphere which has done incredible damage to people, local environments and the ecosystem. Unfortunately countries such as North Korea continue to poison us. From a research and development perspective, the system we built to monitor when nuclear weapon testing occurred had an unintended consequence which was a global monitoring system for the health of the environment and the Earth. We did not know this would come about but it did, and now we use it and it has benefits such as tsunami warnings and examining changes in environmental patterns in local ecosystems and regional areas.

In that regard, research and development is important. Continued investment of public money in science research and development is essential. We must ensure that bodies such as the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies receive appropriate necessary funding for the work they do, which is essential to everything we are discussing here. They require funding to continue to advance our understanding of the technologies and mitigation measures involved, as well as ways of improving energy usage.

The Bill contains some very good ideas which I like. I hope we can take some elements of it forward. The setting of national targets to reduce energy demand is a very good idea, as is having targets for reducing non-renewable energy. I note the Bill provides for a five-year national action plan, but ten years might be preferable, with medium-term plans every three years and key performance indicators being reviewed annually. We should perhaps be more ambitious and set it on a longer timeframe because these issues require consideration and we are talking about changes over a long period.

The presentation of an annual transition statement to the Dáil is a good idea also, as is the establishment of an independent commission producing independent reports. It is important for such a commission's integrity to have such independence so that we can have faith in, and trust, its advice. It should be able to challenge the Government on these issues. The Government does not have a monopoly on information and advice.

Previous contributors to this debate have mentioned incidents in their own constituencies, which are evidence of climate change. We have had severe flooding in Dublin, including my own constituency of Dublin South East. Sadly, it has seriously affected many people. Extreme weather happens, however, and it is not new to the 21st century. Neither is it necessarily, *de facto*, because of what we did in the 20th century. Whatever the cause of these events, we must recognise our own role in these disasters, including bad, wrong or over development which can drastically affect the impact of these events. This was certainly the case in Dublin in recent years but have we learned the lesson? I do not think we have.

I commend the significant amount of work that has been done to date in this area by the Minister, Deputy Hogan. He is fully committed to this matter and we have discussed it in detail on many occasions. I absolutely support his approach on a macro level.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the Poolbeg incinerator which is a local issue but is, nonetheless, important to the Dublin region. I do think it is the wrong plant, the wrong size and in the wrong area. I would also caution against an extension of the Ringsend wastewater treatment plant. I do not mean to be local about this but it is not often that we have the chance to address these issues in the Chamber.

I fully support the Minister's approach and what he is trying to do in his framework plan. I look forward to the Government Bill coming before the House when I will contribute to the debate, bringing some of the ideas we have heard today to that discussion.