

# Ireland to unveil bold plan to tackle climate emergency

Varadkar reveals ideas to curb greenhouse gases and move towards net-zero carbon emissions by 2050

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Students in Dublin join a global protest in March for action to tackle climate change. Photograph: Niall Carson/PA

**Ireland** has unveiled an ambitious plan to tackle the climate emergency by weaning the state, businesses, farms and households off fossil fuels.

The government published a long-awaited report on Monday outlining more than 180 measures to curb the country's greenhouse gas emissions and set a path for net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

It envisages a rise in carbon taxes, a multibillion-euro scheme to retro-fit houses, almost a million electric vehicles and a number of other measures to change behaviour by

institutions, companies and individuals.

The taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, said: “We are going to change how electricity is produced and consumed, how our homes and workplaces are heated; the way we travel; the types of vehicles we purchase, and how food is produced. Above all, we are going to decouple emissions growth from economic growth ... This plan represents the sum of our hopes for the future.”

Ireland is one of the European Union’s **worst carbon emission offenders** and is facing fines of more than €250m for missing 2020 targets on reducing emissions and adopting renewable energy.

Trends in agriculture and transport mean that emissions are set to continue rising in the next few years, risking even steeper fines for missing 2030 goals and raising questions over if and how **Ireland** will make its bold plan a reality.

The Fine Gael-led centre-right government is entering a general election cycle and is wary of alienating poorer and rural voters with higher carbon taxes – the trigger for France’s yellow-vest protests. However, support for Ireland’s Green party surged in local and European elections last month, reflecting growing concern over the climate crisis.

The Climate Action Plan to Tackle Climate Breakdown drew on a report published earlier this year by an all-party committee.

Richard Bruton, the minister for climate action, said it put Ireland on a “trajectory” to net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, a significantly bolder ambition than the previous commitment to reduce emissions by 80% – but it is an aspiration, not a binding target.

The report also commits Ireland to 2030 EU goals – to avert fines estimated at €6bn, it must slash emissions from 60m to 33m tonnes – by planting more trees and buying carbon credits from other countries.

Other goals include:

Boost the use of renewable sources for power generation from 30% to 70% of electricity. New onshore and offshore wind turbines are expected to replace peat- and coal-powered power stations.

Pave the way for 950,000 electric vehicles by expanding charging networks and banning the sale of petrol and diesel cars from 2030.

Retrofit 500,000 homes and 400,000 heat pumps to make buildings more energy-efficient, offering householders “easy payback methods”. Oil and gas boilers will be prohibited in new homes by 2025.

Eliminate non-recyclable plastic and ban single-use plastic plates, cutlery, straws, balloon sticks and cotton buds.

The central strategy involves increasing carbon taxes from €20 to €80 per tonne by 2030 – a politically fraught exercise that will require cushioning poor people and rural dwellers from higher fuel and heating prices.

Another measure targets financial services: pension providers will have to disclose whether they hold fossil fuel assets, giving pension-holders the option to switch providers.

Leftwing parties, including Sinn Féin, have opposed a carbon tax increase, while farmers have assailed Varadkar for saying he is trying to eat less meat to reduce his carbon footprint. Protesters greeted him last month with the chant:

“Where’s the beef, you vegan?”