

Minutes

All Party Group on Climate Action

28 January 2022 | 10:00 am – 12:00 pm

At: Virtual

Members in attendance: Rachel Woods MLA, Kellie Armstrong MLA, Pat Catney MLA, Cllr Maeve O'Neill, Cllr Siobhan Currie, Cllr Brian Smyth, Cllr Martin Gregg, Cllr Michael Henderson, Cllr Stephen Dunlop, Cllr Roisin Lynch, Cllr Emmett Doyle, Cllr Lauren Kendall.

In attendance: Nichola Hughes, Darren Kelly, Francesca Di Palo, Marcus Malley, Alan Richie, Amanda Slevin, Andy Frew, Anne Ford, Austin Orr, Barry Patience, Adrian Blythe, Christine Watts, Ciaran McGrath, Ciaran Fox, Claire Flynn, Danielle Hollinger, David Cowdrey, Declan Allison, Donna Knowles, Emma Adair, Ian Montgomery, Jamie Rea, Jen Patterson, Jim Mairs, Joe McKearney, Julie Mitchell, Karen Arbuckle, Karen Philips, Kieran McCambridge, Liam McNally, Magnus MacMathuna, Marcella Kinsella, Mark Fielding, Michael Boyd, Michelle Farmer, Nigel Downey, Karen Smyth, Pearse McCann, Peter Doran, Richard McLernon, Robert McCreery, Robert Clements, James Orr, Stephanie McEvoy.

Attendees: 56

Apologies: John Blair MLA, Cllr Eddie Thompson, Cllr Robert Irvine, Cllr Billy Webb.

1	Opening Remarks
	Rachel Woods MLA (RW), Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting.
1.1	Apologies
	Apologies were recorded.
1.2	Chair's Business
	<p>RW noted the publication of the Northern Ireland Energy Strategy and Action Plan. She expressed disappointed that department officials were unable to attend the meeting to brief the group on the strategy.</p> <p>Action: RW to write to Minister Lyons to invite his officials to brief the group on the new Energy Strategy when it re-forms in May.</p> <p>RW noted the consultation on Strategic Planning Policy on Renewable and Low Carbon Energy closes 11 February 2022.</p>
2	Meeting Admin
2.1	Minutes of meeting on 26 November 2021
	Minutes of the meeting on 26 November were approved: proposed by Pat Catney MLA and seconded by Cllr Brian Symth.

<p>3</p>	<p>Climate Change Legislation</p> <p>RW welcomed Nick Henry (NH), AERA Committee Clerk, who provided an update on the progress of the two Climate Change Bills, outlined key differences between the Bills and recommendations from the AERA Committee on the No. 2 Bill.</p> <p>In terms of scheduling, the Executive Bill (No. 2 Bill) takes precedence over the Private Members Bill (No. 1 Bill). It will be considered by the Assembly on Tuesday 1 February. A date for consideration of the Private Members Bill is yet to be scheduled.</p> <p>View presentation here.</p> <p>Contact: Nick.Henry@niassembly.gov.uk</p> <p>Q&A followed.</p> <p>RW asked is there anything in the procedural rules that would prevent an amendment to change the target of the Minister's Bill?</p> <p>NH confirmed there is technically no reason why the target cannot be amended if it is supported by a majority in the Assembly.</p> <p>RW thanked NH for his engagement with the All Party Group.</p>
<p>4</p>	<p>Clean Air, Health and Buildings</p> <p>RW welcomed Neil Rowland (QUB), Tom Woolley (UK Clean Air Steering Committee) and Austin Orr (British Lung Foundation).</p> <p>View presentation here.</p> <p>Contacts: N.Rowland@qub.ac.uk tom.woolley@btconnect.com aorr@auk-blf.org.uk</p> <p>Q&A followed.</p> <p>RW thanked the presenters. She noted that DAERA has not yet published a Clean Air Quality Strategy for Northern Ireland and asked why indoor air quality hadn't been considered in the Strategy Discussion Document?</p> <p>Tom Woolley (TW) noted that DAERA officials seemed unaware about the issue when he contacted them. Almost all funding for air quality research to date has focussed on outdoor air quality, despite people spending most of their time indoors. There is very little indoor air quality monitoring happening however home test kits can be purchased.</p> <p>TW noted that the worst indoor air quality tends to be in hospitals and GP surgeries due to use of synthetic carpets, high VOC paints etc. He referenced a landmark report by the Royal College of Physicians (RCP) and the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) that says indoor air pollution may have caused or contributed to 99,000 deaths annually in Europe.</p> <p>Report: https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/news/doctors-say-40000-deaths-year-linked-air-pollution</p> <p>Cllr Maeve O'Neill (MON) asked if there is more that healthcare workers can do to address this issue and if any other countries have successfully tackled this issue?</p>

	<p>TW highlighted doctors in Belgium are trained to identify links between air quality and health. They carry out home visits to check in case illness is caused by environmental factors. He said there are plenty of examples of ‘healthy buildings’ in the UK and Europe. He noted the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health is interested in this issue, but more needs to be done.</p> <p>Examples of healthy buildings: https://www.bigrentz.com/blog/healthy-buildings</p> <p>Andy Frew (AF) noted significant health benefits when the NI Housing Executive moved from coal to oil/gas central heating systems. He asked if government is using health appraisals to weigh up the economic benefits of different forms of heating?</p> <p>TW said he wasn’t aware of any research that had been commissioned by NIHE or government of this nature. He noted that Oil Fired Central Heating (OFCH) can be a bigger source of indoor air pollution than road transport emissions.</p> <p>Ciaran Fox (CF) asked what the top three actions are to improve indoor air quality?</p> <p>TW noted the biggest cause of indoor air problems in Northern Ireland are mould and volatile organic compounds (VOCs). Often new builds have high levels of mould from the outset as they are often left vacant and get damp during the construction phase. The key is to use breathable materials and require vapour permeability in new homes, combined with a ventilation strategy and rigorous testing for ventilation, all of which could be enforced through Building Regulations.</p> <p>Kellie Armstrong MLA (KA) asked if retrofit is making matters worse by creating the conditions for mould formation?</p> <p>TW noted that research is currently underway to test the impact of defective retrofit measures on indoor air quality.</p> <p>AF noted that Northern Ireland is the most humid part of the UK. He highlighted that Denmark is using solar air collectors to reduce indoor humidity and provide space heating.</p> <p>KA noted that a new Housing Strategy will be coming forward and that NIHE / DfC should work with air quality experts to ensure insulation targets are achieved without harming the health of residents through defective retrofit measures.</p> <p>RW thanked TW, NR and AO for their engagement with the group.</p>
5	<p>Rights of Nature</p> <p>RW welcomed Peter Doran (QUB) and James Orr (Friends of the Earth) to provide a presentation on Rights of Nature.</p> <p>Rights of nature is centred on the idea that nature's rights should be recognised and incorporated into human ethics and laws. This is underpinned by two lines of reasoning: that the same ethics that justify human rights, also justify nature's rights, and, that humans' own survival depend on healthy ecosystems.</p> <p>Rights of Nature law recognises that an ecosystem has the right to exist, flourish, regenerate its vital cycles, and naturally evolve without human-caused disruption. Furthermore, when an ecosystem is declared a “subject of rights,” it has the right to legal representation by a guardian who will act on their behalf and in their best interest. This guardian is typically an individual or a group of individuals well versed in the care and management of the ecosystem.</p>

	<p>View presentation here.</p> <p>Contacts: P.F.Doran@qub.ac.uk james.orr@foe.co.uk</p> <p>Q&A followed.</p> <p>RW asked which countries are making progress in transferring this concept into law?</p> <p>PD noted that Latin America and New Zealand have both made significant policy advances. In 2008, Ecuador became the first country in the world to formally recognise and implement the Rights of Nature. It is a relatively new concept, but there is some progress to report internationally.</p> <p>Further examples: http://www.harmonywithnatureun.org/rightsOfNature/ https://www.centerforenvironmentalrights.org</p> <p>JO noted the source of the law ultimately comes from the community. Communities must ask if laws are adequate and challenge law makers if they aren't. He gave an example of a case in the US where a watercourse was the plaintiff against a commercial developer.</p> <p>KA asked if protection for nature could be incorporated into building regulations or planning?</p> <p>PD said it was not within the remit of building control but could be considered in planning. He highlighted that this movement is not about looking at individual organisms, it's about treating the problem at ecosystem scale and recognising that nature has a right to flourish.</p> <p>KS asked if there are any ways of helping decision makers comprehend and understand the difference between the concepts of 'natural capital' and 'rights of nature'?</p> <p>PD noted that natural capital is the wrong kind of framing. The main problem is that it is centred on an anthropocentric worldview that considers humans to be the most important thing in the Universe and places a lot of emphasis on ownership and acquisition. It is a myth that we can pursue infinite economic growth on a finite planet. We need to step out of this kind of value system to fully embrace the concept of Rights of Nature.</p> <p>JO closed by stating that recognising the rights of nature also recognises human rights because we are nature and nature is us.</p> <p>RW thanked PD and JO for their engagement with the group.</p>
6	AOB
	<p>RW noted that there was no further business.</p>
7	Summary and close
	<p>RW thanked all the speakers for their informative presentations.</p> <p>She closed by reflecting on the group's achievements since it was established in</p>

January 2020. In 2 years of running the group there were 14 meetings and average meeting attendance was 53 (Elected Members: 14; Observers: 39). **RW** thanked speakers and observers for the lively debates and discussions. She thanked the Vice-Chair (John Blair) for stepping in and chairing meetings on her behalf from time to time and the Secretariat (Sustainable NI) for setting up the group and organising meetings.

There will be a pause in meetings for the Assembly Elections with purdah due to commence on 28 March. Sustainable NI is keen to keep the group going next mandate and will endeavour to involve Councillors as well as MLAs.

RW thanked everyone for attending and wished Assembly Members luck in the upcoming elections.

Meeting closed at 12.05.