



An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Eacnamaíoch agus Shóisialta
National Economic & Social Council

Grounding the Recovery in
Sustainable Development:

A Statement from the Council

No.152 December 2020

National Economic and Social Council

Constitution and Terms of Reference

1. The main tasks of the National Economic and Social Council shall be to analyse and report on strategic issues relating to the efficient development of the economy and the achievement of social justice.
2. The Council may consider such matters either on its own initiative or at the request of the Government.
3. Any reports which the Council may produce shall be submitted to the Government, and shall be laid before each House of the Oireachtas and published.
4. The membership of the Council shall comprise a Chairperson appointed by the Government in consultation with the interests represented on the Council, and
 - Three persons nominated by agricultural and farming organisations;
 - Three persons nominated by business and employers organisations;
 - Three persons nominated by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions;
 - Three persons nominated by community and voluntary organisations;
 - Three persons nominated by environment organisations;
 - Four other persons nominated by the Government, including the Secretaries General of the Department of Finance, the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, the Department of Housing, Planning and Heritage, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.
 - Seven people possessing knowledge, experience and skills which the Taoiseach considers relevant to the functions of the Council
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7. The numbers, remuneration and conditions of service of staff are subject to the approval of the Taoiseach.
8. The Council shall regulate its own procedure.



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Abbreviations

CCAC

Climate Change
Advisory Council

CLLD

Community-led Local
Development

DCCA

Department of
Communications,
Climate Action and
Environment

EEAC

European
Environment
and Sustainable
Development Advisory
Councils (EEAC) (the
EEAC Network)

EPA

Environmental
Protection Agency

EU

European Union

GRCN

Global Resilient Cities
Network

InCase

Irish Natural Capital
for Sustainable
Environments

MFF

Multiannual financial
framework

NO₂

Nitrogen dioxide

OGP

Office for Government
Procurement

PES

Payments of
Ecosystem Services

RCC

Resilient Cities
Catalyst

SDGs

Sustainable
Development Goals

UN

United Nations

ZEV

Zero-Emission Vehicle

In Ireland and globally, governments are grappling with how to bring about a recovery from the impacts of Covid-19. The context for action is still evolving, and uncertainty remains about the medical and epidemiological course of the pandemic. The scale of the urgency and level of transformative change required to deliver on Ireland's 2030 climate targets and the Sustainable Development Goals cannot be overstated.

However, there is strong agreement at EU level and in Ireland that the response to the Covid-19 crisis can also be used to tackle long-standing economic, social and environmental challenges. Given the scale of investment needed to address the impacts of Covid-19, there may be a 'once in a century' moment to reset towards a low-carbon and resilient economy, rather than return to normal.

This Statement from the Council stresses the importance of grounding the recovery in sustainable development. It should be considered alongside the Council's other work on economic and social issues and that of the Secretariat on the Covid-19 crisis.

Four points are outlined:

First, there is increased recognition of the profound connection, reinforced by the Covid-19 crisis, between the economy, society and the environment, and of the need to keep them in balance.

This Council Statement draws particular attention to environmental sustainability, given that urgent measures are needed to address the climate change and biodiversity emergencies. It is widely accepted that, if we rely only on the current climate commitments of the Paris Agreement, temperatures can be expected to rise 3.2°C by the end of this century.

The biodiversity crisis and climate change each represent a global catastrophe that will require unprecedented global coordination where economic considerations become of secondary importance to existential ones.

The Council Statement reiterates its support for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda. Delivering progress on the SDGs is more pressing than ever and it is important to address each goal and the complex interplay between them.

Second, internationally and in Ireland there is strong consensus that this is the moment to reset in terms of ambition and action to reduce emissions and biodiversity loss.

The Government has outlined its commitment to a sustainable future and recovery in the new Programme for Government, 'Our Shared Future'. It recognises there is an opportunity for doing things differently.

The Council Statement outlines how the task of recovery, and linking it with sustainable development, is considerable but achievable. Investing in nature and in reducing emissions will create jobs and at the same time become a means of reimagining our economy and society, and crucially the relationship between them and our natural environment.

However, we face difficult choices and tensions. We need to balance priorities in ways that enable Ireland to thrive, protect the wellbeing of people, and protect and restore the very foundation on which our lives depend: the air we breathe, the food we eat, the water we drink.

Third, Covid-19 has shown that it is possible to change – and to change radically.

The experience in lockdown, and the responses to the crisis, have signalled new ways of working and living. For example, practical changes are taking place which provide inspiration for further action such as ‘active mobility’ projects with more segregated cycling and walking, while digital technology has been deployed in new ways to connect and conduct business.

This possibility of change can be applied to how we tackle the climate change and biodiversity crises.

Fourth, the ways in which the policy system frames and approaches sustainability and wellbeing can be important drivers of change.

The Council Statement supports the importance of just transition and engagement in climate action. It argues for brave ‘mission-oriented’ actions to achieve sustainable development. It is in the *doing* and ‘nuts and bolts’ of these actions that ambition becomes everyday practice.

The Council will work to help the Irish policy system to embrace these opportunities. It will continue to contribute to the framing and analysis of sustainable development and climate action, including the importance of just transition and engagement. It will also examine specific projects, such as green conditionality and investment, and building resilience.

1.1 Introduction

This is a Statement by the Council on the importance of grounding the recovery in sustainable development. It provides strong endorsement for the principle of linking economic, social and environmental priorities.

Covid-19 has shown that it is possible to change and to change radically: it resulted in a critical economic stop and a virtual cessation in the movement of people. The status quo or business-as-usual, which seemed so inimical to change and thus detrimental to climate and environment, was disrupted. This disruption has presented enormous challenges for businesses, workers and the unemployed, service providers, both private and public, and the public finances.

The crisis also revealed strengths in the level of Irish public solidarity: a generally swift and effective response by the community and voluntary sector and public administration, and a positive response by economic actors where it was possible for them to act.

While uncertainty remains about the medical and epidemiological course of the pandemic, the key policy focus is how to bring about a recovery and to address these challenges.

Considerable uncertainty remains about how long the pandemic will last and how tackling it will affect economies. This statement acknowledges that the context for action is still evolving, and it is somewhat tentative in offering concrete advice. What is not tentative, however, is the Council's conviction that how Ireland responds must strike a balance between nature, society's wellbeing and the economy.

The scale of the urgency and level of transformative change required to deliver on Ireland's 2030 climate targets and the Sustainable Development Goals cannot be overstated. The Council reiterates its support for urgent action to address the climate and biodiversity emergencies. This is more relevant and urgent than ever, and requires efforts to address each and every goal and their complex interplay.

In facing this pandemic, Ireland has not shied away from radical action. This experience of facing extreme challenges will help equip us to develop resilience and adaptability going forward. Responding to Covid-19 can bring transformative change necessary for our wellbeing and for a balanced economy, society and environment. There is an opportunity to use the crisis and the recovery to make tangible and meaningful progress on the existential crises of climate change and

biodiversity loss, in order to bring about rapid emissions reductions and restore habitats and biodiversity. The need for urgent environmental sustainability measures to address climate change and protect biodiversity are necessary, and predate Covid-19 (UNEP, 2019).¹

The core argument in this Council Statement is that those same measures, and other measures not yet fully developed, can and must drive the recovery. The Covid-19 crisis has forcefully highlighted the deep interdependencies between nature, society and the economy. Reflecting this, the measures taken to underpin recovery can help us to reimagine our economy and society and, crucially, the relationship between them and our natural environment.

The Council, in all its work, considers sustainability in social, economic and environmental terms, and recognises that the three are interconnected and interdependent. This Statement, which draws particular attention to environmental sustainability, should be considered alongside the Council's other work, and that of the Secretariat on the Covid-19 crisis. There is recognition, too, that we face, and will continue to face, difficult choices and tensions as to how to balance these priorities in ways that enable Ireland to thrive, protect the wellbeing of people, and protect and restore the very foundation on which our lives depend: the air we breathe, the food we eat, the water we drink.

The overall structure of the Statement is as follows.

- Section 1.2 outlines the connection, reinforced by the Covid-19 crisis, between the economy, society and the environment.
- Section 1.3 argues that, internationally and in Ireland, this is the moment to reset in terms of ambition and action to reduce emissions and biodiversity loss.
- Section 1.4 sets out the contribution that NESC will make to help the Irish policy system embrace this opportunity.
- Section 1.5 stresses the importance of just transition and engagement.
- Section 1.6 concludes.

1.2 Environment, Economy and Society

A wide range of studies underline how our economy and wellbeing are wholly dependent on stable climate and natural systems (Juniper & Howard Boyd, 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic has starkly demonstrated the interdependencies that deeply bind our natural, social and economic systems (Haigh & Bäunker, 2020). The

¹ If we rely only on the current climate commitments of the Paris Agreement, temperatures can be expected to rise 3.2°C by the end of this century.

pandemic illustrates how much we depend on one another—one humanity living on one planet—for our health systems as well as for our food systems and supply chains (Troëng *et al.*, 2020).

It has highlighted the relationship between good air quality and health. Poor air quality is a major health risk, causing lung diseases, cardiovascular diseases and cancer (DCCA, 2020). During the pandemic, improved air quality has been reported in cities in the UK (OECD, 2020a; Helm, 2020). In Ireland, key contributors to our pollution levels fell dramatically during the first lockdown period, with decreases of up to 50 per cent in nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) reported by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) from its air-quality stations around the country (EPA, 2020). However, this has not been sustained (O’Brien, 2020; EPA, 2020).

Measures taken to protect lives have also limited economic activity and therefore reduced carbon emissions, with an expected 8 per cent reduction in emissions globally in 2020 (IEA, 2020). Estimates for Ireland vary between a reduction of 5 per cent or 3 million tonnes (MaREI, 2020) and 9.5 per cent (De Bruin *et al.*, 2020). This is likely to be temporary without policy intervention, given that the rebound in the global economy could result in emission levels rising quickly to previous levels. For example, indications from cities emerging from lockdown suggest that car usage is returning to normal and in some cases increasing. Dublin quickly saw a 75 per cent return to ‘normal’ traffic levels (Kelly, 2020b).

The IEA argues that globally, it will require ambitious and purposive policy action to avoid the rebound that business-as-usual would bring (IEA, 2020). *Time* magazine describes 2020 as ‘Our Last, Best Chance to Save the Planet’, drawing on evidence to point to the fading opportunity to reduce emissions in an orderly way through thoughtful reconfiguring of economies (Worland, 2020).

Over longer timeframes, Covid-19 may have serious physical and mental health consequences through its effect on the global economy, on global and regional food systems, and on available resources for disaster response and social protection (We Mean Business Coalition, 2020a). The poorest and most vulnerable people are affected disproportionately by the pandemic, including women, children, older persons, persons with disabilities, migrants and refugees and informal sector workers. The Report of the UN Secretary General on progress towards the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) points to the impact of Covid-19 as likely to push tens of millions of people back into extreme poverty and hunger (UN, 2020).

The crisis has cast light on the potential frailty of business-as-usual. For example, global value chains have been severely disrupted as the flow of materials and goods necessary for the current model of manufacturing production was halted (Seric *et al.*, 2020). Countries, such as Germany, are reflecting on how value chains could be shortened in the production of system-critical goods. Irish pharma businesses are also considering this in relation to the supply of personal protective equipment (Paul, 2020). A renewed emphasis on resilience, spurred by the pandemic, shines a light on frailties in Ireland’s enterprise model. Before the crisis, elements of this related to the domination of our goods exports by a small number of firms and the growing relative importance of specific taxation revenue streams (NCC, 2020). It is not yet clear how the continued crisis will shift that debate and those concerns. There is a view that, while the probability of a shock appears low currently, with

known risks, the impact of such a shock would be considerable, making these issues a risk worth considering today. Hidden risks such as sourcing ‘high-quality oil’, for example, could substantially increase that probability. For Ireland, given these concerns, it will be particularly important to reflect on what the crisis has revealed in relation to the potential vulnerability of global food systems, and to ensure that they remain resilient.

Covid-19 has revealed the inadequacies in healthcare, wages, job-quality and social safety-net systems, and raised societal concerns about inequality (WEF, 2020). The impacts have been more severe in disadvantaged communities in terms of exposure to the virus, especially with existing poor health conditions. Lockdown, social distancing and cancellations to routine care are reportedly exacting a heavier social and economic price on those already experiencing inequality (Bibby *et al.*, 2020; BBC, 2020).

In these ways, the crisis has illustrated that we are part of a complex system of environmental, sociopolitical and economic systems that are constantly reconfiguring (Hynes, 2020). Increasing understanding as to how these linkages and connections affect our wellbeing will be vital; for example, through cross-species virus transmission (Fine & Kang, 2020).² The crisis has shown that what we do to the natural world can have a negative impact on human health and wellbeing (McDonagh, 2020).

As outlined in the introduction, responding to the crisis reaffirms the importance of the SDGs, themselves deeply built upon recognition of the connection between environment, economy and society. However, despite some progress in addressing certain SDGs, to date progress in environmental sustainability has been slow – and environmental goals in Ireland have been particularly poorly served. The Sustainable Progress Index 2020 from Social Justice Ireland reports the low relative ranking of Ireland’s response to:

- SDG 7 ‘Affordable and clean energy’;
- SDG12, ‘Responsible consumption and production’;
- SDG13, ‘Climate action’; and
- SDG14, ‘Life below water’ (Clark *et al.*, 2020).

Critically, biodiversity is not being adequately addressed. The Aichi Biodiversity targets³ in the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity were not met by many countries, but Ireland’s response to biodiversity restoration has been poor (IUCN, 2020). Ireland has invested relatively little in biodiversity conservation. The International Union for Conservation of Nature calls for OECD countries to contribute at least 0.3 per cent

² In ‘wet markets’ across the globe, live and dead animals—including many wildlife species—are sold for human consumption, which increases the extent of zoonotic diseases (that spread to humans from animals).

³ The Aichi targets are a set of 20 global targets under the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020; see <https://biodiversity-a-z.org/content/aichi-biodiversity-targets.11/09/20>.

of their GDP for biodiversity conservation. Ireland currently spends 0.13 per cent of GDP in this area (Green News, 2019; Morrison & Bullock, 2018).

The significance of policy coherence to deliver sustainable development underpins a body of work on mainstreaming governance frameworks, particularly on the implementation of the SDGs (see for example, (Monkelbaan, 2019). In Ireland, the Sustainable Development Goals National Implementation Plan commits Ireland to mainstreaming the SDGs across all policy areas (Government of Ireland, 2018). Considerable challenges remain to effectively embed the goals to core policy design and delivery.

The challenge is to ensure that the crisis inspires fresh thinking and action on sustainable development. In particular, lessons are being drawn from Covid-19 to prepare for the response to climate change (Hayes, 2020). The pandemic crisis and climate change each represent a global catastrophe that will require unprecedented global coordination, where economic considerations become of secondary importance to existential ones. This may revitalise the Conference of the Parties (COP) and UN efforts on climate action, or may lead to new approaches. However, it is important to recognise that transitioning to a low-carbon and digital economy and society is not solely a technical or economic challenge but a deeply social one, now more than ever (NESC, 2020). Although some tensions were apparent at times, the response to the pandemic crisis has been strengthened through international cooperation.

There is a growing consensus that responding effectively will require more than incremental steps. A systemic change in energy, heating, food and mobility practices is needed. The policy response here and in the EU will require both openness to change and a heightened focus on building resilience. Going forward, governments will need to monitor and assess sustainability risks; for example, the work already carried out for the National Risks Assessment needs to be deepened. How this analysis is then used by the policy system should also be carefully considered.

1.3 Moment to Reset

1.3.1 Introduction

The opportunities for reform have been described as presenting a ‘once in a century moment’ to reset our economy towards a low-carbon and resilient economy.⁴ This section argues that there is a sense in which ‘the stars are beginning to align’ to support meaningful ambition on sustainable development and climate action. It notes, however, that much uncertainty remains about how prolonged and severe the impacts of the pandemic will be.

⁴ Contribution by Helen Mountford, Vice-President for Climate and Economics, World Resources Institute Grantham, in LSE discussion (LSE, 2020).

First, at European level the Commission is championing a new and ambitious Green Deal. Second, in Ireland, the Programme for Government provides a strong signal of support. Third, this is reinforced by the positions now outlined by a number of sectoral organisations. Finally, some emerging examples reinforce the sense that there is now more openness to change.

1.3.2 European New Green Deal

The European Commission is progressing its policy programme, outlined prior to Covid-19, including the Green Deal and the Just Transition Mechanism, but with the additional and necessary shift to providing a stimulus package for recovery.

Leading environmental NGOs across the EU petitioned the European Commission for a green and just recovery.⁵ However, there are many calls for green investment beyond environmental groups. Campaigns have focused on boosting efforts for a green recovery by leaders of the G20 and in the European Green Deal (Healthy Recovery Campaign, 2020). There is a considerable banking, investor and finance push to greening the recovery. Many international investors, such as those represented by the Global Investor Coalition on Climate Change, are lobbying for funds to be channelled into the development of ‘new sustainable and climate-adaptation assets’ (Magan, 2020).

The IMF points out that, as governments look to recovery, the scope and need for broad-based fiscal stimulus will increase, especially for green measures that boost both aggregate demand and employment (IMF, 2020). The European Environment Agency states that ‘the investments we will make to mitigate the economic impacts of this [Covid-19] crisis should be, and can be, fully aligned with our long-term sustainability goals’ (EEA, 2020).

The OECD points out that green stimulus measures are required but that these have to be adapted to current social priorities such as the environment-health nexus, and concerns about a ‘just transition’, which it argues reflects shifts in social preferences (Agrawala *et al.*, 2020). It argues that ensuring that environmental aspects are incorporated into a fiscal stimulus is not only viable but could also have major co-benefits. Introducing environmental aspects into the packages allows governments to make progress towards long-term environmental objectives, such as the transition to a low-carbon and resource-efficient economy, while also providing a boost to economic activity in the shorter term (OECD, 2020b).

A key part of the debate in Europe currently has been on how much to align the Green Deal with the stimulus package for Europe’s recovery. Beyond investment and jobs, a key focus is that ‘recovery has to be green but also it has to be a path to a better economy, to better health and wellbeing, to inclusion and a just transition, and with respect for planetary boundaries’ (Bhattacharya & Stern, 2020).

⁵ Greenpeace has produced a detailed manifesto for a green recovery. It argues that the Covid-19 crisis and the resulting economic downturn demonstrate the profound need for a social and economic transition to be both just and green, enabling societies to be resilient in the face of crisis (Sauven *et al.*, 2020; Greenpeace, 2020).

Pragmatic reasons are recognised for accelerating the low-carbon and digital transitions via recovery investments to avoid paying twice. EU Commission Executive Vice-President Hans Timmermans said, on launching the Just Transition Mechanism:

As we rebuild our economies and our societies, we will have to resist falling into the trap of rebuilding old structures. We simply cannot afford paying to go back to business as usual and then paying again to transform (Timmermans, 2020).

This reflects the idea of ‘Building Back Better’ frequently applied to Covid-19 and economic recovery (WRI, 2020; We Mean Business Coalition, 2020b; OECD, 2020c). The idea focuses on the need for a people-centred recovery that focuses on wellbeing, improves inclusiveness and reduces inequality. The OECD argues that it should involve aligning a number of key ambitions – net-zero greenhouse-gas (GHG) emissions; climate resilience; reducing biodiversity loss; innovation building on behaviour changes, and improving supply-chain resilience and circularity – to bring about wellbeing and inclusiveness. Other advocates to ‘build back better’ from civil society have emphasised the need to protect vital public services, repair inequalities, create secure and rewarding jobs, and prepare us for the climate and environmental emergency.⁶

In terms of financing the recovery, it seems that the principle of embedding green investment into plans has been broadly accepted. The European Parliament recently adopted a resolution in which the importance of the Green Deal for the EU’s recovery after Covid-19 was also underlined (Simon, 2020). Ireland and 16 other climate and environment ministers in the EU have backed a call to put the European Green Deal at the heart of a post-coronavirus recovery. In their joint letter, they argued that the Green Deal, an EU blueprint to reach net zero emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050, should be central to any resilient recovery. Ireland’s National Competitiveness Council has noted ‘mounting support within EU institutions for the idea of linking economic recovery strategies to the goals of the EU Green Deal’.

In July, the European Commission put forward a Multiannual Financial Framework of €1.8tn for the period 2021–2027. The Commission proposed an emergency recovery instrument, Next Generation EU, to help repair the immediate economic and social damage brought about by the pandemic, support an economic recovery and build a better future for the next generation. A Recovery and Resilience Facility of €672.5bn is included, which will offer financial support for investments and reforms, including in relation to the green and digital transitions and the resilience of national economies, linking these to the EU priorities (EC, 2020b, 2020c).⁷ This recovery package is targeted at member states whose economies have suffered as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

⁶ See <https://www.buildbackbetter.org.uk/about.html> 11/09/20.

⁷ See https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/eu-budget/long-term-eu-budget/2021-2027_en 11/09/20.

Of relevance also is the European Green Deal Investment Plan, which will mobilise EU funding and create an enabling framework to facilitate and stimulate the public and private investments needed for the transition to a climate-neutral, green, competitive and inclusive economy. As part of this, the Just Transition Mechanism will provide targeted support to help mobilise at least €150bn over the period 2021–2027 in the most affected regions, in order to alleviate the socio-economic impact of the transition (EC, 2020d). The Just Transition Fund is the first pillar of the Just Transition Mechanism and will be equipped with €40bn.⁸

Positive signals are coming from the EU in relation to the Green Deal and a sustainable recovery, but the debate continues as countries face into a difficult winter. This debate is likely to intensify, however, as the economic impacts of the lockdown become clearer, with pressures to support economic growth and jobs. The social benefits of any investment have also to be considered. However, proposals from the European Commission on the Green Deal and Just Transition Mechanism, alongside contributions from business, societal and environmental stakeholders, represent a new push to deliver a sustainable and inclusive future. This points to strong intent and substantial funding at a European level. As well, while it is still early in this crisis, there seems to be political will to design a sustainable recovery from Covid-19 and to emerge from the crisis onto a pathway that is more sustainable (Fetting, 2020). As was the case during the economic crisis post-2008, a key task is to ensure that these programmes translate to concrete national actions that deliver the change desired. To be successful, the funds and programmes must help policymakers plan for sustainable mobility, deploy new technology, restore habitats, adopt circular practices, and build community wealth, etc.

1.3.3 Programme for Government

The Government has outlined its commitment to a sustainable future and recovery in the new Programme for Government, ‘Our Shared Future’. It recognises that there is an opportunity for doing things differently.

The pandemic has acted as a catalyst, enabling us to implement radical policies that were considered impossible before; it will not and must not be used as an excuse for failure to take immediate action to deliver on all that is needed to build a better society and a secure future for all living things (Government of Ireland, 2020b).

It makes a commitment to ‘build a stronger, fairer and more sustainable economy prepared for the next phase of disruptive technologies and on a pathway to a low-carbon future’. It seeks to ‘create economic opportunity through climate action and establish bottom up mechanisms to ensure local and national policy making addresses community needs to ensure that nobody is left behind’. Further, it will seek to ‘put sustainability at the heart of our fiscal, enterprise, innovation and environment policies’. It sees this recovery as ‘an opportunity to embed structural

⁸ See https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/actions-being-taken-eu/just-transition-mechanism/just-transition-funding-sources_en 29/09/20.

shifts that will benefit our economy and people, the adoption of technology and innovation, and the pursuit of climate resilience both sectorally and nationally.’

In its introduction, the Government outlines that it will seek to deliver a better quality of life for all, equality within society, and build a deeper sense of connection to the natural world around us, and to each other. It states the importance of reaching ecological harmony and economic equity, of recovering in a way that is fair and balanced, leaves no-one behind, and is futureproofed against shocks. As part of this approach, the Government states that wellbeing that goes beyond the narrow confines of economic growth will be pursued.

The Programme for Government has a strong focus in the form of a central mission to achieve ‘A Green New Deal’, with particular actions on emissions reductions, climate governance, renewable energy, retrofitting, a just transition, natural heritage and biodiversity and water. Notably, the Government is committed to an average 7 per cent reduction each year in overall GHG emissions from 2021 to 2030 (a 51 per cent reduction over the decade) and to achieving net zero emissions by 2050.

There is also a commitment to work to achieve a broad political and societal consensus on a just transition to a sustainable future for all communities. The Programme for Government also commits to developing a new model of engagement with citizens, sectors and regions as an early priority for government, building on the learning of recent years. The Government also acknowledges the need to supplement existing economic measurements. It intends to use ‘wellbeing indicators as well as economic indicators to point out inequalities and help ensure that policies are driven by a desire to do better by people’ (this is discussed further in Section 1.4.1).

Another commitment is to establish a Citizens’ Assembly to address biodiversity loss, following on from the positive contribution of a previous assembly on climate change.

Other sustainable development priorities are outlined across land use, agriculture and transport. There is a commitment to make active travel and public transport better and more accessible. The Programme sets aside 20 per cent of the 2020 capital budget (€360m) for cycling and pedestrian projects and commits Government to a 2:1 ratio of expenditure between new public transport infrastructure and new roads over its lifetime.

While work to deliver on these commitments has begun, it is useful to note that there is broad support among key societal actors, outlined in the next section, for such a sustainable and inclusive approach to recovery.

1.3.4 Wider Irish Support for a Sustainable Recovery

Representative bodies such as the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) and Ibec have emphasised sustainable action as part of what they see as necessary for recovery. ICTU, in ‘No Going Back: A New Deal for a Safe and Secure Future for All’, calls for three key elements in relation to sustainability:

- a ‘green new deal’ stimulus and inclusive plan;
- ‘Green-proofed’ public procurement; and
- a ‘Just Transition’ for workers and communities.

The ICTU outlines the need for a green investment stimulus to include retrofitting, public transport and renewable energy infrastructure, coupled with more investment in areas such as childcare, and a massive increase in spending on public housing (ICTU, 2020).

Ibec argues in its ‘Reboot and Reimagine’ strategy that sustainability must be firmly built into our economic recovery. Ireland requires ‘a complete transformation in how we travel, use energy, design products, run factories, manage logistics, build communities, and interact with our living environment’. This will also mean a major step-up in investment (Ibec, 2020).

Social Justice Ireland identifies sustainability as one of five key outcomes that it considers government should work to achieve: 1) a vibrant economy; 2) decent services and infrastructure; 3) just taxation; 4) good governance, and 5) sustainability (Social Justice Ireland, 2020).

A group of 56 coalitions, networks and organisations, including Stop Climate Chaos, ICTU and the Wheel, have produced ‘A Shared Vision for a Just Recovery’. This sets out a vision for a just recovery in Ireland, the EU and internationally that results in open, fair, equal and healthy societies, flourishing within the ecological limits of our one planet (StopClimateChaos, 2020).

The National Competitiveness Council has argued that ‘early action on initiatives in Ireland’s Climate Action Plan, and linking economic stimulus measures with environmental objectives can be an engine for growth and innovation. There is significant potential for existing enterprise, agricultural and sustainability initiatives to be reframed and expanded in order to provide a stimulus for sustainable growth, and spur a transition in our economy and society toward low carbon activities’ (NCC, 2020).

Embedding sustainability in a deep and meaningful way requires aligning key actors on the same course, guiding, enabling and leading all on the journey. To be effective, concrete collaborative action on multiple fronts is needed. This will require a shift towards embedding the goal of sustainability in concrete ways. There will be differences as to how best to deliver a sustainable recovery that also reduces GHG emissions and sustains nature. If plans and ambitions are to be realised, resources and dialogue will have to be devoted to exploring and resolving differences.

1.3.5 Practical Changes

The experience in lockdown, and the responses to the crisis, have signalled new ways of working and living. Practical changes are taking place which provide inspiration for further action: ‘active mobility’ projects with more segregated

cycling and walking (Kelly, 2020a; Roche, 2020), and green recovery or stimulus packages, including circular and bioeconomy supports.

Circular economy practices are gaining momentum, given the disruption of long manufacturing supply chains during the crisis (Bennett, 2020). Debate has begun in the EU on how value chains may be restructured in a fair and sustainable way (Goßner, 2020). A paper by the OECD points out that investments to support reparability, reusability, remanufacturing and recycling can help support value creation and economic resilience. These developments offer new impetus and possibilities for greening the Covid-19 recovery (Hynes, 2020). For example, technologies such as 3D printing are contributing to supporting the transition to domestic production in order to shorten supply chains (Degnarain, 2020). Previous NESC work outlined the value and potential of a circular economy as a key means of working towards more long-term sustainable economic, social and environmental development (NESC, 2017).

In addition, digital technology has been deployed in new ways to connect and conduct business. The HSE and the education sector both relied on digital technology to deliver services in ways that were unprecedented. Remote work/working from home is likely to continue to a greater extent than before. However, a careful review of practices will be needed to ensure that everyone can benefit and that challenges, including childcare and lack of a suitable space at home, are examined (NUIG, 2020).⁹ There may be unintended consequences in some of the changes. While digital technologies can be an enabler, there are barriers in the lack of digital access, broadband and skills for some service users.

Finally, the Climate Action Fund was one of four funds established under the National Development Plan 2018–2027 as part of Project Ireland 2040. This is a very practical means of supporting climate action. It will provide at least €500m in government funding up to 2027.¹⁰

1.4 Making the Change a Reality

While the ambition to deliver climate action and other key areas of environmental sustainability is now evident in Ireland, it will be extremely challenging to bring these priorities into the heart of Ireland's economic and societal revitalisation. In addition, the combined economic impacts of recovery, decarbonisation and restoring nature will require further and ongoing discussion and examination. Recovery measures and funding, which will provide a double dividend of supporting the recovery but also reducing GHG emissions, will be critical.

NESC is well-placed to provide leadership to help meet this challenge. The rest of this Statement outlines specific ways in which the Council will contribute to

⁹ This was a National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG) / Western Development Commission (WDC) national survey of 7,241 individuals across a wide range of industries and sectors over a one-week period in April-May 2020.

¹⁰ See <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/de5d3-climate-action-fund/> 09/09/20.

meaningful action on building sustainability and tackling climate change and biodiversity loss. To deepen sustainability in practice and to help build on the policy momentum arising from the European Green Deal and the new Programme for Government, the Council will focus on three areas of action:

- i. Framing and Driving Policy Action;
- ii. Green Investment and Conditionality; and
- iii. Strengthening Sustainability and Resilience in Cities, Communities and Governance.

The final key area, just transition and dialogue is outlined in Section 1.5.

1.4.1 Framing and Driving Policy Action

The challenges for policymakers to deliver credible and attainable plans and measures to achieve biodiversity and climate action are considerable, and the urgency has never been greater. Addressing the loss of nature has been particularly neglected in policies and governance, given its crisis state both internationally and at home (UN IPBES, 2019).

In addition, the Supreme Court’s ruling makes this a critical period for Irish climate policy. It found that the 2017 National Mitigation Plan falls ‘well short’ of being specific enough to provide the transparency required to comply with the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 (McKeown, 2020). Future plans will need to be credible and sufficiently detailed, and provide for political and legal accountability (Jackson, 2020).¹¹ They will need to specify the manner in which 2050 targets will be achieved, as well as cover the entire period, and not just the first decade. A new National Mitigation Plan will be required. The Climate Action (Amendment) Bill published on October 7, 2020 proposes to set out new climate targets in law, carbon budgets and changes to the Climate Advisory Council. The proposal for carbon budgets for three five-year periods is potentially an important development.

In previous NESC work, *Climate Policy: Getting the Process Right* (NESC, 2019), the Council argues that it is necessary to combine a high-level mission and the guiding strategy, on the one hand, with the creation and application of mitigation actions by government, business and civil society, on the other. It further outlined that, while missions create some certainty in setting the direction, they provide little insight into how to get there.

The Programme for Government refers to missions in relation to delivering its policy ambitions. For missions to be effective as tools, they require different actors (both public and private) and different sectors to innovate (going to the moon required innovation in aeronautics, robotics, textiles and nutrition). However, they also have to enable bottom-up experimentation and learning (Mazzucato, 2018).

¹¹ Dr Andrew Jackson’s Presentation at Stop Climate Chaos Event (09.09.2020), ‘The implications of the Supreme Court judgement in the Climate Case for climate action in Ireland’.

Mission-oriented action is key to support and deliver progress. To be effective, the ‘nuts and bolts’ of governance—including collaborative policy design and implementation—require attention. The doing of sustainable development is where ambition becomes everyday practice. This will require exceptional expertise, innovation, collaboration and experimentation across business, academia, the public sector and civil society.

There is scope for the Council to provide further insight and debate on ways to support the Programme for Government, reflecting in particular on innovative ways to deliver credible mitigation measures emerging from other countries. There is potential in exploring the use of standards and flexible regulations, for example, as outlined by Jaccard (2020) and illustrated by California’s zero-emission vehicle (ZEV) standard.

In addition, the ways in which the policy system frames and approaches sustainability and wellbeing are important drivers of change. A more comprehensive and holistic way of thinking could be applied to improve government and business decision-making through policy-balancing frameworks for sustainability (Bourgon, 2020). Work has already progressed on green budgeting frameworks and through Ireland’s engagement with the OECD in this area.

The Programme for Government commits to the development of a set of indicators to create a broader context for policymaking, including wellbeing indices and an assessment of outcomes and impacts of policies on individuals and communities. A paper published by the Department of Finance alongside Budget 2021 examines international best practice and sets out potential options (Government of Ireland, 2020a).

Bringing long-term thinking into strategic planning is essential for addressing the climate and biodiversity emergencies. Countries are approaching this need to include long-term thinking in policymaking in interesting ways, such as the Welsh Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (2015) and the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales.¹² The Wellbeing Act embeds wellbeing and the needs of future generations into Welsh law. It sets out seven wellbeing goals, including resilience, cohesive communities, and prosperity. It focuses on long-term thinking, prevention, integration, collaboration and involvement (National Assembly for Wales, 2015).

If there is a recognition that there are critical thresholds (in terms of safe planetary boundaries such as emissions and biodiversity) that need to be safeguarded, it is helpful to consider how best to apply this to governance for the short, medium and long term. This is the idea of living within safe operating spaces for our economies and society to thrive (Economics Observatory, 2020).

¹² See <https://www.futuregenerations.wales/09/09/20>.

Table 1 provides examples of tools useful for balancing economic, social and environmental priorities, including more holistic economic models; national accounts in wellbeing and sustainable development; a circular bioeconomy wellbeing framework, and accounting for nature through ‘natural capital’ and ecosystems services.

Table 1: Examples of Potential Economic, Policy and Accounting Frameworks

Type of Approach	Further Details
Economic model developed by Kate Raworth of Oxford University’s Environmental Change Institute: the ‘doughnut model’.	This sets out the planetary and social boundaries that we need to live within and identifies the hole in the middle as the proportion of people falling short on life’s essentials (Raworth, 2020; Monbiot, 2017). Amsterdam is adopting Raworth’s model to focus economic recovery.
The Circular Economy of Wellbeing outlines the flows that underpin a circular bioeconomy, which relies on healthy biodiverse and resilient ecosystems (Palahí <i>et al.</i> , 2020).	This uses renewable natural capital to holistically transform and manage land, food, health and industrial systems with the goal of achieving sustainable wellbeing in harmony with nature. It involves integrating circular thinking and practice widely into industrial, waste and business policy frameworks.
Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development Tools (OECD, 2016)	Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals through integrated planning and policy-making.
The wellbeing budget in New Zealand	This will structure budget allocations according to national wellbeing indicators (The Lancet, 2019; New Zealand Treasury, 2019). The wellbeing budget has multiple priorities, including tackling mental health issues, improving child wellbeing, supporting marginalised populations, fostering an environmentally sustainable economy, and improving employment (Robertson, 2019).
Wellbeing of Future Generations	The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act requires public bodies in Wales to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, and work to engage with communities to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales). ¹³
Accounting for nature or natural capital accounting. Policy measures include payments of ecosystem services (PES), conservation agreements, green fiscal policies and carbon offsetting.	This uses a standardised method to assess nature’s stocks and flows, and will allow decision-makers to better understand how the environment affects our economy, and <i>vice versa</i> . The In-Case Project demonstrates how this can be applied further in Ireland; ¹⁴ Derry City and Strabane District Council also have put it into practice and have assigned a value to their parks and green spaces in the District by creating a Natural Capital Account (Doherty, 2020). The Irish Forum on Natural Capital (IFNC) is a group of organisations and individuals from academic, public, private and NGO sectors, interested in developing and applying the natural capital agenda in Ireland. It has over 650 members. ¹⁵

¹³ See <https://www.futuregenerations.wales/about-us/future-generations-act/> 09/09/20.

¹⁴ The InCase (Irish Natural Capital for Sustainable Environments—INCASE) project applies Natural Capital Accounting principles to a suite of ecosystem and geosystem services at river catchment scale across Ireland. It will recommend a framework to operationalise Natural Capital Accounting in Ireland. See <https://www.incaseproject.com/about-the-project>.

¹⁵ See <https://www.naturalcapitalireland.com/about> 09/09/20.

It would be useful to examine which frameworks—and the measurements and mechanisms for their application—would be most useful for Ireland. This examination should include: holistic economic models; policy coherence tools for sustainable development; wellbeing accounts, and measures for natural capital accounting. There is a bigger ongoing debate, acknowledged here, that challenges the imperative of economic growth and looks for different ways of measuring prosperity (Jackson, 2011).

1.4.2 Green Investment and Conditionality

Ireland's pre-crisis commitments on energy and climate implied the need for a substantial increase in investment, and a modification of the existing pattern of investment. During the period of economic recovery from the pandemic, it makes sense to progress towards the higher level of green investment required, including switching planned conventional investment to greener options (for example, replacing an ageing oil boiler with a heat pump).

Ireland can be a leader in many areas, including net zero housing, renewable energy generation and balancing the grid, light rail and trains, cycling and walking infrastructure, and green business investments. Transformation of energy, housing and transport systems are the kind of stimulus that could make communities more resilient to future emergencies, reduce unemployment and contribute to a cleaner, greener and more just economy (Roberts, 2020). While the pandemic is a catalyst for change, sustainable and green measures and investments are also catalysts for recovery. Ireland and the Department of Finance have been proactive, both at EU and global level, in developing sustainable finance, green bonds, etc. to mobilise the extraordinary level of investment required.

Stiglitz, Stern and others (Hepburn *et al.*, 2020) make the case for conditionality and argue that, rather than business-as-usual:

An alternative way to restore confidence is to steer investment towards a productive and balanced portfolio of sustainable physical capital, human capital, social capital, intangible capital, and natural capital assets (Zenghelis *et al.*, 2020), consistent with global goals on climate change. Finally, any recovery package, including climate-friendly recovery, is unlikely to be implemented unless it also addresses existing societal and political concerns—such as poverty alleviation, inequality, and social inclusion—which vary from country to country.

A sustainable proactive and fair response from the state could be supported by attaching conditions to rescue measures that provide developmental outcomes for the public good. That means delivering immediate solutions, but designing them in such a way as to serve the public interest over the long term (Mazzucato, 2020). The OECD also advises that sector-specific financial support measures should be made conditional on environmental improvements where possible. The IMF also suggests that brown development activities could be supported conditional on making progress on climate (IMF, 2020).

Other facets of conditionality include green public procurement, in which the state seeks to source goods, services or works with a reduced environmental impact. The Government is committed to developing and implementing a sustainable

procurement policy, which builds on efforts by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCAE), the Office for Government Procurement (OGP) and the EU to shift towards green procurement practices (DCCAE, undated-b). A recent Interreg Project, GPP 4 Growth, provides momentum, bringing together partners from nine countries to exchange experiences and practices and improve their capacities for implementing resource-efficiency policies that promote eco-innovation and green measures through Green Public Procurement (GPP) (DCCAE, undated-a).

The Secretariat has commissioned research to explore the practical application of green conditionality.

1.4.3 Strengthening Sustainability and Resilience in Cities, Communities and Governance

There is little doubt that communities, cities, regions, and food and energy systems will need a capacity to better withstand future shocks in relation to climate change and pandemics, and also to other economic, social and environmental events and shifts. The concept of resilience acknowledges that massive disruptions can and will happen. There is a body of work on resilience from a range of fields, including research on disaster relief and climate adaptation; in relation to debates on sustainable and resilient cities and designing infrastructure, and ways of limiting the vulnerability of food and energy systems (Wilson, 2020).¹⁶ While resilience is frequently mentioned in the discussion on economic, environmental and societal sustainability and the low-carbon transition, it can be a fuzzy concept or be applied in a way that has little policy impact. What does it mean to build in resilience in order to adapt and cope with future shocks in all aspects of our economy, society and environment?

A number of key areas warrant further exploration in relation to resilience, including a focus on cities, communities and governance:

- **Resilient cities:** Cities around the world are working together towards becoming more resilient through investment and peer learning, underpinned by private and public funds, including from the Rockefeller Foundation, the World Economic Forum and the World Bank. Supports arising from funds have included the establishment of a Chief Resilience Officer to lead a resilience efforts (Rockefeller Foundation, 2013).¹⁷ Through being included in the Rockefeller network, Belfast established a key role of Commissioner for Resilience at Belfast City Council.¹⁸ The council also produced a Smart Belfast Framework, working with Future Cities Catapult (a government-supported centre for the advancement of smart cities), and engaged with local stakeholders while

¹⁶ See <http://www.ifiad.ie/covid-19-and-agrifood-systems-resilience-web-portal/> 09/09/20.

¹⁷ This network is no longer funded by the foundation but still exists in the form of the [Resilient Cities Catalyst \(RCC\)](#) and the [Global Resilient Cities Network \(GRCN\)](#). See Carey (2020) and <https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/belfastresilience> 09/09/20.

¹⁸ The commissioner is responsible for mobilising partners across diverse sectors including community, education, energy, health, housing and transport to create an urban resilience strategy and implementation plan.

drawing from the expertise and practice of other places (Belfast City Council, 2018). Dublin and other Irish cities could gain by being actively part of this or similar networks, such as C40 cities or the Global Covenant of Mayors.¹⁹ Further work to identify barriers, and opportunities for networking Irish cities, would be useful given their considerable potential for finance, sharing good practice and collaboration. It is likely that cities will require tailored and adaptive approaches, while learning from recent initiatives, for example, in relation to the increased cycling infrastructure and changes to the public realm. NESC has commissioned a scoping paper on building resilience and sustainability in cities.

- **Local economic resilience:** Reconfiguring systems could help communities to be more resilient economically, socially and environmentally. This could include promoting a shift towards more sustainable tourism or shortening supply chains to support local food producers (EC, 2020a). Building resilience in communities includes climate and energy, food systems, community development, tourism and many other elements for different contexts. The European Commission’s focus on smart specialisation also has potential value (EC, 2018; Hausmann & Rodrik, 2002, cited in Atteridge & Strombo, 2020).

Another approach is ‘community wealth building’ and community-led local development (CLLD) (McCabe, 2020). A key tool of CLLD is to focus on shortening supply chains and prioritising local business. Changes in finance on a local level could play an important role in building resilience—such as an expanded community/public banking sector.²⁰ This could leverage local and national government procurement to drive the development of cooperatives, local and community business, and social enterprise. Irish cooperatives have a role to play, with a track record in food and renewable energy.²¹ In other countries, cooperatives have formed part of ‘food belts’ with local economies that point to their wider economic and well as social value (Hopkins, 2020).²² NESC has commissioning a scoping paper on building resilience in communities.

1.5 Just Transition and Dialogue

Finally, a central strategy to deliver sustainable development will be a focus on a fair and just approach to transition, in both process and outcome. NESC’s work to date has highlighted the critical role of a just-transition approach as part of a low-carbon transition—one that is fair, participative and place-based both in process

¹⁹ See <https://www.c40.org/> and <https://www.globalcovenantofmayors.org/> 09/09/20.

²⁰ Different models are emerging, such as the Dutch-style ‘safe haven’ banking proposal. <https://www.onsgeld.org/archief/Guidebook.pdf>. Correspondence from the Environmental Pillar (October, 2020).

²¹ Previous work by NESC on community engagement and wind energy demonstrated the enormous potential for locally led renewable energy projects as drivers of local responses and resilience-building (NESC, 2014).

²² Ceinture Aliment-Terre Liégeoise (‘The Liège Food Belt’) started with the question ‘What if, in a generation’s time, the majority of food eaten in Liège came from the land closest to Liège?’ In the past five years, it has created 21 new cooperatives and raised €5m from local people. It has also created vineyards, shops, distribution networks, a local currency and popular city centre shops (Bousbaine, 2016).

and in outcome (NESC, 2020; Moore, 2020). This is even more important in the context of a post-Covid-19 recovery.

The Climate Change Advisory Council has recently argued that a just transition calls for in-depth understanding of the distributional impacts of policy actions and measures, alongside a policy development and implementation process that is inclusive and developed in a transparent and open way (CCAC, 2020: 91). Work has already been undertaken in relation to Budget 2021, as the Department of Finance commissioned analysis from the ESRI to inform its preparation and to ensure the Budget package was broadly progressive. This analysis indicated that those in the lowest four income deciles would benefit the most in terms of proportion of disposable income (ESRI, 2020). A paper outlining how additional carbon-tax funds will be allocated has been also published (Government of Ireland, 2020c).

Social dialogue is one of the key elements in a just-transition approach, as documented in the international case-study work undertaken for NESC (Mercier, 2020). Deliberative engagement also provides a valuable and necessary tool for collaborative problem-solving in respect of complex policy solutions (Fung, 2005). Wider engagement and social support for climate action and sustainable development is critical. Engagement with stakeholders and appropriate communication are important to build ownership and support for climate action (CCAC, 2020). The Climate Change Advisory Council (CCAC) outlines how policymakers will need to consider when and how they engage individuals and communities, and whom to engage, in the process of developing viable policies. NESC and the CCAC both emphasise that the climate policy process is strengthened through social dialogue and deliberation, as ‘climate change is a collective effort’ (*ibid.*:93).

The Council, while recognising that this is a time of uncertainty, considers that embedding all facets of sustainable development equally into policy provides a focus for direction that can shape Ireland’s recovery. Nevertheless, tensions and challenges will arise that require effective and timely dialogue in order to continue to build social support for the change and transitions underway. The Council is undertaking further work to discuss these challenges and what it can bring to the development of a galvanising vision for Ireland’s future.

NESC also continues to monitor and support the developments in this area. It hosted the 28th Annual Conference of the European Environment and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils (EEAC) network, ‘Delivering a Just Transition for All’, online on October 27–29th 2020.²³

²³ See <https://www.nesc.ie/news-events/events/nesc-to-host-the-28th-eeac-annual-conference-delivering-a-just-transition-for-all-online-27-to-29-october-2020/>, 29/10/20.

1.6 Conclusion

Covid-19's arrival is a severe, disruptive event that has cast light on the resilience or otherwise of our global economic, societal and environmental systems to cope and adapt. It has further called into view the multiple critical challenges to our economic, environmental and social sustainability, which must be addressed if Ireland and humanity are to thrive into the future.

Governments are increasingly recognising the environmental, social and economic opportunities to do things differently as part of recovery from Covid-19. As Ireland works to 'rebuild better', the Council recognises it is important to reflect on how we can configure and align policy responses to deliver sustainable low-carbon development and practices that sustain our lives and surroundings. Positive action on climate and biodiversity can bring multiple benefits to society and nature, and help to drive the recovery.

In broad terms, the direction of travel outlined across new EU strategies is to deliver economies that are low- to zero-carbon, with nature restored, more resilient rural and agricultural economies, and with circular business and industry using closed loops for materials and products.

The details of how to deliver this transformation in a job-intensive way, sooner rather than later, as part of the recovery from Covid-19 is being actively debated in many countries and at EU level. A key issue is ensuring a fair, just and inclusive transition in terms of outcomes and processes.

The Council considers that urgent environmental sustainability measures require action, but it believes they can also drive the recovery. The task is considerable but achievable if policy objectives and implementation are aligned. Investing in nature and in reducing emissions will create jobs and at the same time become a means of reimagining our economy and society, and crucially the relationship between them and our natural environment.

It is clear that delivering sustainability effectively and urgently will require more than navigation. It will necessitate concrete innovative and collaborative systemic action on multiple fronts, including governance, finance, business and technological innovation and a just transition.

To deliver a coordinated and purposeful response will require collaborative and imaginative reflection, and a grounded analysis of the sustainability challenges, risks and opportunities, as well as the 'nuts and bolts' of delivering mission-oriented actions.

The Council will continue to contribute to this overall framing of sustainable development and climate action and to the examination of specific projects, such as green conditionality and building resilience.

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