

Varadkar warns of 'major fines' for not meeting climate targets



The country is facing the prospect of "pretty major fines" unless greenhouse gas emissions begin to rapidly reduce, Taoiseach Leo Varadkar has admitted.

Ireland is among a minority of EU nations where emissions are rising despite the increased awareness about the impact of climate change.

The Government has signed up to reduce carbon emission by 20pc by 2020 - but they actually rose for the past two years as the economy recovery took hold.

Mr Varadkar now says there will be a "big focus" on climate change in the year ahead and "the things that can be done in the next 10 years to enable us to meet our commitments which we are not meeting at the moment".

He added: "From 2020 onwards, we're heading into some pretty major fines for not meeting our obligations. I would rather spend money now on meeting our commitments than on fines from 2020 onwards."

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, there was a 3.5pc [increase in greenhouse gas emissions in 2016](#). An estimated 61.19 million tonnes of CO2 equivalent were pumped into the atmosphere.

The rise in emissions is being attributed to increased activity in the dairy and energy industries, as well as the transport sector - and, unless it is reversed, some experts predict Ireland could be facing fines in excess of €450m.

Meanwhile, Climate Change Minister Denis Naughten said the frequency of storms now hitting Ireland was down to climate change.

"You cannot directly associate any single event with climate change," he said. "But the reality is that the severity of the storms that we are seeing this particular season are a result of the fact that a polar air mass has gone significantly further south in the Atlantic. It's down as far as the Florida coast now. So that has increased the power of the storms we're experiencing this particular winter.

"It's not the case of any particular storm being associated with climate change - but the reality is we are having more frequent storms, more frequent flooding, more frequent '100-year' floods. The frequency of that can be associated with climate change but it is the broader issues that we have to tackle, not just on a national level but as a global issue."

Met Éireann forecaster Evelyn Cusack said the recent bad weather was linked to Arctic air across North America. It has been bringing the weather systems across the Atlantic which have been lashing the southern and western coasts of Ireland.

Eleanor was the sixth storm to hit Ireland this winter, including ex-Hurricane Ophelia last October which sparked the first ever Status Red warning from Met Éireann.

Source – The Irish Independent