

Feasta Climate Group Weekend

Dublin, 27th-29th February, 2009.

Theme: Developing the Twin Track Strategy

At our last meeting a year ago at Schumacher College, David Wasdell convinced us that the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere was already too high and that plant growth was likely to be the best way of extracting and sequestering the excess. We also agreed that if Cap and Share, or some other method of reducing fossil fuel emissions, was introduced, the price of energy would rise and this would mean that people turned to plant-based fuels, with the result that the stocks of carbon already held in plants and soils would be reduced. Indeed, in the short-run, CO₂ emissions could rise rather than fall.

This led us to adopt what we called our twin-track strategy. One track was continuing with development and promotion of Cap and Share, to reduce fossil fuel emissions. The other was devising an approach that would mean that plant and soil carbon stocks were rapidly increased rather than being reduced. The meeting will therefore discuss the progress we've made on both tracks.

Cap and Share

We need to discuss whether Cap and Share has progressed almost as far *as an idea* as the group can take it. The publication in December of the reports on it commissioned by the Irish sustainable development council, Comhar, plus the assessments of its initial impact if adopted in South Africa and India as part of a global climate agreement, have given it considerable weight. Is it now ready to leave home and make its way in the world? It certainly needs to be taken up by researchers and other organisations if it is to be adopted. So one of the aims of the weekend will be to decide how this can be brought about, both in the UN process and without.

Increasing plant and soil carbon stocks

Last April, Feasta held a workshop during which experts on the measurement of carbon stocks advised us that it was not possible to measure the weight of carbon in the soil and in the permanent plants growing on it with sufficient accuracy to pay the land owners for any increase. What was needed instead, they said, was a new type of farming which increased the amount of carbon locked up and a reward system that ensured that farmers adopted it. So this is what we are trying to devise for Irish conditions with the help of a grant from the Irish Department of the Environment. We've using the money to set up the Carbon Cycles and Sinks Network linking researchers in the field. The Networks' first meeting was set to co-incide with this weekend so that common events could be held. It looks as though biochar (charcoal) will be a key component of the farming system that the Network finally recommends. Coming up with an Irish solution is only part of the Climate Group's task, of course and we need to do what we can to devise a global system.

The Global Climate Trust

Another outcome of our last meeting was a decision to try to get support for the establishment of a Global Climate Trust. Some progress has been made, as we will hear.

Suggested Programme

Friday, 27th February, 2009,

14.15- 16.30 The Central Hotel, Exchequer Street, Dublin.

Joint meeting with Feasta's Carbon Cycles and Sinks Network

Each presentation will be followed by a discussion. Tea will be served in the break between the talks.

1. Dr. David Wilson, University College, Dublin. *Peatlands in Ireland.*

Peatlands cover around 16% of the land in Ireland and store an estimated 1.2 billion tonnes of carbon. At present, it is estimated that 2.5 million tonnes of this carbon is being released each year, equivalent to the amount of carbon annually emitted by cars on Irish roads. The key controller of carbon cycling in peatlands is the position of the water table. In intact or undamaged peatlands, the water table remains at or close to the surface. Decomposition rates are very slow and as a result, more carbon enters the peatland than exits. However, when hydrological functioning is impaired through drainage the peatland quickly switches from being a small net carbon sink to a large net carbon source. Less than 20% of Ireland's peatlands remain in an intact form. The remainder have mainly been converted to agricultural use, utilised for their fuel / horticultural resource or afforested. Each land use change significantly impacts on carbon dynamics within the peatland and has major implications for future policy decisions.

2. Dr. Matt Tyburski, University College, London, *Changes in Land Carbon Stocks in Ireland.*

Old photographs show that many places in rural Ireland have more trees and scrub today than they did a century or so ago. This "greening" is continuing at a rapid pace according to satellite data. This means, of course, that carbon dioxide is being extracted from the atmosphere and locked up in above- and below-ground biomass and in the soil. Until now, however, there has been no way of measuring how many tonnes of carbon are being removed this way with the result that Ireland cannot use a removals figure to offset its fossil-fuel and land-based greenhouse emissions in the returns it makes to the EU and the UN. Dr. Tyburski believes he has overcome this problem and that he could use satellite data to calculate with reasonable accuracy how much carbon is being locked away if measurements are available to establish the base-line levels in sample areas. He will describe how the system works and how it might be applied in Ireland.

19.30 - 21.30 The Central Hotel, Exchequer Street, Dublin.

1. Brian Davey, Feasta. *Mobilising for the Climate Emergency*

Climate scientists are now saying that targets for greenhouse gas stabilisation should be lower than 350ppm CO2 perhaps even below 300ppm. To achieve these very low greenhouse gas concentrations would involve re-allocations of economic resources on a scale not previously achieved in anything other than war or revolution. So, how can the necessary massive changes, not just in what we can consume, but how we work and live our lives, be motivated? How can we achieve the common commitment to go for the scale of change that would make this at all possible?

2. Dr. Matt Tyburski, University College, London.

Roughly 27% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions come, not from the burning of fossil fuels, but from agricultural practices and changes in land use, such as the clearing of forests and the draining of bogs. These emissions have to stop. The level of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is already above a safe level so, not only does the use of fossil fuels have to be reduced to virtually zero, but the land has to become a sink, absorbing the gases already in the air, rather than a source.

How can this be made to happen? Could a way be found to reward countries that increase the amount of carbon locked up in their soils and the plants growing on them and penalise countries that persist in clearing their forests and draining their land? Dr. Tyburski thinks that satellite data could be used to calculate whether a country's land is part of the solution or part of the problem. Moreover, he says that the accuracy is sufficiently good to provide the basis for a global system of penalties and rewards. He will explain the implications of his work for a possible international climate agreement in Copenhagen in December this year.

Discussion will follow each paper and there will be a comfort break between them. After the talks, transport will be provided for those staying at the Emmaus Centre to take them there for the night.

Saturday

Emmaus Centre, Swords

Turning the land into a carbon sink

09.00 – 10.30 Suggestions for the session: Outline of the Carbon Cycles and Sinks project by Corinna Byrne followed by a report on the various approaches being taken to developing a REDD (a mechanism for compensating countries for **R**educing **E**missions from **D**eforestation and forest **D**egradation) to be agreed in Copenhagen. It is hoped that REDD will spur a massive flow of funds to tropical countries, help preserve rainforests and bring economic benefits to impoverished rural communities.

11.00 – 12.30 What suggestions?

Lunch

Next steps for Cap and Share

14.00 – 15.30 Suggestion: Two simultaneous sessions for the first 45 minutes. One would be “Cap and Share for beginners” . The other would be “How Cap and Share compares with, and could relate to, Greenhouse Development Rights, Kyoto2 and other proposals. “

Remaining 45 mins. What suggestions?

16.00 – 17.30 Suggestion: that we discuss whether it is likely to prove more or less difficult to introduce Cap and Share - whether nationally or internationally - in the current depressed global economy. If, for example, C&S had been adopted in Ireland last year, the price of emissions permits would have collapsed, just as the EU ETS permits have done. They would have dropped to the floor price and the issuing organisation would have had to borrow the funds to buy the surplus permits to maintain the price. How might the borrowing be repaid? Would a variable tax have done any better?

And if C&S was to be introduced next year, what level of emissions would be taken as the baseline? If the depressed level was taken, would that provide adequate energy for the switch to a low carbon economy? Other issues arise if we are considering C&S as an international framework: for example, might the oil producers be more amenable to sharing the scarcity rent than they would have been a year ago? Could C&S, coupled with an ebcu issue, provide the basis for getting the world economy out of depression? A paper would be prepared to start the discussion off if this suggestion is adopted.

Evening Meal

19.00 – 22.00 Personal presentations

Suggestions:

Tim Helweg Larson on Code Red

Mariska Evelein on the latest biochar research

Emer O Siochru on the Biocharter

David Friese Greene on cooking stoves that make biochar

The need for the introduction of a non-debt currency if energy use is to be cut and the progress with the Liquid Network project.

Sunday

Advancing our ideas

09.00 – 10.30 Working outside or in parallel to the UN framework

Suggestions: Presentation on the Global Climate Trust project by John Jopling followed by discussion. How can we get mileage out of the reports on C&S in the BRICSA countries? Any other ideas?

11.00 – 12.00 Working inside the UN framework: what role can or should we play in the series of meeting planned in preparation for Copenhagen? More suggestions?

12.00- 12.45 Conclusions and Wrap-up.

Lunch 13.00

Those catching the 14.30 Irish Ferries sailing from Dublin Port to Holyhead will have to leave at 13.30. The rest of us will be able to stay on at the Centre for as long as we wish.