

# Climate change and national interests

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Sir, – It's not often that I disagree with noted meteorologist Ray Bates, but I was puzzled by his statement that "I do not agree that we are currently facing a planetary emergency requiring the abandoning of vital national interests when climate legislation is being considered", in his discussion of a recent conference on climate change at Maynooth university ("Climate [focus](#) on farm emissions misguided", Opinion & Analysis, July 1st; [Letters](#), July 10th).

I attended the Maynooth conference, but did not hear any speaker advocating the abandonment of vital national interests. Nor did I hear anyone suggest that "Irish agricultural emissions should be reduced by about two-thirds", as stated by Prof Bates in his article of July 1st. What I did hear were some thought-provoking presentations by speakers such as UN Special Envoy for Climate Change Mary Robinson and Jean-Pascale van Ypersele, vice-chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, on the likely effects of global warming on the poorest and most vulnerable regions of the world, if left unchecked.

To be sure, several conference speakers suggested that the inaction on global warming to date likely stems at least in part from a marked tendency for each country to put national self-interest ahead of global issues.

It seems to me that this is a valid concern that should not be dismissed lightly.

Indeed, it's worth noting that our own climate Bill contains no specific targets for a reduction in carbon emissions, while the recently appointed Advisory Council on Climate Change comprises economists and representatives from agricultural and industry sectors, but not a single scientist.

Both initiatives indicate an approach to climate change that is motivated by narrow self-interest, rather than a concern for the fate of the poorer nations of the world. – Yours, etc,

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Sir, – Trócaire very much welcomes the view of Prof Ray Bates that the Maynooth Conference on Climate Justice provided for "a new phase" in the public debate on climate change, especially in the context of the finalisation of the Climate Bill. The recent openness of the Taoiseach and Minister for the Environment Alan Kelly to an amendment on climate justice in the Bill is testament to the impact of this debate. However, to suggest that one statement regarding agricultural emissions "captured the mood of the conference" would not be an accurate reflection of the constructive discussions over the two-day event.

The conference was addressed by a range of eminent global figures from the political, scientific and activist communities involved in climate justice, including Mary Robinson, Prof van Ypersele and Bill McKibben. Speakers put forward ideas on how all sectors of Irish society can contribute towards building a low carbon future around principles of justice and equity. The mood reflected the deep and growing consensus, now shared by Pope Francis in his encyclical, that climate change is a planetary emergency. It was a call to action on many fronts.

Agriculture was one of five focus areas addressed on the second day of the conference. This session examined opportunities to support just and sustainable food and farming in Ireland in the context of climate change. – Yours, etc,

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