Facing the challenges of climate change

Fáilte Ireland's Carbon Strategy
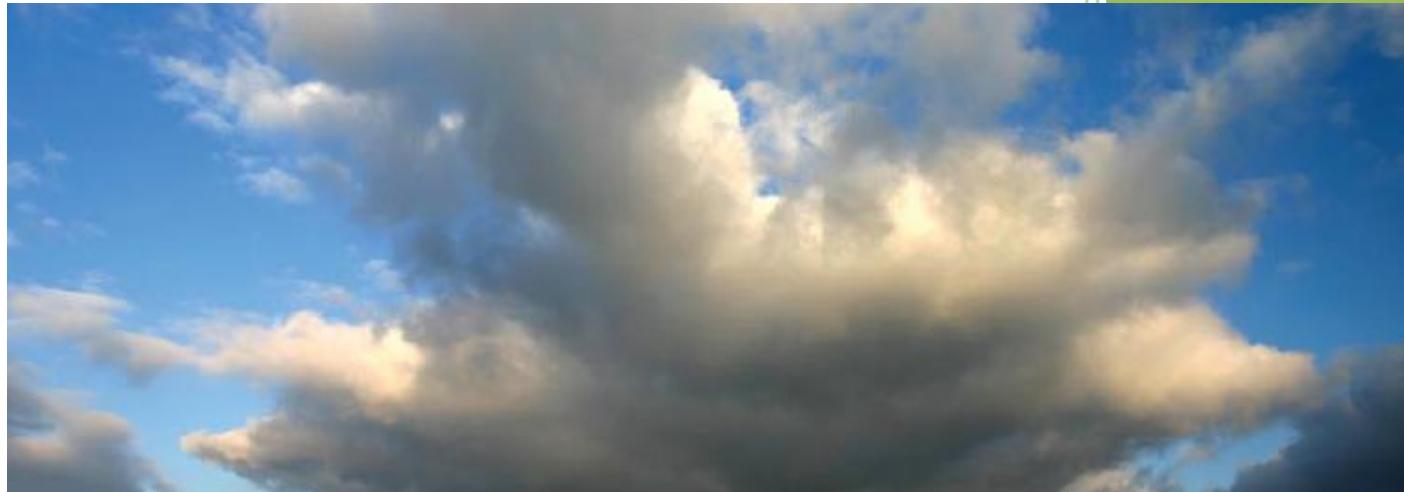
Fāilte Ireland
National Tourism Development Authority

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INTRODUCTION

"Action to reduce the carbon footprint of the tourism industry will result in significant cost savings for individual businesses. Fáilte Ireland will provide information and support on how to improve environmental performance through suitable environmental schemes and initiatives."

FACING THE CHALLENGES OF CLIMATE CHANGE

THE ISSUE

Climate change is a significant change in the "average weather" or climate that a region experiences. The term climate change is generally used to refer to changes in our climate that occur due to the build up of greenhouse gases (GHG) in the atmosphere (www.change.ie). While carbon dioxide (CO_2) is the GHG that is referred to most often in this context, methane (NH_4), nitrous oxide (N_2O), hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), perfluorocarbons (PFCs) and sulphur hexafluoride (SF_6) are also GHGs that are contributors to climate change. In 2007 the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded that man-made emissions of greenhouse gases (from activities such as burning fossil fuels for energy, transport and heating), are driving climate change.

Research carried out by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) in association with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) indicates that CO_2 emissions from international tourism (including all forms of transport), accounted for just under 5% of global emissions in 2005.
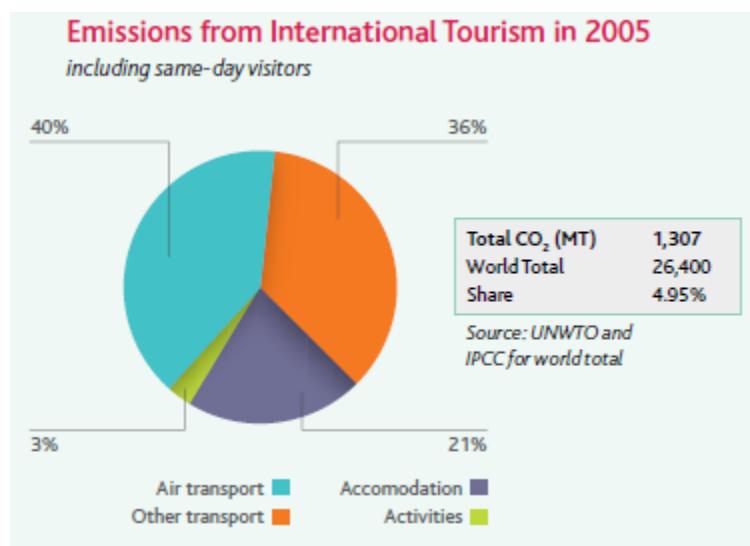
If climate change is left unchecked, Ireland along with the rest of the world could face severe fluctuations in temperature and rainfall, together with more extreme and unpredictable weather events and rising sea levels. All of this could have a significant impact not only on our environment but also on our economic development and quality of life. For the future sustainability of the tourism industry, it is vital that all stakeholders try to adopt measures to mitigate and adapt to the challenges of climate change.

The purpose of this short booklet is to introduce the issues of CO_2 emissions and climate change in as far as they relate to tourism and to outline what Fáilte Ireland is doing to address these issues and the challenges facing the tourism industry. Some of these actions are already outlined in Fáilte Ireland's *Environmental Action Plan 2007-09*, while others are new and will extend beyond the period of the *Action Plan*. The implementation of this 'carbon strategy' will be undertaken with the participation of various industry stakeholders, in particular Tourism Ireland and the Irish Tourism Industry Confederation (ITIC).

We welcome your comments on our strategy and any suggestions on how we can do better.

SEVEN KEY ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN

1. Assess the impact of climate change on the tourism industry
2. Assess the impact on tourism of any measures proposed to tackle climate change
3. Contribute to the Government's *Change* campaign
4. Measure and reduce the carbon footprint of the tourism industry
5. Communicate the challenges to the industry and raise awareness
6. Offer our visitors a low-emissions choice
7. Manage Fáilte Ireland's own emissions

ACTION 1: ASSESS THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

Research is currently being undertaken by Fáilte Ireland and the Heritage Council to identify *The Impact of Climate Change on the Heritage and Tourism of Ireland's Inland Waterways and Coast*.

As well as identifying natural and built heritage at risk from climate change, the report will identify:

- Potential impacts on the attractiveness of Ireland as a tourist destination;
- Potential impact on the visitor's enjoyment of their holiday and on the range and quality of tourist activities.

The goals and objectives of this project have been linked to clear and compelling industry stakeholder needs. The project report will present steps that will be necessary in order to respond and adapt to the predicted impacts of climate change. It is intended that these recommendations for adaptation would be used to inform the strategies and policies employed by all stakeholders in the tourism industry, from national, regional and local authorities, to the tourism providers themselves. The report of this project will be published towards the end of 2008.

ACTION 2: ASSESS THE IMPACT ON TOURISM OF ANY MEASURES PROPOSED TO TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE

A number of measures have already been proposed at European and National Government level to tackle climate change. Among these are the European Parliament's recent decision to include airlines in the EU's emissions trading scheme (ETS) from 2012, and the inclusion in the Programme for Government of the consideration of a national 'carbon tax'. While these measures are aimed at addressing the sources of climate change, there is a risk of unintended negative consequences for the tourism industry depending on how they are implemented. As an island destination largely dependent upon air access, it is important that the introduction of carbon taxes does not give rise to any significant economic displacement effects that would unduly penalise the tourism industry and restrict competitiveness.

Furthermore, there are other factors linked to this area that are also likely to have serious implications for Irish tourism. These include the significant rise in the price of oil in the past year which has substantially increased the cost of air travel, together with the increases in energy related costs which translate through to key utilities such as gas, electricity, and transport upon which the tourism industry currently has a significant dependency.

Given that Irish tourism operates in a competitive global market where cost competitiveness is essential, individual tourism enterprises are most often price-takers in the market place rather than price-makers.

This means that adverse economic developments can impact strongly on already narrow profit margins. Within this context, any development which increases the cost base of tourism enterprises is likely to erode profit margins by an equivalent sum, given that consumer demand for tourism services is strongly elastic in nature.

Fáilte Ireland will keep a watching brief on these issues and will make recommendations to the appropriate authorities as necessary to ensure that the correct balance is struck to allow the development of tourism in a sustainable manner.

ACTION 3: CONTRIBUTE TO THE GOVERNMENT'S *CHANGE* CAMPAIGN

Fáilte Ireland is working closely with *Change*, the national awareness and communication campaign on climate change which is being led by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG). The aim of the *Change* campaign is to focus Ireland's plan of action in response to the challenges of climate change by engaging with individuals and sectors to encourage and support positive changes. Fáilte Ireland is a member of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Group (STAG) which provides advice on the accuracy and robustness of the statistics and scientific information provided through the *Change* campaign. In addition to this the Department of Arts, Sports and Tourism is represented on the campaign steering group.

Fáilte Ireland is linking with the campaign to provide information to both the general public and the tourism industry on steps that can be taken to reduce their carbon footprint. In the coming months Fáilte Ireland will contribute to the development of a Carbon Management Tool which will form the cornerstone of the *Change* programme aimed at businesses. This tool will help tourism businesses to calculate and manage their own carbon footprint. On an individual level, the *Change* website www.change.ie recently launched a personal carbon calculator to enable individuals to calculate their carbon number and make positive changes to reduce it.

This link to the *Change* campaign provides a strong context for actions that Fáilte Ireland will be implementing over the next two to three years arising from the recommendations in its recently published *Review of Good Environmental Policy and Practice in the Tourism Sector*, including the links with the Environmental Protection Agency's Green Business Initiative and encouraging tourism businesses to pursue 'green' accreditation.

ACTION 4: MEASURE AND REDUCE THE CARBON FOOTPRINT OF THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

The tourism industry is a heterogeneous sector comprising approximately 18,000 businesses, the vast majority of which are small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs). Possibly due to the size and nature of the sector, the carbon footprint of the tourism industry has never been calculated, and very little information exists to enable this to happen. As a result of this it is difficult to determine if progress on improving environmental performance is being made, and if tourism in Ireland is moving towards becoming a 'clean' industry.

Over the next two years, Fáilte Ireland will seek to determine the carbon footprint of the tourism industry in order to benchmark its current environmental performance and monitor progress in the future. In line with the EU's goal to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 20% on 1990 levels by 2020, all sectors of the economy will be required to play a greater role in the new "effort sharing" agreement which was issued by the EU for general consultation in January 2008. Fáilte Ireland will work closely with the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in calculating the tourism industry's carbon footprint and will utilise the Carbon Management Tool that is currently being developed and validated as part of the *Change* campaign. The first step in this calculation process will be to collect significant background data on the precise nature and extent of the tourism industry, as well as projections for future growth in the sector. Over the coming year, Fáilte Ireland will work to collect this data to provide a better understanding of the type and range of businesses in the sector and the way in which their activities are responsible for CO_2 emissions.

Action to reduce the carbon footprint of the tourism industry will result in significant cost savings for individual businesses. Fáilte Ireland will provide information and support on how to improve environmental performance through suitable environmental schemes and initiatives.

ACTION 5: COMMUNICATE THE CHALLENGES TO THE INDUSTRY AND RAISE AWARENESS

Considerable awareness and communication of climate change issues will be required across all industry sectors in the future, not least of all the tourism industry. In late April / early May 2008 the *Change* campaign held a number of workshops around the country for the various industry sectors including tourism, agriculture and construction.

These workshops can be considered a starting point to introduce the industry to the issue of climate change, however each industry is facing considerably different challenges. To this end it is considered that a more tailored option for the tourism industry is required. Fáilte Ireland intends to raise awareness within the sector and to provide support to individual businesses as required.

This will be accomplished in two ways:
1. In line with the recommendations in the *Review of Good Environmental Policy and Practice in the Tourism Sector,* training will be provided as part of the Tourism Learning Networks (which will include an environment module in 2009) and CPD programmes in order to raise awareness of climate change issues and to reach a wide ranging audience.

2. Fáilte Ireland will establish a panel of environmental mentors which will be available to provide tailored advice to individual tourism businesses. The primary function of the mentors will be to undertake environmental audits of businesses and make recommendations on the introduction of environmental management systems, with a view towards achieving one of the available forms of environmental accreditation.

Fáilte Ireland's environment webpage, together with its Performance Plus webpage (www.failteireland.ie) provides comprehensive information on steps that can be taken by individual businesses to reduce their carbon emissions. Information is also provided on various initiatives and accreditation schemes that are available to tourism businesses.

Information and guidance is also available through the Change website - www.change.ie and also through the lo-call number 1890 CHANGE (1890 242643) provided as part of this campaign.

ACTION 6: OFFER OUR VISITORS A LOW EMISSIONS CHOICE

In addition to the initiatives outlined above, it is also important that tourists to Ireland are given the options to reduce the carbon footprint of their holiday. With an increase in the levels of good environmental practice in the tourism sector in recent years, Ireland is in a better position than ever to offer choices to the visitor that wishes to have a lower emissions holiday. From golf courses and activity providers, to hotels and B&Bs, to visitor centres and spas, a wide range of tourism businesses have already taken steps towards improving environmental performance, ranging from simple steps such as reducing energy consumption to becoming fully accredited ecotourism businesses. As a result of this progress, Fáilte Ireland intends to provide further marketing opportunities to businesses with an environmental standard or accreditation as part of a new "green tourism" section of its consumer website www.discoverireland.ie.

This separate webpage will allow consumers to identify and choose businesses with proven environmental credentials and will also raise the profile of the businesses themselves.

The *Change* campaign website (www.change.ie) also provides the domestic tourist with ideas on how to reduce the carbon footprint of their holiday.

Fáilte Ireland has also initiated consultation with various tourism and environmental stakeholders in order to develop a view on the issue of carbon off-setting. A position paper will be developed in relation to this issue during 2009.

Further Information
For further information or updates on Fáilte Ireland's Carbon Strategy contact the Environment Unit of Fáilte Ireland at 01 6024 323 or log on to the Environment section of Fáilte Ireland's website at www.failteireland.ie

Published August 2008

ACTION 7: MANAGE FÁILTE IRELAND'S OWN EMISSIONS

Fáilte Ireland as a public sector agency will also be required to play it's part in the EU's "effort sharing" agreement in order to meet the emission reduction targets of 20% (based on 1990 levels) by 2020. In addition to this, Fáilte Ireland will also be required to meet the targets set for the public sector as part of Ireland's energy policy[1]. This will require an increase in energy efficiency of 33% across the public sector by 2020.

In order to begin working towards these targets, Fáilte Ireland's Environment Unit has recently established an internal Environmental Management Committee to oversee the environmental management of Fáilte Ireland's buildings. The purpose of the Committee is to develop measures to reduce water, waste and energy consumption, and to introduce environmental procurement policies across the agency.

Through the Environmental Management Committee, it is intended to develop an Environmental Management System for the Amiens Street office and training centre in 2008/2009, with a view to eventually seeking accreditation to ISO 14001. The possibility of rolling this out on a phased basis to all Fáilte Ireland premises over time will also be considered. This would introduce a controlled management system for the implementation of Fáilte Ireland's environmental targets across all business activities and facilities.

In order for any Environmental Management System to succeed, buy-in will be required from all Fáilte Ireland staff. It will be necessary to raise awareness amongst all staff of the Environmental Management System and secure the active participation in the programme.

To achieve this, the Environment Unit will devise and run a number of tailored workshops for Fáilte Ireland staff during 2009.

"Considerable awareness and communication of climate change issues will be required across all industry sectors in the future, not least of all the tourism industry."

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[1] Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, *Delivering a Sustainable Energy Future for Ireland – The Energy Policy Framework 2007-2020.*