



Slow fall in emissions disappoints Minister

Opposition parties brand reduction strategy a failure

HARRY McGEE,
Political Staff

MINISTER FOR the Environment **John Gormley** has admitted that a 1 per cent reduction in **carbon emissions** last year masked "painstakingly slow" progress in reducing **carbon emissions**.

Mr Gormley announced his second **carbon** budget in the Dáil yesterday and accepted that he was frustrated at the slow rate of progress.

Its modest emission-reduction **targets** for next year was immediately rounded on by the Opposition. Both Fine Gael and Labour castigated Mr Gormley, accusing him of political failure and describing the exercise as a "farce" and a "charade".

The **carbon** statement for 2007 showed a slight reduction in **carbon emissions** of some 700,000 tonnes - from 69.6 million tonnes to 68.9 million tonnes.

Mr Gormley welcomed the fall, pointing out that the out-turn was significantly lower than recent predictions, some of which had predicted increases of up to 5 per cent in 2007.

The reduction was accounted for by decreases in the energy and **agriculture** sectors, as well as by increased afforestation (forests act as **carbon** sinks). However, the Environmental Protection Agency

(EPA) figures also show that there were further increases in other key areas.

Transport increased from 13.7 million tonnes to 14.4 million tonnes; while waste emissions increased from 1.83 million tonnes to 1.93 million tonnes.

According to the **carbon** budget, emissions will be reduced by only 400,000 tonnes during 2009. Half of that fall will be accounted for in the transport sector (the effect of last year's VRT and motor tax changes). The other 200,000 tonne reduction will come from organic farming and increasing the length of the grazing season.

"They will not be enough to achieve the type of emissions reduction we require," he said. "We need to be more radical. The introduction of a **carbon** levy next year will be an important step but it is only one step."

Speaking at a press conference later, Mr Gormley said this was not an admission of failure on his part or on the part of the Greens.

"I am being upfront. We do need to be more radical. That's not an admission of failure. We are making progress but it's painstakingly slow," said Mr Gormley.

The only new specific funding

announcement made by Mr Gormley was a €5 million allocation to upgrade cycle paths in Dublin. Some €3 million of this will be spent on the city centre portion of the proposed Sutton to Sandycove cycling route. The remainder will be spent on upgrading existing cycle routes.

Beyond that, there were a number of new strategies and **targets** unveiled by Mr Gormley. However, none of the announcements were accompanied by a concrete budgetary allocation.

Mr Gormley said his Green Party colleague, Minister for Energy Eamon Ryan, will be unveiling a strategy in the coming weeks aimed at having up to 10 per cent of Ireland's road fleet electrically powered by 2020.

Fine Gael's spokesman **Phil Hogan** castigated the Green Party for selling its soul for what he said was a €200,000 bicycle scheme.

"The **Carbon** Budget is a waste of time," he said. "It is an opportunistic and damaging money grab from the commuters of Ireland that will have little effect on Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions."

Labour spokeswoman Joanna Tuffy said that the news from the **carbon** budget was there was no **carbon** budget.

"Why environment Minister **John Gormley** insists on continuing with the charade that is his **carbon** budget' is beyond me," she said. "Most of the announcements he made referred to deferred action or proposals that he is looking into that he might get around to," she added.