Thank you for allowing me to be part of this public consultation.

I am delighted to see that the Dept of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is finally putting together a plan for how to deal with the biggest problem to ever face mankind. However, with perhaps the exception of Deirdre Murphy’s courtroom, I have rarely seen such a misinterpretation of the facts... Please allow me to explain:

In the overall adaptation goal, it states that we must "Build resilience to the effects of climate change" and "reduce any negative impacts where possible". How is this possible when our entire agri sector has become more monoculture driven, the mantra from government being "we must sustainably intensify". The bigger a monoculture farm becomes the more it opens itself up to trouble when any problems, climate or otherwise occur. I recall the last feed crisis, the current Minister of the DAFM followed the strategy that it would all be fine and no help was needed, luckily the weather changed and things were fine, but I think these sort of incidences demonstrate how absolutely unprepared we are for any negative impact from climate change.

In number one of the overarching objectives, it states that a joined up approach should be ensured between Agriculture, Food and the Marine. I have terribly sorry to be the one to break this to you but the Dept of Marine is no longer under the control of the DAFM, it is under control of the Dept of Housing. It is the Dept of Housing that is creating huge Marine Spatial Plans, it is the Dept of Housing that is handing out licences to mechanically extract native seaweed from its marine environment without the knowledge of the Dept of Agri. I know this for a fact because both Depts are happily granting licences covering the exact same area (T05/587A and FS006061).

Personally I feel that the Depts of Housing and Agri are huge Depts that don’t need to have a Marine section attached to either. I think the Marine sector is big and complex enough to have its own Dept. In this adaptation plan, there is speak of trying to get the DAFM to work coherently together. There are 9 different Depts that deal with separate marine issues, this is a recipe for disaster. How can you avoid the "oops, sorry I thought you were dealing with it" scenarios. A separate Dept of the Marine should be created as a matter of urgency.

Having worked in the fishing industry and having family members who have been part of the fishing industry for decades it is quite clear in what direction the fishing industry is going. In 10 years from now, there will be absolutely nothing left. It will be like the Canadian cod: declare a fishing ban after it is irreversibly damaged. Let's have a look at what your adaptation plan says: The seafood sector must "deliver a sustainable, growth driven sector focused on competitiveness and innovation driven by a skilled workforce delivering value added products in line with market demands". I suspect that this statement was geared towards the salmon farm industry where it takes 5 kilos of wild fish to produce one kilo of farmed fish, clearly an industry which will grow until wild fish stocks are completely depleted. The word "sustainable" should not be connected with this industry.

Perhaps we should look at what Climate Change actually is. In my humble opinion, climate change means the extreme fluctuations in our weather patterns caused by increased planet temperature. We can expect to get more extreme high and low temperatures, we got -15°C a number of years ago. We can expect more
dry periods, leading to drought and more wet periods leading to flooding. We can expect more high winds. Basically our ability to predict and forecast what kind of weather, longterm, we might get in December or July becomes impossible. We also have rising sea levels to contend with. This will cause massive problems for lowlying towns and cities, with a knock-on effect on the farming community. There is also a very real possibility, due to the increased temperature of seawater around the equator, that the Gulf stream may not stay exactly where it is now...

In a nutshell, Irish Farmers should prepare for much tougher conditions. Yes, grass will grow in the dark, warm, wet, winter conditions, but the quality and nutritional value will be very poor due to lack of sunshine. Farmers will have to prepare for taking livestock indoors over the summer due to grass and water shortages. With regards to forestry, it is very difficult to see how 50 or 60 foot high sitka spruce plantations will adapt to increasing wind speed... On the plus side the increasingly rough weather may hamper shipping and so also the effects of the Mercosur beef deal.

At the moment there are many farms in Ireland which contain hundreds of bovines. The methane produced naturally from the slurry could power small villages. Harnessing this completely untapped resource would have many positive effects. Building a methane industry will create employment. Once it was up and running it would create a cheap energy source. The process creates a better quality fertiliser which would be better for wetter climates. Methane is more than 30 times worse than carbon dioxide as a greenhouse gas, so harvesting it as opposed to letting it go into the atmosphere has a very positive impact for the planet. At present, most of our methane is produced by slurry tanks, not by cows farting or burbing in the field.

Even though Ireland has always had vast amounts of clean freshwater, this is going to come under serious pressure in the coming years. Many wells in the countryside are now going low in the summertime. In Ireland, we’ve never had to irrigate our agri sector as they do in other countries, but at some point in the future this will become a reality, putting freshwater sources under enormous pressure. The salmon farm industry uses vast amounts of freshwater to treat the farmed fish for amoebic gill disease. The used freshwater is dumped at sea, where it causes huge damage to sea life that cannot exist in freshwater, or severely reduced salinity. We need to start planning how we are going to deal with huge water shortages, and "lets get it from the shannon" is not a longterm alternative.

In the adaptation plan it states "well managed riparian forests can act as a buffer between water courses and agriculture". This is true but we must not forget the role of kelp in taking nutrients out of the water. Kelp is also very important for fighting costal erosion. It appears at the moment that kelp is treated by the DAFM as a waste product that can be exploited by the Dept of Housing without any consequence. Growing kelp/seaweed has many positive impacts and should be encouraged.

Pádraic Fogarty in his book "Whittled Away" makes the case that we should not be grazing our upland peatlands because of the erosion this is causing. He says that birch woodland is the natural covering of these upland areas. The DAFM Adaptation Plan states: "Maintaining grazing in upland peatlands also has an important dual purpose role to play in both protecting against wildfires and acting as a sink during periods of high water flow surges. Grazing with adequate animal numbers can maintain a cover of grass and inhibit the ability
of scrub and woody species to self-seed and develop. The absence of a woody mass to fuel a fire reduces the risk of wildfires in dry conditions.

Let us be clear, the reason why we have fires in Ireland is more to do with the presence of a gallon of petrol and a match than because of ideal wildfire conditions. The vegetation that grows in upland peatlands while it is being grazed is bog grass and gorse, both burn incredibly well.

The whole idea of hilltop grazing to prevent "wildfires" is a little like rotovating your lawn to prevent it from catching fire. Calling it a sink to help with high water flow surges is very naive.

To conclude, there are many positive actions that can be taken. The sooner actions are taken the quicker their positive effects can be felt.

I disapprove of the relaxed attitude that climate change means warmer weather so we'll be grand, drive on the sustainable intensification of economic growth. The entire thing looks like the captain of the Titanic saying how those lovely white fluffy things in front are there solely for our benefit. Do we need to wipe out our fish before we "realise" that we've gone too far. Do we need to have a hurricane wipe out our sitka spruce plantations before changing to smaller, better managed, native woodlands. Do we need to have huge losses to farm livestock due to feed and water shortages before there is an emergency plan put in place?

I hope that my contribution has been useful. I look forward to supporting further public consultation on this matter in the future.

Dolf D'hondt,