



Strengthening Democratic Governance
for Climate Transitions

D4.2 – INDEPENDENT CLIMATE ADVISORY BODIES

WP4 – Non-majoritarian Institutions



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EC Summary Requirements

1. Changes with respect to the DoA

The work carried out under this task closely aligns with what was described in the DoA with the following adaptations.

The cross-country Europe-wide mapping of advisory body design features set out in the DoA was completed and informed the selection of case studies for this report. It is not reproduced in full in order to keep this deliverable focused, but a summary table is presented on p.10. The DoA proposed three national case studies, each assessing set-up, governance, mandate, and key outputs. This report instead presents three case studies covering four countries, each using a different method suited to the specific question it addresses (see p.13) but drawing on analysis of references to the bodies in policy reports and decisions, parliamentary debates, and major media outlets as set out in the DoA.

The DoA specified at least 10 semi-structured interviews with members of advisory bodies, experts from government, parliament, civil society and business organisations. The first (Section 4) and third (Section 6) case study draw on 23 interviews in total, exceeding this minimum. The selection of interviewees was slightly adapted in light of access and relevance, with more academics and media actors interviewed in the place of businesses representatives, but represented a broad range of stakeholders consistent with the DoA.

2. Dissemination and uptake

This deliverable is for publication for the wider public and for use within the project consortium.

3. Short summary of results (<250 words)

This report, produced under Work Package 4 of the RETOOL project, examines the contribution of independent climate advisory bodies to democratic climate governance. Over 40 countries have established such bodies, yet existing research skews toward the UK's Committee on Climate Change (CCC). It emphasises positive impact on climate policymaking but does not address the impact on broader democratic governance and does not consider how these bodies withstand growing political contestation around climate action across Europe.

The report addresses these gaps in two ways. First, applying the RETOOL analytical framework, it evaluates the impact of Ireland's Climate Change Advisory Council (CCAC) across the pillars of climate democracy. Second, it examines how advisory bodies are impacted by and respond to rising contestation—externally, through UK CCC mentions in parliamentary debate, and internally, through interviews with policy stakeholders in Ireland, Finland and Sweden and the Irish CCAC, the Finnish Climate Change Panel, and the Swedish Climate Policy Council.

Findings show that the advisory bodies considered in the study contribute most strongly to the effectiveness and accountability pillars of climate democracy, while their contribution to participation and deliberativeness remains limited, except for the UK CCC, largely due to mandate and resourcing constraints rather than any inherent limitation of the model. Under political contestation, institutional resilience depends less on public standing of the body than on statutory embeddedness, parliamentary engagement, and anchoring to legal commitments such as EU targets. A statutory "duty to respond" requiring governments to consider and respond to advice matters for impact but is not sufficient alone. The report concludes with recommendations on legal embeddedness, mandate and accountability provisions, funding arrangements and strategies for the bodies to increase resilience.

4. Evidence of accomplishment

This report.

Preface

The overall goal of the RETOOL project is to advance our understanding of how to address the twin challenges of responding to the climate imperative while strengthening and reinvigorating democratic governance. The project has four overarching objectives: (i) To deepen our understanding of the relationship between democratic governance and the climate imperative by developing a novel analytical framework and creating new empirical underpinnings, including important new open-access datasets; (ii) To understand how a variety of democratic institutions across Europe are responding to the climate challenge, including learning lessons from history and studying new and innovative democratic practices; (iii) To contribute to reinvigorating democratic governance in Europe by developing and synthesising new knowledge and insights on climate democracy, and presenting them in a range of high-impact formats; and (iv) To serve as a bridge between academic research on climate democracy innovations and policymakers and practitioners, as well as civil society and the wider public. RETOOL brings together an international and interdisciplinary consortium, with partners from Western Europe (Ireland, UK, Belgium, Austria), Northern Europe (Finland), Eastern Europe (Estonia), and Southern Europe (Italy, Greece), combining expertise in political science, political sociology, deliberative democracy, environmental law, European studies, and public administration. The consortium includes a democracy practitioner foundation (Praxis), and all partners are closely associated with practitioner and civil society networks and involved in hands-on activities. RETOOL will be undertaken by a mature, settled consortium that has significant experience of working together, with six of our nine partners core members of the EU-funded Jean Monnet Network GreenDeal-NET.

Consortium Partner	Acronym	Country	Logo
Dublin City University	DCU	IR	
Vrije Universiteit Brussel	VUB	BE	
Università degli studi di Trento	UNITN	IT	
Universiteit Gent	UGent	BE	
Universität für Bodenkultur Wien	BOKU	AT	
University of Eastern Finland	UEF	FI	
HOLISTIC S.A.	HOL	EL	
Praxis Think Tank	PRAXIS	EE	
London School of Economics and Political Science	LSE	UK	

Executive Summary

Background and rationale: This report, produced under Work Package 4 of the RETOOL project, examines the contribution of independent climate advisory bodies—expert councils, committees, or panels—to democratic climate governance. Over 40 countries have established such bodies as a cornerstone of climate governance, yet existing research skews toward the UK’s Committee on Climate Change (CCC), emphasises policy impact over broader governance contribution, and rarely addresses how these bodies withstand growing political contestation around climate action.

Objectives and approach: The report addresses these gaps in two ways. First, applying the RETOOL analytical framework that outlines key features of democratic climate governance, it evaluates the impact of Ireland’s Climate Change Advisory Council (CCAC) across the pillars of climate democracy, drawing on 15 stakeholder interviews. Second, it examines how advisory bodies are affected by, and respond to, rising political contestation—externally, through analysis of UK CCC mentions in parliamentary debate between 2019 and 2025, and internally, through 23 interviews with members, secretariats, and external stakeholders of the Irish CCAC, the Finnish Ilmastopaneeli (Climate Change Panel) and the Swedish Klimatpolitiska Rådet (Climate Policy Council).

Key findings: Independent advisory bodies make their strongest and most consistent contribution to the effectiveness and accountability pillars of climate democracy, through their influence on carbon budgets, targets, and policy measures, and through their watchdog function. Their contribution to participation and deliberativeness remains limited, a gap attributed primarily to mandate and resourcing constraints rather than any inherent limitation of the advisory-body model. Under political contestation, institutional resilience depends less on public popularity than on statutory embeddedness, parliamentary engagement, and anchoring to external commitments such as EU targets; a statutory “duty to respond” matters for impact but is not sufficient on its own, as the comparison with Denmark’s stronger “duty to act” model shows. Advisory bodies have adopted a range of adaptive strategies in response to contestation, spanning communication practice, stakeholder engagement, and collaboration with sister bodies—though resourcing constraints run through nearly all of them, leaving their ultimate resilience dependent on political will in the absence of stronger institutional safeguards.

Recommendations: The report sets out recommendations in four areas. On establishment and legal embeddedness, it recommends embedding advisory bodies and their core mandates directly in legislation, with statutory funding floors, multi-year funding cycles, and cross-party input into appointments. On mandate design, it recommends moving towards a statutory duty to act rather than merely to respond, explicitly authorising public engagement and stakeholder consultation, and providing a legal right of access to government data. For advisory bodies themselves, it recommends diversified communication practices, deliberate stakeholder-ecosystem building, joint publications with sister bodies, and proactively building an evidence base of their own cost-effectiveness. Finally, on safeguarding independence under funding pressure, it recommends carefully bounded co-funding arrangements with aligned technical agencies as a partial buffer against politically driven budget cuts.

Table of Contents

1	Introduction	7
2	Conceptual Foundation	7
2.1	Existing Literature on Independent Climate Advisory Bodies.....	8
2.2	Mapping of Independent Advisory Bodies.....	9
3	Methodology	12
3.1	Research Design.....	12
3.2	Case study 1: The Impact of the Irish Climate Change Advisory Council on Climate Action and Democratic Governance	13
3.3	Case Study 2: The Influence of the UK Climate Change Committee Under Political Contestation ...	15
3.4	Case Study 3: The Experience of Irish, Swedish and Finnish Climate Advisory Bodies Under Political Contestation	15
3.5	Limitations.....	16
4	The Impact of the Irish Climate Change Advisory Council on Climate Action and Democratic Governance	16
4.1	Context	17
4.2	Impact	18
4.2.1	Perceptions of the CCAC.....	18
4.2.2	Impact on climate democracy	19
4.2.3	Barriers and Enablers of Impact	22
4.3	Implications.....	24
5	The Influence of the UK Climate Change Committee Under Political Contestation	25
5.1	Context	26
5.2	Impact	26
5.2.1	The CCC as Legitimiser	26
5.2.2	The CCC as Policy Entrepreneur	26
5.2.3	The CCC as Watchdog: Accountability for Net Zero	27
5.2.4	Contested Authority and Misrepresentation of Evidence.....	27
5.3	Implications.....	28
6	The Experience of Irish, Swedish and Finnish Climate Advisory Bodies Under Political Contestation	28
6.1	Context	29
6.1.1	Declining Political Interest in Climate Change.....	29
6.1.2	Political Polarisation Around Climate Change	29
6.1.3	Targeted Opposition to Climate Action by Lobby Groups.....	30
6.1.4	Distrust in Science and Mis- and Disinformation	30
6.2	Impact	30
6.2.1	Ireland.....	30
6.2.2	Sweden.....	31
6.2.3	Finland.....	32
6.3	Implications	33

6.3.1	Key Debates	33
6.3.2	Key Strategies	34
7	Findings and Recommendations	37
7.1	Findings	37
7.1.1	Independent Advisory Bodies and Climate Democracy.....	37
7.1.2	Advisory Bodies under Political Contestation	38
7.1.3	Strategies to Enhance Resilience	38
7.2	Recommendations	39

List of Figures

Figure 1. Stakeholder perceptions of the Irish Climate Change Advisory Council	18
Figure 2. Perceived impact of the Irish Climate Change Advisory Council	21

List of Tables

Table 1. Independent expert advisory bodies on climate change in Europe.....	10
Table 2. Key features of the Irish, UK, Swedish, and Finnish climate advisory bodies.....	11
Table 3. Application of the RETOOL analytical framework to independent climate bodies	14

1 Introduction

This report is part of Work Package 4 of the RETOOL project, which examines the contribution of non-majoritarian institutions to democratic climate governance, and is focused on the role of independent climate advisory bodies. More than 140 countries have announced net zero targets aligned with the Paris Agreement. Meeting these targets will require evidence-backed policymaking which, in turn, depends on rigorous analyses of climate science, and of underlying economic and political conditions. Over 40 countries worldwide have responded by creating independent climate advisory bodies (Miljand and Bäckstrand, 2021; Nemet et al., 2017; Brunner et al., 2012). Over time, these bodies have become a cornerstone of effective climate governance.

While much of the existing literature has examined the form and function of independent climate advisory bodies, comparatively less attention has been paid to their impact, particularly on democratic governance. Research on the role of these bodies experiencing high levels of contestation around climate change also remains limited, even though this is the reality in many European countries. This report has three key objectives:

- To understand the real and potential contributions of independent climate advisory bodies to democratic climate governance.
- To understand how independent climate advisory bodies are affected when political consensus around climate change shifts and climate democracy is challenged by distrust in science, disinformation and polarisation.
- To understand the implications of these emerging challenges for the role of the advisory bodies and draw lessons learnt on how they are responding to those political challenges.

To pursue these objectives, the report analyses three case studies. The first case study considers the Irish Climate Change Advisory Council (CCAC) and examines its impact on climate action and democratic governance through the perspectives of the key policy stakeholders, using the RETOOL analytical framework (Brawley-Chesworth al. 2024) that fleshes out the key elements of climate democracy. The second case study considers how increasing polarisation and contestation around climate change in the UK's political debate and policy reversal by the government affected the use of the information produced by the UK Climate Change Committee (CCC) through the analysis of the parliamentary debates. The third case study considers how change in the political commitment to climate change by governments, and the growing contestation around climate change, affect the role and impact of independent advisory bodies based on the analysis of the perceptions of the policy stakeholders and the advisory bodies themselves. It takes a cross-cutting perspective and analyses the examples of the Irish CCAC, the Swedish Klimatpolitiska Rådet (Climate Policy Council), and the Finnish Ilmastopaneeli (Climate Change Panel). It also explores how climate advisory bodies worldwide are responding to these political challenges.

The report is structured as follows. Section 2 develops the conceptual foundations for the report by reviewing the existing literature on independent climate advisory bodies, mapping the landscape of European climate advisory bodies and comparing key features of the four bodies on which this report focuses. Section 3 outlines the methodology for the report and the three empirical case studies. Section 4 investigates the impact of the Irish CCAC on climate action and democratic governance. Section 5 and 6 investigate how challenges such as declining interest in or resistance to climate action, political polarisation around climate change, targeted opposition to climate action, distrust in science, and mis- and disinformation around climate change are affecting the UK CCC, the Swedish Climate Policy Council, and the Finnish Climate Change Panel. Section 7 concludes by presenting the key findings and recommendations.

2 Conceptual Foundation

This section establishes the conceptual foundation for the analysis presented in the remainder of this report. Section 2.1 reviews the existing literature on independent climate advisory bodies. Section 2.2 maps the key features of the four independent climate advisory bodies on which this report focuses.

2.1 Existing Literature on Independent Climate Advisory Bodies

Independent climate advisory bodies have become a widespread institutional response to climate change. Called by different names—councils, committees, or panels—they typically comprise experts from different backgrounds and are primarily tasked with providing expert advice on climate policy. Their emergence reflects a broader logic in climate governance design: that bodies of experts, insulated from short-term political pressure, are well placed to depoliticise contentious issues and provide the long-term perspective and consistency that short-term electoral cycles struggle to sustain (Crowley and Head, 2017; Hale, 2026). The design of independent climate advisory bodies varies considerably across mandate, relationship with government, composition, appointment process, and resourcing, but most perform some combination of three functions: advising government on climate targets and policy pathways; monitoring and assessing implementation; and engaging stakeholders and the public (Elliott et al., 2021; Averchenkova and Lazaro, 2020).

Research on independent climate advisory bodies has grown substantially over the past decade, reflecting their rapid proliferation as a feature of national climate governance. The literature on climate advisory bodies divides into two strands. The first is literature that maps the landscape of advisory bodies and their key design features. Weaver et al. (2019) provide an early overview, describing roughly a dozen bodies world-wide. Evans and Duwe (2021) map advisory bodies across Europe using a three-tier typology, categorising them as “watchdog”, “information provider” and “convenor”. Zooming in at the national level, Elliott et al. (2021), drawing on 28 expert interviews and survey responses across nine bodies in six countries, identify factors that practitioners associate with effectiveness in relation to the mandate, independence, membership and leadership, research practices, and operations and budget of climate advisory bodies. Abraham-Dukuma et al. (2020) examine how the multidisciplinary composition of bodies shapes the recommendations they produce.

The second strand is empirical research on the impact of independent climate advisory bodies. Within this research, the UK’s CCC has been a key focus. Averchenkova, Fankhauser and Finnegan (2021a) assess the body’s contribution to policy certainty and the quality of the UK climate debate over the first decade of its existence. In a related study, using an original dataset of CCC mentions in UK parliamentary debates between 2009 and 2018, Averchenkova, Fankhauser and Finnegan (2021b) develop a typology of advisory-body roles — “legitimiser”, “knowledge broker”, and “policy entrepreneur”. Dudley, Jordan and Lorenzoni (2022) extend this empirical base, analysing 700 CCC recommendations issued between 2009 and 2020, finding that recommendations became more cross-sectoral and specific in their addressee over time, with nearly half repeated across successive reports. A follow-up study by Dudley, Holmes, Jordan and Lorenzoni (2025) examines government responses to these same recommendations, assessing the extent to which government uptake reflects genuine policy impact rather than nominal acknowledgement.

Beyond the UK, a smaller number of studies have examined the impact of advisory bodies elsewhere. For example, Tallon et al. (2021) provide an independent five-year review of Ireland’s CCAC, and Gaia Consulting (2023) provide an evaluation of Finland’s Climate Change Panel. Averchenkova et al. (2024) compare framework-law impacts across Germany, Ireland and New Zealand, finding that climate advisory bodies were among the “most important institutions created by the legislation across all three country case studies”. More recently, scholarship has shifted to exploring the impact of climate advisory bodies beyond Europe and at the subnational level (Talbot and Bernier, 2026).

Despite these advances in the literature, three key gaps remain. First, empirical research on the impact of climate advisory bodies remains skewed towards the UK. While the UK has been studied for over a decade using a range of methods, few studies have focused on other independent advisory bodies in Europe. Second, much of the literature focuses on the policy impact of climate advisory bodies, neglecting the potential impact of these bodies on broader governance. Notable exceptions include Averchenkova et al.’s (2021a) study, which finds that the CCC’s influence extends beyond its formal remit into the wider political debate on energy and infrastructure, and Elliott et al.’s (2021) study, which finds that advisory bodies can generate secondary benefits, such as awareness-raising and consensus-building. A third gap is that relatively little research has examined how climate advisory bodies have been affected by growing contestation around climate change. Aarthun and Sundqvist (2025) apply a science-and-technology studies lens, conducting interviews to examine how the Swedish Climate Policy Council understands and navigates the tension between political independence and the political dependence needed to secure influence, but this remains exceptional.

Drawing on existing literature, and with a view to addressing these research gaps, this report advances our understanding of independent climate advisory bodies in two ways. First, it explores the impact of climate advisory bodies on democratic governance, as well as climate policy, by employing the RETOOL analytical framework (Brawley-Chesworth et al., 2024) to evaluate the impact of the CCAC. Second, it explores how climate advisory bodies are affected by, and respond to, growing contestation around climate change from two angles. From an external perspective, through analysis of mentions of the UK CCC in parliamentary debates, it investigates how the UK CCC's advice is used over time. From an internal perspective, through interviews with members and secretariats of the Irish CCAC, Finnish Climate Change Panel, and Swedish Climate Policy Council, and with actors who engage closely with these bodies, it investigates how these bodies understand and navigate challenging political contexts.

2.2 Mapping of Independent Advisory Bodies

Based on our analysis, as on 1 July 2026, 31 European countries have either established some form of climate advisory institution or passed a law to create one. These bodies vary in the degree of independence, membership and mandate, with some bodies being independent while others are based on institutional representation. A typology by Evans and Duwe (2021) splits climate advisory institutions into independent expert advisory bodies on climate change, which are the focus of this report; in-house scientific units within government, and stakeholder or ministerial advisory bodies.

In Europe, 16 countries have an operational independent expert advisory body on climate change, with 14 of those located in the member states of the European Union (see Table 1). Portugal and Spain have mandated creation of such bodies in their national climate laws, but at the time of writing the bodies have not yet been operationalised. The European Scientific Advisory Board on Climate Change (ESABCC) was established in 2021 to provide scientific advice at a regional level and beyond Europe. The International Climate Councils Network (a network of climate advisory bodies) now brings together 28 climate advisory bodies worldwide.

This report focuses on four independent climate advisory bodies: the Irish Climate Change Advisory Council (CCAC), the UK Climate Change Committee (CCC), the Swedish Klimatpolitiska Rådet (Climate Policy Council), and the Finnish Ilmastopaneeli (Climate Change Panel). These bodies were chosen for three reasons.

First, they are among the few first independent advisory bodies on climate change established in Europe and internationally. The oldest, the UK's Committee on Climate change, has been in operation for about 18 years; while the youngest, the Swedish Climate Policy Council, has existed for 8 years. This provides for a meaningful time period to assess their impact and to evaluate changes over time.

Second, they are similar enough to support meaningful comparison, while differing along dimensions that are likely to shape the impact of each body, and how each body experiences and responds to political challenges (see Table 2). All four are statutory bodies comprised mostly of independent experts (with exception of ex officio members in CCAC) that advise the government on climate policy. They differ, however, in several respects that are relevant to this report. Only in Ireland and the UK is the government legally required to respond to the body's advice. The CCAC and CCC both propose specific carbon budgets, while the Swedish Climate Policy Council and Finnish Climate Change Panel are confined to evaluating targets, pathways and policy gaps defined by government actors. Resourcing also varies substantially, with the UK's CCC by far the largest (~40-45 secretariat staff, £6-7m) and Finland's Climate Change Panel the smallest (~5 secretariat staff, €750,000), while Ireland and Sweden's climate advisory bodies sit in between. Finally, the Irish CCAC is distinctive in being composed of independent members with ex officio institutional representatives, while the other three bodies are composed entirely of experts.

Table 1. Independent expert advisory bodies on climate change in Europe

Country	Independent advisory body	Start of operation
Belgium	Committee of independent experts, “Conseil scientifique du climat”	2024
Denmark	The Danish Council on Climate Change, “Klimarådet”	2014
Estonia	Climate Council	2023
Finland	The Finnish Climate Change Panel, “Suomen Ilmastopaneeli”	2011, in 2015 formalised in law
France	High Council on Climate, “Haut Conseil pour le Climat”	2018, decree in 2019
Germany	The Council of Experts on Climate Change, “Expertenrat für Klimafragen”	2020
Greece	Special Scientific Committee	2022
Ireland	Climate Change Advisory Council	2015, reformed in 2021 through amendment of the law
Luxembourg	The Climate Policy Observatory, “Observatoire de la politique climatique”	2020
Malta	National Climate Action Council (NCAC)	2024
Netherlands	Scientific Climate Council, “Wetenschappelijke Klimaatraad”	2023
Portugal*	Mandated by law, but pending operationalisation, “Conselho de Ação Climática”	pending
Romania	Scientific Advisory Board for Climate Change ¹	2026
Slovenia	Climate Council, “Podnebni svet”	2023
Spain*	Mandated by law, but pending operationalisation, “Comité de Expertos de Cambio Climático y Transición Energética”	pending
Sweden	Climate Policy Council, “Klimatpolitiska Rådet”	2018
Iceland	Icelandic Climate Council, “Loftslagsráð”	2018; 2019 embedded into law; 2024 reformed
United Kingdom	Committee on Climate Change	2008

Source: Authors.

¹ Launched in June 2026: <https://business-review.eu/sustainability/the-forecast-for-climate-action-is-finally-turning-favorable-the-scientific-advisory-council-on-climate-change-has-been-officially-launched-in-romania-296929>.

Table 2. Key features of the Irish, UK, Swedish, and Finnish climate advisory bodies

Feature	Irish Climate Change Advisory Council (CCAC)	UK Climate Change Committee (CCC)	Swedish Klimatpolitiska Rådet (Climate Policy Council)	Finnish Ilmastopaneeli (Climate Change Panel)
Members	13 members; mix of experts and ex officio	~ 8 core members; multidisciplinary experts	8 independent experts	~ 15 academic experts
Secretariat size	~12 staff	~40-45 staff	~4 staff	~ 5 staff
Annual budget	No data	~£6-7 million ²	~€2 million ³	~€ €750,000
Appointment of members	Government on Minister's nomination	Joint appointment by UK nations	Appointed by government	Appointed by Government; academic institutions nominate
Advice on targets	Yes—proposes carbon budgets	Yes—recommends carbon budgets	Yes—advises on targets and pathways	Not directly—produces, compiles and analyses scientific information and identifies information needs
Progress assessment	Annual report	Annual report	Annual report	No
Policy advice	Advises on climate action plan	Advises on mitigation pathways	Evaluates government policy against climate goals	Advises on specific plans (e.g. on the long-term and medium-term climate policy plans, the adaptation plan, and the land-use sector plan)
Duty for the Government to respond to the advice	Yes—within carbon budgets compliance cycle, but not for the policy advice	Yes—respond to CCC progress reports with a set deadline (annual, covering both mitigation and adaptation)	No	No

Source: Authors based on desk review of the underlying legislation and website of the advisory bodies.

Third, the choice of case studies was informed by the availability of and gaps in the existing literature. The CCAC was first established under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act (CALCDA) in 2015 and was significantly amended by the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021. It has

² <https://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/CCC-Annual-Report-And-Accounts-2024-25.pdf>

³ <https://formas.se/download/18.f65873b1869c967bcf24cf9/1678375786525/Budgetunderlag%202024-2026.pdf>

already been the subject of empirical research, directly by Tallon et al. (2021) and indirectly by Averchenkova et al. (2024), but this evidence base is now a few years old, and neither of the previous studies evaluate the CCAC's impact on democratic governance as distinct but connected to its impact on climate action, nor do they assess how the CCAC is being impacted by and is responding to increasing political contestation around climate action. Thus, this report revisits the CCAC to provide an updated evaluation of its impact based on perceptions of policy stakeholders, with particular attention on its perceived contributions to democratic governance.

The UK CCC, established under the Climate Change Act in 2008 as the first statutory climate advisory body of its kind, is the most extensively studied climate advisory body worldwide. Yet very little of this literature examines the CCC's influence under conditions of contestation around climate change. This report therefore deliberately focuses on the period of climate politicisation and policy backsliding between March 2023 and March 2025 to examine whether and how the way in which the body's advice is used in the political debate has changed. Furthermore, by building on the previous assessment of the role of the CCC in parliamentary debates in its first decade of 2008-2018 by Averchenkova et al. (2021b) and extending it up to 2025, we are able to enrich our understanding of how the use of information produced by an advisory body changes over time as it matures.

Finally, the Swedish Climate Policy Council and the Finnish Climate Change Panel were selected because they remain relatively understudied and because they surfaced a live and pressing concern during the research for this deliverable. The Climate Policy Council was established in 2018 alongside Sweden's Climate Act, as part of the broader national climate policy framework adopted by the Swedish parliament in 2017. The Finnish Climate Change Panel has provided science-based climate policy advice since 2011, though its role was only formally defined in law with Finland's 2015 Climate Act, subsequently reformed in 2023. There is very little literature on either of these bodies. Moreover, participants at the RETOOL stakeholder workshop held in January 2025 reported that the role of these bodies had been contested. Thus, this report investigates whether and how the Swedish Climate Policy Council, the Finnish Climate Change Panel and the Irish CCAC are being affected by political trends related to climate change being witnessed across Europe, as well as how they are responding.

3 Methodology

This section sets out the methodological approach underpinning the analysis presented in the remainder of this report. Section 3.1 outlines the overall research design and the three case studies through which the report's central questions are examined. Sections 3.2 to 3.4 each present one of these case studies in turn. Section 3.5 sets out limitations.

3.1 Research Design

This report adopts a mixed-methods research design to examine the role of independent climate advisory bodies in democratic climate governance in Europe. The objectives and scope of this report were determined by three steps. First, a review of existing literature on independent climate advisory bodies was conducted, as set out above, which highlighted the research gaps that this study aims to address. Second, a mapping of independent advisory bodies across Europe was undertaken, which highlighted similarities and differences in terms of mandates, composition and appointment procedures, relationship to government, and resourcing (Table 1).

Third, a RETOOL stakeholder workshop was held in January 2025. The workshop brought together more than 40 individuals from a range of disciplines, sectors, and countries, and included members and secretariats of 10 independent national and regional climate advisory bodies across Europe. A dedicated session on independent climate advisory bodies examined how advisory bodies can strengthen democracies, how their impact can be sustained in the context of growing social backlash against climate change and shrinking democratic space, and how that impact can be measured. Participants highlighted the risk that these challenges pose to the legitimacy and funding of independent advisory bodies. This session directly informed this report's focus on evaluating impact on democratic governance and on how advisory bodies experience

and respond to political contestation.

On this basis, the report undertakes three case studies, each using a different method suited to the specific question it addresses. The first case study addresses the impact of independent climate advisory bodies on democratic governance and climate policy, by evaluating the CCAC's impact using stakeholder interviews, which are analysed using the RETOOL analytical framework. The second and third case studies focus on how the role of advisory bodies changes during—and how they experience and respond to—political contestation, from complementary perspectives. The second case study takes an external perspective, drawing on content analysis of mentions of the UK CCC in parliamentary debates to investigate how the CCC's advice has been used in political debate over time. The third case study takes an internal perspective, drawing on interviews with members and secretariats of the Irish CCAC, Swedish Climate Policy Council, and Finnish Climate Change Panel, and with actors who engage closely with these bodies, to investigate how these bodies understand and navigate challenging political contexts. Table 2 presents a mapping of the four independent advisory bodies on which this report focuses: the Irish CCAC, the UK CCC, the Swedish Climate Policy Council and the Finnish Climate Panel.

3.2 Case study 1: The Impact of the Irish Climate Change Advisory Council on Climate Action and Democratic Governance

This case study builds on two earlier evaluations of the CCAC: the Independent Evaluation of the Climate Change Advisory Council conducted by Tallon, Turner and Thorgeirsson in 2021, and the study on the Impacts of climate framework laws: lessons from Germany, Ireland, and New Zealand conducted by Averchenkova, Higham, Chan, and Keuschnigg in 2024, which covered the CCAC as a key innovation under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act (CALCDA).

To understand stakeholders' perceptions of the CCAC, the case study draws on 15 semi-structured interviews with a range of stakeholders, some of whom fall into more than one stakeholder category: 6 current and former members of the CCAC and its secretariat, 3 civil society actors, 3 academics, 3 current and former government actors, and 1 media actor. The interview transcripts were coded inductively in NVIVO.

For ease of reference, direct quotations in Section 4 are footnoted using the interviewee key below:

- Interviewee 1 – Member of the CCAC
- Interviewee 2 – Academic
- Interviewee 3 – Member of the secretariat of the CCAC
- Interviewee 4 – Civil society actor
- Interviewee 5 – Civil society actor
- Interviewee 6 – Journalist
- Interviewee 7 – Former member of the CCAC and government actor
- Interviewee 8 – Member of the CCAC
- Interviewee 9 – Former government actor
- Interviewee 10 – Civil society actor
- Interviewee 11 – Member of the CCAC
- Interviewee 12 – Academic
- Interviewee 13 – Academic
- Interviewee 14 – Government Actor
- Interviewee 15 – Member of the secretariat of the CCAC

The interviews investigate how the CCAC is perceived by stakeholders, whether and how it is perceived to have evolved over time, its perceived impacts on climate action and democratic governance, and the barriers

and enablers that shape its impact, as well as potential areas for improvement.

To evaluate the CCAC’s impact on democratic climate governance, interview findings were analysed using the RETOOL analytical framework, set out in Table 3, which identifies seven interrelated dimensions of democratic climate governance: participation, representation, knowledge and expertise, accountability, deliberativeness, effectiveness, and justice (Brawley-Chesworth et al., 2025). These are understood as mutually reinforcing dimensions of climate democracy that, together, provide a comprehensive basis for assessing the CCAC’s contribution to climate action and democratic governance.

Table 3. Application of the RETOOL analytical framework to independent climate bodies

RETOOL analytical framework	Analytical indicator	Application in this report
Participation	Inclusion of citizens and affected groups in climate governance	Whether the advisory body creates channels for stakeholders, civil society, and the public to engage with and influence its advice.
Representation	Recognition and inclusion of diverse interests, perspectives and affected groups in climate governance	Whether the advisory body’s composition and outputs incorporate the interests of underrepresented groups, vulnerable communities, and future generations.
Knowledge and expertise	Integration of scientific and expert knowledge into democratic decision-making	How the advisory body synthesises scientific evidence for government and the public, and how its independence and credibility shape the influence of that evidence.
Accountability	Holding public and private actors accountable for climate-related decisions	How the advisory body scrutinises, and enables others to scrutinise, government progress against climate targets, and whether government is required to respond to its findings.
Deliberativeness	Promotion of informed public debate and reasoned decision-making	Whether the advisory body’s reports, advice, and public engagement stimulate informed and reasoned dialogue on climate policy.
Effectiveness	Capacity of democratic institutions to deliver climate action	The advisory body’s influence on targets, policymaking, and implementation, as well as political and public debate.
Justice	Procedural, distributive and intergenerational justice	Whether the advisory body’s advice promotes the equitable distribution of climate burdens and benefits.

Source: Adapted from the RETOOL analytical framework (Brawley-Chesworth et al., 2025).

3.3 Case Study 2: The Influence of the UK Climate Change Committee Under Political Contestation

In this case study Averchenkova and Pabreja (2026) analyse the UK CCC's role in parliamentary debates on net zero between 2019 and 2025, a period marked by intense political contestation over fossil fuels and the costs of decarbonisation, and climate policy reversals. The study is based on a content analysis of parliamentary interventions referencing the CCC, drawing on Hansard records for 1 January 2019 to 31 March 2025 across the House of Commons, House of Lords, and committee proceedings. Using the same search terms to identify parliamentary interventions that mention the CCC as an earlier 2008–2018 study by Averchenkova et al. (2021a), to enable comparability, Averchenkova and Pabreja (2026) identify and code 1,758 contributions into thematic categories using NVivo. They assess the CCC's influence along three dimensions: evidentiary influence (use of CCC output as supporting evidence), direct influence (on matters where the CCC is a statutory adviser, such as carbon budgets), and diffused influence (references across legislation beyond its formal remit). They also conduct a deep dive into parliamentary interventions in the period of intense political contestation between March 2023 and March 2025, coded under the theme "Net Zero" and assess how the information produced by the UK CCC was used in political debates during this period.

The earlier study by Averchenkova et al. (2021a) presented an empirical assessment of CCC influence during 2008–2018, categorising it into three roles: a "legitimiser", which justifies government's pre-determined policy objectives using ambiguous or contested evidence; a "knowledge broker", which generates neutral advice based on a synthesis of the best available evidence and is respected by stakeholders, generating the basis for well-informed dialogue; and a "policy entrepreneur", which facilitates efforts to influence government decisions and the adoption of innovative solutions. Averchenkova and Pabreja (2026) extend this analysis to parliamentary debates between 2019 and 2025, adding a dimension of contestation to capture instances where the CCC's authority, analytical methods, or statutory remit are directly challenged, a dimension that became particularly salient during 2023–2025 as climate policy became more politically contentious.

3.4 Case Study 3: The Experience of Irish, Swedish and Finnish Climate Advisory Bodies Under Political Contestation

This case study was motivated by reports from participants at the RETOOL stakeholder workshop in January 2025 that the role of independent climate advisory bodies in Sweden, and especially Finland, had been contested. It investigates whether and how the Irish Climate Change Advisory Council, the Swedish Climate Policy Council, and the Finnish Climate Change Panel are affected by a political trends being witnessed across Europe: declining interest in or resistance to climate action, political polarisation around climate change, targeted opposition to climate action, distrust in science, and mis- and disinformation around climate change (Crawley et al., 2022; Coffé et al., 2025; Errichiello et al., 2025; Zapp, 2022; Sethi, 2024; Science Feedback, 2026). It also investigates how these bodies are responding to these challenges, with a view to developing learnings for other independent climate advisory bodies and climate policy actors facing contestation.

The findings in this case study are based on 23 interviews with a range of stakeholders from Ireland, Finland, Sweden and beyond, some of whom fall into more than one stakeholder category: 9 current and former members of the CCAC and its secretariat, 5 civil society actors, 6 academics, 3 current and former government actors, 1 media actor and 1 international expert. The interview transcripts were coded inductively in NVIVO. For ease of reference, direct quotations in Section 6 are footnoted using the interviewee key:

- Interviewee 1 – Ireland – Member of a climate advisory body
- Interviewee 2 – Ireland – Academic
- Interviewee 3 – Ireland – Member of the secretariat of a climate advisory body
- Interviewee 4 – Ireland – Civil society actor
- Interviewee 5 – Ireland – Civil society actor
- Interviewee 6 – Ireland – Journalist
- Interviewee 7 – Ireland – Former member of a climate advisory body and government actor

- Interviewee 8 – Ireland – Member of a climate advisory body
- Interviewee 9 – Ireland – Former government actor
- Interviewee 10 – Ireland – Civil society actor
- Interviewee 11 – Ireland – Member of a climate advisory body
- Interviewee 12 – Ireland – Academic
- Interviewee 13 – Ireland – Academic
- Interviewee 14 – Ireland – Government Actor
- Interviewee 15 – Ireland – Member of the secretariat of a climate advisory body
- Interviewee 16 – Sweden – Civil society actor
- Interviewee 17 – Sweden – Academic
- Interviewee 18 – Finland – Member of the secretariat of a climate advisory body
- Interviewee 19 – Sweden – Former member of a climate advisory body and civil society actor
- Interviewee 20 – Sweden – Academic
- Interviewee 21 – Finland – Academic
- Interviewee 22 – International – Expert on climate advisory bodies
- Interviewee 23 – Finland – Member of the secretariat of a climate advisory body

3.5 Limitations

The findings presented in this report should be interpreted in light of the scope and methodological choices underpinning the research. The analysis reflects the state of each advisory body, and the political context in which it operates, at the time the mapping exercise (December 2025, with an update for the case study countries in July 2026) and case studies (March 2025 for the UK CCC, and July 2026 for the Irish CCAC, Swedish Climate Policy Council, and Finnish Climate Change Panel) were conducted. The mapping exercise presented in Tables 1 and 2 rely on publicly available information, which varies across countries. Resourcing figures are especially subject to change over time. The report considers four countries with differing legal, institutional, and political systems, which inevitably affects the depth and comparability of information available for each body.

As set out in the RETOOL project proposal, this task was to be “supplemented by at least 10 in-depth semi-structured interviews with the members of the advisory bodies, experts from government, parliament, civil society and business organisations, to understand how they perceive these bodies and in what way they use their outputs.” The Irish case study (Section 4) and Case study 3 (Section 6) draw on 15 and 23 interviews respectively, though some interviewees were common to both. The categories of stakeholder interviewed were adapted from those specified in the proposal in light of access and relevance, with academics and media actors interviewed in place of parliamentary and business representatives. The resulting samples offer a broadly representative range of perspectives rather than comprehensive coverage. Coding interview transcripts and parliamentary interventions also necessarily involved an element of researcher judgement.

Finally, the findings in this report, while relevant beyond the cases studied, are not directly generalisable to all independent climate advisory bodies.

4 The Impact of the Irish Climate Change Advisory Council on Climate Action and Democratic Governance

This case study evaluates the impact of the Irish Climate Change Advisory Council (CCAC) on climate action

and democratic governance, bringing up to date two earlier evaluations of the body.

The Climate Change Advisory Council (CCAC) was established under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 (CALCDA) and significantly strengthened by a 2021 amendment that mandated it to propose five-year carbon budgets and produce an annual review, assessing the state of implementation of climate policy and government compliance with carbon budgets and sectoral ceilings (Ireland, 2021). It is a statutory body, combining independent experts with ex-officio representatives from state agencies, that advises government and the Oireachtas on climate targets, policy, and progress.

A study comparing framework laws in Germany, Ireland, and New Zealand, describes the CCAC as “an authoritative, evidence-based voice in the climate debate” (Averchenkova et al., 2024, p.9); their interviewees identified the CCAC’s establishment as one of the most positive outcomes of the original 2015 Act. This corroborated an earlier independent evaluation, conducted five years after the CCAC’s establishment, which concluded that it “has been successful in establishing itself as an authoritative voice in the national climate debate”, and that its “frank and rigorously evidence-based annual analysis of Ireland’s disturbing record on mitigation has been a defence against even further slippage” (Tallon et al., 2021, p. 3). It also credited its evidence with helping to justify an increase in the national carbon tax and the end of government subsidies for peat and coal burning. Tallon et al. (2021), however, recommended that the Council move towards a more proactive role capable of shaping a more ambitious national vision for decarbonisation, and suggested several design improvements to strengthen the mandate and accountability, many of which were implemented through the amendment of CALCDA in 2021.

This case study builds on these previous evaluations of the CCAC in two ways. First, it asks whether the “authoritative voice” both studies describe still holds today, several years on. Second, it examines, for the first time, the CCAC’s contribution to democratic governance as well as climate action, drawing on 15 stakeholder interviews interpreted through the RETOOL analytical framework.

The remainder of this case study is structured as follows. Section 4.1 sets out the context, examining how the CCAC has evolved since Tallon et al.’s (2021) evaluation. Section 4.2 examines the CCAC’s impact: how it is perceived by stakeholders, its impact across the dimensions of the RETOOL framework, and the barriers and enablers shaping that impact. Section 4.3 sets out the implications of these findings, including areas for improvement identified by interviewees.

4.1 Context

Since Tallon et al.’s (2021) evaluation the CCAC has evolved in three key areas: its mandate, the selection and diversity of its members, and its capacity. Interviewees pointed to the 2021 CALCDA amendment and Tallon et al.’s evaluation itself as the major catalysts for this evolution. One interviewee described the amendment as being “widely recognised as one of the most... progressive acts on climate at that time”,⁴ while another called the evaluation “critical”, noting that it helped to “open [the] eyes” of the secretariat to areas for improvement.⁵

On mandate, since the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021, the CCAC has been mandated to propose five-year carbon budgets to the Joint Oireachtas [Irish Parliament] Committee on Climate, Energy, and the Environment. A member of the secretariat of the CCAC argued that this marked a “huge expansion” in the body’s mandate. On membership, the CCAC’s membership is now selected through an open call for applications, rather than the more informal process previously in place, and the previous preponderance of men and economists has given way to a better balance of gender and expertise. This was the change interviewees mentioned most frequently, and one that they appeared to welcome; one interviewee also suggested that current members generally had a stronger background in climate change. On capacity, the secretariat of the CCAC has expanded in recent years, growing, according to interviewees’ estimates, from around 4 members to around 12. While interviewees welcomed this growth, they also suggested that capacity remains insufficient (see Section 4.2.3).

Beyond these formal, documented changes, interviewees suggested that the CCAC has taken on a more

⁴ Interviewee 2, academic

⁵ Interviewee 3, member of the secretariat of the CCAC

proactive advocacy role, with one describing this as a “divergence from the original remit”.⁶

4.2 Impact

4.2.1 Perceptions of the CCAC

As per Figure 1, perceptions amongst stakeholders of the CCAC vary, but appear to be generally positive. Several interviewees referenced the perceived independence, balance and impartiality of the body. Interestingly, all concerns about the opacity of the CCAC and its willingness to be critical of government were raised by civil society interviewees, while all concerns about the CCAC becoming activist were raised by current or former members of the CCAC and/or current or former members of the government. One interviewee also suggested that perceptions of the CCAC are significantly shaped by its chair, as the “primary external voice of the council”.⁷ This points to the importance of the role played by the chair(s) of independent climate advisory bodies.

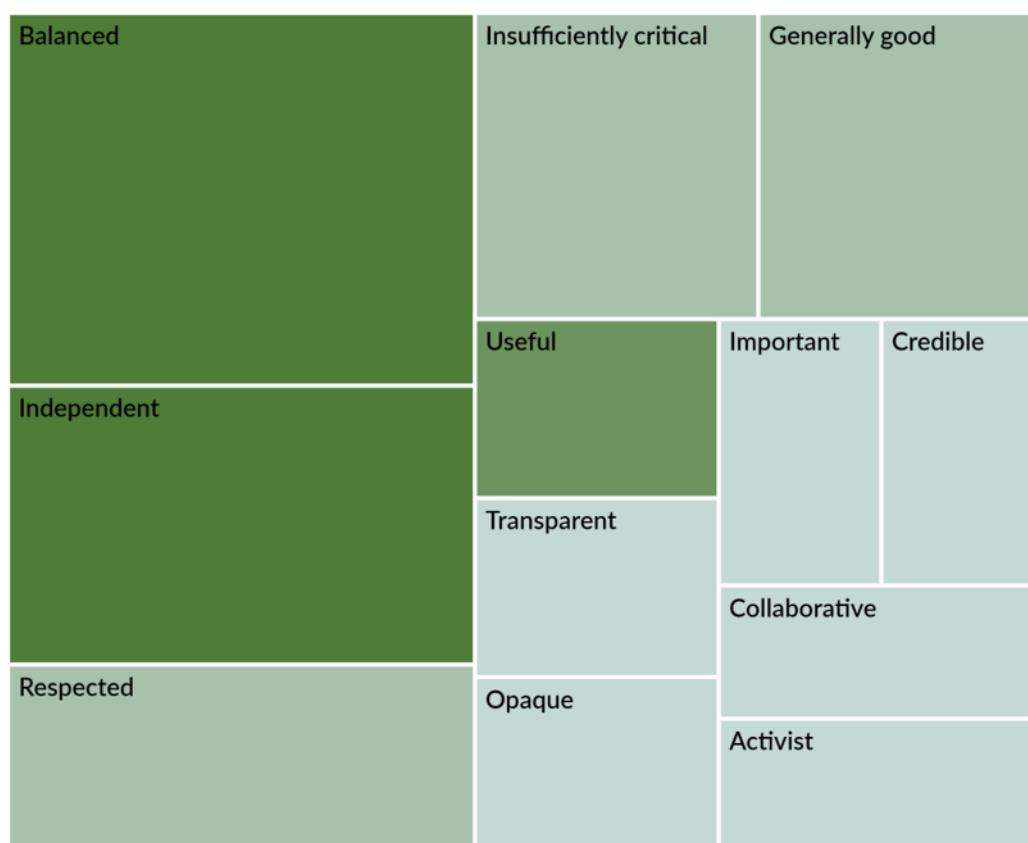


Figure 1. Stakeholder perceptions of the Irish Climate Change Advisory Council

Source: Generated using NVivo’s hierarchy chart function. Box size reflects the number of items coded for each perception (the number of distinct interviews in which it was raised); shading reflects the number of coding references (the total number of times it was mentioned), with darker boxes indicating perceptions mentioned more frequently overall.

Although the CCAC appears to be well regarded among those interested in climate change, several interviewees noted that wider awareness of the CCAC remains low. Three interviewees observed that a report that the CCAC co-published with the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council titled “A colossal missed opportunity:

⁶ Interviewee 7, former CCAC member and government actor

⁷ Interviewee 15, member of the secretariat of the CCAC

Ireland’s climate action and the potential costs of missed targets” in March 2025 received considerable media attention (Irish Fiscal Advisory Council and Climate Change Advisory Council, 2025). One interviewee added that the report’s highest estimate of what Ireland would have to pay out to the EU if it failed to meet its climate targets of €26 billion was “referenced everywhere for months”.⁸ Yet these interviewees also observed that this attention was short lived, with one interviewee stating that it was “disappointing” to see such reports “dismissed or... condensed into a single line”⁹. Relatedly, interviewees suggested that the media plays an important intermediary role between the CCAC and the public, and that the visibility of the CCAC and its recommendations, or lack thereof, are ultimately attributable to the choices of media actors.

4.2.2 Impact on climate democracy

4.2.2.1 Effectiveness

When asked about the contributions of the CCAC to democratic climate governance, the area on which the largest number of interviewees focused was on the CCAC’s contributions to effectiveness, through policy influence and policy innovation. In terms of the former, the most frequently cited policy impact of the CCAC was on Ireland’s carbon budgets. As noted above, it is now a core part of the CCAC’s mandate to propose 5-year carbon budgets and, as one interviewee put it, this makes the body an “intrinsic part of the policymaking process”¹⁰. Interestingly, while the CCAC’s impact on Ireland’s carbon budgets was identified as the most tangible area of impact, it was also the most contested: many interviewees highlighted weaknesses with the carbon budgets, and this emerged as a key area for improvement (see section 4.5). Beyond the carbon budgets, interviewees identified ways in which the CCAC had shaped policy on transport, energy, and carbon taxation. Indeed, the CCAC’s proposal for a predictable increase in the carbon tax rate, reaching at least €100 per tonne of CO₂ by 2030, was highlighted as a key innovation, which was legally enshrined in Finance Act 2020. Interviewees also highlighted innovative recommendations by the CCAC on Land Use, Land Use Change, and Forestry, which contributed to the government’s National Land Use Review (A Living Land, 2026); and on electric vehicles, including a recommendation for tailored grants for lower-income households, which were not taken up directly, but contributed to a shift in policy.

Despite these positive steps, several interviewees made it clear that the government does not always take up recommendations by the CCAC, and that climate action remains slow. In terms of uptake, an interviewee estimated that “somewhere between 30% and 50%” of the CCAC’s recommendations “have been properly followed through”, though they questioned whether this included “the big ones”.¹¹ In terms of progress towards climate goals, an interviewee summarised the situation saying “at the moment” the “ambition is very high, but the implementation is very slow”¹². The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Change, Environment and Energy has verified this, stating that Ireland is likely to overshoot its current carbon budget, which will roll excess emissions into the 3rd and 4th carbon budgets (Joint Committee on Climate, Environment and Energy, 2025).

Interviewees identified a lack of political will and organised political opposition as key barriers preventing further progress, especially in relation to agriculture; these are discussed further in Section 4.2.3. Generally, therefore, the CCAC appears to have made mixed contributions to the effectiveness of Ireland’s climate governance.

More broadly, interviewees discussed ways in which the CCAC has shaped the political and public debate on climate change in Ireland. This included the suggestion that the CCAC has helped to sensitise the public on climate change, which, in turn, has helped to keep climate change on the political agenda. Two interviewees added that the CCAC has not just helped to keep climate mitigation on the political agenda, but also climate adaptation. Crucially, these impacts were discussed in the context of a green backlash in Ireland, featuring declining interest and outright opposition to climate policy (See Section 6). Within this context, one interviewee

⁸ Interviewee 10, civil society actor

⁹ Interviewee 14, government actor

¹⁰ Interviewee 11, former member of the CCAC

¹¹ Interviewee 8, member of the CCAC

¹² Interviewee 3, member of the secretariat of the CCAC

argued that without the CCAC, climate issues “would slip down the agenda even further”¹³, while another working in the same space suggested that the CCAC “holds a line” against green backlash.¹⁴

4.2.2.2 Accountability

The CCAC’s contribution to accountability was highlighted by most interviewees referencing structured ways in which the CCAC holds the government accountable, e.g. annual reports, and ad hoc ways, e.g. statements on contentious issues, such as connecting data centres to the national grid (Donnelly, 2023). One frequently-mentioned example of the CCAC acting as a watchdog was the CCAC’s objection to the move by the government to disapply section 15 of the CALCDA, which requires relevant bodies to perform their functions in a manner consistent with climate plans, in three recent pieces of legislation (the Critical Infrastructure Act 2026, the Development (Strategic Gas Reserve) Act 2026, and the Dublin Airport (Passenger Capacity) Act 2026).

Furthermore, the CCAC equips other actors to hold the government accountable according to the interviewees (captured in Figure 2 as “enabling accountability”). This includes providing an evidence base for climate litigation cases, e.g. in the ongoing Friends of the Earth Ireland vs the Government case regarding Ireland’s Climate Action Plans, and NGO advocacy campaigns. One interviewee noted that NGOs regularly “fasten on statements from the CCAC as a hammer”¹⁵ while another admitted that they “routinely highlight” recommendations from the CCAC, including those around energy poverty.¹⁶

However, these non-binding mechanisms have their limits: the limited enforcement powers of the CCAC emerged as one of the key barriers preventing the body from having greater impact (see Section 4.2.3). Two interviewees pointed to delays in the publication of the latest Climate Action Plan and a statement by the Minister for Climate, Energy and the Environment that Ireland will miss its legally binding 2030 climate goals, as evidence of the limited impact that the CCAC has had in holding the government accountable. Another interviewee suggested that the government does not “take [the CCAC] that seriously” and that the government’s efforts to listen to them have merely been “lip service.”¹⁷ Overall, therefore, interviewees gave the sense that the CCAC makes a significant but limited contribution to accountability. As one interviewee put it, the CCAC prevents the Irish government from “run[ning] free”, but there is still “a gap in accountability.”¹⁸

4.2.2.3 Justice

One area around which there was some disagreement was on the CCAC’s impact on national, global, and intergenerational justice. A few interviewees noted that considerations of national justice are embedded into the CCAC’s recommendations on the recent energy crisis, transportation, and social housing—for example, it has called for targeted financial support for lower income households for electric vehicles (Climate Change Advisory Council, 2026). An interviewee also argued that members have generally “rail[ed] against policies that are regressive.”¹⁹ However, a few interviewees questioned whether these considerations were fully integrated into all of the CCAC’s work. One civil society interview added that they “wouldn’t associate the CCAC with carrying the justice torch.”²⁰ Similarly, a few interviewees argued that while the CCAC takes into consideration the idea of a global “fair share” when proposing carbon budgets, as per the Paris Agreement, that there is room for the CCAC to go further (see Section 4.5). One interviewee suggested that the CCAC’s minimalist interpretation of climate neutrality is an attempt to be pragmatic and that the body should instead facilitate a “broader conversation about what we owe to developing countries.”²¹ Finally, with regards to intergenerational justice, interviewees had little to say about whether the CCAC is encouraging long-term or intergenerational governance, although one interviewee noted that there is no young person on the CCAC.

¹³ Interviewee 2, academic

¹⁴ Interviewee 12, academic

¹⁵ Interviewee 2, academic

¹⁶ Interviewee 5, civil society actor

¹⁷ Interviewee 2, academic

¹⁸ Interviewee 10, civil society actor

¹⁹ Interviewee 8, member of the CCAC

²⁰ Interviewee 10, civil society actor

²¹ Interviewee 12, academic

One related development that is worth noting is the establishment of a Just Transition Commission in Ireland in 2024. On this too, interviewees had mixed positions. The majority were positive about its creation, arguing that it could be a valuable complement to the CCAC and calling for collaboration between the two bodies. One interviewee noted that the language of the CCAC and the Just Transition Commission around energy security, for example, has already aligned over time. However, a minority were more sceptical. One member of the CCAC went as far as to call the commission “pointless”,²² while another noted that its creation makes it harder to understand and operationalise the CCAC’s responsibilities related to justice, especially since the Just Transition Commission is not a statutory body; they added that the CCAC had “pulled back on justice and equity considerations” in its latest annual reviews.²³

4.2.2.4 Knowledge and Expertise

According to interviewees, the CCAC has also contributed to knowledge and expertise. Most obviously the CCAC acts as a bridge between academia and policy, providing as one interviewee put it, a “direct sort of impact pathway” for researchers to feed into decision-making²⁴. The CCAC also stimulates further research directly, by commissioning specific pieces of research, and indirectly, by encouraging members or collaborators to pursue a new direction of research. One interviewee working in academia also suggested that they use evidence from the CCAC in their teaching, while a member of the CCAC noted that the remuneration they receive for being a member goes to their institution and could be put towards teaching costs. They added that having a staff member on the CCAC can help to raise the profile of an institution, which is important in an era where higher education institutions are assessed not only on research excellence, but also impact. Thus, the CCAC also appears to have a broader effect on education.

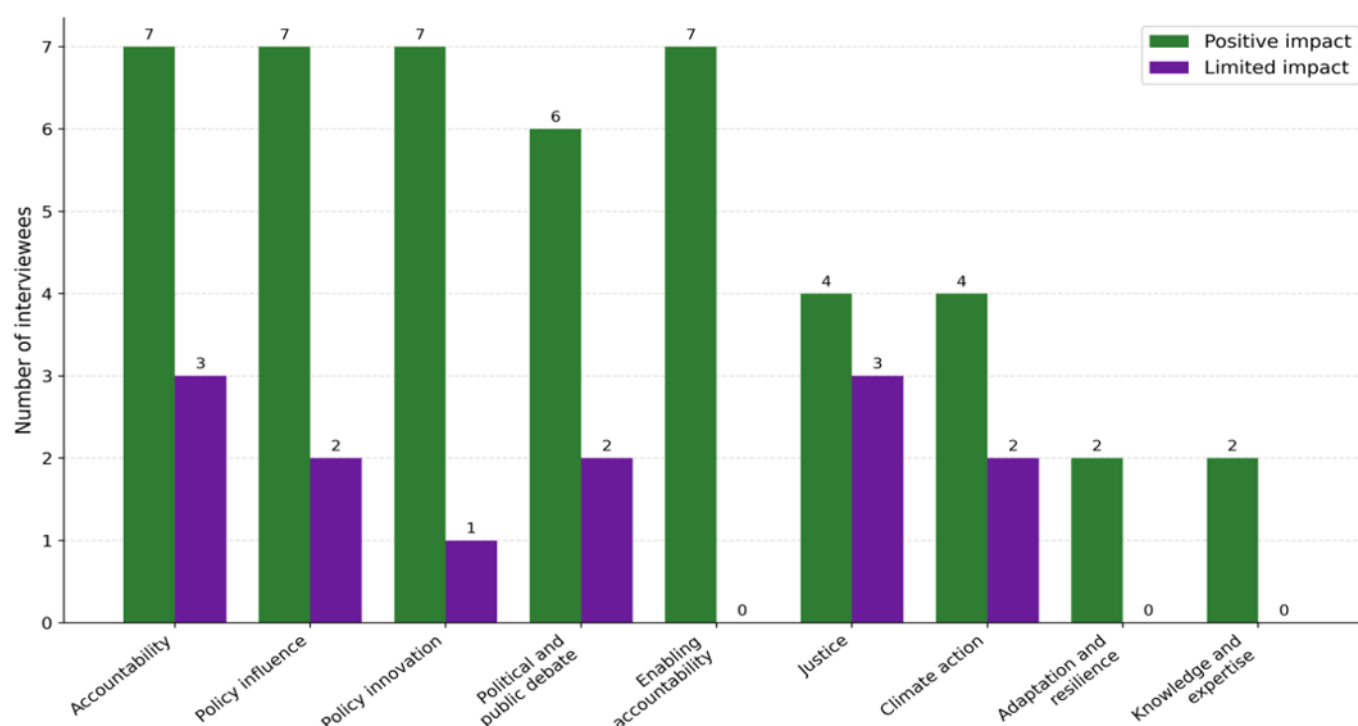


Figure 2. Perceived impact of the Irish Climate Change Advisory Council

Source: Authors based on interview data. Bars show the number of interviewees describing the CCAC’s impact as positive or limited, by impact type, ordered from highest to lowest total number of interviewees.

²² Interviewee 11, member of the CCAC

²³ Interviewee 9, member of the CCAC

²⁴ Interviewee 1, member of the CCAC

In sum, the CCAC appears to have had positive impacts on several key characteristics of climate democracy: effectiveness, accountability, justice, and knowledge and expertise, but its impact continues to be limited by a variety of factors, which are further explored in the following section. The absence of participation and deliberativeness from this account does not mean the CCAC has no impact on these dimensions, only that they did not come up in interviews. Many interviewees also highlighted the fact that measuring the impact of the CCAC is challenging. Although the secretariat tracks the uptake of the CCAC’s recommendations by government, making it possible to assess the impact of the CCAC on policy, the impact of the CCAC on actual climate action and democratic governance is harder to trace. This is not unique to Ireland’s independent climate advisory body but, rather, speaks to the general difficulty of measuring the impact of democratic innovations.

4.2.3 Barriers and Enablers of Impact

Interviewees identified a range of barriers and enablers shaping the impact of the CCAC. This section organises them by whether they are internal or external to the CCAC, rather than by whether they function as a barrier or an enabler, because several factors, including the CCAC’s advisory mandate and the inclusion of ex officio members, were identified by different interviewees as simultaneously constraining and enabling its impact. Presenting these under a single “barrier” or “enabler” heading would obscure these potentially significant tensions.

4.2.3.1 Internal

The mandate of the CCAC was perceived to create both challenges and opportunities. Interviewees generally lauded the fact that the body is statutory and embedded in legislation but were divided on the fact that the body is advisory. On one hand, several interviewees argued that the limited enforcement powers of the CCAC constrain its impact, since the government does not need to, and indeed does not always, listen to the CCAC. On the other hand, one interviewee argued that the advisory nature of the body means that it has not been subject to interference or opposition by the government. In their words, “you have a trade-off between being really powerful, in which case the politicians will get excited, or being advisory... and not dominating decision-making, in which case you’re let to your own devices”.²⁵ On balance, the concern about limited enforcement powers was raised by several interviewees, while the insulation argument was made by a single interviewee. This suggests interview evidence leans towards seeing purely advisory mandate as more of a constraint on impact than a protection for it, even though both dynamics appear to be at play.

Similarly, interviewees generally lauded the changes to the way in which members of the CCAC are appointed but were divided on the value of ex officio members. There are currently 3 ex officio members on the council from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA, which houses the secretariat of the CCAC), Teagasc (the Agriculture and Food Development Authority of Ireland), and Met Éireann (Ireland’s national meteorological service). 4 interviewees from academia and civil society were against the idea of ex officio membership, arguing that it undermines the independence of the CCAC and that it potentially explains why the body has not been more “vociferous” on the issue of agriculture. However, 4 interviewees (3 from the CCAC and 1 former government actor) argued in favour of ex officio membership, because it provides the CCAC with additional resources—the EPA, Teagasc, Met Éireann, and the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland²⁶ all provided technical assistance for the preparation of the carbon budgets, helps to ensure that the recommendations of the CCAC are politically relevant and practicable, and promotes buy-in from key policy institutions. More neutrally, some interviewees added that those who have served as ex officio members on the CCAC to date have not tried to exert undue influence, and that they have been collaborative even when the official position of their institution was counter to the CCAC’s. One interviewee suggested that the reason that this dynamic has worked is because of the political culture: in their words, “the Irish tradition is not to stuff boards... with political hacks.”²⁷ However, the fact that the four interviewees who defended ex officio

²⁵ Interviewee 11, member of the CCAC

²⁶ The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland previously had an ex officio member on the CCAC; this was removed with the amendment of CALCDA in 2021.

²⁷ Interviewee 11, member of the CCAC

membership were current or former CCAC members and a government actor, while the four who opposed it came from academia and civil society, suggests that the disagreement may track institutional vantage point as much as a genuine empirical disagreement about the practice's effects.

More broadly, interviewees emphasised the independence of the CCAC in terms of its work programme, over which, in the words of one interviewee, "the government has no control"²⁸ and in terms of its budget, which is set by the government, but appears to have been approved in full each year. One member of the CCAC added that the fact that the secretariat is based in the EPA does not undermine its independence, but rather, reduces the administrative burden of the CCAC, when compared to the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council.

Relatedly, albeit somewhat contrarily, 7 interviewees identified the limited resources of the CCAC as a barrier to its impact. As well as financial resources, they referred to the limited capacity of the secretariat, which although it has grown over time, is smaller than others, and the limited capacity of members, many of whom "wear...many hats".²⁹ These were particularly seen as a barrier to greater engagement with stakeholders, the public, and other independent advisory bodies; section 4.3 discusses interviewees' specific suggestions for strengthening public engagement. Interestingly, a former member of the CCAC argued that the requirement for the CCAC to propose carbon budgets places an unnecessary drain on the body's resources, especially since they are ultimately set by the government—a resourcing critique distinct from the substantive critiques of the carbon budgets themselves, which are addressed in Section 4.3.

4.2.3.2 External

Interviewees identified both structural and conjunctural political barriers to the impact of the CCAC. In terms of structural barriers, several interviewees highlighted the inertia of democratic systems and the temporal mismatch between climate change and political and media cycles. As one member of the CCAC put it, transitioning to net zero "would involve considerable disruption" which makes politicians reluctant to implement the CCAC's recommendations "because they will lose their seats".³⁰ Another member of the CCAC also suggested that this is why the CCAC has abstained from taking a "maximalist" view of "fair share" when developing its carbon budgets. Also, short timelines in the media and politics—as a result of 5-year electoral cycles, made worse by rapid ministerial turnover in recent years—mean that climate change often slips off the political agenda; this means that, in the words of one interviewee, "it takes long and tedious... repetition" for messages to stick, which can be demoralising for members of the CCAC.³¹

In terms of conjunctural barriers, many interviewees pointed to political will as a key determinant of the impact of the CCAC, especially because the CCAC has limited enforcement powers. Interviewees conveyed that the political environment in Ireland had changed over time, and especially since the Green Party was excluded from the new Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil coalition government in January 2025. One interviewee argued that interest in climate change has "completely waned", pointing to the delays in the publication of the latest Climate Action Plans as evidence.³² Although, a former government actor argued that the fact that the CCAC largely engages with a Joint Oireachtas Committee rather than parliament or the government means that the body can continue to maintain a pathway for productive, cross-party collaboration on climate change.

This lack of political will was felt especially acutely in relation to agriculture. One interviewee suggested that "no government would go down [the] road" of putting VAT on fertilizers,³³ while several interviewees referred to the political dominance of Ireland's agricultural lobby. One interviewee that this has meant that the CCAC has "shied away" from being more "straight" about the agricultural reforms needed for Ireland to meet its climate targets,³⁴ though a member of the CCAC noted they had engaged in productive and sometimes difficult conversations with the agriculture sector, including at the annual National Ploughing Championship. Declining political will, and its effect on the CCAC, is explored further in Section 6, which examines similar dynamics across Ireland, Sweden, and Finland.

²⁸ Interviewee 3, member of the secretariat of the CCAC

²⁹ Interviewee 8, member of the CCAC

³⁰ Interviewee 1, member of the CCAC

³¹ Interviewee 15, member of the secretariat of the CCAC

³² Interviewee 14, government actor

³³ Interviewee 2, academic

³⁴ Interviewee 6, journalist

Those factors that interviewees identified as enabling the CCAC to have greater impact were mostly international, with one key exception: the fact that Ireland is a small country. 6 interviewees noted that the small size of the climate governance space in Ireland means that there are close links between sectors, especially academia and the government; and frequent opportunities for formal and informal interactions between people working in the space; this allows for ideas to spread quickly and fosters collaboration—both of which are key to advancing progress on climate change.

One international enabler identified by 3 interviewees was the existence of EU climate targets. The interviewees suggested that EU climate targets add weight to the work of the CCAC, since Ireland could face high costs if it fails to meet these targets. This was also highlighted in the report that the CCAC co-published with the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council. A former member of the CCAC added that these targets help to act as a broader “backstop” against roll back on climate commitments. Another international enabler identified by 4 interviewees was collaboration with other independent climate advisory bodies. These interviewees lauded the work of the International Climate Councils Network, stating that it helped them to exchange knowledge with “like-minded bodies”, including the UK Climate Change Committee, the Danish Climate Council and the Maltese Climate Council.

In sum, the CCAC’s advisory mandate, ex officio membership, and resourcing, were described by interviewees in dual terms, as simultaneously constraining the CCAC’s reach and independence, and providing it with protection, technical capacity, and buy-in. Resourcing, by contrast, was described only as a constraint, limiting the CCAC’s capacity for stakeholder and public engagement. External factors were similarly one-directional. Political will emerged as the clearest barrier to the CCAC’s impact, discussed further in relation to Ireland’s changing political environment in Section 6, while the country’s small climate governance space, EU obligations, and connection with other advisory bodies were consistently framed as enablers, fostering collaboration and legitimacy, and pressure that help offset the CCAC’s limited enforcement powers. Of these factors, political will appears the most consequential; external enablers, while valuable, appear to function more as buffers against declining political will than as substitutes for it.

4.3 Implications

Despite generally positive perceptions of the CCAC, interviewees identified some areas for improvement. The area that came up most frequently was the CCAC’s work on carbon budgets. 5 interviewees from civil society and academia criticised the carbon budgets for not being sufficiently ambitious or justice-oriented. They raised the following issues with the carbon budgets proposed by the CCAC:

- The focus on “temperature neutrality” as opposed to net zero, since temperature neutrality permits substantial ongoing methane emissions as long as warming isn’t increasing further.
- The use of blended CO₂e reporting rather than gas-by-gas figures, since this obscures how much of any reduction relies on methane’s short-lived behaviour as opposed to lasting CO₂ cuts.
- The exclusion of aviation and shipping from carbon budgets, which has persisted since the first round of carbon budgets.
- The choice of 2018 as the baseline year, since this is later than the baseline used by the rest of Europe.
- The weakened ambition of the Paris test between rounds: interviewees felt that the CCAC adopted a less ambitious version of the test in the second round, which compared Ireland’s 2100 contribution to a 2050 global peak and shifted the reference year from 2015 to 2020, and did not integrate proposals by academics to improve the test.
- The lack of explicit national fair-share analysis, since this is a statutory requirement under the Climate Act—interviewees argued that even where the CCAC’s Paris test passed, this does not substitute for showing fair-share allocation.

By contrast, one interviewee argued that the carbon budgets are insufficiently grounded in reality: they stated that during the drafting of the carbon budgets, “it became nearly a competition to be ambitious”, with some

council members becoming “more activist than independent scientists”.³⁵

However, there was no consensus among interviewees about how the carbon budgets should be improved. Interestingly, a member of the CCAC, acknowledging some of these criticisms, argued that the fact that they’ve been “hated for the numbers [they have] given from both sides suggests the numbers are about right”.³⁶ They added that the aim of the CCAC when developing the carbon budgets was to “maximise competitiveness... which means minimising change in a zero-sum world”.³⁷ This hints at the pragmatism of the CCAC and at the approach the body is likely to take in setting future carbon budgets, though this depends on the priorities of its relatively new chair.

Another area for improvement mentioned frequently was the CCAC’s communication efforts. Interviewees acknowledged that the CCAC has taken steps to improve its communications, including producing multiple sectoral reviews as opposed to a single annual review as well as cross-sectoral summaries at the beginning of each sectoral review; generally ensuring that communications are more accessible; adjusting the body’s messaging to focus on the economic dimensions of climate change, including through the report co-published with the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council. However, interviewees suggested that the CCAC’s communications would benefit from being more frequent but shorter, to ensure that key messages can easily be picked up and disseminated by the media and civil society—currently, media choices determine whether key messages reach the public. Other suggestions included finding ways to make climate change more tangible, e.g. focusing on energy or food security, while acknowledging the cost-of-living crisis already facing people; and highlighting where there has been progress on climate change. One interviewee also suggested building on the example set by scientists during the COVID19 and introducing regular emergency briefings to convey the urgency of climate change.

Relatedly, interviewees suggested that the CCAC could expand its public engagement efforts. At a minimum, they suggested that the CCAC could call out poor participation processes, e.g. during the development of the National Energy and Climate Plan in 2023. They also, however, suggested that the CCAC could find more ways of engaging in-person with people outside of Dublin, and facilitate national conversations about contentious issues, e.g. defining national fair-share in relation to carbon budgets. In terms of a model for such national conversations, interviewees were divided on the citizens’ assembly model: some acknowledged the benefits of citizens’ assemblies, others raised concerns about the resources required and relative impact of citizens’ assemblies, and others questioned whether citizens’ assemblies had been over-used in Ireland and whether running further citizens’ assemblies would simply exhaust the good will of the public. This concern echoes findings from RETOOL Deliverable 5.1, which found that citizens’ assemblies are likely to have the greatest impact when reserved for particularly divisive or complex issues, and noted a decline in their use and standing in Ireland in recent years (Machani et al., 2025).

Interviewees also raised concerns about the diversity and expertise of the CCAC. They acknowledged that the expertise had been broadened in recent years and praised the inclusion of a behavioural scientist in the council, but suggested that including more social scientists, especially focusing on human rights or justice, would help to strengthen the council’s policy recommendations. Interviewees were mixed on the issue of whether there should be an NGO or youth representative on the CCAC, with some arguing that it would help to add different perspectives, with others arguing that the CCAC should avoid becoming a stakeholder or political body. In terms of member appointments, one interviewee suggested that the Minister for Climate, Energy and the Environment should have less influence, but this was not corroborated by other interviewees.

5 The Influence of the UK Climate Change Committee Under Political Contestation

This case study asks how the CCC’s influence has fared under shifting political consensus and growing contestation around climate policy, drawing on the parliamentary debate content analysis set out in Section

³⁵ Interviewee 7, former member of the CCAC and government actor

³⁶ Interviewee 8, member of the CCAC

³⁷ Interviewee 8, member of the CCAC

3.3. The analysis applies the CCC's earlier legitimiser/knowledge-broker/policy-entrepreneur typology (Averchenkova et al., 2021a) and complements it with a new dimension capturing direct challenges to its authority, analytical methods, and statutory remit.

The remainder of this case study is structured as follows. Section 5.1 sets out the political context in which the CCC has operated since 2019. Section 5.2 examines the CCC's impact across four dimensions: as legitimiser (5.2.1), policy entrepreneur (5.2.2), and watchdog (5.2.3), before turning to instances in which its authority was directly contested and its evidence misrepresented (5.2.4). Section 5.3 draws out the implications of these findings for advisory bodies elsewhere.

5.1 Context

The Climate Change Committee (CCC) was established in 2008 under the Climate Change Act (UK CCA, United Kingdom, 2008), and its creation has been hailed as one of the most innovative components of the Act (Muinzer, 2018). The Act places statutory responsibility on the CCC to advise government on long-term emissions reduction targets and five-year carbon budgets, and to conduct independent assessment of progress on implementation; the government is under statutory obligation to respond publicly to its advice.

The political consensus that characterised the CCC's first decade has since eroded. In the aftermath of COVID-19 and against the backdrop of the Russia-Ukraine War, an organised backlash against climate policy, and net zero in particular, emerged from 2021 onwards, turning climate change into a political "wedge issue". This culminated in the Conservative government's announcement in September 2023, under Rishi Sunak, of a "new approach to net zero", which made the case for weakening climate policies framed around equity and fairness, rolled back several climate policies, and permitted new oil and gas field licences and coal mines (Averchenkova and Pabreja, 2026).

5.2 Impact

5.2.1 The CCC as Legitimiser

The CCC was referred to by all major parties, highlighting a progressive trend in reliance on the CCC as a key evidentiary source and credible policy advisor across the political spectrum. Interestingly, the share of CCC references by the Conservatives rose from 25 per cent in 2008-18 to 35 per cent in 2019-25, while the share of Labour reduced sharply from 60 to 31 per cent. Since taking office after the general election in July 2024, Labour's share of the references grew by 8 per cent, while the Conservatives' share declined by 6 per cent. The relative growth in references to the CCC by the party holding government potentially points to a growing importance of the CCC's function as a policy legitimiser in recent years.

Government members also drew on CCC analysis to defend their own policy choices. Following the September 2023 policy reversals, government members cited CCC analysis to argue that the revisions made "no material difference" to the pathway and that the UK remained projected among the fastest-decarbonising G20 nations, characterising the approach as "pragmatic, proportionate and measurable". This confirms the importance placed by politicians on being able to refer to CCC analysis to justify policy proposals and decisions as a measure of legitimacy, even when the decisions arguably diverge from the Committee's own advice pointing to the CCC's continued acceptance as a policy legitimiser, even amid growing contestation of its authority (Averchenkova and Pabreja, 2026).

5.2.2 The CCC as Policy Entrepreneur

Climate change requires action across multiple sectoral policy areas such as energy, transport, and buildings. Thematic analysis shows that in 2019–2025 the CCC was referred to during discussions on 82 statutes and bills, covering diverse topics beyond mitigation and adaptation including agriculture, nature and biodiversity, carbon capture, transport and storage, infrastructure, financial services, and buildings, with over 35 per cent of references falling under net zero and a further 15 per cent under energy. This diversity of themes reflects the CCC's influence on climate discourse beyond its statutory remit under the UK Climate Change Act, and reinforces the evidence of its impact on policy integration (Averchenkova and Pabreja, 2026).

For example, during debates on the Environment Bill 2019–2022, where the CCC was referred to in over 55

per cent of all sittings, parliamentarians relied on CCC outputs for evidence on the role of forest cover, woodland, tree planting and peatland restoration targets in keeping global temperature rise below 1.5 degrees and achieving the net zero target by 2050. They cited the CCC when arguing for the need to constitute the Office for Environment Protection as an independent regulator under the legislation, based on the same principles.

Similarly, under the Energy Bill 2022–2023, CCC output was used to demand specific policies on heat pumps, carbon capture and storage, and energy efficiency, and to strengthen the regulatory framework of the energy sector. CCC recommendations were used to support an amendment for the inclusion of net zero as a statutory duty of Ofgem (the energy regulator), intended to end reliance on fossil fuels and deliver a low-carbon energy transition. The government’s objection to these amendments reflecting its divergence from the CCC on making net zero a key criterion for energy governance confirms the CCC’s ability to generate independent opinion and influence climate policy in ways that go beyond its knowledge broker and legitimiser roles, and demonstrates the CCC’s impact in its role as policy entrepreneur.

Another example concerns the CCC’s recognition of Carbon Capture, Usage, and Storage (CCUS) as “a necessity, not an option”, which was widely cited across political affiliations to push for investment and policy, and directly shaped the Net Zero Strategy’s CCUS deployment targets and the government’s £22 billion commitment. Adhering to CCC advice, the government also decided not to carry forward the UK’s overachievement of its Third Carbon Budget, a direct example of CCC influence on a policy decision that strengthened the credibility of the carbon budget framework. While many CCC proposals were not adopted, their diversity demonstrates the breadth of the CCC’s influence as a generator of policy ideas.

5.2.3 The CCC as Watchdog: Accountability for Net Zero

As a statutory adviser, CCC recommendations are not binding on the government. However, analysis of parliamentary debates indicates they are widely used by members to assess performance and help hold the government accountable. The usage of the CCC’s recommendations to highlight policy gaps provides arguments for the opposition. The CCC thereby acts as a watchdog and contributes to strengthening accountability.

The CCC’s statutory power is limited to advising and reporting. The UK Climate Change Act contains a “duty to respond” for the government requiring it to respond to progress reports but placing no obligation to accept recommendations. However, it falls short of setting a “duty to act”, similar to the one established by Danish climate legislation, which gives the advisory body an explicit role in assessing whether the government’s plans are short of the emission target and then requires the government to outline how it would meet the gap identified by the body (Denmark, 2020; Gorrissen Federspiel, 2023). The absence of a duty to act means there is no statutory trigger for policy correction. This creates a dynamic in which the CCC’s influence depends on the willingness of other actors, such as parliamentarians, media, courts and civil society, to use its analysis for accountability, and raises an important consideration of whether the UK CCC’s mandate and accountability arrangements are sufficient to withstand growing political pressures.

5.2.4 Contested Authority and Misrepresentation of Evidence

CCC evidence was deployed across the political spectrum, but to markedly different ends. Speakers in support of new fossil fuel investment argued that fossil fuels will remain key components in the transition, referring to the CCC’s projections that fossil fuels would still account for 25 per cent of the UK’s energy balance in 2050. Other speakers drew on the same CCC analysis to establish that new fossil fuel investments were incompatible with climate targets, pointing out that the CCC had recommended oil consumption should fall by over 80 per cent by 2050. This reveals a clear gap between the CCC’s stated position and the way its evidence was cited in parliamentary debate, an important finding for understanding how advisory body evidence can be appropriated for purposes contrary to the body’s own recommendations. At the same time, it confirms the importance placed by politicians on being able to refer to CCC analysis to justify policy proposals and decisions as a measure of legitimacy, even when the decisions go against the advice provided by the Committee.

Alongside misrepresentation of CCC advice, several mainly Conservative MPs questioned the CCC’s own authority and credibility while arguing against net zero policies. Their most frequent critique was that the CCC had done inadequate cost-benefit analysis of net zero, or that it relied on “highly contestable” assumptions.

However, this criticism appears largely unfounded: the CCC had produced a cost-benefit analysis for the debate on the net zero amendment (CCC, 2019), which was examined by the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR, 2021), and its updated assessment found that the cost of inaction is significantly greater than the cost of action. Some politicians directly attacked the CCC, questioning the authority of unelected bodies over decisions affecting people's lives and asserting that political decisions should be taken by elected representatives rather than determined by the CCC's scientific analysis. Direct challenges of this kind to the CCC's legitimacy were largely absent from the 2008–2018 period; their emergence in the subsequent period marks a genuinely new form of contestation, going beyond selective use or misrepresentation of the CCC's evidence to questioning the CCC's authority over policy at all. The UK experience during 2023–2025 demonstrates that even with a well-established duty to respond, advisory body influence can be substantially undermined during periods of intense political contestation underscoring the importance of institutional design features that go beyond response requirements.

5.3 Implications

During 2023–2025, the CCC was not merely cited but actively contested with its statutory authority, analytical methods, and institutional legitimacy all challenged in parliamentary debates. This politicisation is itself evidence of significance: bodies whose analysis is irrelevant to political debate are not worth contesting. However, increased contestation of the authority of a body designed to partly depoliticise climate targets can also be detrimental to its impact.

Overall, the CCC's influence is substantial but structurally constrained. Its analysis shapes the terms of parliamentary debate and is treated as authoritative by most participants, but the absence of binding force means governments can, and do, selectively interpret or misrepresent its findings (Averchenkova and Pabreja, 2026).

The next case study turns to the other side of this dynamic, exploring how the Irish, Swedish, and Finnish advisory bodies themselves experience and respond to having their evidence and authority contested.

6 The Experience of Irish, Swedish and Finnish Climate Advisory Bodies Under Political Contestation

This case study was motivated by reports from participants at the RETOOL stakeholder workshop in January 2025 that the role of independent climate advisory bodies in Sweden, and especially Finland, had been contested, as set out in Section 3.4.

The Irish Climate Change Advisory Council (CCAC), the Swedish Klimatpolitiska Rådet (Climate Policy Council), and the Finnish Ilmastopaneeli (Climate Change Panel) together anchor this report's final case study on political contestation. The CCAC was established under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 and strengthened by a 2021 amendment (see more in Section 4). The Klimatpolitiska Rådet was established in 2018 alongside Sweden's Climate Act, as part of the broader national climate policy framework adopted by the Swedish parliament in 2017. The Ilmastopaneeli has provided science-based climate policy advice since 2011, though its role was only formally defined in law with Finland's 2015 Climate Act, subsequently reformed in 2023.

Where the previous case study traced how a single, long-established body has been affected by contestation from the outside, this case study turns to these three less-studied bodies to ask how they experience and respond to a similar set of pressures. As set out in Section 3.4, this case study draws on 23 interviews with stakeholders from Ireland, Finland, Sweden, and beyond.

The remainder of this case study is structured as follows. Section 6.1 sets out the political context shared, and not shared, across the three countries. Section 6.2 examines the impact of this context on each body in turn: the CCAC (6.2.1), the Climate Policy Council (6.2.2), and the Climate Change Panel (6.2.3). Section 6.3 sets out the implications of these findings: first the underlying tensions shaping how bodies decide whether and how to act (6.3.1), then the specific strategies they have adopted as a result (6.3.2).

6.1 Context

6.1.1 Declining Political Interest in Climate Change

Across all three countries, interviewees agreed that political interest in climate change has declined. In Ireland, where one interviewee argued climate change has become “a complete afterthought”,³⁸ the decline was linked to the departure of the Green Party from government in January 2025. In Finland, decline was linked to the collapse of the country’s land use carbon sinks in 2022, due to high rates of logging and low rates of tree growth, especially as Finland moved to replace timber imports from Russia following the EU’s import ban on Russian goods in response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine (Piaterinen et al., 2025). This coincided with a general realisation that Finland was making slow progress on climate goals. Since 2023, Finland’s right-wing government, made up of the National Coalition Party, the Finns Party, the Swedish People’s Party, and the Christian Democrats, appears to have capitalised on this disillusionment: in the words of another interviewee, the government is “not that friendly to any climate action”.³⁹ In Sweden too, the decline was linked to the arrival of a new government in 2022, which is composed of the Moderate Party, the Christian Democrats, and the Liberals, but bound, because it is a minority government, to right wing parties including the Sweden Democrats, to stay in power. Interviewees suggested that although Sweden had never been as strong on climate action as other countries, there has been a marked difference in attitudes to environmental NGOs and rhetoric: the government has argued that other countries, including China, India, the United States, and Brazil, should take on greater emissions reduction responsibilities (Government Offices of Sweden, 2024).

Across all three countries, interviewees noted that climate change had fallen further down the agenda in recent years as a result of geopolitical events, such as the Russia-Ukraine and Iran wars, which have caused energy costs to rise. As one interviewee argued, these conflicts and the high cost of living across Europe feel more urgent than climate change or at least create competition for time and resources—in Sweden the government has aggressively cut tax on petrol and diesel to keep fuel costs low.

Interestingly, Ireland was the only country in which interviewees gave specific examples of resistance to climate action by the government and the public. These examples were: the delayed publication of the Climate Action Plan, the move by the government to allow the disapplication of section 15 of the CALCDA in relation to critical infrastructure developments (see Section 4.2.2), the Civil Reform Bill, which could undermine climate litigation by restricting standing (Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration, 2026; thejournal.ie, 2026), and widespread fuel protests calling for the removal of the carbon tax. The latter was once again linked to the ongoing wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, highlighting the way in which national climate politics is shaped by geopolitics. That interviewees did not raise examples of resistance to climate action in Finland and Sweden does not mean that there is no resistance there: it may simply not have come up in the limited number of interviews conducted.

It is also worth noting that across Europe, climate adaptation is struggling even more than climate mitigation to draw and keep political attention. As one interviewee put it, “it’s harder to quantify and have a clear target”.⁴⁰

6.1.2 Political Polarisation Around Climate Change

Interviewees also agreed that polarisation around climate change has grown in recent years but suggested that the degree of polarisation is higher in Finland than in Ireland and Sweden. Two interviewees argued that it is natural to have some degree of polarisation around climate change, especially as countries move from creating climate targets and policies to implementation. One interviewee in Sweden added that as long as there is consensus around the problem, i.e. climate change, which there does appear to be, then contestation around the solutions can be handled in the political debate. Similarly in Ireland, although interviewees pointed to a few climate change related issues that have become flashpoints for polarised debates—data centres, wind and solar farms, and the burning of turf (peat)—there is a general consensus around climate change, in part due to the relatively depoliticised coverage of climate change in the media. One interviewee even suggested

³⁸ Interviewee 12, Ireland, academic

³⁹ Interviewee 21, Finland, academic

⁴⁰ Interviewee 22, International, expert on climate advisory bodies

that polarisation, at least among politicians, is antithetical to Irish tradition. Finnish interviewees, by contrast, emphasised the highly polarised nature of the public debate on climate change and pointed to land use, and especially forestry, as the key issue around which the debate has centred in recent years, noting that debates around land use escalate in the lead up to elections. This is independently corroborated by an official evaluation of the Climate Panel, which found that its calculations and positions on Finland’s land-use carbon sink were the single most visible and most debated topic among stakeholders (Gaia Consulting, 2023). The intensity of debate around land use reflects both the significance of the land use sector within Finland’s carbon budget and the country’s pattern of land ownership: around 600,000 private individuals own approximately 60% of Finland’s forests; this is a more widespread pattern than in Sweden, for example, where forest ownership remains more concentrated among large and historically established forestry companies. As a result, measures that encroach on land rights are especially sensitive in Finland (Ekblom and Laikola, 2025).

Notably, one interviewee argued that polarisation is the “main challenge” facing these bodies, as it makes it harder for them to remain impartial and ensure their advice is listened to by both sides of the political spectrum.⁴¹

6.1.3 Targeted Opposition to Climate Action by Lobby Groups

Two major lobby groups identified by interviewees were the agricultural lobby in Ireland and the forestry lobby in Finland. Both lobbies hold significant political power, because of their role in the economy and/or their contributions to climate change. To illustrate the power of the agricultural lobby in Ireland, interviewees stated that a tweet by the EPA encouraging people to eat less meat was taken down within 48 hours due to pressure from agricultural associations. Both lobbies have generally opposed climate action and an interviewee argued that the agricultural lobby’s resistance to climate change has been reinforced by “broader European, anti-intellectual, anti-science, anti-climate change”.⁴² A member of the CCAC also suggested that the agricultural lobby had been a prominent actor in the fuel protests.

6.1.4 Distrust in Science and Mis- and Disinformation

Across all three countries, interviewees suggested that trust in science remains high, but acknowledged that there are minority groups who distrust scientists, and certain issues around which there is evidence of mis- and disinformation—especially in Finland. In Ireland, interviewees from a range of backgrounds argued that trust in science and expertise remains high, with one interviewee suggesting that where there is evidence of distrust of science, this can generally be traced back to a distrust of government. Interviewees also argued that climate denialism remains low, with an interviewee stating that “anybody who says [climate change] is a hoax doesn’t really get listened to here”.⁴³ Interviewees also generally dismissed the idea that the public debate on climate change is affected by mis- and disinformation, although one government actor suggested that false information has circulated in debates around the burning of turf (peat) in the Irish Midlands. In Sweden too, interviewees suggested that it is a minority of the population that denies climate change, with the majority accepting that climate change is a reality and maintaining a high regard for scientific expertise. Public opposition to climate action, interviewees suggested, is motivated by a rise in living costs, which is being exploited to argue that Sweden should not make further sacrifices, while other countries do not reduce their emissions. The same pattern was observed by interviewees in Finland, where interviewees noted that climate scepticism or denialism is almost non-existent. Interviewees also stated, however, that the public debate on forestry and land use in Finland features a lot of misinformation. One interviewee noted that the misinformation had become so prolific that the Climate Change Panel doesn’t know how to address it, pointing to the mismatch between the scale of the challenge and the capacity of the secretariat to respond.

6.2 Impact

6.2.1 Ireland

In Ireland, interviewees suggested that the political context outlined above has constrained the impact of the

⁴¹ Interviewee 22, International, expert on climate advisory bodies

⁴² Interviewee 11, Ireland, member of a climate advisory body

⁴³ Interviewee 6, Ireland, journalist

CCAC. Most obviously, the government has stated that it will not approve the CCAC’s latest carbon budgets (2031–2035) until it develops a “feasible” Climate Action Plan, implying that the CCAC’s carbon budgets are unfeasible and undermining the CCAC’s main pathway to policy impact. The CCAC has publicly pushed back against this, highlighting the economic costs of inaction, but the government has continued to delay the publication of the Climate Action Plan and their approval of the CCAC’s latest carbon budgets. More subtly, interviewees suggested that government engagement with the CCAC has diminished over time, making it harder for the CCAC to influence government thinking.

Interviewees were clear that the CCAC, unlike climate litigants and NGOs in Ireland, which have faced government criticism and legislative efforts to restrict their access to judicial review (Savaresi et al., 2026), has not faced attacks by the government, public, or lobby groups. One interviewee argued that this is because the CCAC “is not perceived as being in any way politicized”,⁴⁴ while another argued that this is because the council is “not seen to be dominating government”.⁴⁵ Interviewees also noted, however, that the body’s advice has been met with criticism of late, and suggested that opposition from the agricultural lobby may become more apparent in the future. Take, for example, the suggestion by the government that the CCAC’s carbon budgets are unfeasible. The Taoiseach (Irish Prime Minister) has also pushed back on the €26 billion figure identified by the CCAC and Irish Fiscal Advisory Council as the potential cost of Ireland not meeting its obligations towards the EU (Irish Fiscal Advisory Council and Climate Change Advisory Council, 2025). Opinions on whether the agricultural lobby may more openly oppose the CCAC going forward were mixed, with some, mainly members of the CCAC, suggesting that this is unlikely as the CCAC continues to have a productive relationship with the sector, and others arguing that open opposition from the lobby towards climate action, and eventually the CCAC, is inevitable, with one academic expressing hope that the CCAC “will be capable of standing up where necessary to... powerful lobby groups”.⁴⁶ Another academic added that although the CCAC has not faced political attacks to date, this does not mean they will not in the future: the Housing Commission has faced hostile intimidation from right-wing activists.

6.2.2 Sweden

The picture in Sweden was similar to that in Ireland, with the exception of some more open attacks on the body by actors on the right of the political spectrum. Like in Ireland, interviewees suggested that the current government is engaging significantly less with the Climate Policy Council than previous governments. Critically, one interviewee noted that the Minister for the Climate and Environment did not attend the launch of the Swedish Policy Council’s annual report. Aarthun and Sundqvist (2025, p.4) separately find that at the 2024 launch, both the Prime Minister and Minister for Climate and Environment characterised the review as one view among several, rather than an authoritative assessment, prompting their interviewees to describe the event as “unfortunate” as the Climate Policy Council was not intended “to be like a group of elves who came up with [their] own opinions”. Interviewees also noted that the Sweden Democrats, who were the only party to object to the creation of the Climate Policy Council, have pushed to completely abolish the council, framing it as an ideologically motivated body that issues opinion- rather than fact-based recommendations.

On the whole, however, interviewees suggested that the high trust in science in Sweden has, and will continue to, safeguard the Climate Policy Council. One interviewee, for example, argued that “it would be a huge thing to get rid of the Climate Policy Council, because support for the council is super, super big”.⁴⁷ By way of evidence some interviewees referenced the fact that the mandate of the current chair of the Climate Policy Council has been extended by government for another three years; this would have required implicit support from the right-wing parties, including the Sweden Democrats. More sceptically, one interviewee suggested that actors on the right of the political spectrum may have strategically conceded to this extension, with a view to pushing the Climate Policy Council to focus more on international climate action, such as buying carbon offsets, than domestic emissions reductions. Aarthun and Sundqvist (2025) also find that the government is reviewing how members of the Climate Policy Council are appointed, with a proposal to replace the current system, under which the body nominates members for government approval, with a parliamentary committee.

⁴⁴ Interviewee 13, Ireland, academic

⁴⁵ Interviewee 11, Ireland, member of a climate advisory body

⁴⁶ Interviewee 2, Ireland, academic

⁴⁷ Interviewee 19, Sweden, former member of a climate advisory body and civil society actor

This would be a more direct involvement of the government than seen in other climate advisory bodies.

6.2.3 Finland

The political context outlined above appears to be having a more profound impact on the Finnish Climate Change Panel than its Irish and Swedish counterparts. Interviewees claimed that the current government is less likely to take on the body's advice than the previous government: for example, the government is pushing ahead with a nuclear-only energy strategy, despite the body's advice that nuclear energy must be complemented with renewable energy. They also noted that the body's advice has been criticised by a range of actors. Within the government, for example, the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, Sari Essayah, has publicly rejected the Climate Change Panel's recommendation to reduce logging (Rajala, 2025), arguing separately that such restrictions would lock Finland into a fossil-based economy and increase emissions overall (Essayah, 2026). Beyond the government, the forestry lobby has argued that the Climate Change Panel's focus on land use carbon sinks, as opposed to climate mitigation, in recent years is misguided. Interviewees also referenced explicit criticism of the Climate Change Panel in traditional and social media, by right-wing politicians and far-right activists respectively, in the lead up to elections. An independent evaluation similarly identified growing politicisation as a threat to perceptions of the body's independence and authority, echoing the finding in the previous case study that contestation of an advisory body can be a sign of its political relevance (Gaia Consulting, 2023).

More worryingly, some interviewees argued that the challenge facing the Climate Change Panel is existential. The main source of evidence for this was a proposal by the government last year to merge four independent advisory bodies in Finland working on climate change and the environment—the Climate Change Panel, the Nature Panel, the Sustainability Panel, and the Forest Bioeconomy Panel—under the Prime Minister's Office (Yle, 2025). According to interviewees, this proposal was challenged by the various panels, environmental NGOs, private sector actors such as the Confederation of Finnish Industries, MPs and MEPs. Interviewees also objected to this proposal, arguing that there is ongoing need for all of these panels as they each provide a different perspective to the planetary crisis, and that merging them wouldn't lead to significant savings as they are generally very cost effective. This proposal has been stalled for now, but an interviewee conveyed that events such as this under the current government mean that they are "no longer taking [their] funding as granted"—especially as the Climate Change Panel must apply for its budget on an annual basis.⁴⁸ This precarity is compounded by the Climate Change Panel's resourcing relative to its peers: an independent evaluation found that Finland's Climate Change Panel operates on an annual budget of approximately €750,000 (Gaia Consulting, 2023) compared to a much better resourced UK CCC.

Notably, interviewees stressed the Climate Change Panel continues to enjoy widespread political and public support. This is evident from the strong reaction against the government's proposal to merge the Climate Change Panel with other independent climate advisory bodies. Based on this experience, a member of the panel said that they did not think it would be "worth the political points" the government would gain among a minority of the population to abolish the body.⁴⁹ Going further, one interviewee suggested that even the criticisms levelled at the Climate Change Panel from the forestry lobby and right-wing politicians are performative, designed to appeal to small segments of their supporters, while another added that the Climate Change Panel, has maintained good relations with actors from the forestry industry behind closed doors.

Overall, therefore, the Finnish Climate Change Panel appears to be operating in a more hostile environment than its Irish and Swedish counterparts. For now, it seems unlikely to be abolished in its entirety or merged with other independent climate advisory bodies, though interviewees were less certain about the other. It seems less unlikely, however, that the body could lose some of its already limited resources, putting it at risk of being powerless in practice if not on paper.

⁴⁸ Interviewee 18, Finland, member of the secretariat of a climate advisory body

⁴⁹ Interviewee 23, Finland, member of the secretariat of a climate advisory body

6.3 Implications

6.3.1 Key Debates

The Irish Climate Change Advisory Council, the Swedish Climate Policy Council, and Finnish Climate Change Panel, and other independent climate advisory bodies worldwide, have adopted a range of strategies to respond to the challenges above. A key tension underlying these strategies is the question of whether independent climate advisory bodies *should* respond to these challenges. On one end of the spectrum is the argument that these bodies should focus solely on providing scientific advice to the government and avoid engaging in political or public debates to maintain their independence and credibility. On the other end of the spectrum is the argument that these bodies have a duty to ensure that the government is meeting its climate targets, intervening where needed to advocate for specific policies, call out mis- and disinformation, and sensitise and engage stakeholders, including the general public.

Across the case studies, a pattern emerged with those working in or with climate advisory bodies arguing for caution and those less connected to the climate advisory bodies arguing for greater intervention. For example, a member of the CCAC argued that “our job was not to sell policy, but to explain the technical issues, and why we recommend [them]”,⁵⁰ while a former member argued that engaging in the public debate “might have been a bit of a distraction from the advice to government”.⁵¹ A member of the Secretariat of the Finnish Climate Change Panel also summarised the debate within the body: “I think in practice there is a clear demand for... taking policy positions and suggesting different policy options, but there comes a tension from... reluctance to be seen as a lobby actor... we don’t want to be... associated as one of the NGO or environmental organisations”.⁵² By contrast, a civil society actor in Ireland argued that “it’s really important that [climate advisory bodies] push back against... regression”,⁵³ while a former member of the Climate Policy Council, who is now a civil society actor in Sweden, argued that the Climate Policy Council should realise that public engagement is “super important” and that they “as a public agency have a responsibility to really take [public engagement] seriously... it’s not someone else’s job”.⁵⁴

Notably, independent research on the Swedish Climate Policy Council leans towards the latter view, arguing that the body’s tendency to avoid scientific and political details means it is not as politically salient as it could be (Aarthun and Sundqvist, 2025). They argue that advisory bodies should take on a role that reaches further than a usual scientific identity, adopting a “dual accountability” in relation to both science and politics to become “a relevant boundary organization that provides science advice with political influence” (Aarthun and Sundqvist, 2025, pp. 5-6).

An international expert suggested that there are a few key factors determining which of these approaches, or more likely, what blend of these two approaches, a climate advisory body is likely to take:

- **Mandate:** The interviewee noted that “a lot of councils feel constrained by their mandate”.⁵⁵ Some bodies are solely mandated to advise the government, and not engage stakeholders or act as a watchdog, meaning they can’t take a “more public facing and scrutiny approach”.⁵⁶
- **Resources:** The interviewee suggested that even if some bodies wanted to take a more interventionist approach, they would not have the resources to do so: most, with the exception of the UK and Denmark, have a small secretariat and “all [climate advisory bodies] have been facing budget cuts over the last few years”.⁵⁷ A narrow mandate can also make it harder to justify additional resourcing.
- **Independence:** Although the focus of this report has been on independent climate advisory bodies, the interviewee made it clear that not all these bodies are independent. This means they cannot publish independently on, and especially critically about, the government.

⁵⁰ Interviewee 11, Ireland, member of a climate advisory body

⁵¹ Interviewee 7, Ireland, former member of a climate advisory body and government actor

⁵² Interviewee 18, Finland, member of the secretariat of a climate advisory body

⁵³ Interviewee 10, Ireland, civil society actor

⁵⁴ Interviewee 19, Sweden, former member of a climate advisory body and civil society actor

⁵⁵ Interviewee 22, International, expert on climate advisory bodies

⁵⁶ Interviewee 22, International, expert on climate advisory bodies

⁵⁷ Interviewee 22, International, expert on climate advisory bodies

A related concern raised across all three councils is the need to balance criticism of government with continued collaboration. A member of the Secretariat of the Finnish Climate Change Panel described this as an unresolved tension: “how do we remain sufficiently critical about their policymaking while still being heard so that they don’t just put us aside”.⁵⁸ The same interviewee suggested that panel members are themselves divided on the right approach. A similar caution shaped interviewees’ accounts of Irish practice. One interviewee framed constructive engagement as a precondition for impact rather than a compromise on independence: “being independent and talking into a void is not a value proposition. You’ve got to be constructively engaging, otherwise what’s the point?”⁵⁹

6.3.2 Key Strategies

Building on these tensions, this section sets out the specific strategies climate advisory bodies have adopted in response to the challenges outlined above. While Ireland, Finland, and Sweden remain the focus of this study, strategies employed by other climate advisory bodies worldwide, as shared by interviewees, are also included to illustrate the wide range of strategies available and to highlight potential learnings for the three focus countries.

6.3.2.1 Communication

All interviewees noted that independent climate advisory bodies had changed the way they communicate. This hints at a shared underlying view amongst these bodies that changing the way they communicate can help them to respond to the challenges outlined above—getting their evidence heard by the right audiences, in the right form, at the right time is key. The International Climate Councils Network (ICCN) has a dedicated communications working group to support climate advisory bodies with this. The changes adopted by these bodies have taken many forms, spanning frequency, accessibility, channel, tone and framing:

- **Frequency:** The CCAC has moved from a single annual review to multiple sectoral reviews published throughout the year, generating more frequent media attention and sustaining political and public discourse rather than concentrating it around a single launch.
- **Accessibility:** According to interviews, the Finnish Climate Change Panel has made a concerted effort to communicate the scientific basis for its recommendations in terms that are accessible to non-specialists, in part to reinforce that its recommendations are evidence- rather than opinion- based. This includes hiring a part-time communications specialist, shared with the Nature Panel, which was identified as driving increased media visibility and public reach (Gaia Consulting, 2023). The Swedish Climate Policy Council has also developed a Panorama tool to help people visualise Sweden’s climate transition.
- **Channel diversification:** As per its members, the Irish CCAC has expanded into longer-form media, including op-eds, alongside more in-person stakeholder engagement.
- **Tone:** Some bodies have shifted towards conveying urgency: South Korea’s climate advisory body has been renamed as the Commission on the Climate Crisis Response and the Finnish Climate Change Panel has been grappling with how to communicate uncertainty without underplaying the need for immediate action.
- **Reframing around economic and security concerns:** This appears to be one of the most consistent strategies being employed by climate advisory bodies internationally. For example, the UK CCC’s analysis that the cost of a single fossil fuel price shock could rival the cost of net-zero (Climate Change Committee, 2026), Canadian Climate Institute’s Climate Costs Tracker, mapping of the costs of climate-related disasters, and the European Scientific Advisory Board’s framing of its advice around security and competitiveness (European Scientific Advisory Board on Climate Change, 2025).

6.3.2.2 Public Engagement and Countering Misinformation

Public engagement was one of the areas where interviewees most consistently stressed that a council’s scope

⁵⁸ Interviewee 18, Finland, member of the secretariat of a climate advisory body

⁵⁹ Interviewee 8, Ireland, member of a climate advisory body

for action is dictated by its mandate. A body without a public-engagement remit neither has the license nor, often, the resourcing to take on a more active public role, even where individual members might want to. Section 4.5 discusses this tension in detail for Ireland.

Perhaps as a result of this constraint, public engagement was one of the least developed areas of strategic response across Ireland, Sweden and Finland—sometimes at the frustration of interviewees. One interviewee in Sweden, for example, argued that the body needs to treat public engagement as a genuine priority rather than “someone else’s job”, insisting that as a public agency dealing with a sometimes-contested issue, the Council has “a responsibility to really take this issue serious”—while expressing doubt that it currently does.⁶⁰ They speculated this might partly reflect the Council’s composition, drawn entirely from academia, which may leave it “a bit distant” from public sentiment on the ground.⁶¹ Beyond these countries, other climate advisory bodies have adopted a range of responses:

- South Korea has gone furthest institutionally: In May 2026, the Presidential Committee on National Climate Crisis Response launched a permanent Climate Citizens’ Assembly under the Framework Act on Carbon Neutrality and Green Growth, with 220 citizen members serving as policy “co-designers” alongside the Committee’s scientific advisors, rather than as passive consultees (Seoul Economic Daily, 2026). The move followed a 2024 Constitutional Court ruling that found Korea’s existing climate targets unconstitutional for failing to protect future generations.
- The UK CCC has commissioned citizens’ panels of its own to inform specific pieces of advice, e.g. testing what changes households would find accessible and affordable as part of its Seventh Carbon Budget advice, and gathering public views on acceptable levels of climate risk and disruption for its 2026 adaptation report (Climate Change Committee 2025; Climate Change Committee 2026).
- Australia’s Climate Change Authority has adapted its public communications by maintaining an active LinkedIn presence to disseminate its advice and reports, and has published an Engagement Strategy setting out its approach to public consultation (Climate Change Authority, 2023). An international expert added that Australia has been comparatively proactive on tackling disinformation.

Notably, the scale of social media, and the high prevalence of mis- and disinformation around climate change, was seen by some as simply too large for any individual climate advisory body to meaningfully counter through its own communications efforts.

6.3.2.3 Engagement with Government

Section 4.3.1 set out the tension that climate advisory bodies face between remaining critical of the government and maintaining collaboration. In practice the three bodies in focus in this study appear to be resolving this approach by engaging with the government in public and in private simultaneously, and adjusting their messaging as needed.

- The Irish CCAC and Finnish Climate Change Panel have both made public statements to correct specific inaccuracies or push back on contested issues, while continuing to engage with the government behind closed doors. In Ireland, the small climate governance space means it is particularly easy to maintain productive relationships between the CCAC and the government. Notably, both bodies have adopted a similar approach in their dealings with oppositional lobby groups.
- Sweden’s Climate Policy Council has taken a cross-party approach, organising briefings with individual party representatives rather than engaging the government alone. Interviewees suggested that this helped secure the Council’s continued existence despite the Sweden Democrats’ initial objections to it. One interviewee noted that the head of the secretariat has maintained relationships not only with the Minister for the Environment but with the individuals responsible for environmental policy in other parties, allowing the Council to navigate the political landscape without compromising its independence.
- Beyond government, the International Climate Councils Network is encouraging members to extend their engagement to sectoral parliamentary committees—especially those that don’t focus on climate

⁶⁰ Interviewee 19, former member of a climate advisory body and civil society actor

⁶¹ Interviewee 19, former member of a climate advisory body and civil society actor

change or the environment. These committees are seen as key to establishing and sustaining strong climate framework laws.

6.3.2.4 Stakeholder Engagement

One idea put forward by an international expert is that climate advisory bodies can call on a wider “ecosystem” of stakeholders, including civil society organisations, academics, the private sector, or political champions, to take forward and act on a council’s recommendations, rather than directly engaging in political advocacy—especially when they have a narrow mandate. The Swedish Climate Policy Council appears to have been operating with this idea in mind: a former member argued that collaboration with civil society and the private sector is key to helping them defend the country’s climate targets and for legitimacy.

When it came to the form that stakeholder engagement should take, interviewees were divided on whether this should be formalised, like Denmark’s Climate Dialogue Forum (Klimadialogforum)—a legally mandated stakeholder platform established under the Danish Climate Council, or left informal ad hoc. Some argued that a more formalised process would be more transparent, while others expressed concern that this could lead to a loss of discretion and agility. Underlying both positions, however, was a concern that meaningful stakeholder engagement is resource-intensive and beyond the capacity of many climate advisory bodies, especially those whose mandates do not explicitly call for stakeholder engagement.

Below are some of the ways in which international climate advisory bodies are working to strengthen their ecosystem:

- The South African Presidential Climate Commission builds stakeholder representation directly into its structure, with commissioners drawn from business, labour, academia, civil society, and traditional leadership, allowing it to draw on these relationships to disseminate its recommendations.
- Chile’s Comité Científico Asesor de Cambio Climático (Scientific Advisory Committee on Climate Change) and New Zealand’s Climate Change Commission (He Pou a Rangi) both work closely with national university networks, using academic partnerships to extend their research capacity and amplify their recommendations.
- Sweden’s Climate Policy Council collaborates with civil society organisations and private sector actors to help defend its climate targets, with this kind of external support seen as important to the Council’s continued legitimacy.
- Denmark’s Klimarådet and Canada’s Canadian Climate Institute were referenced as actively convening dialogues with the private sector, unlike many other climate advisory bodies. This may represent a wider gap worth addressing: one interviewee recounted that the interim chair of the UK CCC told them that business actors would wait for the body’s sectoral pathways because they “filter down into investment decisions”,⁶² suggesting that private sector actors are already a significant audience for council advice even where no formal engagement mechanism exists to reach them.

6.3.2.5 Collaboration with Other Advisory Bodies

A further strategy has been for climate advisory to collaborate directly with other official advisory bodies, lending greater credibility to their recommendations, by pooling expertise and conveying the broader implications of climate change:

- Finland’s Climate Change Panel has published joint work with two sister panels: with the Finnish Forest Bioeconomy Science Panel on biogenic carbon dioxide capture and forest-sector value creation (Bioperäisen hiilidioksidin tulevaisuus Suomessa, Ilmastopaneeli Report 5/2026, June 2026), and with Suomen Luontopaneeli (the Finnish Nature Panel) on aligning climate and nature policy (Suosituksia ilmasto- ja luontopolitiikan kustannustehokkuuden ja johdonmukaisuuden vahvistamiseksi, November 2025).
- Ireland’s CCAC published a joint report with the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, *A Colossal Missed Opportunity: Ireland’s Climate Action and the Potential Costs of Missed Targets* (March 2025),

⁶² Interviewee 22, International, Expert on climate advisory bodies

estimating the financial penalties Ireland could face for missing its EU climate targets.

- The Netherlands’ Scientific Climate Council published a joint advisory report with the Health Council of the Netherlands, *Climate Change and Health: Directions for Policy* (21 May 2026), on the growing health risks posed by climate change and how policy should respond.

6.3.2.6 Ways of Working

Climate change advisory bodies have also adapted how they organise and conduct their work, in order to insulate themselves from political pressure, build transparency, and keep their work more focused.

- The Irish CCAC now recruits members through open applications, although the Minister for Climate, Energy and the Environment still makes the final appointment. This is a shift from the previous system, which lacked open applications.
- Finland’s Climate Change Panel publishes minutes of every Panel meeting on an ongoing public archive (Ilmastopaneeli, n.d.), while Sweden’s Climate Policy Council maintains a public repository of its own recommendations to government, compiled from its annual evaluation reports (Klimatpolitiska Rådet, n.d.).
- The Irish CCAC has developed adaptation scorecards to track annual progress on adaptation policy and resilience-building across eleven sectors, including local government (Climate Change Advisory Council, 2025).
- The Irish CCAC has introduced a horizon-scanning programme, allowing its secretariat to monitor emerging debates and challenges so the Council can respond to new topics more quickly (Climate Change Advisory Council, 2024).

Crucially, resourcing constraints run through nearly every strategy discussed above. Some climate advisory bodies have taken steps to address this constraint. For example, one interviewee noted that Ireland’s CCAC has moved towards co-funding specific projects with aligned institutions such as the SEAI and Met Éireann. The ICCN also supports members by facilitating the sharing of best practice on communications and climate modelling, and helping climate advisory bodies build a stronger evidence base of their own impact, e.g. the ICCN joint statement on the impact of climate councils published at COP30 (ICCN, 2025). This evidence can then be brought to government or parliament during legislative reviews or resourcing negotiations. However, the resources of climate advisory bodies are ultimately dependent on political will, especially in the absence of institutional safeguards.

7 Findings and Recommendations

Drawing together the evidence from Ireland (Section 4), the United Kingdom (Section 5), and the comparative analysis of political contestation in Ireland, Finland and Sweden (Section 6), several messages emerge about the role and impact of independent climate advisory bodies in climate democracy and how that impact holds up under democratic and political challenge.

7.1 Findings

7.1.1 Independent Advisory Bodies and Climate Democracy

Effectiveness and accountability are the pillars of climate democracy where the contribution of independent advisory bodies in our case studies is strongest. The most consistently documented contribution of these bodies is to the effectiveness of climate democracy through influence on determination of carbon budgets, targets, and sector-specific policy measures. The UK case also demonstrates the contribution to mainstreaming climate concerns into policy areas beyond an advisory body’s formal statutory remit through its evidence being drawn into a much wider range of parliamentary and legislative processes, including energy, transport, water, financial regulation and other policies. There is also strong evidence of independent advisory bodies’ impact on accountability via its watchdog function, in particular through annual progress reporting, and their use by

parliamentarians, NGOs, and courts to hold governments to their commitments.

Participation and deliberativeness dimensions of the RETOOL framework of climate democracy have not come through strongly in the case studies, apart from occasional references to the Irish Citizens' Assembly on climate change. While the analysis of the operation of the UK's CCC has not been the focus of the UK's case study, it is worth noting that they have been championing the outcomes of the UK's Citizens Assembly on Climate Change held in 2020 and have since integrated deliberative methods into their work. Yet the case studies on the other advisory bodies considered in this study did not show much evidence of these bodies substantively broadening public participation or facilitating deliberation. This gap to a large extent reflects the mandate of the respective bodies and their resourcing rather than limitation of the independent advisory model itself. For example, external stakeholders in the interviews express interest in the advisory bodies taking a more proactive approach in engaging with stakeholders. This suggests that strengthening the participation and deliberativeness pillars of climate democracy requires a deliberate design choice at the point of establishment or reform, rather than something that follows automatically from a body's independence or credibility.

7.1.2 Advisory Bodies under Political Contestation

The impact of advisory bodies becomes more contested, and more dependent on institutional design, once political backlash against ambitious climate action sets in. The UK and the Ireland-Finland-Sweden comparison both show that advisory bodies' influence does not simply persist through periods of declining political consensus but that it is actively challenged. How well it holds up depends on structural features rather than public standing alone. The UK CCC's authority was directly contested in Parliament during 2023–2025, even as its evidence continued to be cited by all sides. Ireland, Finland and Sweden each faced pressure on their mandates, resourcing, or continued existence as political consensus around climate action weakened. What appears to matter for resilience is not whether a body is popular, but whether it is statutorily embedded, engaged with parliament rather than solely the executive, and anchored to external commitments such as EU targets.

The "duty to respond" is key for impact but is not sufficient on its own. A recurring finding across the case studies is that a statutory obligation for government to respond to advisory body recommendations does not guarantee that recommendations are acted on, particularly once political will weakens. The comparison with Denmark's stronger "duty to act" suggests that institutional design choices beyond the duty to respond may matter more for accountability under contestation than has previously been recognised.

Taken together, these findings suggest that independent climate advisory bodies make their greatest contribution to climate democracy through strengthening effectiveness and accountability pillars. This contribution is resilient but not immune to political contestation, while participation and deliberativeness will likely require more attention going forward.

7.1.3 Strategies to Enhance Resilience

Resourcing constraints and political contestation compound one another. The body facing the most acute contestation in this study, the Finnish Climate Change Panel, also has the smallest secretariat among the four bodies and faces annual rather than multi-year budget uncertainty. This suggests that political contestation and resourcing fragility are not independent risks: a body under-resourced relative to its peers is less able to withstand a period of heightened political pressure, and a body under political pressure is less able to secure the resourcing it needs. Public support alone does not resolve this: the Finnish Panel enjoys strong public and political backing, yet remains structurally exposed because its funding is not statutorily guaranteed.

Adaptive communication practice contributes to resilience. All bodies covered in this study (the CCAC, CCC, Swedish Climate Policy Council, and Finnish Climate Change Panel) have shifted communication practices, including frequency, channel, tone, and economic or security-based framing, in response to growing contestation. This consistency across otherwise very different institutional contexts suggests that adaptive communication should be understood alongside statutory embeddedness, parliamentary engagement, and external anchoring as a fourth, cross-cutting factor shaping how well advisory bodies withstand political contestation.

Collaboration with other advisory or expert bodies strengthens credibility but does not substitute for

resourcing. Joint publications, such as the Finnish Panel with its sister science panels, the Irish CCAC with the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, lend legitimacy and extend reach at low cost. However, this is a complement to, not a substitute for, adequate secretariat capacity: collaboration can multiply the impact of existing analysis, but it does not address the underlying resourcing gap facing several of the bodies studied.

7.2 Recommendations

1. On establishment and legal embeddedness

- A. Founding legislation should **embed in law the body and its core mandate**, rather than leaving its existence or functions to administrative discretion, to strengthen its resilience against political change.
- B. Legislation should specify **a minimum secretariat size or funding floor**, rather than leaving resourcing to annual budget negotiation; annual, discretionary funding leaves bodies structurally exposed even where public and political support is otherwise strong.
- C. Funding should be allocated on a **multi-year cycle**, ideally spanning electoral or parliamentary terms, to reduce exposure to short-term political shifts.
- D. Appointment procedures should include **cross-party input or ratification**, rather than sole ministerial discretion, to help secure durable, cross-party buy-in for the body's advice and protect it from being characterised as a partisan actor.

2. On mandate: duty to respond, duty to act, watchdog function, and stakeholder consultation

- A. Where feasible, legislation should establish a **duty on government to act** on an advisory body's findings, not merely a duty to respond to them. The comparison with Denmark's example of a duty to act model suggests this distinction may matter more for accountability under political contestation than a duty to respond alone, which can be satisfied without government engaging substantively with the underlying advice.
- B. **Mandates should explicitly authorise public engagement and stakeholder consultation** as a core function of the body, rather than leaving this to the discretion of individual members. The case studies show that bodies without an explicit remit for public engagement consistently under-invest in it, regardless of individual members' interest in doing so.
- C. Legislation should consider providing for a **horizon-scanning or continuous-monitoring function**, formalising practice already adopted informally by the Irish CCAC, so that advisory bodies can respond to emerging contestation, including disinformation and targeted lobbying, proactively rather than reactively.
- D. Legislation should provide advisory bodies with a **legal right of access to government and public-body data**, rather than relying on informal cooperation, to remove a recurring practical constraint on their analytical capacity.

3. Advice for the advisory bodies themselves

- A. Adopt a **continuous communication** issuing several outputs, for example, sectoral or rolling reviews rather than a single annual review. This is now common practice across the bodies studied that allows drawing public attention several times a year and reduces the risk of a single, unfavourable news cycle limiting a body's visibility for the rest of the year.
- B. Where mandate and resources allow, **build stakeholder ecosystems deliberately** rather than defaulting to informal, ad hoc engagement, which the evidence suggests is more often a symptom of limited resourcing than a considered strategic choice.
- C. Pursue **joint publications with other advisory bodies** in adjacent policy areas such as fiscal, health, nature, or forestry panels, as a low-cost way of extending credibility and reach, particularly for smaller secretariats that cannot independently produce cross-sectoral analysis.
- D. **Reframe climate advice** around economic and security costs, similar to the UK CCC's comparison of fossil-fuel price shocks with the costs of net zero or the European Scientific Advisory Board's framing

around competitiveness, as a strategy for depoliticising advice, rather than an occasional communications choice.

- E. Build evidence of the **body's own impact and cost-effectiveness** proactively, before facing merger or abolition threats, rather than reactively when under threat.

4. On safeguarding independence under funding pressure

- A. **Consider co-funding arrangements**, following the Irish CCAC's emerging practice with the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland and Met Éireann, as a partial buffer against politically driven budget cuts. Any such arrangement should be carefully bounded to avoid creating a perception that it compromises the body's independence.

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