

The end of the fossil fuel age?

December 17 2015, by Fiona Tyrrell

The Paris climate change deal signifies the beginning of the end of the fossil fuel age, according to climatologist Professor John Sweeney, who was among speakers responding to the Paris climate change deal at a public event in Trinity College Dublin this evening, Wednesday, December 16th.

The public discussion took stock of the historic global deal on climate change which was struck at the United Nations summit in Paris last weekend and focused on how to mobilise all sections of society to tackle the climate change crisis head on. The event was organised by the European Observatory of the New Human Condition at Trinity's School of Histories and Humanities in conjunction with Climate Gathering.

The Paris agreement signifies the beginning of the end of the fossil fuel age with each of the 195 countries committing to limit their greenhouse gas emissions progressively over coming decades with the aim of keeping global warming below 2 degrees C above pre industrial levels, and ideally below 1.5 degrees C, according to John Sweeney, Professor Emeritus Maynooth University who was a member of the IPCC team awarded the 2007 Nobel Prize.

"Like all agreements which are reached on a unanimous basis, no-one got everything they want. Aviation and shipping escaped mention. Human rights received much less attention than it should have and 'climate justice' was also not incorporated at the request of some countries."

"Timetables and emission reduction figures were vague and generally greater ambition in several areas would have been welcomed. But overall this is a historic agreement which paves the way for progressively tighter controls on [greenhouse gas emissions](#) in the years ahead, as well as offering developing countries the finance necessary to develop along more sustainable lines."

Poul Holm, Professor of Environmental History, Trinity College Dublin, argued that in the wake of the Paris agreement we need to radically change how we talk about [climate change](#) in order to effect real change.

"There is not one single way to fix the climate. The challenges look differently to people in the streets of Beijing, in the townships of Johannesburg, and in the fields of Kansas. Citizens and corporations across the world need to translate the aspirational talk of politicians to actions, investments and consumer choices that match the realities of life. This is the responsibility of us all."

"The deal agreed upon in Paris gives rise to hope that the legacy of this generation will not weigh as a burden on the next. People need to see to it that governments and businesses follow through on the promises made in Paris. But the real transformation is about the transformation of the minds and actions of us all. We need to change wasteful and harmful behaviour to pro-environmental action. We need to transform our ways of living from ripping off the resources of the world to building a smart and sustainable planet."

Eamon Ryan, Green Party Leader and Co-Convenor of the Dublin Climate Gathering: added: "The COP21 agreement is a real achievement for everyone involved. No one should underestimate its significance. This agreement changes everything and involves everyone in a way we have not seen before. We've answered the question of where we're going as a society – now we need to ask how we get there."

Provided by Trinity College Dublin

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