



# Climate change:

what Northern Ireland really thinks

A report prepared by Dr Liz Fawcett  
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## Executive Summary

**This report is based on a survey of the views of more than 1,000 people in Northern Ireland on the most significant issue currently facing mankind – climate change. The survey's results reveal considerable concern about the issue, and a willingness to take steps towards a more sustainable way of living. Some questions were also included in a similar survey carried out by WWF Northern Ireland in 2005<sup>1</sup>, enabling us to examine to what extent attitudes have changed in that time. Below are the key findings from this latest survey:**

- 87% of people agreed that human activity is damaging the planet;
- there's been a sharp rise in the percentage of people who strongly agree that human activity is damaging the environment – 61% now strongly agree that this is the case, compared with 33% two years ago;
- the proportion of respondents who say they're definitely prepared to take steps to live more sustainably has more than doubled in the past two years – more than half of all respondents now express this level of willingness;
- there's currently a higher level of concern about climate change in Northern Ireland than across the UK as a whole;
- most car drivers say they are making at least some effort to reduce their car use;
- nearly half of all recent air passengers say they would be prepared, either definitely or possibly, to reduce the number of flights they take;
- 90% of respondents support a proposal for an energy efficiency rate rebate, with more than two-thirds strongly agreeing with this idea;
- in common with young people in the rest of the UK, those in Northern Ireland are less engaged with the issue of climate change than older people; and
- nearly half of all young people in Northern Ireland say they haven't studied environmental issues at school, college or university.

The results from the survey also suggest that people would like to be encouraged to live more sustainably through positive incentives and although there is still major opposition, support is growing for measures such as a congestion charge or road tolls.

## Introduction

Two years ago, many people in Northern Ireland wouldn't have known what climate change was. Now, in 2007, you can't switch on a radio or TV or open a newspaper without finding the latest news on this most significant and pressing of issues. The seeds were sown by the publication in October 2006 of the Stern Review on climate change, commissioned by the UK Treasury, and the recent publication of a series of alarming reports by the esteemed Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

The media have embraced climate change with open arms. But what do ordinary people think? Do they believe the world's climate is altering? Do they think the government or the Northern Ireland Executive can do anything about it? And are ordinary individuals prepared to take any steps themselves to reduce their carbon footprint?

WWF Northern Ireland wanted to find out. It commissioned a survey of more than 1,000 people across Northern Ireland to discover exactly what they thought about climate change. This report presents the results of that investigation.

The survey involved the inclusion of a series of special questions in the monthly Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey, covering a variety of issues, conducted by Ipsos MORI Ireland. This survey, carried out through face-to-face interviews in April 2007, involves a representative sample of the population in Northern Ireland aged 15 and over. The fact that the questions were included in a regular wider survey means there is less likelihood of obtaining a self-selecting sample which is more interested than average in environmental issues. The survey is thus a particularly robust record of current opinion and behaviour relating to climate change in Northern Ireland.<sup>2</sup>

## Attitudes towards climate change

Most respondents were firmly of the view that “human activity is damaging the environment”; 87% agreed, at least to some extent, with this assertion, with 61% strongly agreeing (see Chart 1). This question was also asked of respondents in a similar survey commissioned by WWF Northern Ireland in 2005. While the overall proportions agreeing and disagreeing were similar to the responses in 2005, the big change is in the proportion strongly agreeing with this assertion. The proportion of respondents strongly agreeing that human activity is damaging the environment has almost doubled, from 33% in 2005 to 61% in this latest survey. Although a slight alteration in the wording of the possible responses may explain some of this increase, it is still a remarkable change and suggests that fears about our adverse impact on the environment have become a major concern for many people here.<sup>3</sup>

Social-economic group was an important factor; the higher a respondent’s social-economic group, the more likely it was that they would strongly agree with the statement (see Chart 2).

Most respondents (69%) also strongly agreed that the world’s climate was changing (see Chart 3). Again, there was some correlation with social-economic categories, with 76% of respondents from the highest two social-economic groupings (AB and C1) strongly agreeing, compared with 63% of DEs. The age group most likely to firmly believe that the global climate was changing was the 45-54 year old category, with 75% strongly agreeing. The younger (15-34 years) and oldest age groups were the most sceptical (see Chart 4).

The overall responses to this question almost exactly mirror public attitudes on this issue across the UK; in the most recent survey on attitudes to climate change commissioned by the UK government through the Central Office of Information (COI), 70% of respondents strongly agreed that the world’s climate was changing.<sup>4</sup>

Chart 1: “Human activity is damaging the environment”

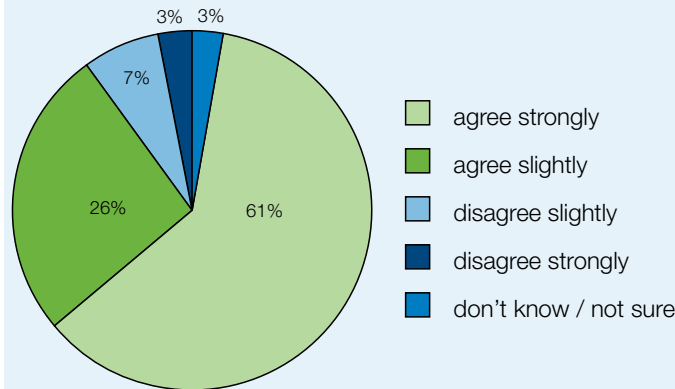
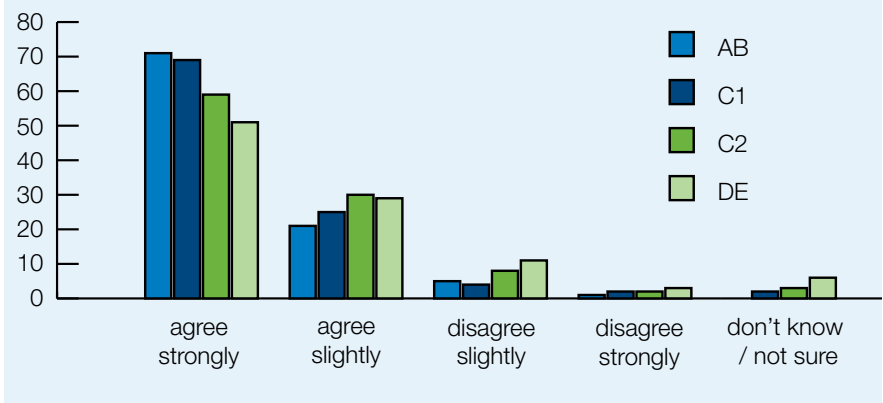


Chart 2: “Human activity is damaging the environment”: social-economic group breakdown



However, there was a higher level of concern about the impact of climate change among respondents to WWF Northern Ireland’s survey than among those who responded to the government’s UK-wide survey. Responding to the WWF Northern Ireland survey, 40% said they were very concerned about the impact of climate change on the province, compared with 32% of respondents to the UK government survey who said they were very concerned about the impact of climate change on the UK.<sup>5</sup> Forty-two per cent of respondents to the WWF Northern Ireland survey said they were very concerned about the impact of climate change on the world as a whole. Age and social-economic group were both factors as regards responses to the latter question; the older a respondent and the higher their social-economic grouping, the more likely they were to express strong concern.



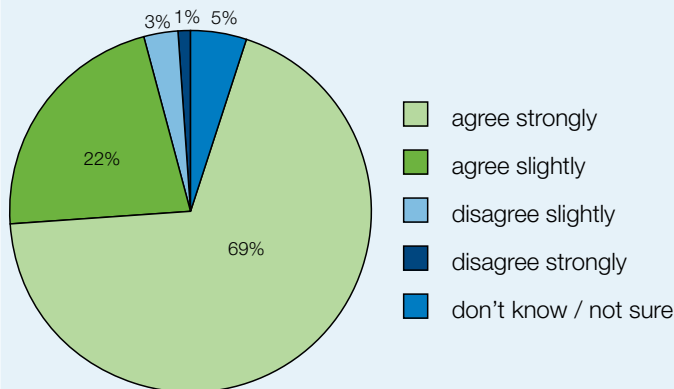
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## Are we doing anything about it?

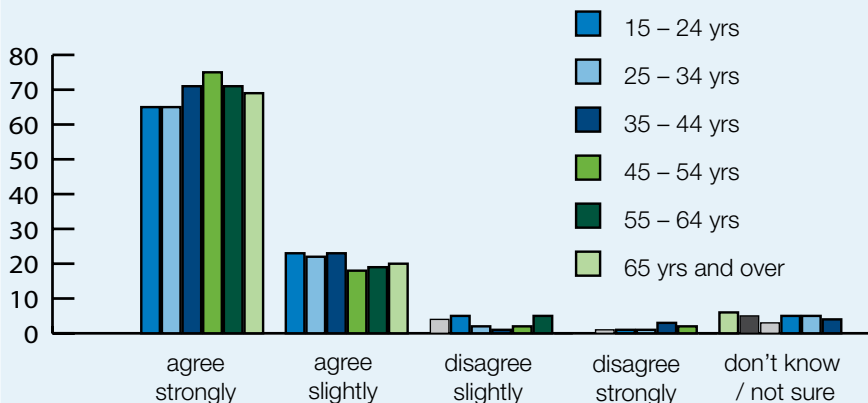
Just under two-thirds of respondents (65%) felt they personally could have at least a little influence on limiting climate change. This proportion is lower than the 76% of respondents to the government's UK-wide survey who perceived their potential influence in the same way.<sup>6</sup> But respondents to the WWF Northern Ireland survey were much less likely to say they could have no influence at all; just 8% opted for this response, while 22% of respondents to the UK-wide survey felt they could have no influence.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, 87% expressed some willingness to make lifestyle changes to reduce environmental damage; more than half (54%) agreed strongly that "I'd be willing to make changes to my lifestyle to reduce environmental damage on the planet", while 33% agreed slightly with this statement (see *Chart 5*). This question was also asked in the WWF Northern Ireland 2005 survey. Just 22% strongly agreed with the statement in 2005 (see *Chart 6*). Although slight changes in the wording of possible responses may explain some of this change, the results do suggest that a much higher proportion of people in Northern Ireland are now definitely willing to take steps to adopt a more sustainable lifestyle<sup>8</sup>. There was a strong correlation with social-economic group on this issue, however; 65% of those from the AB social-economic category strongly agreed with this statement, compared to 45% of those from the DE group.

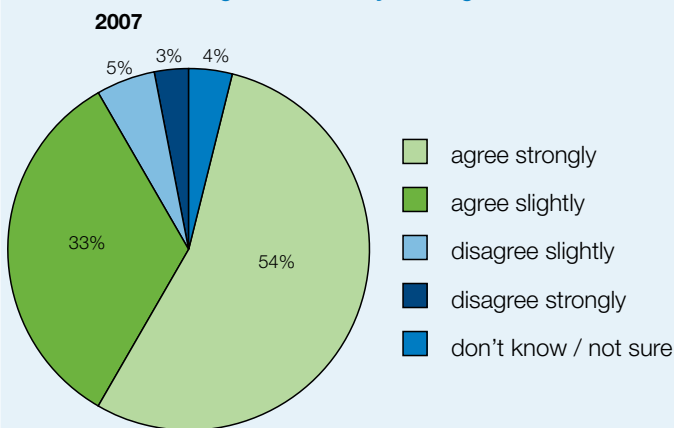
**Chart 3: Is the world's climate changing?**



**Chart 4: Is the world's climate changing?: breakdown of age**



**Chart 5: "I'd be willing to make lifestyle changes to reduce environmental damage".**

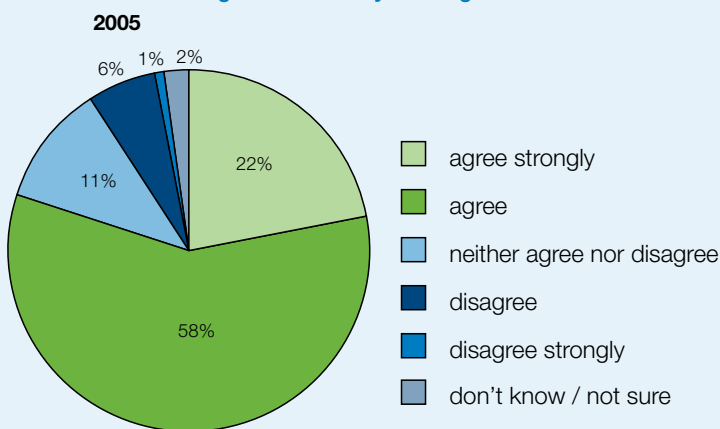


So, if most people feel they can have some influence and are willing to make behavioural changes, what are they actually doing?

The WWF Northern Ireland survey included some questions designed to monitor both current and potential environmentally-friendly behaviour. One of the simplest steps in reducing your carbon footprint is to turn off lights when you leave a room or no longer require them. A total of 82% of respondents said they frequently switched off lights when they didn't need them. This finding is very similar to a survey carried out in the north-east of England which found that 83% of respondents claimed to be switching off lights when they left a room.<sup>9</sup>

The north-east of England survey team found that saving money was a major reason for taking steps which reduced an individual's carbon footprint.<sup>10</sup> However, while the WWF Northern Ireland survey did not examine motivations, there is evidence to suggest that environmental rather than financial concerns may be motivating at least some respondents to switch off the lights. If financial concerns were the prime motivating factor, one would expect those from the lowest social-economic group category, DE, to be the most likely to turn off the lights. In fact, however, it was those in the AB social-

**Chart 6: "I'd be willing to make lifestyle changes to reduce environmental damage".**



economic grouping who were most likely to switch off their lights regularly, while those in the DE category were least likely to do so on a frequent basis.

Moreover, most car drivers said they were making at least some effort to use alternatives to the car specifically for environmental reasons; 37% said they had done so frequently in the preceding year, while a further 33% said they had taken this option occasionally. A similar question was asked of respondents in a Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey in 2000. On that

occasion, just 12% of respondents who were car drivers said they always or often cut back on their car use for environmental reasons.<sup>11</sup> The WWF Northern Ireland findings suggest that, if the claims made by the respondents are true, significant behavioural change among car drivers may be taking place.

Responding to the WWF Northern Ireland survey, 52% of those questioned reported that they had flown during the preceding year. Social-economic group had a very marked bearing on the likelihood that a respondent had taken a flight: 78% of ABs, and just 39% of DEs, said they had flown in the past year. This finding contradicts claims by budget airlines that cut-price flights are making flying widely accessible to those on low incomes.

Those who had flown within the preceding 12 months were asked whether they would be prepared to reduce the number of flights they made to help the environment (see Chart 7). Just over half this group said they would not be prepared to take this step. However, nearly one in five air passengers said they would definitely be prepared to reduce their flights, while a further 29% said they might. The level of willingness to take this important step compares favourably with the north-east of England, where 78% of recent fliers said they would not be prepared to cut back on flights.<sup>12</sup>



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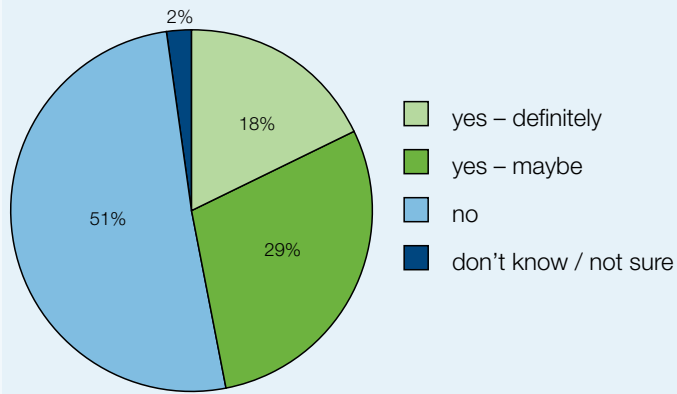
Respondents were also asked whether they would be prepared to pay higher prices and/or taxes in order to help protect the environment. Not surprisingly, there was much greater willingness to pay higher prices than higher taxes. But views on both these issues were divided, as *Chart 8* shows.

These questions were included because they featured in the NILT survey in 2000. Surprisingly, the overall pattern of responses on both these questions in WWF Northern Ireland's latest survey almost exactly mirrors the results of the NILT survey (see *Chart 8*). The one exception relates to the fact that there is a higher proportion of respondents who state they are "fairly willing" in each instance. In the previous survey, respondents had the option of saying they were "neither willing nor unwilling" – an option not available in the WWF Northern Ireland survey. It would seem that many who might have selected this option, had it been available, chose "fairly willing" when the range of possible responses presented encouraged them to express a definite view on this issue<sup>13</sup>. Thus, the results do suggest that many people are prepared to consider paying higher prices, while a smaller group would not feel aggrieved if they had to pay higher environmental taxes.

At the same time, the proportions of respondents who say they are fairly or very unwilling to take each of these steps is almost exactly the same in this most recent survey as in the 2000 survey. This suggests that there exists a sizeable segment of the population who do not wish to make financial sacrifices for the sake of the environment, and whose stance on this issue has not changed over time.

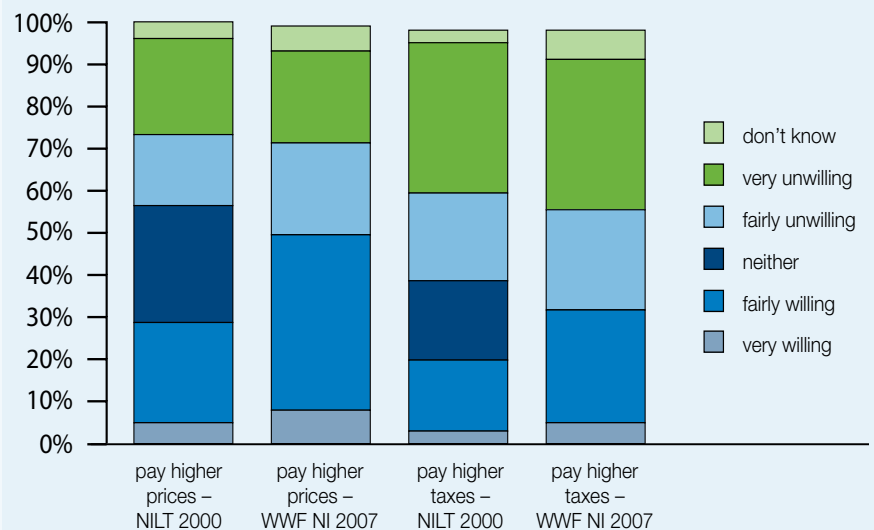
*Note: The category "don't know" relates to those respondents who selected "don't know/not sure" in the WWF Northern Ireland survey and "can't choose" in the NILT survey. "Neither willing nor unwilling" was only available as a response option in NILT survey.*

**Chart 7: Proportion of air passengers willing / not willing to reduce flying**



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**Chart 8: Willingness to pay higher prices / taxes**

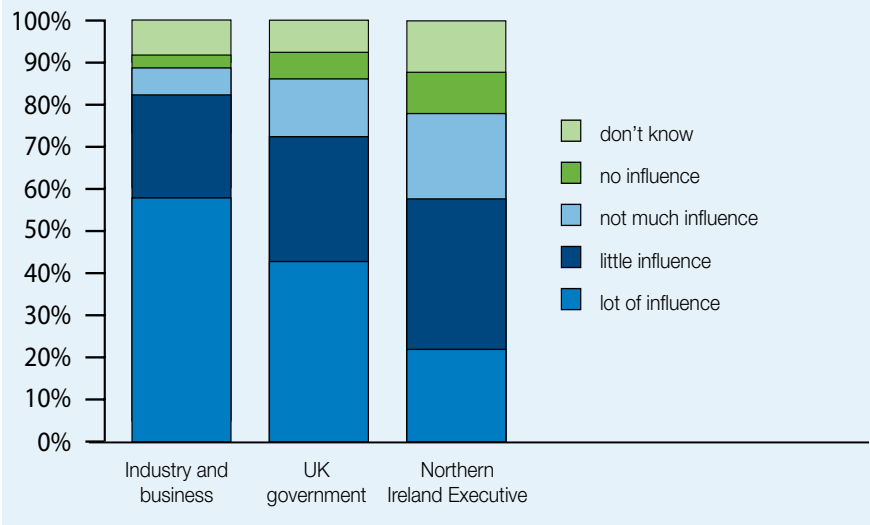


## Who can tackle climate change?

Respondents were asked how much influence they felt the UK government, the Northern Ireland Executive, and business and industry could have on limiting climate change.<sup>14</sup> They were most likely to see business and industry as influential and least likely to view the Northern Ireland Executive as influential in this regard (see Chart 9).

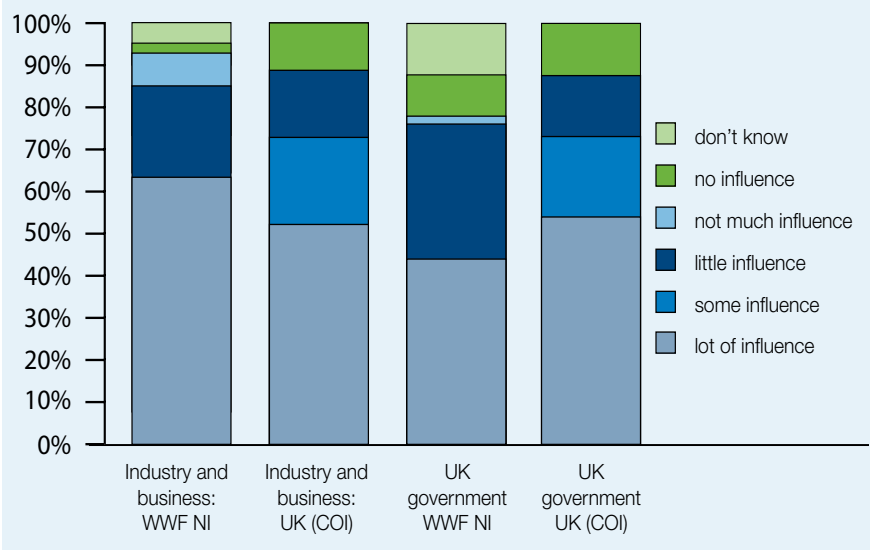
Respondents to the UK government survey carried out through the COI in 2007 were also asked how much influence they believed both their government, and business and industry, could have in limiting climate change (see Chart 10). While it is not possible to make a completely direct comparison as the possible responses were structured in a slightly different way, the comparative results do suggest that people in Northern Ireland are more likely than in the UK as a whole to see business and industry as having the potential to tackle global warming effectively, but somewhat less likely to have faith in the potential of the UK government to help tackle climate change than people in the UK as a whole. The latter difference is probably explained by the fact that many people in Northern Ireland would not identify with the UK government to the same extent as people in Great Britain.

Chart 9: Who can influence climate change?



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Chart 10: Who can influence climate change?



Note: The category "lot of influence" relates to the wording used in the WWF Northern Ireland survey, and to the category "a large influence" in the COI survey. The response option "some influence" was available only in the COI survey, while the option "not much influence" was available only in the WWF Northern Ireland survey.

## What should the Executive do?

The survey questionnaire sought responses to three practical steps which the Northern Ireland Executive could take to help reduce carbon dioxide emissions. These were:

- a rate rebate for householders who improve the energy efficiency of their homes through measures such as installing extra insulation or double glazing;
- a charge for motorists driving through Belfast, similar to the congestion charge in London; and
- a more general system of road tolls or charges on busy roads throughout Northern Ireland.

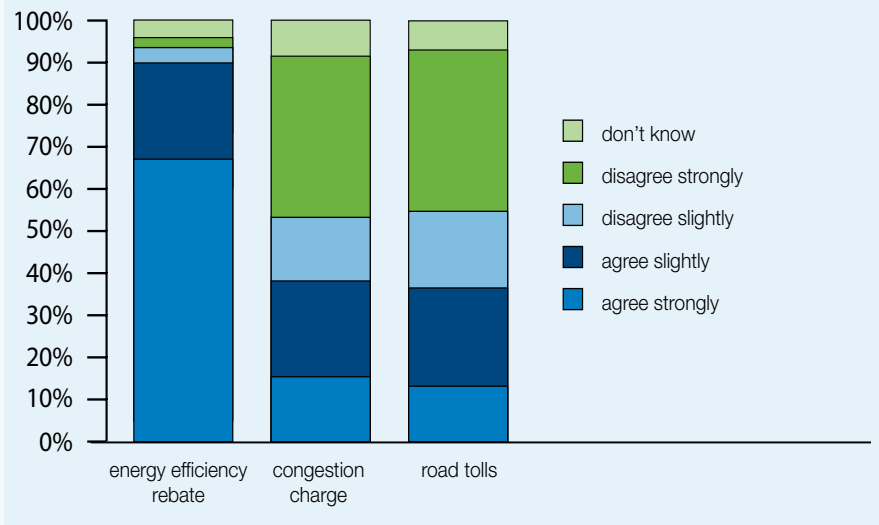
Of these three policy options, by far the most popular was the energy efficiency rebate (see Chart 11). This was supported by no less than 90% of respondents, with more than two-thirds (68%) strongly agreeing with the proposal.

This proposal received strong support from all social-economic groups, although DEs were somewhat less likely to be strongly supportive, with 62% strongly agreeing. This difference is probably explained by the fact that a larger proportion of this group said they didn't know or weren't sure about this particular proposal.

However, there was a considerable level of opposition to the introduction of a congestion charge for Belfast. Almost two-fifths (39%) of the sample strongly disagreed with this proposal, with a further 14% disagreeing slightly. Not surprisingly, opposition was strongest from many of those most likely to be directly affected by it; 51% of those from the greater Belfast area outside the Belfast City Council boundary were strongly opposed to it. The level of opposition in the Belfast City area was similar to the sample as a whole.

There was an identical level of strong overall opposition to a more general system of road toll charges in Northern Ireland, with 39% strongly disagreeing with the idea, and 17% disagreeing slightly. Opposition was particularly strong in County Derry and the rural part of Antrim<sup>15</sup>.

Chart 11: Support for policies to tackle climate change



Similar, although not identical, questions were asked in the NILT survey in 1999<sup>16</sup>.

The level of strong opposition to the idea of both a congestion charge (for towns and cities) and a more general road toll (confined to motorways in the relevant question) was broadly similar to that expressed in WWF Northern Ireland's more recent survey. At the same time, the level of overall opposition to the idea of the congestion charge has diminished, although differences in the wording of the possible responses may explain some of the change.

The most notable change, however, lies in the fact that a much higher proportion of individuals now strongly support both congestion charging and road tolls. In the NILT 1999 survey, just 3% of respondents strongly agreed with each of these methods of reducing traffic and raising revenue, compared with 16% who expressed strong support for congestion charging and 14% who expressed strong agreement with road tolls in the more recent WWF Northern Ireland survey. Again, differences in wording must be taken into account. But these results do suggest that there is a growing and no longer insignificant minority of people in Northern Ireland who want the Executive to take action to curb car use.



## Learning about the environment

Finally, respondents were asked whether they had studied environmental issues and/or climate change at school, college or university. Most respondents said they had not studied either topic; 75% said they had not learned about environmental issues and 77% said they had not learned about climate change. What is of greater concern is the large proportion of young people who said they had not studied these subjects; 47% of 15-24 year olds said they had not learned about environmental issues, and 46% said they had not studied climate change.

As might be expected, in general, the older a respondent, the less likely it was that they had studied either of these topics. There was also a clear correlation between social-economic group and the likelihood that a respondent had studied climate change; the higher the respondent's social-economic group category, the more likely it was that they had learned about this topic. Those in the AB social-economic grouping were also more likely to have studied environmental issues than those in the DE category.

The results also reveal that respondents in the Belfast City Council area were much more likely than respondents elsewhere to have studied environmental issues (32% as opposed to 23% of the overall sample) and somewhat more likely to have studied climate change (27% as opposed to 21% of the overall sample). It is difficult to interpret this finding; it may be, in part, that schools in Belfast have been more aware of the significance of these issues. However, it must be borne in mind that many Belfast-based respondents would have grown up in other parts of Northern Ireland.

What these results do suggest is that children and young people have not been receiving equal access to environmental education across Northern Ireland. Whether this is still the case would require a separate investigation. But the fact that nearly half of 15-24 year olds report that they have not studied environmental issues must be a serious cause for concern.

It had been hypothesised that respondents who had learned about environmental issues at school or college would display greater awareness and concern about climate change and its impact, and would be more willing to make behavioural changes. Although this was generally – but not always – the case with regard to each of the questions, there tended to be no more than a slight difference between the responses of the group which had received some relevant education and those who had not.

This finding contrasts with the results of a special survey of youth opinion carried out by the COI for Defra in England in 2006<sup>17</sup>. This survey, which investigated the views of 11-17 year olds, found significant differences in the level of awareness and concern about climate change across a range of questions between those who had and had not studied climate change at school.

The reason for this difference probably lies in the fact that the WWF Northern Ireland survey sample covered all age groups from 15 years up; one would expect that those still at school or who have just left – as in the COI survey – would be more influenced by their education than those who left many years ago, as was the case with most of the WWF Northern Ireland sample.

## The influence of social and demographic factors on attitudes

Notwithstanding the influence or otherwise of their education, when compared with their older counterparts, the 15-24 year old age group in the WWF Northern Ireland survey was more sceptical about the potential negative impact of human behaviour on the environment, more sceptical about the existence of climate change, less concerned about global warming, and less willing to take practical steps to help limit climate change. This pattern mirrors the findings of the previous WWF Northern Ireland survey on environmental attitudes in 2005, and also echoes the results of the UK-wide COI surveys.

It should be stressed that most young people do express a concern about the issue and some degree of willingness to take practical action. But climate change does not seem to have engaged the attention of this youngest age group to the same extent as older groups. This is understandable when it comes to their degree of willingness to take practical action: many young people still live at home and have a limited degree of control



over the size of either their carbon or more general ecological footprint. But it is unclear why there is not the same degree of concern as among the population as a whole. What is evident is that, on this most crucial of issues, young people here are not out of step with their British counterparts.

At the other end of the age spectrum, those aged 65 and over did not differ greatly from the overall sample in terms of their attitudes on most issues, although they did display more concern than the sample as a whole about the impact of climate change. But the oldest age group was more likely to use sustainable modes of transport than the other groups. Respondents in this category were the least likely to drive a car, and the least likely to have flown within the preceding 12 months. Of those who did drive, nearly half (47%) said that in the preceding year they had frequently made an effort to walk, cycle or take public transport rather than use the car, specifically for environmental reasons. This compares with 37% of the sample as a whole who said they did likewise. The oldest age group was also the most likely to switch off lights frequently and was more supportive than average of the energy efficiency rate rebate proposal. It seems likely that financial concerns and access to free public transport are major factors in the sustainable behaviour of many respondents in this group.

Social-economic group was a major factor with regard to a number of the questions. Respondents from the AB category were more likely than those in the DE social bracket to agree strongly that human activity was damaging the environment, more convinced that climate change was happening, more concerned about global warming, and more willing to take practical steps to try to limit environmental damage.

In the previous WWF Northern Ireland survey, respondents from the Belfast City Council area displayed a higher level of concern about the environment than those from other areas. That was not the case this time round; it seems that most other areas had caught up with Northern Ireland in terms of environmental awareness. The exception was counties Tyrone and Fermanagh.

Respondents in this area were, of any region in Northern Ireland, most sceptical about the likelihood that human activity was damaging the planet and that climate change was occurring. They were also much less likely than the sample as a whole to be willing to make practical changes to reduce their impact on the environment.

## Conclusion

There seems little doubt that climate change is a major concern for many people in Northern Ireland. Indeed, the available comparative UK-wide data suggests that the level of concern in Northern Ireland is higher than for the UK as a whole. There is also a growing willingness among people to make more sustainable living choices.

However, WWF Northern Ireland's previous environmental attitudes survey in 2005 revealed the extent to which people prefer to be motivated into action through carrots rather than sticks. This preference is evident in the results of this latest survey. The extremely positive response to the idea of an energy efficiency rate rebate contrasts with the more negative reactions to the proposals for a congestion charge or road tolls, and for higher environmental taxes. Even on the concept of paying higher prices to help the environment, people in Northern Ireland remain divided. That said, it would seem that a growing proportion of people would be prepared to accept certain financial penalties or greater costs, even if they are, for the most part, not strongly in favour.

As noted above, it is the lesser degree of engagement by young people with the issue of climate change – both here and in the UK as a whole – which is perhaps the greatest cause for concern. The results of this survey do not suggest that environmental education at school or college necessarily plays a significant role in stimulating that interest later in life. However, the COI's youth survey indicates that it most certainly can make a difference to the level of engagement among young people. It should be a matter of concern that so many young people here are still reporting that they received no environmental education at school or college.

We hope that the new revised curricula for both primary and post-primary schools will have an impact in this regard.

## Technical note

A total of 1,013 face-to-face interviews representative of the Northern Ireland population aged 15 and over were conducted at 59 sampling points across Northern Ireland between 5 and 30 April 2007. Quotas were set by age, gender, social-economic group and location in accordance with the 2001 Northern Ireland Census figures.



## What we really do...

If everyone lived like we do in Northern Ireland, we would need three planets worth of resources to survive. We are using much more than our fair share of natural resources, and in so doing we are contributing to global problems such as deforestation and climate change.

In this survey 87% of respondents expressed some willingness to make lifestyle changes to reduce environmental damage. Volunteers agreed to have measure their current ecological footprint and to find out how they could become more environmentally friendly.

WWF believes that everyone can live a healthy, happy One Planet lifestyle by making simple changes to how they live. Each person can reduce their ecological footprint by the equivalent of one planet, and government and business must play their part to help us reduce it by another planet.



### Case study 1: Niall McKenna

When 24-year old Niall McKenna featured in our first Who Cares? report, he was a student union official at the University of Ulster's Coleraine campus. He freely admitted that he was not particularly interested in environmental issues and only used public transport because he couldn't afford a car.

Two years on, Niall has a temporary teaching job and owns a 1.4l Renault Mégane. Niall is living at his parents' home in Cookstown to save on costs, and drives 120 miles a day to and from the school at which he's teaching across the border in Cootehill, Co Cavan. He averages one further 80-mile round trip each week to visit his girlfriend who lives in Monaghan. And there are plenty of shorter trips – Niall says he's the type of person who gets in the car to go somewhere even if it would take five minutes to walk.

"I'm pretty lazy when it comes to getting to places," he says. "It's just so much more convenient to hop into the car."

Niall is sceptical about the existence or severity of climate change, and believes there are many far more pressing issues: "Although I'm not a scientist, I do know that the planet's temperature has fluctuated over time anyway," he says. "The Earth has warmed up before and it may well be happening again, but I don't think we're facing imminent extinction."

"I do think that environmental groups and the media are guilty of a bit of scaremongering about climate change. I certainly think there are more pressing problems, such as world poverty, war, crime, health and education."

In addition to his car travel, Niall notched up three flights last year – two to Great Britain and one to Boston. One of these flights was essential; he had to attend an interview in England for a place on a teacher training course which he will be starting in September. However, the other two journeys were purely for pleasure. Niall says that he wouldn't reduce the flights he's able to make voluntarily, but he does believe that the government should impose higher taxes on airlines.

### How Niall measures up

Niall is currently living as if we had **3.01 planets** to support us – very slightly below the UK average environmental footprint. He's also responsible for **13.22 tonnes** of carbon emissions each year, which is above the UK average.

Niall is limited in the steps he can take to reduce his footprint by the fact that most of his car journeys can't be replaced easily with bus travel. However, by taking a few simple steps, he could still reduce his carbon emissions by 9% to 12.09 tonnes a year and his overall environmental footprint would shrink to 2.75 planets. To achieve this, he would need to do the following:

- Cut out long-haul flights and stick to no more than two short-haul flights;
- walk instead of taking the car for short journeys;
- turn off lights and appliances when he's not using them;
- just eat meat or fish a few times a week, rather than every day;
- buy less jewellery for his girlfriend;
- recycle his plastic bottles (which can be put in the council blue bins in his area); and
- try buying organic produce.

### Case study 2: Colin Gervin

Colin, aged 18, is completing his final year of A-level studies at Dungannon Integrated College. He is passionate about the environment and extremely concerned about climate change.

"I'm very worried about the future impact of climate change," he says. "I'm particularly concerned about its effects on the developing world, given that so many people there are already living in extreme poverty. But I'm also worried about the impact here in Northern Ireland – sea levels will rise, and it's going to affect our water and food supplies."

Colin believes that both the UK government and the Northern Ireland Executive can have a significant influence in terms of limiting climate change. "The UK government can influence other countries," he says. "It could and should be showing leadership on this issue. And the Northern Ireland Executive could have just as much influence. If every country plays its part, we can make a real difference."

However, Colin accepts that his concern about climate change isn't shared by most of his contemporaries. "Most people my age are only vaguely aware of climate change, and they just think 'Northern Ireland is a small place – what can we do?'" he says.

For Colin, it's been the environmental education he's received through his geography A-level studies which has really opened his eyes.

"My geography lessons have been really influential in teaching me about the factors which affect the environment, and issues such as global warming. They've also taught me about the steps ordinary individuals can take, like recycling."

Colin lives at home in the countryside near Dungannon. The family never fly anywhere, as his mother dislikes travelling by air. Colin takes the bus to school, but gets a lift in a car to the bus stop. He also gets lifts into Dungannon where he has a part-time job. However, most of his car journeys are short.

When it comes to domestic energy use, Colin's family home is well-insulated but also pretty warm. Colin says he'd be happier with less central heating but his parents like a warm house and, as they pay the bills, he has to go along with their wishes.

### How Colin measures up

As Colin is still living in the parental home and is not yet earning a full-time salary, he has limited scope for influencing key decisions about household environmental impact, such as central heating, and limited individual consumer power. At present, he is nominally living as if there were **2.45 planets** to support us and he is responsible for **9.44 tonnes** of carbon emissions a year. Both of these figures are below the UK national average.

Until Colin leaves home and/or starts a full-time job, he won't be in a position to significantly reduce his environmental footprint. But he could cut his carbon emissions by **8%** to 8.71 tonnes, and his overall footprint to 2.34 planets, if he used a bike instead of some short car journeys he makes, and by reducing the time he spends in a car every week to no more than two hours.

### Case study 3: The Conway family



Francey and Mary T Conway live with their three children, Caoimhe, 11, Oisín, 9, and three-month old baby Niamh, in the townland of Creggan, 15 miles from Omagh.

When we interviewed them two years ago, environmental issues were not among their major concerns. But the media coverage of climate change and their children's growing interest in environmental problems has changed all that.

"Every week, our children are coming home from school with a project related to the environment," says Mary T. "They're also fascinated by BBC TV's Newsround programme which often covers topics such as global warming. So it's become a big subject of discussion in our household and, as a result, Francey and I are much more aware of the issues than before."

The family's location and the lack of any good public transport links means they are very reliant on car travel. Mary T commutes to work in the family's large diesel-powered Mercedes, while Francey, a lorry driver, takes the vehicle he uses for work. However, the children take a bus to school and finances preclude all but the most occasional of flights abroad. Although the family did fly to France last year, it was their first holiday abroad for seven years.

The family do make an effort to buy environmentally-friendly products, primarily because their household income has increased. "Two years ago, I only brought something like recycled kitchen paper if it was cheaper because we couldn't afford more expensive alternatives," says Mary T. "Now our budget goes a little further, we're able to buy more environmentally-friendly

products." They also have a fairly well-insulated house and keep the heating at a reasonably low temperature.

### How the Conway family measure up

The Conway family are living as though we had **2.48 planets** to support us, while their individual average carbon emissions are **9.77 tonnes**. Both these figures are below the UK average, but still well above a level which could be considered sustainable.<sup>18</sup>

Given that it's almost impossible for the family to reduce their car travel without improved local public transport, the most significant and feasible step they could take would be to holiday within the island of Ireland and, when their youngest child is older, take the ferry to destinations further afield. This would bring down their carbon emissions by 6% to 9.18 tonnes and give them an overall environmental footprint of 2.41 planets.

If they could reuse glass containers wherever possible, and take the remainder to a recycling point, they could further cut their annual emissions to 8.9 tonnes as long as they ensure they do this while using the car for another regular trip, such as shopping. This would give them a total cut in emissions of **9%**, and would bring down their overall footprint to 2.35 planets.

The following additional small steps would further reduce their overall emissions to 8.77 tonnes (a 10% cut), and their environmental footprint to 2.23 planets (again, a 10% cut):

- Limit meat and fish consumption to a few times a week (they currently eat meat or fish every day);
- increase the amount of organic produce they buy (they sometimes buy organic food); and
- install a home compost bin, enabling waste food as well as garden waste to be recycled.

#### Case study 4: The Giles family



Linda Giles and her six-year-old son Ross live in Dromore, Co Down, which is 17 miles from Belfast. When we interviewed her two years ago, she took her car to work in Belfast every day. Now, due to the delays caused by the huge roadworks involved in widening the M1/Westlink, she takes the train from Lisburn which is near her home town. Having discovered the train, she says she'll probably stick with it, even when the roadworks are finished.

"It's more convenient and less stressful," she says. "I was aware that there were a lot of cars going into Belfast with just one occupant, and I did think that more could be done on car-sharing."

Having told us previously that she knew little about global warming, Linda says the recent publicity about climate change has made her much more aware of the issue, and the fact that the warnings are coming from the scientific community has convinced her that the problem is serious.

However, Linda has no immediate plans to change her lifestyle as a result of the reports. She has recently acquired a 2.2 litre diesel-powered 4x4, primarily because its raised chassis allows her to park her caravan in her sloping driveway without scraping the ground. She admits that it did not occur to her to check the vehicle's fuel efficiency before she bought it, as this was not an important criterion for her.

In the past year, she and Ross have flown to Cork, where they have family, and to London, Rome, Geneva and Paris. In all, they have taken six return flights in 12 months.

Although they don't normally fly as much as that, Linda says she wouldn't be prepared voluntarily to reduce their air travel. Instead, she says it's up to the government to introduce higher taxes on flying.

"I'm much more prepared to pay for the damage that I'm doing, to salve my conscience, rather than alter my behaviour radically."

She believes it's up to governments to provide the solution and would like to see the UK government do more. "Even though the UK is a relatively small place, it's one piece in the jigsaw and, if all the pieces fitted together, climate change could be tackled effectively," she says. "If our government showed leadership on this, other governments may weigh in behind it."

#### How the Giles family measure up

The Giles family are living as if we had **3.91 planets** which is above the UK average. Last year, they were responsible for **17.39 tonnes** of carbon dioxide, more than one and a half times the UK average.

The most significant step which Linda and Ross could take would be to take more breaks and holidays closer to home, and to cut their flying to no more than 5 hours a year – roughly equivalent to two trips to Cork to see their extended family. This would bring down their carbon emissions by 13% to 15.06 tonnes.

If the family took a number of additional simple steps as well, they could bring their total carbon footprint down to 12.83 tonnes, which represents a 26% reduction. Their environmental footprint would shrink to 3.12 planets, which is just above the UK average and represents a 20% reduction on their current overall footprint. They could, for example:

- Turn down their central heating thermostat;
- install energy saving light bulbs;
- recycle tin cans;
- eat meat or fish just once a week;
- try buying organic produce; and
- buy less new clothing and accessories.

#### Case study 5: Pat Taylor

Pat Taylor, 76, lives alone in Lisnagelvin, just outside Derry/Londonderry. She owns her own semi-detached home, but exists on a modest income; the only addition to her state pension is a very small pension from her late husband's pension fund.

Pat never learned to drive and doesn't have a car. She gets everywhere by public transport and is very pleased with the fact that pensioners get free travel on buses and trains.

She normally takes a plane once a year for a family reunion in Scotland. She used to travel by ferry, as did her extended family in Scotland when they came to see her. However, as Pat lives just 15 minutes' drive from Derry City Airport, air travel is much more convenient.

"On one occasion recently, my son-in-law came over to see me," Pat recalls. "He left Prestwick airport, close to his home in Ayr, at 9.30am and was walking in through my door at 10 to 10! Basically, it's about an hour, door to door, by plane, whereas it takes all day if you do the journey by ferry."

And Pat has special reason to be grateful for cheap, convenient air travel. "For the past couple of years, I've had to take on a caring role here, due to family illness, and that has been stressful at times," she says. "The fact that my family in Scotland has been able to come over and provide extra support has made a huge difference. They wouldn't have been able to visit me so much if they'd had to take the ferry."

But Pat is also very concerned about climate change. She would like to take what steps she can, but understandably feels practical and financial considerations must come first.

"At my age, I'd be reluctant to take a long ferry journey when I can take the plane," she says. "And I'd really hate to miss out on our annual family get-together by not going at all."

"I do sometimes buy organic food and would like to buy more – but, in my position, cost has to be a consideration. And, although relatives do occasionally buy me extra things like a new television, it's done to

make things easier for me – for instance, the new television was just a small one for my bedroom.”

She believes that local councils could make it easier to recycle. She recounts how, when she enquired how she could recycle her grass cuttings, her local council told her to take them to the nearest council recycling centre. When she explained she had no car, an official said “Well, just put them in the black bin then – nobody will know.”

### How Pat measures up

Pat’s overall environmental and carbon footprints are both below the UK average. However, she’s still living as if we had **2.58 planets** and she is responsible for **9.63 tonnes** of carbon each year. Pat is clearly limited in the measures she can take – but she could reduce her carbon footprint by **10%** to 8.84 tonnes, and reduce her overall footprint by 8% to 2.33 planets by taking the following simple steps:

- Switch to a green electricity tariff (Pat wasn’t aware NIE offered this facility);
- improve the insulation in her home;
- eat meat or fish a few times a week, using vegetarian alternatives the rest of the time; and
- start a compost heap or keep a compost bin at home, for recycling those grass cuttings and food waste.

### Case study 6: The Mallon family



John Mallon (60) and his wife June (73) are retired. They live in Newtownabbey with their son, Douglas. They manage on their state pensions and, when they were first interviewed two years ago, said their main motivation for most of the environmentally-friendly aspects of their lifestyle was saving money.

Since then, their interest in environmental issues has grown considerably, thanks to the recent publicity about global warming. June says she finds conflicting reports about climate change confusing, but firmly believes it is happening.

“First, the government says the climate’s changing and then some boffin comes in and says it was like this years ago,” says June, “but I’m a strong believer that we are causing serious damage to the world’s climate system. When I was a child, there were distinctive and predictable seasons – now, spring’s coming earlier and earlier and it’s hard to tell the seasons apart.”

June believes that the UK government could have a big influence in terms of leadership, but feels there’s little chance of any meaningful progress unless the world’s larger superpowers come on board.

“Unless you get the US, China and Russia pulling together and taking decisive action on the ground, you’re not going to achieve much,” she says. “They have to recognise this is an emergency.”

But, while John and his son Douglas travel very little, June is an active member of a network of community organisations and uses the car most weeks to attend meetings and give lifts to other participants. Due to

the location of the meetings, it wouldn’t be possible to get there easily by bus and the group can’t afford a minibus. However, the organisation does try to minimise car travel by car-sharing as much as possible. June says she’d be reluctant to give up or cut down on her participation in these meetings, as her voluntary work is her main interest and greatly enhances her quality of life.

### How the Mallon family measure up

The Mallon family have the lowest average individual environmental and carbon footprints of any of the people featured in our case studies. This is partly due to two family members, John and Douglas, travelling very little at all. Other important elements are the fact that they live in a terraced house, which is relatively energy-efficient, and that they use their central heating a minimal amount to keep costs down.

However, they are still living as if we had **2.14 planets** and they are responsible, on average, for **8.01 tonnes** of carbon a year. Although both these figures are below the UK average, there is a little scope for cutting this figure further. If they took the following steps, the household would reduce their individual average environmental footprint by 3% to 2.08 planets and their carbon footprint by 2% to 7.83 tonnes:

- Switch to a green electricity tariff (the Mallons were not aware that NIE offered this facility);
- increase the amount of organic produce they buy, where feasible;
- start growing some vegetables in their garden; and
- avoid buying over packaged products.

## Case study 7: Fiona, Quintin and family



Fiona MacMillan and Quintin Oliver were featured two years ago as a reasonably affluent couple who, while genuinely concerned about environmental issues, could also afford to make environmental choices when it came to buying food and appliances. They said their two sons, Finn, now aged 14, and Duncan, 12, had proved a great source of inspiration. But the family admitted they took advantage of cheap flights, and Fiona commuted by car to work across town from their home in south Belfast.

Last year, the family began cutting down on air travel. Fiona, who occasionally flew to Scotland for a spot of “retail therapy”, started taking the train to shop in Dublin instead. However, the family still managed to clock up two holiday flights, to Spain and London, while Fiona flew out to meet Quintin while he was on a business trip in Newcastle.

The family have now decided to stop flying for summer breaks. “We’ve considered these issues during the last year,” explains Quintin. “We started noticing the number of times we were discussing the carbon footprint of air travel in a general sense – and we began thinking about what we were doing. I guess all the publicity about climate change has affected us.”

“As an individual, you have to take responsibility,” declares Fiona. “It’s a bit pointless saying that the government should be doing more about climate change if you’re not prepared to take steps as an individual. The government is only taking action because people themselves are making changes.”

Fiona and Quintin say their boys remain an enormous source of encouragement and

cajoling. The boys’ active interest in the environment began through school, but has blossomed into a passion. Thanks to their sons, Fiona and Quintin are about to order a water butt for the garden, and they’ve just installed a special device which will tell them exactly how much electricity each household appliance uses.

The family already try to be as environmentally-friendly as possible in their consumption habits and in the way they deal with waste – all their batteries are now rechargeable, for instance. But financial considerations do preclude them from switching their old oil-fired boiler to a more environmentally-friendly model until their current one breaks down. And they’re having to take a step by step approach to installing double glazing because they want old-style sash windows which cost roughly £1,000 a window.

Yet, for all their very laudable efforts to be an environmentally-friendly family, they do have a guilty secret. Quintin runs his own lobbying firm and, while he cycles to work and generally takes the bus to out of town meetings, he also flies – rather a lot. In fact, in the past year, Quintin has clocked up 30 return flights within the UK, and one long-haul flight to Montreal.

Quintin says that he can’t really see any scope for reducing that figure. “It’s very difficult because my business is a contact sport. You need to talk to people face to face, and video conferencing just wouldn’t be an adequate substitute.

“In my defence, I would say that I’ll always try to fit in as many meetings as I can when I fly – and I’ll often make it a three-leg journey, covering two cities across the water, for instance, rather than making a separate flight to each.”

### How Quintin and Fiona measure up

While Fiona also travels by air a few times a year for her job, she works for a UK-wide charity and is not in a position to determine her employer’s policy on flights. However, as Quintin runs his own company, he is responsible for his business travel footprint. So we felt it was fairest to look separately at the footprints created by Quintin and Fiona,

taking into account Quintin’s additional air travel but not the extra work-related flights taken by Fiona.

On this measure, Fiona is living as if we have **2.51 planets**, which is below the UK average, but she is also responsible for **11.47 tonnes** of carbon emissions which is slightly above the average. She could reduce her overall footprint by 21% to 1.99 planets and her carbon footprint by a huge 29% to 8.11 tonnes, by taking the following steps:

- Reduce personal flying to no more than one short-haul flight a year (producing a 8% cut in carbon emissions);
- switch to a smaller car (the family have a 1.8 litre model);
- reduce the amount Fiona uses the car, by taking the bus to work two or three times a week (even though she works across town, she could take a bus into the city centre and then get another one out to her workplace);
- turn down the central heating thermostat and put on an extra layer of clothes instead (Fiona says it’s currently at a warmish 65°C); and
- always opt to buy organic or locally-produced produce (the family already do this when they can, and are also vegetarians).

If we were looking only at personal travel and consumption, Quintin’s footprint would be slightly lower than Fiona’s as he does very little driving. But the story’s very different if we look at his business-based air travel. The WWF calculator doesn’t provide any precise footprint for Quintin’s scale of air travel. However, at a rough estimate, his business flights would have been responsible for 8 tonnes of carbon emissions, bringing his total carbon footprint to approximately 17 tonnes – roughly one-and-half times the UK average.<sup>19</sup>

While Quintin may wish to consider video-conferencing in future, the biggest single impact on his business travel carbon footprint could be made by forgoing long-haul flights. His Montreal trip would have been responsible for almost 2 tonnes of carbon emissions; doing without long-haul flights would thus immediately reduce his business-related footprint by 25%.

## Footnotes

- 1 WWF Who Cares report on environmental attitudes in Northern Ireland. This report is available at [wwf.org.uk/northernireland](http://wwf.org.uk/northernireland)
- 2 Further details of the research design are available in the Technical Note at the end of this report.
- 3 In 2005, respondents were given the following response options with regard to this question: strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree, and don't know. In 2007, respondents were given the following options: agree strongly, agree slightly, disagree slightly, disagree strongly, and don't know/not sure.
- 4 Information supplied by the Central Office of Information (COI) relating to the results of a survey carried out in March 2007 for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on behalf of the COI by ICM. A total of 3,111 adults aged 18 and over were interviewed for the survey. This is the fifth in a series of six-monthly surveys which have produced very similar sets of results in each instance. PowerPoint summary of results available at: [www.climatechallenge.gov.uk/multimedia/climate\\_change\\_wave\\_5.ppt](http://www.climatechallenge.gov.uk/multimedia/climate_change_wave_5.ppt)
- 5 UK-wide result refers to COI survey – see footnote 3.
- 6 The categories used in the COI survey were slightly different and this may account for some of the difference in the results.
- 7 The difference may be explained, in part, by the fact that the WWF Northern Ireland survey questionnaire included a possible response of "not much influence" for this question, while the UK-wide survey did not.
- 8 In 2005, the possible responses to this statement were: agree strongly, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, disagree strongly, or don't know. In 2007, the possible responses were: agree strongly, agree slightly, disagree slightly, disagree strongly, or don't know/not sure.
- 9 Sale Owen (2005) Public attitudes to climate change, motivators and barriers to action: Newcastle and the North East (Newcastle: CarbonNeutral Newcastle), pp. 40-41. Available at: [www.gos.gov.uk/nestore/docs/envandrural/156971/public\\_attitudes\\_fullrep.pdf](http://www.gos.gov.uk/nestore/docs/envandrural/156971/public_attitudes_fullrep.pdf)
- 10 *op. cit.*, pp.11-12.
- 11 Results of Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (NILT) 2000. Available at: [www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2000/Environment/LESSDRIV.html](http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2000/Environment/LESSDRIV.html) It should be noted that the percentage quoted in this report relates to the percentage of respondents who were car drivers/owners, while the percentages in the relevant NILT table given are percentages of all respondents. The former figure was calculated using the available figures on the website.
- 12 Sale Owen, *op. cit.*, p. 47. It should be noted that this survey was carried out in 2005. It is possible that there would be greater willingness if the same survey was carried out now, due to the recent publicity about the adverse impact of climate change and the factors which influence global warming.
- 13 In the WWF Northern Ireland survey questionnaire, the possible option "neither willing nor unwilling" or similar options, e.g. "neither agree nor disagree", were not used. However, respondents could select the option "don't know/not sure" with regard to any of the questions, and could opt to say they were "slightly" willing/unwilling or that they agreed/disagreed "slightly". In general, the "don't know/not sure" option was selected only by a very small proportion in any instance, suggesting that this structure of possible responses discourages fence-sitting.
- 14 The wording used with regard to the Northern Ireland Executive was "a devolved Northern Ireland administration" as this survey was carried out shortly before the devolution of powers to the Executive.
- 15 The latter refers to the area in County Antrim outside the greater Belfast conurbation.
- 16 The NILT survey questionnaire asked respondents whether they would support or oppose the following options: charging all motorists around £2 each time they enter or drive through a city or town centre at peak times, and charging £1 for every 50 miles motorists travel on motorways. Both these options were presented as possible ways of raising money to fund public transport.
- 17 COI (2006) Attitudes to Climate Change – Youth Sample. Topline Summary. Available at: [www.climatechallenge.gov.uk/multimedia/climate\\_change\\_toplines\\_YOUTH.pdf](http://www.climatechallenge.gov.uk/multimedia/climate_change_toplines_YOUTH.pdf)
- 18 It should be noted this calculation does not take account of Francey's use of his lorry for his job. If this factor were included, it would significantly increase the family's individual average emissions.
- 19 The figure for Quintin's business flying was calculated using BP's online Carbon Calculator. Although this does permit precise calculations, a rough estimate was calculated in this instance, assuming the equivalent of 30 return flights between Belfast and Heathrow, in addition to the Belfast-Montreal flight.



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- conserving the world's biological diversity
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