

Environment and Climate Change Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Mobilising action on climate change and environment: behaviour change

Tuesday 1 February 2022

11 am

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Members present: Baroness Parminter (Chair); Baroness Boycott; Lord Browne of Ladyton; Lord Cameron of Dillington; Baroness Chalker of Wallasey; Lord Grantchester; Lord Colgrain; Lord Lilley; Lord Lucas; Baroness Northover; The Lord Bishop of Oxford; The Duke of Wellington; Lord Whitty; Baroness Young of Old Scone.

Evidence Session No. 7

Virtual Proceeding

Questions 49 - 58

Witness

[I](#): Paula Lehtomäki, Secretary-General, Nordic Council of Ministers.

Paula Lehtomäki.

Q49 **The Chair:** Good morning. We now start the second of our panels this morning, with examples from areas other than the UK on behaviour change for climate and the environment. We are extremely pleased to be able to welcome the secretary-general of the Nordic Council of Ministers, Paula Lehtomäki. We really welcome you here today. Thank you so much for agreeing to speak to us. We have a number of questions that we would like to put to you, but I know that you would like to make some opening remarks, so please go ahead.

Paula Lehtomäki: Thank you, Chair and your Lordships. I would like to thank you all for the invitation and the opportunity to give evidence to this committee on such an important matter. Climate change is, without a doubt, one of the biggest challenges we face, so we really need to work together on this issue.

Today, as is known, I stand before you as secretary-general of the Nordic Council of Ministers. It is the official body of co-operation between Governments of the Nordic countries, including Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland and Iceland. In addition, the co-operation includes the autonomous territories of the Faroe Islands, Greenland and the Åland Islands. As individual countries, the Nordics are frontrunners from an international perspective when it comes to tackling climate change. It is our vision to be the most sustainable region in the world by 2030.

The Nordics have very ambitious climate goals and top positions in many sustainability rankings, but challenges also remain. I would like to raise, in particular, consumption-based greenhouse gas issues. A significant share of rich countries' consumption-based emissions is embodied in imported products. If we look at these emissions, the need for behavioural change becomes evident.

It is my perception that, in this change, we need to look at two levels at least, a systemic level and an individual level. In addition to these two levels, I would like to raise a third element, namely the concept of just transition. In Nordic welfare states, it is a high political priority that green transition is not to be only green; it also needs to be just.

How do we make the changes on the systemic level that can benefit our climate and biodiversity? I am not sure whether anybody has succeeded yet, but we have seen great potential for positive interaction between climate and the economy. Climate friendly is and needs to be good business as well. The role of business is not just important; it is essential.

In order to create and host a favourable business environment, dialogue and involvement have proved to be good mechanisms. In Nordic countries, business society is actively involved in designing road maps towards carbon neutrality, at both national and Nordic levels. Different kinds of climate partnerships, where civil society is also involved, ensure platforms for close and continuous co-operation between stakeholders.

Involvement is, in many ways, a key element in designing climate policies in the Nordics. Green transition is a question of thorough economic and social transformation. It is assessed to be vital that negative consequences for citizens are limited, that all have possibilities to seize the opportunities and that no one is left behind. This is what we call just transition.

This social safety is considered to be essential in strengthening the acceptance of different policies on the individual level. Behind every system and organisation there are individuals. We need change on individual and household levels, but they cannot bear the burden and drive the change if we do not succeed on the systemic level as well. We need individuals on board and we need them to make the right choices, particularly within mobility, food and housing.

Economic policies and legal frameworks are often difficult decisions, but still decisions that can be taken overnight. Social norms are more difficult to change and take more time, but are an essential part of the necessary change. The third key is personal awareness and effective consumer choices. In this area, we have good examples and concrete tools, such as the lifestyle test to measure your personal CO₂ emissions in Finland, or the Nordic Swan Ecolabel, which has, since 1989, labelled environmentally good products and helped consumers make better choices.

Behavioural change is key to the green transition and it starts and ends with the individual. The overall awareness of the necessity of climate actions is today at a completely different level than at the time I had the pleasure to serve as the Environment Minister of Finland, from 2007 to 2011. The challenge now is that we need much more and we need it more quickly. Conveying this message, we need to be honest but encouraging. I am looking forward to discussing this topic here today and now leave the floor to the right honourable Baroness Parminter.

The Chair: We are very keen to learn from examples of successful initiatives. You mentioned one or two just then, including the Nordic eco label. Perhaps you could say a bit more about what you feel have been the most successful initiatives. As a supplementary to that, what do you see as the role of government in this sphere, because it is a contested issue?

Paula Lehtomäki: For the first, the successful examples can be divided into hard ones and soft ones. The hard ones are different kinds of economic incentives, or taxes for that matter. We can see in different Nordic countries that different kinds of CO₂ taxation or economic incentive have led to good results.

As I mentioned in my opening remarks, it is very important that the general awareness is strengthened and that, at the consumer level, making sustainable choices is easy. There, different kinds of labelling or even educational investment can be of help. Those are the things that I

would like to raise in the beginning. I look forward to returning to these issues.

The Chair: Can I press you on the second point I raised, about the role of Governments in implementing and helping consumers and businesses deliver the behavioural change that we need?

Paula Lehtomäki: I see the role of Governments as essential. The Governments are the only bodies capable of seeking systemic change. They have the legislative power. They also have the economic power to set the framework for different organisations and individuals to act.

It is very important, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, that we pay a little more attention to these consumption-based emissions. We can see in some cases that the difference between production-based emissions and consumption-based emissions, where you take into account trade, exports and imports, can be rather big. Here, again, Governments are coming into the picture. The biggest emission sources that households or individuals have are transportation, food and then housing—how we live, how we heat our apartments, et cetera.

If the government-level or regional solutions lock us into non-sustainable options, it is impossible for individuals to make sustainable choices. If the heating is based on coal production, it is very difficult on the household level to make a more sustainable choice. There, the Government's role in setting the framework and making it possible and attractive for organisations and individuals to change their own behaviour is essential.

Q50 **Baroness Boycott:** Good morning. It is very nice to meet you on Zoom. I wanted to pick up on something that was in the notes we were sent, which was that you had employed a storyteller to help people work imaginatively around the future. I wondered if you could say a few words about that.

Paula Lehtomäki: I am very sorry; I am not quite sure I understood that.

Baroness Boycott: In the reference notes we were sent, it said that you had employed a storyteller to help people with imagination on climate change.

The Chair: I think it is the Swedish cities that have employed a storyteller.

Paula Lehtomäki: Yes, I agree; maybe it is somebody else, but it is a good idea. Maybe I should employ a storyteller in our secretariat.

The Chair: We will find out information about this by another route.

Q51 **The Lord Bishop of Oxford:** Thank you, Secretary-General. Good morning. Can you tell us what you see as the key considerations in developing policy to enable that behaviour change for climate and environmental goals? Focusing in particular on the individual and

household, you talked about food, transport and household consumption. How are you joining up thinking on that?

Paula Lehtomäki: Here, I would like to refer to what I mentioned briefly in my opening remarks. A very key element in this green transition in the Nordic countries, and a very high political priority, is keeping the green transition a just transition as well. I could call that a key consideration.

It is assessed as very important in these societies that we prevent individuals' fear of this change, and safeguard and take care of everybody, such that some of the population do not feel like outsiders in this transformation. So that people are willing to contribute and be involved in this change, it is rather important that they can see that there are also possibilities for them.

As has become very clear in the recent climate discussions, it is quite easy to start a discussion on these issues as if it is already too late or the job is definitely not doable. Therefore, it is important also that we keep in mind that we still can have an effect and individual choices also play a role. Every tonne counts. That is a very important message to ordinary citizens, because sometimes it is easy to forget that even my own actions count.

The Lord Bishop of Oxford: Is there a uniform view of climate and the need to address this across the countries you are dealing with? In many ways, I think, in the UK we are a more divided and polarised society, so gaining that ownership is more challenging here. Are you encountering a similar phenomenon?

Paula Lehtomäki: Here we have to bear in mind the specifics of the Nordic societies, which are characterised by relatively high educational levels, the so-called Nordic welfare model and, one might say, a tradition and culture where paying high taxes, for example, is quite accepted. There is broad acceptance behind these actions. In different polls, people have been asked whether they are ready to pay higher taxes because of the climate and the acceptance is pretty high. These trends contribute to our common work and may make it a bit easier to go forward with the feeling that everybody is kept on board.

Q52 **Baroness Young of Old Scone:** Good morning. From the background in your work in Finland, but also looking across the Nordic countries, has anybody cracked the problem of co-ordination across government departments and competing interests across government? Are there some mechanisms that appear to work better than others—committees, processes, organisations, whatever?

Paula Lehtomäki: Absolutely, this problem is very familiar. Today, as in earlier years, in many Nordic countries the issue is solved, or at least people are trying to solve it, by exactly those kinds of working groups or sectoral processes within governments. Strategic papers, such as a carbon neutrality strategy or White Paper, are prepared through very broad co-operation within Governments. In that sense, there is an

attempt to solve the questions or problems that might arise, because different sectors are looking at the questions in different ways.

At the Nordic level, we work on the basis of different ministerial councils, so that Finance Ministers have their own council, as do Environment Ministers. We are mostly taking care of the co-operation and this cross-sectoral view here on the secretariat, but definitely one of our challenges, if not headaches, is to improve cross-sectoral co-operation and co-ordination, even in our organisation.

Baroness Young of Old Scone: Allegedly, in this country, we have a ministerial committee that meets to co-ordinate our work on climate change and the environment. Are there examples from either Finland or the Nordic countries of similar institutions, and has anybody made them work yet?

Paula Lehtomäki: Within the Governments, the structure is pretty much the same in that sense. There are these ministerial groups that are co-ordinating policies. What is also a very important part of the Nordic climate policies is much broader involvement of businesses, NGOs, civil society and rights activists. For example, in Finland, the Prime Minister is leading a broad sustainable development committee, where NGOs, business representatives and trade unions are represented. This slightly broader group is discussing regularly and contributing to the sustainability policies in the country.

Also, here in Denmark, when the Government started a couple of years ago to prepare the national sector-specific road maps towards carbon neutrality or the goal of reducing CO₂ emissions by 70% by 2030, they collected business representatives, sector-specific groups, to make these road maps and even binding agreements for the sectors on the actions and road maps. In that sense, involvement, not only in government structures but in society in the broader sense, is very active and a very key part. That is considered to be a very important element in designing policies.

Q53 **Lord Whitty:** Despite the way you have described Nordic society, structures and institutions as being quite favourable towards adopting pro-climate change policies, you must have encountered some challenges and opposition, through vested interests or people being attached to the old ways of doing things, to their cars or whatever. How do you deal with those challenges and what do you learn from them? As a second part of my question, what are the metrics by which you judge success or failure of the policies in the various Nordic countries?

Paula Lehtomäki: The dialogue itself does not solve the problems, but it is also natural that, in a bigger group of representatives, there are very different views on policy issues. In democratic systems such as ours, it is, at the end of the day, the Government who decide what we do, which tools we start to utilise and which way to go.

Involvement and dialogue are considered to be essential tools, even in situations where the end result does not satisfy all the stakeholders, because after that they have the feeling anyhow that they have been heard. In governmental circles, or within the Government, it is often recognised that very important information, very important points of view and, one could even say, very important wisdom can be collected by a broader dialogue.

As for individual decisions or tools, for example different taxational solutions, Governments follow up on which way the results have been achieved and whether the targets set have been achieved. In the big picture, CO₂ emissions, and our capability to reach CO₂ neutrality and go beyond it, are the most relevant way of measuring success.

That is why I talked in my opening remarks about these consumption-based emissions, which we do not talk about as much as the territorial production-based emissions in our countries. As for the Nordic countries, today it is only Sweden that regularly publishes these statistics, taking into account the impact that consumption in our countries has on other countries, which produce products that are then imported to our countries.

Therefore, what we measure is important. We tend to get what we measure and, if we measure only territorial emissions in our countries, we then cut them down, but we have to take the bigger picture into account as well.

Lord Whitty: Are your consumers convinced by that?

Paula Lehtomäki: That is a very good question. I would think that a big majority of Nordic inhabitants are aware of the fact that a higher living standard often causes a big amount of CO₂ emissions. It is completely another question whether it is acceptable for different kinds of consumption taxation, for example, to be raised. Cutting CO₂ emissions is a great challenge, so it is important that we are capable of looking the problem in the eye, and very openly and honestly seeing where the possibilities are and where we need to act.

Q54 **Lord Lilley:** Thank you very much for your evidence. I wonder whether you have any quantitative information that you may be able to send us about the impact policies have had on emissions and particularly on the contribution that voluntary behaviour change has made, as against the impact of tax, regulations and subsidies. We are trying in particular to look in this project at the impact of behaviour change. It would be nice to know whether, in any of the countries, not necessarily over all of them, you have any figures as to what actual impact it has had quantitatively.

Paula Lehtomäki: I could name the Commitment 2050 platform or the webpage that the Sitra fund has in Finland, where there is an opportunity for an individual or a household to take a test and in that way calculate the amount of CO₂ emissions their lifestyle produces. They then have the opportunity on the same webpage to make a public commitment, which is

called Commitment 2050, to reduce personal or household emissions. The webpage also gives some tools or suggestions as to the way in which that can be done.

So far, over a million people have taken this test. This kind of concrete tool could provide information on the possible impact. At least the sum of all the commitments made so far can be definitely found.

Lord Lilley: Thank you. That would be very helpful.

The Chair: We will follow up with the office of the secretary-general after the session.

- Q55 **Lord Lucas:** Secretary-General, I would be really interested to hear your thoughts on how the countries in the Nordic region are working with local government, businesses and the third sector on enabling behaviour change for climate and the environment. To choose a couple of Nordic-related examples, we have in this country difficulty in persuading people to take up more vegetable-based diets because, for instance, the price of Oatly oat milk is 50% greater than that of cow's milk. When you are getting people to choose consumer durables such as washing machines, it is not noticeable that Electrolux advertises how long its machines last or how easy and cheap it is to repair them as selling points. How does one move industry on these matters when it is not immediately obvious that it is to its advantage to move, but where the implications for energy use and climate change are considerable?

Paula Lehtomäki: As you referred to different diets and the food that we are eating individually or in the household, there are at least two examples here in Denmark. It is a long tradition that the Government publish every now and then the official dietary guidelines. These used to be helpful guidelines for having a healthy diet, but lately they have also included climate-healthy diet guidelines. These are easy guidelines to help individuals, if they are willing, to take care that their food consumption is climate friendly.

From another Nordic country, I know that in schools there is public lunch served every day. For example, in many towns or regions, it has been decided that there are non-meat days or to reduce the amount of meat in school lunches. This has quite a big importance, because there are tens of thousands of school kids having their lunch at school every day. Changing those guidelines can have a big impact.

A very important area for co-operation between the Government and the regional or local level is on land use questions. Where do we build, or do we build, motorways? Where do we build new houses? On an international level, it can be seen that land use is becoming an ever more important part of climate policies and climate considerations because, as you know, we do not have enough sustainable forestry or land use at the moment. Therefore, it is very important to plan land use in a good way.

- Q56 **The Chair:** Could I ask a question about the Nordic ecolabelling you mentioned at the beginning, to get a sense of whether that is a voluntary

scheme or whether there is some form of regulation by the Governments in that particularly important area?

Paula Lehtomäki: It was launched in 1989 and it is simply an ecolabel, a logo, which is then placed on the product, based on very broad and thorough criteria on which kind of chemicals are used et cetera. Then, if a product gets the label, it gets the green swan on it and it is a very important and good marketing asset where you have this ecolabel. As mentioned, it already has quite a long history behind it. Swan Ecolabel is one of the most well-known trademarks among consumers in the Nordics. A broad range of products wish to have it because, if you sell products that do not have the label, it might not be so beneficial as against a competitor with the label.

At the moment, work is going on to broaden the swan's scope to CO₂ emissions. That is to say that we hope, in the future, the Swan Ecolabel can label much more on the basis of climate friendliness, not only overall environmental friendliness, such as for chemicals or poisonous substances.

Q57 **Lord Browne of Ladyton:** Secretary-General, on this issue of ecolabelling, which authority decides whether any business can deploy this label, in a regional co-operation in which some members are full members of the European Union and others are not? Is this a club that other countries could join?

Paula Lehtomäki: If you are referring to the Nordic Council of Ministers, there have been no other countries wishing to apply, at least not lately. It consists of the Nordic countries and the three autonomous areas of the Faroe Islands, Greenland and the Åland Islands.

Swan Ecolabel is an older ecolabel than many of the Nordic countries' EU membership, for example Finland's or Sweden's, so in that way there is a long tradition of Nordic co-operation. The ministerial council had its 50th birthday last year and, this year, the parliamentary co-operation within the Nordics has its 70th birthday.

Swan Ecolabel has its own organisation and criteria by which it is investigating all the products that wish to have the label. It is very important for the ecolabel that it can keep its credibility, but it is not directly directed by the Governments. It is a separate organisation.

Lord Browne of Ladyton: This Nordic Council profile for sustainability is a very deliberate step, and the Prime Ministers in 2019 came together and declared that this was a collective ambition. You yourself talk about Nordic policy. Is it beneficial to your countries' ambitions that the public understand that your countries are co-operating together and that your individual citizens are not in this alone, but that everybody in the neighbourhood is following basically the same rules?

Paula Lehtomäki: We have at least very broad support from Nordic citizens. Last year, we conducted a survey among Nordic citizens. If I remember correctly, almost 90% of the more than 3,000 people who

answered the survey considered Nordic co-operation to be important or very important, and 60% wished to see more co-operation.

Different security and stability issues were very high on the rankings when we asked our citizens what areas of co-operation they would like to see us focusing on, but climate and environmental issues have, during the last couple of years, come very high up on the agenda as well. Nordic citizens think that we ought to co-operate on climate and environmental issues in particular.

Yes, we have very ambitious goals as individual countries and as a region. I often call this a family, with lots of common traditions, lots of common history, lots of common ground, even as regards languages. On the Nordic level, within the framework of our organisation, the ministerial council, we focus first and foremost on co-operation, learning from each other and acting to find common concrete solutions, more quickly together than individually.

Q58 Lord Grantchester: Congratulations on the fact that the ecolabel has been going since 1989 and it is the most recognised brand in your marketplace. What is the market penetration of the logo brand and how is it then utilised competitively between two organisations that are both using the logo?

Paula Lehtomäki: Unfortunately, I am not aware of the market penetration. That is a number that we can check and then inform you of afterwards.

The Chair: On that point, I will bring the meeting to a close. We will be in touch, Secretary-General, with your office to obtain the information on that point and to follow up on the offer of the information in response to the question from Lord Lilley.

We are extremely grateful for your time today where you have, with clarity, set out your achievements in this space. We wish you godspeed with all that you are doing in the Nordic countries to make sure that we can meet the challenges for climate and the environment. We in this committee are determined to play our part in making sure that this country, in addition to other countries, delivers on those. Thank you very much for your time and I bring this meeting to a close.