The Irish Climate Assembly (ICA):

Lessons from the Parliamentary Consideration of Citizens' Climate Recommendations

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Abstract:

Citizens' assemblies (CAs) are increasingly being utilised at the national level amid pressure for climate action. Ireland has been at the forefront of institutionalising such deliberative processes during the past decade and has held successive CAs, including on "how the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change". However, despite sweeping claims of both process and policy success, there has been a dearth of empirical research exploring the consideration of the Irish Climate Assembly's (ICA) recommendations by responsible bodies. This paper therefore makes an important contribution to the field by elucidating how actors (elected representative and their advisors) engaged with the official receiving body – the Parliamentary Committee on Climate Action (PCCA) – perceived and responded to the ICA process. Specifically, it explores PCCA actors' perceptions of process-design with reference to two controversial proposals: i) carbon taxation (CT) and ii) a carbon tax on agricultural emissions (CTAE). It subsequently draws upon in-depth interviews, observational data, and documental analysis to make several important findings. Firstly, it raises significant questions about the degree of expert-influence and representational bias within the ICA. Moreover, it illuminates political actors' perceptions of these flaws and finds that the PCCA played an important role in counteracting ICA process-issues. It also casts doubt on the narrative of "success" and the ICA's capacity to deal with controversial policy topics. Overall, the findings have important implications regarding the utilisation of climate assemblies at the national level.

Introduction:

In response to the "wicked problem par excellence" of climate change (Termeer et al. 2013, 28), deliberative processes have been propounded by proponents as "the best chance of finding effective and legitimate climate policies" (Lenzi 2019, 313). For instance, Devaney et al. (2020, 1) note that "(a)mid pressure for climate action worldwide, processes of deliberative democracy are being called upon to address public policy complexities, include citizens in decision-making, restore faith in public institutions and enhance governance processes". However, despite the "rave reviews from both their participants and their academic observers" (Pilon 2009, 2), there is still little concrete empirical evidence - particularly at the national level - to suggest that citizen assemblies (CAs) actually lead to better or different (environmental) policy outcomes (e.g. Roberts et al. 2020), leading Jacquet and van der Does (2021, 470) to raise "a fundamental question: What kind of consequences can minipublics have on the policy-making process?".

Hence, within the context of the "deliberative wave" (OECD 2020) and a growing number of national-level climate assemblies, there is an urgent need to critically examine the promise of such processes, particularly their capacity to obtain sufficient support for challenging policy action. Herein, Ireland is a unique case-study given its dual status as a "climate laggard" and "deliberative trailblazer" (Farrell et al 2019), with the country being "ahead of the curve in using the citizen assembly format on a national level to address climate change" (Van Beek et al 2022, 6). Moreover, the country has been at the forefront of institutionalising deliberative processes during the past decade (Youngs 2020) - including the 2017 Irish Climate Assembly (**ICA**) – with Courant (2021,4) noting that "(t)he main difference between most mini-publics

worldwide, including other CAs, and the Irish cases it that the latter stand out in terms of policy output". However, despite sweeping claims of both process and policy success, there has been a dearth of empirical research exploring the consideration of ICA recommendations by receiving bodies, mainly the Parliamentary Committee on Climate Action (**PCCA**).

This paper contributes to addressing this research gap through examining two controversial ICA recommendations: carbon taxation (**CT**) and a carbon tax on agricultural emissions (**CTAE**). In drawing on literature and qualitative data outlined in the following sections, it subsequently illuminates how PCCA actors perceived and responded to ICA process-issues, namely expert and representational biases. The discussion section subsequently elucidates that political actor are not merely "passive" recipients of CA recommendations, but instead that representative democracy serves as an(other) important safety-value against the potential limitations and biases of deliberative processes.

Literature Review:

Prominent scholars, such as Goodin and Drysek (2006, 220-1), have purported that deliberative processes "can have real political impact only by working on and through the broader public sphere, ordinary institutions of representative democracy, and administrative policy making". However, as Jacquet and van der Does (2021, 469) propound, "despite ever growing scholarly attention paid to mini-publics, the nature of their consequences on the policy-making process remains unclear". For instance, Youngs (2022, 5) notes that "(o)ne sobering consideration is that increasingly rich layers of formal institutional embedding have not guaranteed tangible policy impact". Indeed, there has been little, if any, empirical research on the acceptance or rejection of specific ICA proposals – particularly concerning difficult or controversial recommendations such as carbon taxes (i.e., CT and CTAE) – by the receiving body (i.e., PCCA). However, this is arguably crucial to assessing the potential of (resource-intensive) deliberative processes and ascertaining whether they can help achieve the requisite "buy-in" to help overcome existing "knowledge-action gaps" (Knutti 2019) between climate science and policy outcomes. Nevertheless, even for those recommendations that are accepted, Font et al. (2018, 616) extensive multi-level analysis strongly suggests that authorities favour those proposals "that are easier to develop or are closer to their own preferences". This concurs with the findings of other scholars who suggest that recommendations are often ignored or diluted in favour of "competing institutional imperatives" (Bussu et al. 2022, 136), disregarded when they are too costly or challenging (Bussu 2019) or "cherry-picked" to align with pre-existing political agendas (Bussu et al. 2022, 136; Courant 2021). However, importantly, Font et al. (2018, 630) also find that the (perceived) "quality of participation" positively influenced the subsequent rate of proposal adoption by (local) authorities", but state that further research is required, something which this paper aims to contribute to at the national level.

Herein, the latter point re. process-quality also challenges the overly "simplified picture" painted by "deliberative thinkers" wherein "elected officials passively and willingly receive public input", with research illuminating "that they are well aware of the many challenges that participatory processes face in practice, such as bias and limited representativeness" (Hendriks and Lees-Marshment 2019, 600-609). While representational issues (e.g., self-selection bias) are well acknowledged within the literature (e.g., Fishkin 2009), the issue of expert influence within deliberative processes – something which is arguably particularly acute for climate

assemblies given the greater need for expertise – has been underexplored to date (Van Beek et al 2022, 3; Muradova et al. 2021). For example, Roberts et al. (2020, 7) note that "allowing experts to determine the witnesses…can recreate existing power relationships in how agendas are shaped". Moreover, Wong (2016) outlines the potential of "eco-technocracy" and "eco-filtering" to escape the dilemma of green democracy (i.e., wherein democratic means may not achieve environmental "good" ends). Specifically, he cites how "a green collective decision is available if, and only if, these exclusive technocrats" – such as expert advisory groups (EAG) used within deliberative processes – "submit green opinions (or judgements) as inputs to the decision procedure". Importantly, he concludes that "even if in principle it can produce green collective decisions…the importance of other values and principles in assessing decision alternatives" are often overlooked in favour of a narrow "cost-benefit" analysis. Regarding the ICA, Muradova et al. (2021,1323) state "it is surprising that no one has analysed why these specific recommendations were forwarded to the government and how expert information played a role in these processes", especially given the "far-reaching implications of the Irish case". However importantly, Hendriks and Lees-Marshment (2019, 607) note that "whereas practitioners typically seek to remedy these participatory shortcomings through procedural innovations, leaders take a more pragmatic approach and seek out informal interactions with the public". Hence, this paper will firstly examine process-faults within the ICA before illuminating the perceptions of PCCA actors and their "pragmatic responses".

Methodology:

Regarding the research approach, this paper makes an important contribution to the existing literature on the Irish case which itself has (perhaps uncritically) been held as an exemplary deliberative model for peer countries. Specifically, Courant (2021, 2-3; also see Carolan 2015) notes how most of the existing research emanates from "authors directly involved in the organization and promotion of several of the Irish CAs". Like Courant, this author does not have "an involved position" and is "not studying assemblies…actively advocated for or organized, which lends itself to a more "external" point of view". Moreover, a qualitative approach also helps to fill another methodological and empirical gap in the literature, as Courant (2021, 2-3) notes that thus far they have "been largely underused", with most scholars taking a "quantitative approach". Specifically, the paper draws upon direct participant observation of the ICA & PCCA respectively, documental analysis and in-depth semi-structured interviews. The primary data analysis draws from 15 interviews with ICA participants[1] and 10 PCCA (politicians; advisors) participants. Overall, the reflections of 10 interview subjects are explicitly referenced within the present paper.

A purposive sampling (Blaikie 2010) approach was utilised to ensure a high degree of diversity with respect to the secondary characteristics of ICA citizen members (e.g., age, gender, geography) and CCA participants (e.g., political affiliation). The process aimed to describe, interpret, and explain "participants' views of the situation being studied" (Creswell 2003, 8), with NVivo software used to analyse the transcribed data via a general inductive approach. Moreover, the two carbon tax recommendations were selected given their prominence within

[1] (citizens; expert advisors; speakers; organisers; and observers)

PCCA debates and interview data, while they also serve as a litmus test of the ICA process's capacity to deal with controversial topics. Overall, the "across methods" triangulation approach utilised "has been found to be beneficial in providing confirmation of findings, more comprehensive data, increased validity and enhanced understanding of the studied phenomenon" (Bekhet and Zauszniewski 2012, 2).

Findings:

Before assessing the perceptions of political actors regarding the two stated recommendations, it is first necessary to illuminate the presentation of the respective carbon tax proposals within the ICA.

i) *ICA Process-Issues*

Firstly, regarding the CT proposal, 80% of the ICA members stated they would be willing to pay higher taxes on carbon intensive activities; the lowest supported recommendation. It also changed significantly from its original drafting (by the EAG & Secretariat), with qualifications added by citizens to ensure a ringfencing of revenue for climate mitigation and to cushion low-income households (ICA Report 2017). The CT was strongly stressed by Prof Fitzgerald, the then Chair of the influential Irish Climate Change Advisory Council (**CCAC**) during his presentation[2] to the ICA and within his accompanying paper[3]. Additionally, despite stated citizens' concerns - such as the "*disproportionate effect on people in rural areas who rely on their cars and have no alternative forms of transport available to them"* (*Response 17 ICA Report 2018, B8*) - no opposing counter-expert viewpoint was provided. Overall, obstacles were presented as individual behavioural rather than broader structural problems to be addressed.

> "*if they are confident that the CT will be maintained or increased...they may decide to purchase…a low emission vehicle*". (Fitzgerald 2017, 4).

Similarly, according to the ICA report (2018, 40), the recommendation that there "should be a tax on…emissions from agriculture" (i.e., CTAE) was introduced "specifically following on from the presentation from {Prof.} Matthews". Specifically, the stated expert presented a paper which argued that *"(c)limate leadership should start by sending a signal to farmers…that, in planning on what to produce and how much, they must take their greenhouse gas emissions into account*" (Matthew 2017, 429). However, likewise to the CT issue, the CTAE proposal arguably represented another "eco-technocratic" approach which neglected "pluralistic values" and instead sought to impose top-down economic metrics to induce behavioural change (Wong 2016). For instance, the paper called for the sector to be "*disciplined*" and that the CTAE would serve as "*an incentive to farmers…to improve efficiencies";* yet it failed to adequately contextually the structural constraints faced by varied farming groups. Indeed, Prof. Matthews acknowledged the ambition of this policy and its practical difficulty when admitting that "*no country in the world has yet adopted the steps that I am advocating".*

[2] Prof. John Fitzgerald, Chair of the Climate Change Advisory Council - Citizens' Assembly - YouTube

[3] John-Fitzgerald-Paper.pdf (citizensassembly.ie)

Nevertheless, despite ICA members concerns that it *"would be unfair to impose a tax before you give farmers a realistic, affordable alternative* (Response 35, ICA report 2018, B16-17), Prof. Matthews counterarguments were couched within the context of Ireland becoming a world "*climate leader*". Once again, no opposing speakers or "*regular farmer*" – as noted by ICA participant (**P8**) – were invited to present. This process failure was also acknowledged by the ICA Chairperson when stating "(i)*n truth, if we had time we could have had more information on the agricultural sphere and, in particular, on how various parts of the sector are and would be affected* (Justice Laffoy, evidence to CAC, 2018). Consequently, ICA members interviewed from rural communities felt the evidence was "*anti-farming"* (P7), that they were "*demonised*" (P11) and it was "*a vote against farming*" (P8); conversely, other ICA members stated that "*farmers have to get in line, {they} really called the shots here for too long" (P9).* In short, rather than consensus being achieved, it appeared that both sides positions became more entrenched.

"*we were in the minority…but I stuck to my guns and didn't change my mind". (P8)*

Interestingly, this "minority" comment also alludes to the inherent representational bias against rural constituents within the ICA, something which may have skewed deliberations. Specifically, 10 counties (of 26) had no representation while over a quarter ICA members came from the capital, with one interviewee remarking they were "*mostly talking about Dublin"* (P1). Moreover, P7 noted how their rural community "*went mad*" at the recommendations, with such hinterlands also disproportionately affected by the CT. Moreover, the debate on a regressive CT tax may have also been affected by self-selection and social-economic class biases within the ICA (Hamilton 2018). For example, P1 noted a "class divide" and stated, "*most people who did it were from a certain class I suppose",* while adding that those working-class members present "*wouldn't have the same confidence and there wasn't many of them there*".

ii) *<u>Political Perceptions of ICA:</u>*

"Well, basically, I think that a lot of the evidence about carbon tax being an effective tool to reduce emissions wasn't really presented in a proper way" (ER1)

"Well, I think it wasn't reflective of wider Irish society. I think there was a an-under representation of farmers…And they think that too…" (ER2).

The above quotes by two elected representatives **(ER)** from opposing sides of the political spectrum criticising the ICA process aptly illustrates how ERs and their advisors (**A**) engaged with the Parliamentary Committee on Climate Action (**PCCA**) were often highly critical of perceived design problems. Specifically, issues relating to framing, expert and representational biases emerged in relation to the discussion of the **CT** and **CTAE** respectively which shall now be explored.

In contrast to the arguably one-sided presentations within the ICA, the respective issues were robustly debated within the PCCA. For example, ER1 – like Respondent 17 cited above – remarked that "*the idea that you change people's behaviour simply by penalizing them, rather than giving them an alternative was misleading in terms of the {CT}".* Likewise, A2 stated that

trying to push CT given Ireland's recent experience with water charges was "*madness*" and lacked "*cultural context*", stating:

"it's a perfect example of where they just implemented something, took it top-down and said 'this will work, and if they don't implement their climate deniers', rather than actually listening and discussing." (A2)

Similarly, regarding the CTAE, those interviewed (e.g. ER2, ER3) shared the concerns of rural ICA members' regarding (perceived) expert and representational biases. For instance, ER2 was "*shocked*" by the report and felt "*it was a very simplistic approach to a very complex problem*". Likewise, ER3 noted how the "*nicely bound ICA report…infers it's kind of professional, peer reviewed and validated. It's actually not!"*. Notably, the then Chair of the Committee on Agriculture, Pat Deering, "*concur{ed} with the comments that the farming organisations and agriculture in general did not get a fair hearing in the ICA"*[4], with farming groups describing the CTAE as the *"bluntest of instruments"*[5] during a PCCA session. The issue of under-representation of farming and rural communities was also repeatedly stressed (with this rural-urban divide also evident within the PCCA), with ER2 for example stating that:

"I think with a CA, there's a number of things you need to be very, very cognizant of, what's the makeup of that assembly to get fairness and balance and fair representation. Because if you go on demographically on the numbers, you just get more of the city people, or if you go on the area land or the consistencies you may have more of a balance with rural voices."

Moreover, interviewees complained that the ICA was composed of *"mainstream {experts} who are never really going to challenge the status quo*" (ER1). This view was shared by A1[6] and A2, who described chosen experts as "a *kind of an elite",* "*a clique*" and noted how the influential CCAC members were *"all economist, and classical ones*". Such comments are notable given that four of the CCAC's then eleven members presented at the ICA while one more served on the Expert Advisory Group (EAG) which played an influential role in agenda-setting, speaker selection and drafting ICA recommendations (Hamilton 2018). Notably, PCCA actors cited the danger of expert capture, with A2 explicitly warning that "*you have to very careful here that CAs aren't taken over by experts*". Similarly, A4 noted the *"'one-up' relationship" and "very big imbalance of power*" between citizens' and experts, stating that *"if somebody just gives them a narrow menu, then whoever does that has a lot of power in influencing the direction of travel".* Additionally, they felt that the ICA was a *"simple legitimacy"*". A2 also concurred that *"there wasn't an in-depth discussion"* on core issues.

Furthermore, A3 also raised concerns regarding "*who picks the experts…that makes such a big difference",* something raised by ICA interviewees and indeed experts themselves. For example, P3 stated they'd *"have questions about the experts…like who are they, were they trying to promote their own thing, how are they appointed*". While one EAG member interviewed remarked "(*h)ow you get identified…it is a total black box, I have no factual evidence to how it works"*. Overall, PCCA members interviewed often perceived that "*that people came in {to the ICA} and presented, and their words were just taken and copy and pasted and put down* {as recommendations}". Importantly, this conformed with ICA members

[4] https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_climate_action/2018-12-12/speech/189/
[5] Joint Committee on Climate Action debate - Wednesday, 12 Dec 2018 (oireachtas.ie)
[6] Advisor 1

who felt they were "*being led*" and that "*there was always the underlying feeling…that they knew the destination before we even took off* " (P5).

"There is a real sense in the mainstream climate movement that the public are populist, and that the public need to be taught and guided and the politicians need to be guided…and that's like a fundamental underlying tone, all of it, all the time. And for me it's really problematic…" (A1)

" You know, some people wanted to bring in CT or felt it was necessary, therefore, they wanted simply legitimacy. And {the ICA} was a narrow exercise, saying, 'can we get these people to agree? And that's that, and then it helps us with our PR'. (A4)

Herein, rather than simply "passively accepting" or "cherry-picking" proposals, it appears the PCCA played an important role in robustly contesting evidence and counteracting potential biases within the ICA. As A2 saw it, this challenged the "*the dominant perspective {among climate experts} that 'politicians are weak".* For example, ER1 was "*very definite and strong on insisting that the {PCCA} need to look at the evidence from scientists who carried out research in other areas where CT was implemented, but actually didn't have an impact on the reduction of emissions*". Similarly, regarding the CTAE, politicians commended the "*very important scientific information*" requested by the PCCA that was not provided to the ICA and argued:

"*If it had been available or, more to the point, requested in advance of the 99 independent people meeting and deliberating for a period of time, the {ICA} may have taken a different slant*[7]".

Moreover, interviewees also challenged the narrow framing of the assembly and emphasis on "climate leadership". This contrasted with other climate assemblies, such as in Scotland, France and Germany, wherein the issues of "fairness", "social justice" and "effectiveness" were explicitly addressed. This was not lost on PPCA participants, with Senator Marshall, for example remarking that "*the environment is one element, but it is important to recognise that there are social and economic issues relating to sustainability as well".* Similarly, interviewees remarked that the ICA failed to account for "*interrelated issues*" (A3) and "*the interconnectedness of everything"* (ER2).

"*(t)he Irish government could legislate tomorrow morning, to deal with climate change to reduce our carbon footprint of our food industry. But that {ICA} will not be able to afford food, or even get food. So it's a very complicated thing. There are all kinds of unintended consequences, but I think sometimes there's the need to virtue signal and have knee jerk reactions" (ER2).*

However, overall, A2 noted how the PCCA provided an important space to "*shift*" the debate when claiming it was *"first time climate change wasn't debated by just a few experts, with technocratic approaches, or generally green thinking having to be translated into neo-liberal economics".* On the contrary, A3 complained the PCCA itself was captured by "*climate fundamentalists*". Nonetheless, as A1 aptly surmised, the PCCA allowed for "*a variety of climate advisors and variety of way to approach different policies",* something they remarked "*seemed interesting, because we've come to stage now where climate is becoming*

[7] https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_climate_action/2018-12-12/speech/189/

mainstreamed, so dominant approaches that once were considered the only way forward are now being debated by different disciplines".

In line with Hendriks and Lees-Marshment's (2019, 608-609) findings of "participatory dissonance, PCCA participants interviewed also presented paradoxical views on the ICA; specifically, on the one hand they generally praised the overall concept of citizen input but on the other hand were critical of stated process-issues. For example, ER1 stated that "…*the citizens were, again, way ahead of the politicians. It's* ***just*** *this one issue of CT* (emphasis added)". Furthermore, they too showed "pragmatic responses" to these flaws by incorporating knowledge "beyond experts….so they can connect and talk to 'real' people…and check the facts 'on the ground'*"* (Ibid). For example, A1 noted how "(t*)he technocratic science was filtered through ordinary people (i.e. politicians) who have to deal with real people who literally come to their door crying because they…can't pay the heating bills, and you'd have to talk about climate with them the next morning, so they see, they connect it".* Likewise, A4 noted the "*responsiveness*" of the representative system in contrast to the ICA which is "a point in time" when stating that:

"..every day, politicians are interacting with people, with organization, with news media. So you have a vast highly responsive system, which processes vast quantities of information at a far larger scale than a ICA… it can react to the up to the minute findings. And so that's, that's what it does".

Ultimately, the PCCA rejected the CTAE proposal while the issue of CT caused a 50/50 split within the committee; consequently, a cross-party "consensus" on climate action was not achieved as intended. This polarisation also permanented the public sphere, with over 80% opposing a higher CT according to respected polls (conducted before the cost-of-living crisis). Moreover, rural regions (73%) and working-class voters (65%) were most opposed to CT increases, which suggests the ICA failed to influence these cohorts, perhaps due to noted representational skew within. Similarly, the response from the farming community within the PCCA and public domain was scathing. ER2, for example, noted how it was a missed opportunity to find "*win-win solutions*", and instead farmers felt they had "*fingers pointed at them*" and were "*treated as the villains of the piece*". Indeed, the ICA was subsequently described by representative groups as the "*wrong model*" wherein "*you end up with…a lot of people who don't necessarily have a stake in agriculture, who don't have an understanding of what it is to farm"*[8]. In short, on both these controversial issues, it appears the ICA failed to secure buy-in from political actors and the broader public - including affected communities - with numerous PCCA contributors noting the danger therein.

"*We need to bring the people along with us. Without people collaborating and participating in a decision it becomes top-down quickly leading to what we have seen in France {i.e. yellow vest movement}*" (Ms Clare Watson, expert evidence to PCAC, Dec 2018).

"in an ideal world, with a great support, press on (with climate action) at maximum speed. Yeah, democracy is slow and cumbersome. But arguably, if you skip that bit, you don't have the public buy-in and stuff gets reversed in 10 or 20 years and so you're worse off situation" (A4)

[8] Cork TD Seán Sherlock calls for citizens' assembly to discuss future of the agri sector | Independent.ie

Discussion:

In sum, the presentation of the CT and CTAE proposals within the ICA conformed with Wong's (2016, 146) conception of an "eco-technocratic" approach. Moreover, the ICA displayed characteristics of a "tamed consultation model" wherein the "goal is to 'reconcile' the 'ordinary citizens' with decision makers" (Courant 2022, 170) or as Bussu et al (2022, 136) asserts, to provide "a democratic veneer to legitimate policy that has already been decided elsewhere". Specifically, the findings contest the viewpoint offered by Stasiak et al. (2021,10) informant that "the approach {for selecting speakers'} was to look purely for experts and not advocates, so they would not be seen as pushing their positions". In spite of this intention, the empirical data herein strongly concurred with Van Beek et al's (2022, 9) conclusions that experts excreted notable influence as "issue advocates" within the ICA. For example, observational and interview data – cross-triangulated with secondary transcript sources – likewise revealed that "a highly respected economist…strongly emphasised {CT} in his presentation" and that "in practice…recommendations reflected policy proposals suggested by one or multiple experts". This was clearly exacerbated by the failure to provide counterviewpoints in both cases; a somewhat surprising oversight given the potential for "carbon taxation to provoke much more public opposition than other climate policies" (Levi, 2021) and the evident need to secure buy-in from affected (and politically influential) voting cohorts who may be disproportionately affected by such climate policies (e.g., rural and low-income).

The findings also concurred with Carolan's (2015, 743) assessment of the prior Irish Constitutional Convention (ICC) wherein "no guidance was issued…(on) the recruitment of experts or to the identification of persons to advocate for and against the proposal being considered…at any given time". Moreover, the perceived under-representation of working-class and rural citizens' may have inhibited the capacity for substantive deliberation and subsequent buy-in. Notably, significant representational issues also emerged during the ICC (Carolan 2015). Overall, this worryingly suggests a complacency and or lack of awareness and/or motivation to address fundamental design issues on behalf of organisers. This is perhaps not helped by the fact that much post-academic commentary of Irish deliberative processes "comes from those who initially advocated it or were involved its operations" (Carolan 2015, 734; Courant 2021). Herein, in order to ensure the ongoing legitimacy of the "Irish model" (Courant 2021), the findings strongly support Demski and Capstick's (2022, 12) assertion that "any evaluation process should be fully independent from those organisations and individuals commissioning, designing, carrying out, or affected by the outcomes of a climate assembly".

Regarding the PCCA, the empirical data provides a more nuanced view of the criticism that political actors merely passively accept recommendations, "cherry-pick" or reject unfavourable proposals (Bussu et al. 2022). In building upon Font et al. (2018) and Hendrick and Marsh's (2019) previous work, the findings illuminate how they instead were cognizant of the ICA's limitations – particularly pertaining to expert and (to a lesser extent) representational biases. Moreover, it suggests the PCCA played a crucial role in counteracting this "insensitivity to pluralistic environmental values and opinion" (Wong 2016) by including a broader spectrum of speakers, disciplines, and countervailing-evidence. Consequently, it arguably acted as an important safety-value against "eco-technocratic" capture of the ICA. This is a particularly significant finding given Youngs (2022, 10) assessment that "climate assemblies" are often pushed "by a narrow circle of officials, experts, and participative practitioners" and thus "rarely

emerge from other sources of political legitimacy" nor are "rarely subject to wide-ranging democratic debate".

Nonetheless, the capacity of political actors and the representative system more generally to mitigate against potential deliberative biases or indeed capture should not be overstated, with the data illustrating that many PCCA participants were often "*unsure or ambivalent*" (A3), "*never questioned*" (ER2) evidence and were "*badly briefed*" (ER3). Hence, clear process-design issues should be addressed for future (environmental) CAs. Firstly, given the negative perceptions of farming and rural communities both inside and outside the ICA, future CAs should consider ensuring a "critical mass or threshold" (James 2008, 122) of affected communities to enhance substantive deliberations. Parkinson's (2003) assertion that representation is "context-specific" and depends upon "the topic at hand" is arguably particularly relevant in the case of climate assemblies were some groups (e.g. rural cohorts) may be disproportionately affected. Secondly, greater transparency and academic scrutiny regarding the role of experts – as advisors, contributors, and evaluators – is required, as "it becomes problematic…if policy recommendations are presented as citizens' own identified ideas whereas in reality these reflected experts' proposals" (Van Beek et. al 2022, 12). Finally, given the limitations of a single-case study design, further research of national-level CAs is required to scrutinise their capacity to deal with controversial policy issues, to further explore the responses of political actors to deliberative recommendations and to address "the deeper concern" (Moore 2016) regarding potential elite capture of citizens' assemblies.

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