



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Department of the Environment, Climate & Communications Annual Report

2020

Prepared by the Department of the
Environment, Climate & Communications
gov.ie/decc

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Executive Summary

Overview of Department

The Department's remit at the time the Statement of Strategy 2019-2021 was published covered telecommunications; broadcasting; postal; energy; climate action; waste management and resource efficiency; environmental policy and air quality; noise and radiation protection policy and natural resources.

Following the formation of a new Government in June 2020 the broadcasting functions of the Department were transferred to the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media with effect from 23 September 2020 ([SI 372 of 2020](#)).

The name of the Department changed from the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment to the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications with effect from 24 September 2020 ([SI 373 of 2020](#)).

COVID-19

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 resulted in some changes to the working environment of the Department. From early March the Department prioritised its work to support the whole of Government response to the pandemic. In line with Government advice, the Department operated remotely with limited attendance in our offices.

Many of the Department's functions were involved in ensuring the security and continuity of critical infrastructure throughout the period of the pandemic. Working with our stakeholders, the Department played a central role in ensuring the continuity of electricity, gas and fuel supplies; the maintenance of waste management services; and the functioning of the telecommunications networks. A range of measures were introduced to support businesses operating online.

Statement of Strategy 2019–2021¹

The Department's **vision under the Statement of Strategy 2019–2021** was for Ireland to become a leader in delivering climate action, achieving environmental sustainability and bringing the opportunities offered by digital communications to all citizens. This long-term vision is focused upon transitioning to a prosperous, modern, competitive and carbon neutral economy, underpinned by flexible well-regulated markets.

¹ In accordance with the Public Service Management Act 1997, a new Statement of Strategy was in preparation at end 2020 which would reflect the commitments in the 2020 Programme for Government – Our Shared Future.

The Department's **mission** was to develop across Government policies which power economic and social progress, while at the same time improving the environment in a lasting way for future generations.

The Department delivered on its vision and mission by focusing on **four key goals**:

Goal 1 - Climate Leadership

Ireland will deliver a coherent and effective response to climate disruption and seize the enterprise opportunities in a low carbon economy.

Goal 2 - Connectivity and Communications

Provide access to a world class communications network with high quality services, supporting connected communities and enabling citizens to embrace digital opportunities in a safe environment.

Goal 3 - Environment and Sustainable Resource Use

Use resources with care and responsibility minimising the generation of waste and consistently enhancing our environment in all its dimensions.

Goal 4 - Governance and Regulation

Be best in class in creating the policy direction and the regulatory environment for our sectors, so as to ensure good governance, competitive markets, diversity, innovation and sustainable practices.

The Department made significant progress on achieving the goals in the Statement of Strategy 2019-2021 and this Annual Report outlines the main achievements and developments during the year.

Key Outputs		Target	Delivered	100%
1	No. of small businesses supported by the Trading Online Voucher Scheme	1,250	13,240	1,059.2%
4	No. of homes supported to improve their energy efficiency	23,200	14,699	63.4%
5	No. of new Grant-Aided Electric Vehicle Purchases	6,000	4,843	80.7%
6	No. of Environmental and Radiological Decisions	1,270	1,137	89.5%
7	No. of Industrial/Waste site visits	1,450	Not Yet Available	N/A

Key Impacts		2020	2019	2018
1	Total no. of Broadband Users (including mobile users)	1.84m	1.76m	1.73m
2	Overall % of gross final energy consumption from renewable resources	Not Yet Available	12.0%	10.9%
3	Achievement of waste diversion, recovery and recycling targets: Biodegradable Municipal Waste (BMW) landfilled	104,000	145,000	190,000

Key Achievements in 2020:

Climate/Environment

- Draft text for the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill was published in early October 2020 and underwent pre-legislative scrutiny by the Joint Oireachtas Committee. The Committee's report was published on 18 December 2020 and informed the finalised text adopted by Government in 2021.
- The Climate Action Fund was established on a statutory basis on 1 August 2020, through the early enactment of the National Oil Reserves Agency Bill.
- The first progress report of the Just Transition Commissioner was published in May 2020 and a second report was published in November 2020, providing a further update on progress on just transition in the Midlands.
- The Department opened a call for applications to the Just Transition Fund in June 2020 and provisional funding offers were announced in November 2020, totalling almost €30m to over 60 projects throughout the region for projects from the private sector, local authorities and communities.
- Government approval was granted in November 2020 for the Bord na Móna Enhanced Decommissioning, Rehabilitation and Restoration Scheme (EDRRS) on 33,000 hectares of decommissioned Bord na Móna peatlands including the provision of funding of up to €108 million from the Climate Action Fund.
- Regulations were finalised for additional 13 towns under the Smoky Coal ban.

Energy

- The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) was designated the National Retrofitting Delivery Body and sanction for additional staff was approved.
- €78.7 million was spent in 2020 on energy efficiency measures through grants to over 17,600 homes (includes Solar PV schemes), 39 community based projects and

1,615 households at risk of energy poverty. These measures delivered energy savings of 138.7 GWh, reduced CO₂ emissions by 35,200 tonnes and lowered energy bills by €9.2 million.

- 68 new renewable energy projects, equating to approximately 1,088MW of new renewable generation, were awarded a letter of offer under the first Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) auction. This includes seven community projects comprising five solar and two wind projects. The RESS scheme will support an investment in Ireland of over €1.4 billion and support the recovery by creating roughly 1,000 jobs.
- Support was provided to 59 beneficiaries through the Excellence in Energy Efficient Design (EXEED) programme in 2020, granting over €3.2 million.

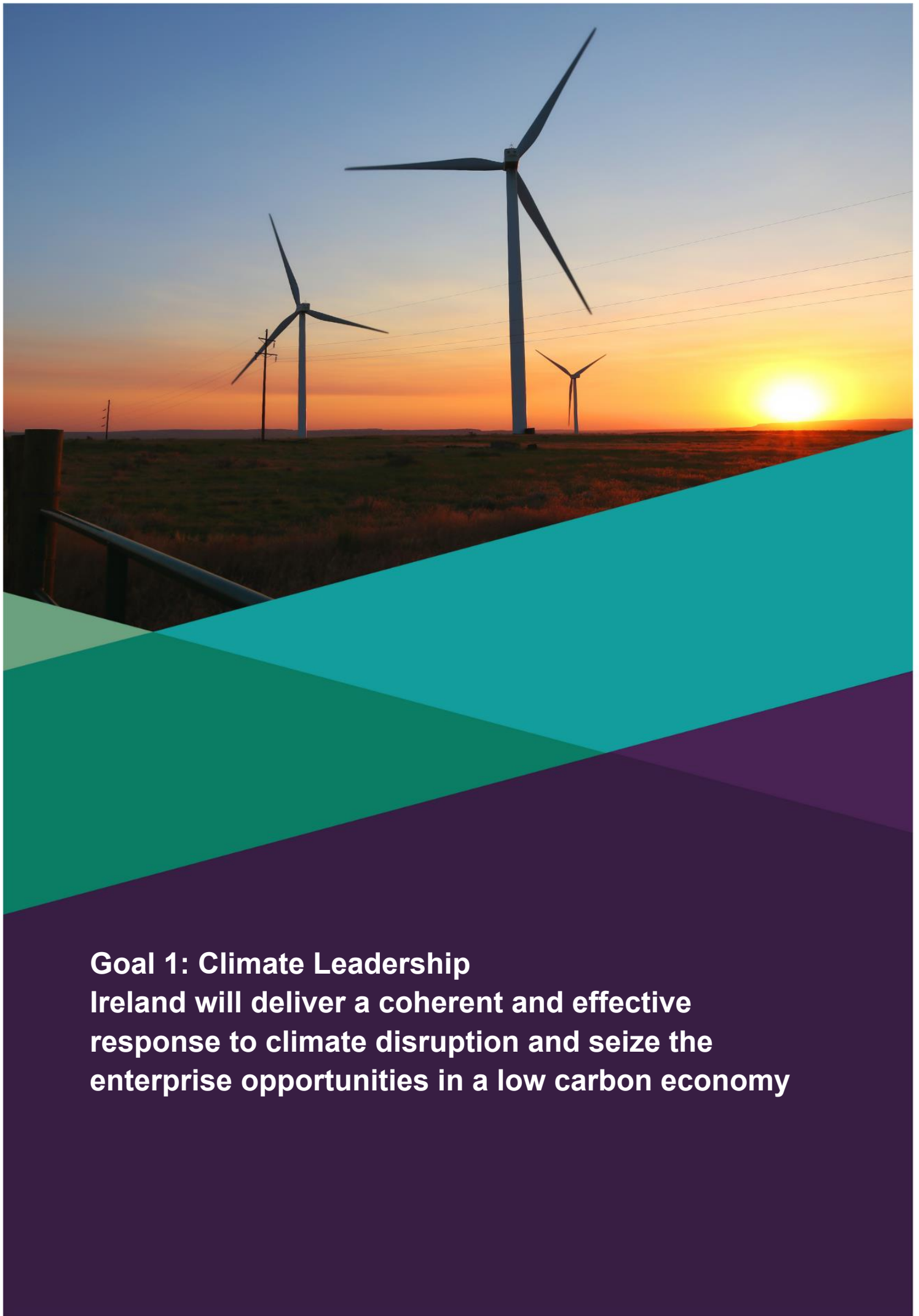
Communications

- National Broadband Ireland (NBI) made significant progress on the rollout of the National Broadband Plan in 2020. Design work was completed in target townlands across every county in Ireland with over 153,000 premises surveyed by the end of 2020. This survey work fed into detailed designs for each deployment area and fibre deployment commenced in late 2020 with the first fibre to the home connection made in Carrigaline, Co. Cork in January 2021.
- The ongoing investment in the National Broadband Plan continues to create employment opportunities with over 700 people directly and indirectly employed in 2020.
- During 2020, 241 Broadband Connections Points (BCP) sites in total were installed by NBI, 170 publicly available and 71 primary schools. The high speed broadband service was switched on for 126 public sites by Vodafone and 31 primary schools by various retail service providers.
- In 2020, over 3,000 people received free digital skills training under the Digital Skills for Citizens Scheme. The School Digital Champion Programme continued to drive digital adoption and provide a platform for greater integration of ICT in second level schools through valuable project-based learning.

Circular Economy, Waste Policy and Natural Resources

- A Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy, Ireland's new roadmap for waste planning and management, was launched in September 2020.
- €32.9 million was provided to Inland Fisheries Ireland to support the protection, conservation and development of Ireland's inland fisheries resource in 2020.
- The Department provided over €11.7 million to Local Authorities to support remediation work on 76 landfill sites around the country in 2020. €6.1 million was allocated from the Environment Fund to Local Authorities to support waste enforcement services and the Anti-Dumping Initiative.
- In 2020, the INFOMAR programme completed 9,406 km² of seabed mapping to reach 62% completion, which is ahead of the targeted 58%.

- Cabinet approval was obtained to introduce legislation to ban licences for new oil and natural gas exploration. The legislation will be included in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill 2021.



Goal 1: Climate Leadership

Ireland will deliver a coherent and effective response to climate disruption and seize the enterprise opportunities in a low carbon economy

Goal 1: Climate Leadership

Total Expenditure in 2020: €204.3m

Current, €31.3m Capital, €173.0m

Outputs		Target	Delivered	
1	No. of homes supported to improve their energy efficiency	23,200	14,699	63.4%
2	Solar PV Scheme (No. of applications)	2,400	2,917	121.5%
3	No. of commercial/other beneficiaries supported to improve their energy efficiency	800	149 ²	18.6%
4	No. of new Grant-Aided Electric Vehicle Purchases	6,000	4,843	80.7%
5	No. of grant-aided electric vehicle home charging points installed	5,000	3,523	70.5%

Impacts		2020	2019	2018
1	% electricity demand generated from renewable resources (RES-E)	38.9% (prov.)	36.5%	33.2%
2	% heat demand from renewable resources (RES-H)	Not Yet Available	6.3%	6.5%
3	% transport demand from renewable resources (RES-T)	9.5% (prov.)	8.9%	7.2%
4	Progress of Public Sector 33% efficiency by 2020	Not Yet Available	29%	27%
5	No. of Building Energy Ratings published	87,500	103,110	98,916

1.1 Climate Action Plan to tackle climate breakdown

The Climate Action Plan 2019, published in June 2019, has a strong focus on implementation over the period 2019 to 2021 including actions with specific timelines and steps needed to achieve each action.

The Climate Action Plan 2019 progress reports are coordinated and published by the Department of the Taoiseach who monitor the implementation of the initiative across Government. Quarterly progress reports are published on gov.ie. The Sixth Progress Report detailed the measures due for completion by the end of Q4 2020. The report demonstrated a total delivery rate of 78%. This Department and agencies under its remit had responsibility for reporting on 268 actions in the Climate Action Plan 2019. Out of the 154 Actions due for completion in 2019 and 114 Actions due in 2020 there was a final completion rate of 76%.

Climate Action Plan 2021

The 2020 Programme for Government commits to an average 7% per annum reduction in overall greenhouse gas emissions from 2021 to 2030 (a 51% reduction over the decade), and to achieving net zero emissions by 2050. In October 2020, preparation began on the next Climate Action Plan, which will set out actions that must be taken in every Government Department and body in order to ensure we deliver on the commitments in the Programme for Government, including making sure we achieve our 2030 targets, prepare for climate neutrality by 2050 at the latest, and make Ireland a leader in responding to climate change. The Plan will be published in Q3 2021.

National Long-Term Climate Strategy

Substantial work was undertaken throughout 2020 in developing Ireland's Long-term Climate Action Strategy (LTS) and to update its scope to reflect the enhanced ambition in the Programme for Government – Our Shared Future. The work has focussed on identifying specific indicative pathways to achieve a climate neutral economy by 2050 and has been underpinned by analysis of transition options across all key sectors of the economy. It is envisaged that the LTS will be brought to Government for consideration and approval in 2021, ahead of being submitted to the European Commission.

Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill

Throughout 2020 the Department developed the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill. The aim of this Bill is to establish a legally binding framework with clear targets and commitments set in law, and to provide that the necessary structures and processes are embedded on a statutory basis to ensure Ireland achieves its national, EU and international climate goals and obligations in the near and long term.

The Bill is designed to include a number of commitments set out in the Programme for Government, including providing that the first two carbon budgets should achieve a 51% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, and giving statutory effect to a commitment to achieve a climate neutral economy by not later than 2050.

Draft text of the Bill was published in early October 2020 and underwent pre-legislative scrutiny by the Joint Oireachtas Committee. The Committee's [report](#) was published on 18 December 2020 and informed the finalised text adopted by Government in 2021.

Climate Adaptation – Sectoral Adaption

Under the [National Adaptation Framework](#) (NAF), seven Government Departments with responsibility for priority sectors were required to prepare sectoral adaptation plans.

The National Adaptation Steering Committee, chaired by this Department, monitored the implementation of the plans during 2020. Considerable adaptation action has taken place across a wide range of areas within the first year of implementation of the plans.

The Department is also actively engaged in ensuring that climate adaptation is mainstreamed across other sectors and the work of all Departments. In 2020, for example, the Department provided input to an Inter Departmental Working Group on Coastal Change, chaired by Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) and the Office of Public Works (OPW), and has worked with the Government Task Force on Emergency Planning on the development and adoption of Strategic Emergency Management Guidance on Climate Change Adaptation which is published on the Office of Emergency Planning (OEP) [website](#).

Local Adaptation

Under the NAF, each local authority developed its own adaptation strategy, which is now being implemented. In total, local authorities adopted 2451 actions across all 31 adaptation strategies covering areas including adaptation, mitigation, awareness building, and community engagement.

Local Authority Climate Action Training Programme

To further enhance local authority response to climate change and facilitate the local authorities in fulfilling their commitments under the Climate Action Plan, the Department allocated €600,000 to local authority climate change training during 2020. Delivery of the training has been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic although training did migrate online during the year.

Climate Ireland

The NAF identified the critical importance of putting Ireland's Climate Information Platform, 'Climate Ireland' (www.climateireland.ie) on a permanent operational basis to continue to inform the relevant national sectors but also in terms of providing a valuable, credible and consistent information resource to civil society and the private sector. Ownership of Climate Ireland has now passed to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Adaptation in the British-Irish Council (BIC) and European Union

The Department chairs the climate adaptation sub-group of the Environment work sector of the British-Irish Council (BIC), and in this capacity, held an online symposium on climate resilient infrastructure in October, 2020 which was attended by representatives from all BIC Administrations.

National Energy and Climate Plan

The preparation of a National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP), covering 2021-2030, is one of the key provisions of the Energy Union Governance Regulation. The [final NECP](#), submitted to the European Commission in 2020, was prepared to incorporate all planned policies and measures that were identified up to the end of 2019 and which will collectively deliver a 30% emissions reduction by 2030 in accordance with the target that applied at the time of the Plan's preparation.

1.2 Create the Cross Government Framework and method of working which develops effective policy platforms to deliver our goal

The delivery of the Climate Action Plan 2019 requires strengthened capacity to evolve policy progressively, to implement agreed actions successfully and to engage meaningfully with many stakeholders.

Climate Action Fund

An Expressions of Interest process was undertaken in 2020 aimed at informing the development of proposals to provide further support from the Climate Action Fund. In response to this, 190 submissions were received from public and private sector bodies, non-governmental organisations and community groups from across the country.

The following five projects, currently supported by the Fund, progressed during 2020:

- ESB e-cars: ESB continued to develop a nationwide, state-of-the-art electric vehicle fast charging network with support of €10 million being provided from the Fund. Notwithstanding some delays due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, by the end of 2020, 164 (328 charge points) of the existing standard AC chargers had been replaced with more modern and reliable charging points and a further 17 had been upgraded to fast DC charge points throughout the country. Fast charging hubs

(150kW and 50kW) have also been installed at four locations with a further four at delivery phase.

- Tallaght District Heating Scheme: €4.45million is being provided from the Fund to this project which will see waste heat from a Data Centre used to heat surrounding buildings, including Tallaght IT and other civic buildings. Ground works commenced during 2020 and construction will commence in 2021. The project, when completed, estimates a reduction in CO₂ emissions in the South Dublin County area of nearly 1,500 tonnes per year.
- Irish Rail – Hybrid Drive: In May 2020, the Irish Rail project to test hybrid drive intercity railcars moved to delivery stage with €1.12 million in support being provided from the Fund. The test phase commenced during 2020 with the retrofit and trial of a new transmission on a three car train. This will be followed by an engine trial later in 2021.
- The 3CEA (Three Counties Energy Agency): This project moved to delivery phase in late 2020 with €1.37 million being provided in support from the Fund. The project aims to reduce fuel consumption and emissions from vehicles with at least a 10% fuel efficiency expected to accrue. Over a two-year period telematics equipment will be installed in over 1,000 heavy goods vehicles and appropriate training for the drivers will be provided.
- Bord Na Móna's large-scale peatlands restoration project: In November 2020, funding of up to €108m was approved by Government for this project. The Scheme will protect the storage of 100 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions, enhance biodiversity, create 310 jobs and will contribute to Ireland's target of being carbon-neutral by 2050. Through the implementation of the Scheme, it is also estimated that over the period to 2050, 3.2 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions will be avoided (including an amount of future carbon sequestration), in comparison to a standard rehabilitation scenario.

1.3 Engage with wider society at local, regional, sectoral and international levels to support the delivery of our goal

National Dialogue on Climate Action

In 2020, the Department established an Interdepartmental Working Group with stakeholder representation from key Departments, Agencies and the local authority sector to assist with

the design of this new structure and to design a public consultation for the next iteration of the Climate Action Plan.

This new structure will harness existing networks, support better communications, and involve specific stakeholder groups. It will have a strong action focus, promoting and leveraging citizen, sectoral and regional involvement in delivering actions within their sphere of influence, including bringing about long-term behavioural change.

Environmental activities and Public Awareness Initiatives

In addition to developing a new structure for sustained engagement, the Department supported a number of wide-ranging environmental activities and public awareness initiatives throughout 2020, including:

- An Taisce to deliver the National Climate Change Action and Awareness Programme (NCCAAP) and the Green Schools Programme. In line with on-going COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, programmes were delivered virtually by An Taisce's Education & Awareness unit to over 90% of schools.
- The Graduate.ie competition, an online competition for Second Level Students in Ireland which aims to engage, inform and inspire young people about important local and national climate topics.

Residential Retrofitting

The Department funds a number of Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) grant schemes to support homeowners to improve the energy efficiency of their properties.

In 2020, SEAI supported retrofit programmes were negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic throughout the year, particularly between March and June when activity was fully paused. Despite these challenges, €78.7 million was spent with over 17,600² homes and community buildings being retrofitted with SEAI support.

- 12,227 homes received grants resulting in 27,444 energy efficiency measures being installed;
- 1,615 households at risk of energy poverty received free energy efficiency upgrades;
- 39 projects were completed under the Communities Programme, including 656 home upgrades;
- 87,500 Building Energy Ratings were published.

² Includes Solar PV Scheme

This package delivered energy savings of 138.7 GWh, reduced CO₂ emissions by 35,200 tonnes and lowered energy bills by €9.2 million.

September 2020 saw the launch of the new National Retrofit (One-Stop-Shop Development) scheme. This scheme is designed to encourage the development of One-Stop-Shops and engage groups of private households, registered Housing Associations and Local Authorities who wish to participate in delivering energy efficiency upgrades, specifically in domestic buildings. The scheme is facilitating larger, more efficient aggregated projects and will bring benefits for homeowners and for the supply side. The scheme also has a strand focusing specifically on the Midlands

Energy Poverty

Over 1,500 more households received free energy efficiency upgrades under the Better Energy Warmer Homes Scheme. The average value of the upgrades provided in 2020 was €14,800.

Energy Efficiency Obligation Scheme

The Energy Efficiency Obligation Scheme achieved 981.2GWh of energy savings in 2020. Of these savings 882GWh were delivered independently of other SEAI programmes/Exchequer supports. Under the Energy Efficiency Obligation Scheme, larger energy suppliers must support energy efficiency projects in homes and businesses across Ireland.

COP26 and the Paris Agreement

While the COVID-19 pandemic postponed in-person international climate meetings, such as the 26th Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP26), multilateral and high-level discussions continued virtually. Ireland continued to participate and engage at key climate events over the year in view of the importance of maintaining momentum and increasing ambition to address the climate challenge. This included high-level engagement at the UN World Environment Day in June and the Online Platform Ministerial Meeting in September.

Climate Finance

In 2020, the Department provided €4.5 million to support international climate action. This included a doubling of our annual contribution to the Green Climate Fund (GCF) to €4million, following commitment to a multiannual pledge as part of the first replenishment for the period

2020 to 2023. The GCF is the world's largest dedicated fund aimed at helping developing countries reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and enhance their ability to respond to climate change, and has a crucial role in the implementation of the Paris Agreement.

Ireland has also contributed funding to other international initiatives addressing climate change including the Adaptation Fund, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, as well as the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) Partnership.

Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS)

The Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) is an auction-based scheme which invites renewable electricity projects to compete for a guaranteed price for the electricity they generate. The first of these renewable electricity auctions took place in July 2020. The final results were approved by Government in September 2020. 68 projects, equating to approximately 1,088MW of new renewable generation, were awarded a letter of offer under the terms and conditions of the scheme. This includes seven community projects comprising of five solar and two wind projects.

A mandatory Community Benefit Fund must be provided by all projects successful in each RESS auction. These funds will be aligned to incentivise investment in local renewable energy, energy efficiency measures and climate action initiatives. The Community Benefit Fund under the first RESS auction which was held in 2020 will deliver almost €4 million a year to sustainable community initiatives targeted at those communities living in close proximity to the RESS-1 Projects.

Solar PV

The SEAI Solar PV Scheme commenced in 2018 to support installation of Solar PV on domestic homes built and occupied prior to 2011. In January 2020, following a scheme review, the grant rates were changed and a minimum Building Energy Rating (BER) C rating requirement was introduced to ensure energy efficiency first principles are achieved. As of April 2021, a total of 5,577 installations had been supported at a cost of €13.515 million, installing a total capacity of 20 MW and saving 5,259 tonnes of CO₂.

Support Scheme for Renewable Heat (SSRH)

The 2020 annual tariff review for the Support Scheme for Renewable Heat (SSRH) was completed and approved by the Minister in June 2020. The public consultation to inform a policy framework for district heating in Ireland was completed in February 2020. Work on the policy framework commenced following a review of submissions to the consultation.

Excellence in Energy Efficient Design (EXEED)

Support was provided to 59 beneficiaries through the Excellence in Energy Efficient Design (EXEED) programme in 2020, granting over €3.2 million. Since 2017, EXEED has supported 152 beneficiaries and provided €9.3 million in capital funding. This equates to 106GWh primary energy savings and 5.8 ktCO₂ of emissions savings.

Following a review of the scheme, it is now aligned to the commitments in the Programme for Government and the primary objective of the EXEED Programme will be to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by supporting entities (businesses and public sector bodies) in adopting the EXEED certified approach to energy efficient design management.

SEAI Energy Academy

During 2020, the SEAI's free online training resource, the [SEAI Energy Academy](#), continued to grow. The resource, specifically for SMEs, focuses on energy efficiency opportunities and gives businesses access to high quality energy training. The total number of participants in 2020 was over 2000 the majority of who completed modules in 2020 with 570 receiving a certificate of completion of a course (i.e. 7 modules selected for their specific sector).

Large Industry Energy Network (LIEN)

The Large Industry Energy Network (LIEN) is an energy efficiency network for large businesses with an energy bill of over €1 million which SEAI supports to share and achieve best practice in energy management. Membership for 2020 reached 199 and included representation from across a number of business sectors. A total of 101 organisations reported specific energy saving projects which has an impact of energy savings of 420GWh (equivalent to 85,000 tonnes CO₂ emissions, €13.9M energy bill savings). A total of 101 of the LIEN members are ISO50001 certified.

Project Assistance Grants (PAGs)

The SEAI provides financial support and practical advice to organisations in the private and public sectors that are seeking to implement energy saving projects through Project Assistance Grants (PAGs).

This support is available to encourage the development of energy saving projects and to drive a considerable increase in scale and depth of energy efficiency investments. During 2020, there were nine beneficiaries of PAGs - five from the private sector and four from the public sector.

Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE)

The Department continued to work closely with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) on drafting the Maritime Area Planning (MAP) Bill (formerly known as the Marine Planning and Development Management (MPDM) Bill). The General Scheme of the Bill was approved by Government in December 2019, and underwent pre-legislative scrutiny in November/December 2020.

The Bill will replace existing State and development consent regimes on the basis of a single consent principle (i.e. one State consent to authorise usage of the maritime area, and one development consent with a single, robust environmental assessment).

Ireland's ambitions for the Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE) sector are contingent on delivering a robust licensing and regulatory regime. The Department has been working on the design and future operation of a new consenting regime for offshore renewable energy under the MAP Bill. This new regime is designed to provide clarity and consistency for applicants, attract investment, remove unnecessary duplication, and ensure ORE projects are in line with State environmental and marine spatial planning policy.

Work was also carried out within the Department to provide input into and finalise the National Marine Planning Framework, led by the DHLGH, and which will govern Ireland's marine spatial planning policy.

Electric Vehicles

Incentives to drive the uptake of electric vehicles continued and by the end of 2020, the total number of electric vehicles on Irish roads was over 26,000, an increase of almost 11,000 from 2019. Though sales of all new vehicles were down in 2020 compared to 2019, sales of new electric vehicles increased again in 2020.

ESB eCars continued to develop a nationwide, state-of-the-art electric vehicle fast charging network supported by funding from the Climate Action Fund. By the end of 2020, four charging hubs were built, 17 standard chargers were upgraded to fast chargers and over 300 standard chargers were replaced with more modern technology.

Responsibility for Electric Vehicles transferred to the Department of Transport at the end of 2020.

All Island Single Electricity Market (SEM) and I-SEM

The new market design for the all island wholesale Single Electricity Market (SEM), which went live in 2018, includes a state aid approved mechanism for remunerating capacity. The mechanism involves regular competitive auctions for capacity for selected future periods.

One such auction took place during 2020, the T-4 2023/2024 held in April 2020. T-4 auctions look at securing capacity to be delivered approximately four years in advance.

Just Transition

The first progress report of the Just Transition Commissioner was published in May 2020 and reflected a comprehensive engagement with relevant stakeholders in the Midlands. A second report was published in November 2020, providing a further update on progress on just transition in the Midlands.

The response to the Commissioner's recommendations has been taken forward through a number of strands, including the Just Transition Fund call for proposals, the Bord na Móna Enhanced Decommissioning, Rehabilitation and Restoration Scheme (EDRRS), and the re-configuration of the Midlands Regional Transition Team.

The Government's approach to just transition in the context of climate action policy has been further informed by research reports by the National Economic and Social Council (NESC), published during the course of 2020.

Budget 2020 prioritised €31m in funding to support a just climate transition in the Midlands Region, ring-fenced from additional carbon tax revenue, through a number of initiatives including, the establishment of a Just Transition Fund.

The Department opened a call for applications to the Just Transition Fund in June 2020, with the objective of funding innovative projects that contribute to the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the wider Midlands region and which have employment and enterprise potential. The Government announced provisional funding offers in November 2020 totalling almost €30m to over 60 projects throughout the region for projects from the private sector, local authorities and communities in late 2020.

Budget 2020 has also provided funding for a €20 million Midlands Retrofit Scheme to upgrade the energy efficiency of the social housing stock in the Midlands, with a focus on upgrading larger batches of homes in distinct, compact geographical areas.

EU Just Transition Fund

The European Green Deal led to the establishment of a new EU Just Transition Fund to alleviate the socio-economic impacts of the low carbon transition in the most affected regions across the EU. This Fund may be used to support the re-skilling of workers, help SMEs to create new economic opportunities, and promote the diversification of economic activity towards low-carbon sectors and progress towards achieving the EU's 2030 climate targets and a climate-neutral economy by 2050.

Ireland has secured €77 million from the EU Just Transition Fund over the period 2021 to 2027 with matching national funding also to be committed. Ireland must now prepare a Territorial Just Transition Plan, for approval by the European Commission, in order to secure access to supports from this new EU Fund. This Plan will set out Ireland's investment priorities and will identify the sectors and regions to be supported.

Bord na Móna Bog Rehabilitation Scheme

Government approval was granted in November 2020 for the Bord na Móna Enhanced Decommissioning, Rehabilitation and Restoration Scheme (EDRRS) on 33,000 hectares of decommissioned Bord na Móna peatlands including the provision of funding of up to €108 million. This rehabilitation will take place over a period of 5 years.

The enhanced interventions can deliver benefits in terms of carbon mitigation, increasing biodiversity, supporting bog amenity and eco-system services, as well as improved water quality and water attenuation relating to flood risk management. The Scheme will protect the storage of 100 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions. It is further estimated that over the period 2020 to 2050 that 3.2 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions will be avoided through the implementation of the Scheme.

The Scheme will, over time, engage 307 employees, some on a seasonal basis, with 210 full time equivalent employees engaged to deliver the project over four to five years.

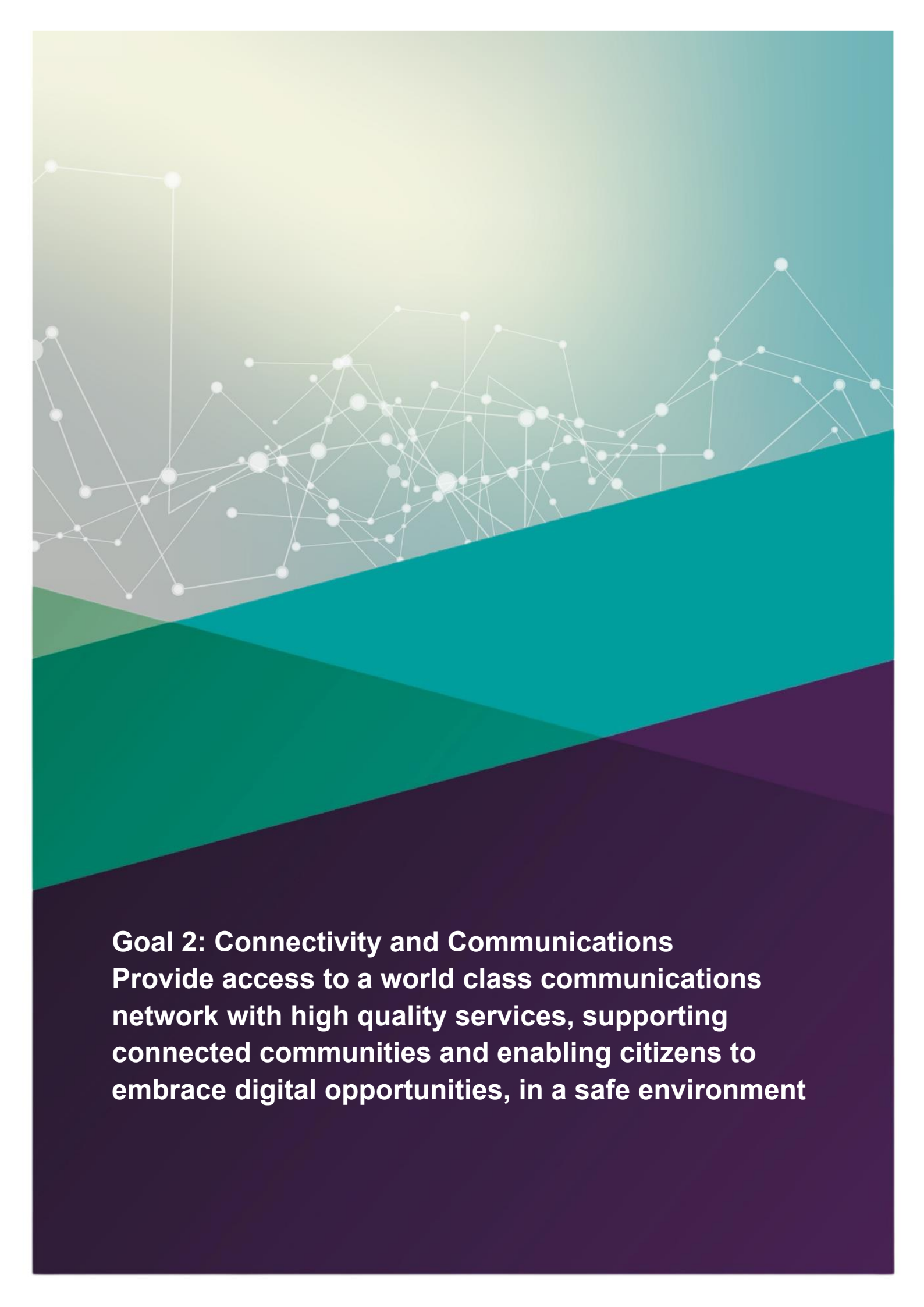
1.4 Demonstrate Leadership in the Public Sector

The role of the Department spans all of the energy sectors including electricity, heat and transport. It will contribute significantly to the transition to a low carbon, climate-resilient future through a range of policies and measures, supporting Ireland in reaching ambitious targets for renewable energy and energy efficiency.

Public Sector Leading by Example

The public sector plays a key role demonstrating leadership to ensure that Ireland is taking the necessary steps to reduce its vulnerability to the impacts of climate change. Work in this area in 2020 included:

- Continued implementation of the Public Sector Energy Efficiency Strategy, with energy performance data from the SEAI showing a 29% improvement in Energy Efficiency by end of 2019. Public bodies and Government Departments have collectively saved over €1.5 billion on energy spend and avoided 5.2 mtCO₂ emissions since 2009.
- The Department itself demonstrated its capacity to lead by example with the most recent data showing that the Department had improved its energy efficiency by 38% at end 2019.
- The Department provided capital funding of over €8.2 million for public sector energy efficiency supports during the year including a number of pathfinder partnership retrofit programmes between the SEAI and Department of Education, Higher Education Authority (HEA), Office of Public Works (OPW) and the Health Service Executive (HSE) which focused on energy efficiency retrofits across education central government and HSE buildings. A total of 90 buildings had energy efficiency upgrades as part of the 2020 Programme with estimated impact of 110 GWh.
- Along with the SEAI and OPW, the Department continued to engage with and support Energy Performance Officers to improve energy management, share best practice and develop further energy efficiency projects.
- During 2020, a study funded under the EU Structural Reform Support Service was undertaken to inform the design and development of a framework for implementing a comprehensive building upgrade programme for the public sector to achieve a BER of B. The study also carried out an assessment of the existing building stock to determine the total level of investment likely to be required to achieve the target.



Goal 2: Connectivity and Communications
Provide access to a world class communications network with high quality services, supporting connected communities and enabling citizens to embrace digital opportunities, in a safe environment

Goal 2: Connectivity and Communications

Total Expenditure in 2020: €61.5m

Current, €11.3m

Capital, €50.3m

Outputs		Target	Delivered		100%
1	No. of digital enterprises based at the Digital Hub	71	51	71.8%	
2	No. of full time jobs based at the Digital Hub	724	499	68.9%	
3	No. of small businesses supported by the Trading Online Voucher Scheme	1,250	13,240	1,059.2%	
4	No. of citizens provided with digital skills training under the Digital Skills for Citizens programme	25,000	3,116	12.5%	
5	No. of Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) deployed across the Intervention Area of the National Broadband Plan (NBP)	Up to 300	242	N/A	
Impacts		2020	2019	2018	
1	Total no. of Broadband Users (including mobile users)	1.84m	1.76m	1.73m	
2	Total no. of Broadband Users (excluding mobile users)	1.51m	1.46m	1.43m	
3	% of SMEs trading online	35%	30%	30%	
4	% of citizens (adults 16 – 74) not engaging with the internet	8%	11%	13%	
5	No. of premises with access to high speed broadband	1.85m	1.84m	1.75m	

2.1 National Broadband Plan – High Speed Broadband to all homes and businesses

National Broadband Plan

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of reliable broadband to ensure that citizens across Ireland can avail of remote working, education and other essential online facilities.

The contract for the NBP State-led intervention is with National Broadband Ireland (NBI). The contract provides that a future proofed high speed broadband network will be deployed and operated by NBI to people living and working in over 544,000 premises in the Intervention Area.

Delivery of National Broadband Plan in 2020

Despite the challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, NBI made significant progress in 2020. The principal focus was on mobilisation activities, together with survey, design and make ready work to prepare the way for the fibre deployment. Design work was completed in target townlands across every county in Ireland with over 153,000 premises surveyed by the end of 2020. This survey work fed into detailed designs for each deployment area and fibre deployment commenced in late 2020 with the first fibre to the home connections made in Carrigaline, Co. Cork in January 2021.

The Programme for Government commits to seek to accelerate the rollout of the NBP. In this regard, the Department continues to engage with NBI to explore the feasibility of accelerating aspects of the rollout to establish the possibility of bringing forward premises which are currently scheduled in years six and seven of the current plan to an earlier date. Exploring the potential to accelerate the network rollout is being undertaken in parallel with the measures required to mitigate delays arising as a result of COVID-19.

The ongoing investment in the NBP rollout is and will continue to create employment opportunities with over 700 people directly and indirectly employed in 2020.

Broadband Connection Points

Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) are a key element of the NBP and provide high-speed broadband in every county in advance of the roll out of the fibre to the home network. The planned BCP locations are in places of community importance, including schools (for educational access only), library hubs, local sports facilities and other public places.

During 2020, 241 BCP sites in total were installed by NBI, 170 publicly available and 71 primary schools. The high speed broadband service was switched on for 126 public sites by Vodafone and 31 primary schools by various retail service providers.

In late 2020, Government and NBI agreed to accelerate the rollout of high speed broadband to some 679 primary schools across the State by the end of 2022, ensuring that by that time all schools across the State will have the necessary infrastructure to carry out their critical day to day educational activities unimpeded by poor broadband.

Impact of NBP on Broadband Landscape

The NBP has stimulated commercial telecommunications investment through policy, legislative and regulatory measures. The telecommunications sector has invested over €3.3

billion in network upgrades and enhanced services since 2012, and further significant investments are planned across the sector, mainly in urban areas.

Average advertised fixed broadband speeds continue to increase. At the end of 2020, 81.6% of all fixed broadband subscriptions were equal to or greater than 30Mbps. In 2020, 45.5% of these subscriptions were equal to or greater than 100Mbps, up from 36.2% at the end of 2019. At year end, 77% of the premises in Ireland had access to high-speed broadband services from commercial operators, similar to the figures reported in 2019.

2.2 Provide digital policy leadership, promoting the digital society nationally and at European and international level, driving digital entrepreneurship and innovation and enhancing digital skills of citizens

Enterprise - Trading Online

The Trading Online Voucher Scheme, which is administered by the 31 Local Enterprise Offices (LEO), continued to support small and micro enterprises to participate in the digital economy in developing their online trading capabilities.

With the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions many more small businesses found themselves unable to trade physically and had to move online.

The Department, in partnership with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment; the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media; Enterprise Ireland; the LEO and Údarás na Gaeltachta, responded by repurposing the Trading Online Voucher Scheme which formed part of the Government's COVID-19 Business Support Package for small businesses.

In 2020, 13,075 vouchers were awarded to businesses – up from 1,218 vouchers in 2019. This brings to over 19,000 the number of businesses that have been approved for funding since the Scheme began in 2014.

In addition, over 38,000 small businesses benefited from training, advice and peer to peer support through participation in the information sessions delivered by the LEOs as part of the Scheme.

Operation of the Scheme transferred to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment on 31 December 2020.

Citizen Skills & Engagement

In 2020 over 3,000 people received free digital skills training under the Digital Skills for Citizens Scheme, removing a key barrier to digital adoption. Participants in the programme report positive impacts, including improved wellbeing, reduced isolation, as well as savings in time and money through increased competence to use online Government services and make informed purchasing decisions.

Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and in order to afford the grantees the opportunity to fulfil their obligations under their current grant agreement, training under the scheme was adapted to a blend of phone and online delivery of classes and the deadline for completion of training was extended to 30 June 2021.

School Digital Champion Programme

The School Digital Champion Programme continued to drive digital adoption and provide a platform for greater integration of ICT in second level schools through valuable project-based learning. In 2020 the Department received 77 applications, from 57 schools in 19 counties. This resulted in over 300 school digital champions working on projects which demonstrated the use of their digital, creative, critical-thinking and communications skills.

Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and in line with Government health guidelines, the 2020/2021 programme events were arranged online including online training, virtual site visits and a virtual showcase.

National Digital Research Centre (NDRC)

The National Digital Research Centre (NDRC) invests in start-ups building “global solutions to global problems”, to create internationally scalable Irish companies

Following a public procurement process, the contract to deliver the NDRC services was awarded to a consortium led by Dogpatch Labs in 2020.

The principal services, which are provided under the NDRC name, include:

- Accelerator Programmes and capital investments in early stage digital enterprises; and
- Regional services: pre-accelerator programmes and “training the trainer” services

There is a strong regional dimension to the services which are delivered through Dogpatch Labs, based in Dublin and its regional hub partners at the Republic of Work in Cork, RDI Hub in Kerry and Portershed in Galway.

Digital Hub Development Agency (DHDA)

The Digital Hub Development Agency (DHDA) was established in 2003 to develop Ireland's digital enterprise sector through the creation of a cluster of digital enterprises.

At end 2020 the occupancy rate for the campus was 51%, with 36 client companies employing 322 people located there. This lower than average occupancy was due to the COVID-19 pandemic public health restrictions in place during the year.

In 2020, the Department completed a review of the policy underpinning the DHDA with a view to informing policy as to future role of the Agency.

Metropolitan Area Networks (MANs)

The Metropolitan Area Networks (MANs) consist of 88 wholesale, open access, state owned, fibre optic telecommunications networks in 94 regional towns and cities. They play an important role in facilitating operators to provide broadband services for business and residential customers in the regions, without having to build their own networks. The MANs infrastructure is playing an important part in the rollout of the NBP.

At the end of 2020, 87 of the fibre optic networks were being used by some 84 commercial operators, facilitating the delivery of retail broadband services mainly to large businesses, SMEs, public bodies and educational institutions, while also supporting wireless service providers to deliver broadband to residential customers outside of Dublin.

The Department continued to oversee the Concession Agreements with enet³ to manage and operate the MANs throughout Ireland. Following on the independent review of the operation of the MANs published in February 2019, a report on the implementation of that review was commissioned from ComReg and was completed in 2020.

Emergency Call Answering Service (ECAS)

The Emergency Call Answering Service (ECAS) is responsible for answering all 112 and 999 calls and texts, providing a vital link between the caller and the Emergency Services (Garda, Fire, Ambulance or Coast Guard). In 2020, the ECAS handled just over 2.3 million calls. Approximately 37% of calls received were forwarded to the relevant Emergency Services; the remaining calls did not require a connection to an emergency service and were filtered. Filtering allows the Emergency Services to respond to genuine emergencies only.

³ Open access network provider

Enforcement powers for ComReg

There is ongoing dialogue between the Department and the Regulator as the sector evolves, with a view to ensuring that the regulator can continue to fully meet current and future challenges in delivering on its statutory and regulatory remit. This continued in 2020 and in the context of the commitment contained in the Programme for Government to give ComReg greater powers of enforcement, with a particular focus on improving competition, innovation and customer service within the communications sector.

2.3 Improve cyber security and resilience of network and information systems to support the development of the digital economy and deliver the highest standard in online safety in a fast changing digital environment

The COVID-19 pandemic, with the heightened sensitivity attached to protecting the operational integrity of critical infrastructure and essential services, together with the fundamental shift to remote working, brought an added importance to the timely and robust delivery of the actions identified in the National Cyber Security Strategy.

Implementation of National Cyber Security Strategy measures

An Inter-Departmental Committee (IDC) comprising of senior managers from a broad range of Government Departments and a NCSC representative was setup to oversee the implementation of the National Cyber Security Strategy (2019-2024) which sets out a series of measures to protect critical national infrastructure and develop the cyber security of the State.

Effective incident detection and response with close international collaboration

During 2020, weekly news reports and quarterly threat landscape reports were issued along with a total of 28 alerts and advisories that provided advice, alerts and dissemination of information to constituents about cyber security risks and incidents as well as vulnerabilities within security products. Included in the advisories were the COVID-19 pandemic cyber threat advisory and the published Working from Home security advisory which were produced as a result of observing an increase in malicious activity such as phishing; online fraud; Business Email Compromise and ransomware leveraging on the COVID-19 pandemic global health emergency.

Incidents were reported from a wide range of sources including Operators of Essential Services (OES); Digital Service Providers (DSP); Government Departments and Agencies; Peer Incident Response Teams and private industry.

The Computer Security Incident Response Team ([CSIRT](#)) function led on the testing, development and deployment of the Sensor system of security incident and event monitoring which adds an additional layer of boundary protection for Government Departments.

Formalised threat sharing arrangements with the UK authorities were established in the form of an All-Island Information Exchange (AIIE) group that meets bi-monthly.

The NCSC and its Policy function established the Cyber Security Education Working Group with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and other key educational stakeholders to develop a short course in Junior Cycle on cybersecurity in line with our Programme for Government commitments. The working group later included a project team from UCD to assist in developing the course specification which is now completed. The project team have also begun assisting with the roll out of a pilot of the course in already selected

Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill

The Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill will establish a multi-person Media Commission, including an Online Safety Commissioner, dissolve the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, establish regulatory frameworks for online safety and the regulation of audio-visual media services, and transpose the revised Audiovisual Media Services Directive (Directive 2018/1808/EU). The finalisation of the General Scheme of the Bill was approved by Government in December 2020.

2.4 Attract strong audiences to distinctive Irish content, including Irish language content, across all existing and emerging platforms including reaching out to younger audiences

Commission on the Future of Media

The establishment of a Commission on the Future of Irish Public Service Broadcasting was announced by the Department of the Taoiseach in December 2019. In September 2020 the Government agreed the terms of reference and membership of the Future of Media Commission. The Commission is chaired by Professor Brian MacCraith, former President of

Dublin City University, and includes experts in public service media, independent journalism, social media, new technology platforms, media economics, culture, language, creative content, governance and international best practice. The Commission held its inaugural meeting in October 2020.

Migration from 700 MHz Band

Additional radio spectrum was made available for use by the mobile broadband sector on the 700MHz band to provide enhanced network coverage and capacity, particularly in rural areas. The task of migrating broadcasting services from the 700MHz band concluded in 2020. The end of the Simulcast Period on 4 March 2020 signalled the completion of the migration and final payments were made to [2m](#) in June 2020.

RTÉ

TV Licence receipts for 2020 totalled €222.55m. RTÉ received €197.65m of total receipts. €36.117m of income was spent on funding programming produced by the independent television and radio production sector.

TG4

TG4 received €39.133m in exchequer funding in 2020 to fund programming commitments, including programming produced by the independent production sector. TG4 broadcast an average of 12.24 hours of Irish language programmes per day.

Broadcasting Fund

In 2020, the BAI received €21.78 million which provided funding and financial support for 235 radio and high quality TV programmes based on Irish culture and heritage under the Sound and Vision 4 Scheme. In addition, in response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sector in early 2020, the BAI waived the Broadcasting Levy in the first half of 2020.

Outputs

#	Title of Indicator	Delivered by end 2020
1	Reach of all RTÉ services among adults 18+	95%
2	Radio all day share (adults 15+)	31.7%

3	TV all day share (adults 15+)	27.7%
4	Hours of home produced content on RTÉ One & RTÉ 2	6,030
5	RTÉ expenditure on independently produced television and radio programmes	€36.5m
6	Average no. of broadcast hours of Irish language programming per day	12.24

Impacts

#	Title of Indicator	2020	2019	2018
1	Number of new television and radio programmes and new projects that will provide for the delivery of an extensive range of new community and local radio programmes that benefit local communities and audiences, offered funding through the Broadcasting Fund Sound and Vision Scheme	235	241	256
3	Average number of hours of Irish produced television programming (RTÉ)	6,030	5,687	5,831

2.5 An Post as a commercially viable State company, delivering on its Strategic Plan which reflects Government objectives; harnessing the opportunities presented by eCommerce and the digital economy, capturing and retaining market share in parcels and delivering a sustainable nationwide post office network offering a range of eCommerce, financial and Government services

An Post continued to make substantial progress in implementing its transformation plan in 2020 despite the challenges it faced due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The importance and resilience of the post office network has been clearly demonstrated throughout the pandemic when An Post kept its network of over 900 post offices open, ensuring the continued distribution of cash to the economy and playing an important commercial and societal role in the communities in which they operate. An Post has also played a key role in enabling small SMEs to trade online during periods of lockdown.

By the end of December 2020, over 62% of post offices were co-located with other high footfall retail businesses.

There were a number of strategic developments by the company in 2020. The surge in eCommerce as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic saw parcel volumes increase by 100% in 2020. An Post completed a €30m investment in its eCommerce campus in Dublin, opening a second new automated parcel processing facility in November, allowing the campus the capacity to handle 2.5m parcels a week. An Post continued to develop its digital capability which has been essential to meet customer demand for eCommerce.

In September 2020 An Post launched its Green Hub, which provides homeowners with trusted support, competitive loan rates and end-to-end upgrade solutions to help them start their home improvement process. The Green Hub is essentially a one-stop-shop which will cover loan-only or full retro-fit services, from initial home assessments to completed works and an SEAI grant application and payment process. As part of the Green Hub, An Post partnered with SSE Airtricity to provide the Home Energy Upgrade Service which includes free home assessments and end-to-end project management.

Eircodes

Eircode adoption and usage continued to grow significantly among members of the public, businesses and the public sector. In 2020, the free online Eircode Finder had on average 2.3 million monthly lookups, representing 42% growth over 2019. During 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic increased the demand on the delivery of goods and services. To assist with this effort the daily lookup limit on the Eircode Finder was increased from 15 to 50. In November 2020 there were 3.1 million matched lookups on the free-to-use Eircode Finder online tool, the highest number of lookups in a single month since launch. During the period March to December 2020, there were over 24million lookups on the Eircode Finder, a 46% increase in usage of the Finder over the same period in 2019.

Eircodes are fully integrated in Google Maps, Microsoft (Bing/Nokia Maps), TomTom, HERE Navigation, Garmin and, most recently, Apple.

Independent research by Amárach in 2020 showed 93.3% of respondents were able to supply a correct and verified Eircode for their address, and 73% know their Eircode by memory. The survey was undertaken to determine that, in year 7 (2020) of the Eircode program, at least 80% of the general public knows the Eircode for their address, as part of the Postcode Management License Holder (PMLH) contract.

By the end of 2020, there were over 1,530 business organisations and State Agencies licensing Eircodes within their business systems and operations across a wide spectrum of sectors, including: logistics/deliveries; utilities; hotel; retail; telecommunications; insurance; financial; and satellite navigation, an increase of 19% on 2019.

The use of the Eircode API was released by Ordnance Survey Ireland in 2019 and made available for use by all Public Sector Bodies (PSBs). Uptake of the API more than doubled, with a total of 13 users in 2020.



Goal 3: Environment and Sustainable Resource Use
Use resources with care and responsibility,
minimising the generation of waste and consistently
enhancing our environment in all its dimensions

3 Goal 3: Environment and Sustainable Resource Use

Total Expenditure in 2020: **€21.2m**

Current, €8.9m

Capital, €12.3m

Outputs		Target	Delivered	100%
1	No. of active Mineral Prospecting Licenses	550	490	89.1%
2	No. of active Mining Leases/Licences	17	16	94.1%
3	No. of Mineral Prospecting Licences in respect of which exploration data released for open access	115	180	156.5%
4	Tellus Survey Programme implementation (sq.km completed)	6,000	3,000	50%
5	INFOMAR Seabed Survey Programme (sq.km completed)	5,500	9,406	171.0%
6	Geoscience Research funding committed (new projects supported)	New Metric	23	N/A
7	Groundwater Catchment Reports completed	New Metric	15	N/A
Impacts		2020	2019	2018
1	Revenue earned by the State from: Mining/Mineral Prospecting	€5.95m	€5.8m	€6.3m
2	Revenue from Petroleum Authorisations	€0.55m	€1.2m	€3.5m
3	Geoscience Ireland - GSI business cluster: Jobs created	69	192	253

3.1 Mainstream Sustainable development across Government and Society

National Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

The 2030 Agenda encourages countries to integrate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into planning and policy, on both a national and international level. Ireland has adopted a 'whole-of-Government' approach to achieving the SDGs, with each Minister having responsibility for implementing individual SDG targets related to their functions. The Department has overall responsibility for promoting the SDGs, and for overseeing their coherent implementation across Government. The Department also has lead responsibility for targets related to a number of SDGs, including:

- Goal 7 on Energy,

- Goal 12 on Sustainable Consumption and Production, with input from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, and
- Goal 13 on Climate Action

A Senior Officials Group (SOG) co-ordinates and monitors SDG implementation and reports as required to Government. To further support the work of the SOG, the Department chairs an Interdepartmental SDG Working Group, comprised of representatives from all Departments with responsibilities for the SDGs. Four meetings were held in 2020 and the group will continue to meet regularly to support the development of the Second SDG National Implementation Plan which is intended to be published in 2021.

SDG Champions Programme

The SDG Champions, who raise public awareness of the SDGs through partnership and promotion, illustrate ways in which organisations and individuals can contribute to achieving the SDGs.

The difficulties arising from the COVID-19 pandemic greatly affected many of the Champions in their 2020 work plans. The closure of the schools resulted in many programmes being unable to commence, while the restrictions on public gatherings also impacted greatly on planned public engagements.

Many SDG Champions have been at the forefront during COVID-19, with the GAA and An Post ensuring that many of those cocooning were not forgotten, with shopping and postal service provision. The Department continued to engage with the SDG Champions throughout the pandemic and supported online Champion activities through the Department's social media platforms.

The Department extended the Programme from September 2020 until Q2 2021 to allow for the work undertaken by the SDG Champions to be completed.

The Call for Expressions of Interest for the 2020 Champions Programme was also postponed until the on-going COVID-19 pandemic restrictions are lifted.

3.2 Support the development of the Bioeconomy

The first National Policy Statement on the Bioeconomy recognised that the bioeconomy is crucial for sustainability while also providing an impetus to rural and regional development and employment. In October 2020, Bioeconomy Week took place virtually placing the spotlight on Ireland's bioeconomy through a series of online events and activities from

multiple leading stakeholder groups within the Irish Bioeconomy Network suited towards a diverse range of audiences including citizens, industry professionals and policymakers.

3.3 Prioritise Environmental Protection, particularly in relation to Air Quality and the Safe Use of Chemicals

National Air Pollution Control Programme (NAPCP)

Ireland's National Air Pollution Control Programme (NAPCP) is a technical document which outlines the pathway Ireland will follow to achieve compliance with its commitments under the National Emission Ceilings Directive (NEC Directive). A review of the NAPCP which had been submitted to the Commission in 2019 was carried out in 2020 and underwent a public consultation process.

Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Programme

Funding of €5 million has been committed to an expansion of the Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Programme (AAMP) programme between 2017 and 2022. The programme involves a greatly expanded national monitoring network supported by increased modelling capability providing more comprehensive, real-time, localised air quality information to the public. To date, the network has expanded from 29 stations to 92 stations across the state, 18 of which were installed in 2020.

Introducing Nationwide Solid Fuel Regulations

In line with a commitment in the Programme for Government to extend the Smoky Coal ban to new towns and, over the term of Government move towards a full nationwide ban, 13 additional low smoke zones were introduced in September 2020, extending the existing Solid Fuel Regulations to all conurbations with a population in excess of 10,000.

Urban Transport Related Air Pollution (UTRAP)

The Urban Transport Related Air Pollution Working Group (UTRAP) was formed in autumn 2019, to consider and address rising concerns about the level of transport-generated air pollution. An interim report was finalised in 2020 which included measures to address transport related air pollution in urban areas and recommendations on how to further develop an evidence-based national policy framework within which local authorities could address future exceedances.

National Radon Control Strategy

Implementation of Phase 2 of the National Radon Control Strategy continued in 2020. Efforts to promote radon testing in homes and businesses and to carry out remediation works where necessary were sustained in 2020. Significant research also continued in the area of radon prevention in new build housing and in behavioural aspects in relation to radon testing and remediation.

Radioactive waste

Efforts to reduce Ireland's limited inventory of radioactive waste continued in 2020. Ireland's framework for the management of radioactive waste will be subject to an international peer review mission led by the International Atomic Energy Agency in 2021.

Environmental Noise Action Plans

Implementation of Round 3 of the Noise Action Plans (NAPs) continued in 2020. There is a new statutory requirement for all Noise Mapping Bodies to report progress on implementation of their NAPs annually to the EPA.

Environment Fund

Due to the success of the Plastic Bag Levy and Landfill Levy in implementing behaviour change, there has been a steady decrease in income in to the Environment Fund in successive years. In 2020 a total of €10.58 million of funding commitments were identified to be transferred to the Vote.

However, efforts to advance the protection of the environment continued with expenditure of almost €17 million from the Environment Fund. Allocations included:

- €6.1 million to Local Authorities to support waste enforcement services and the Anti-Dumping Initiative;
- €3 million provided to support the work of the Environmental Protection Agency including the National Waste Prevention Programme;
- €1.8 million to support the roll out of regional climate offices;
- €1.3 million to environmental awareness, including funding for the Community Environment Action Fund, Green Schools, the Environmental Pillar and the Irish Environmental Network of environmental NGOs; and
- €29,000 to the National Spring Clean, and the PURE Initiative covering South County Dublin/Wicklow. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the work of local

authorities funding totalling almost €869,000 was carried forward to 2021 to support the 2020 Anti-Litter Awareness Grant Scheme.

3.4 Implement a new resource efficiency strategy, based on the principles of the waste hierarchy and the circular economy, to achieve 2025-2035 obligations and targets for waste reduction and recycling.

A Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy

A Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy, which was launched in September 2020, is Ireland's new roadmap for waste planning and management. This Plan shifts focus away from waste disposal and looks instead to how we can preserve resources by creating a circular economy.

A public consultation process on the new policy was completed in February 2020 with almost 300 responses received. A Waste Action Plan Advisory Group was also established, consisting of relevant stakeholders from the economic, environmental and social sectors. The Group assisted in the compilation of the new policy by guiding strategic thinking and decision making.

The Plan outlines the contribution of the sector to the achievement of a number of other national plans and policies including the Climate Action Plan. It also matches the level of ambition being shown across the European Union through the European Green Deal, which encompasses a range of actions supporting circularity and sustainability.

The Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy sets out a range of aims and targets for the State and the measures by which these will be achieved, including increased regulation and measures across various waste areas such as Circular Economy, Municipal Waste, Consumer Protection and Citizen Engagement, Plastics and Packaging, Construction and Demolition, Textiles, Green Public Procurement and Waste Enforcement.

Circular Economy

The Programme for Government recognises that the next ten years are critical if Ireland is to address the climate and biodiversity crisis facing the world today. In addition to marking a step-change in the level of Ireland's Climate Action ambition, the Programme committed to a range of actions to support the transition to a circular economy. This included the

establishment of a Circular Economy Division and the adoption of a Circular Economy Strategy. Circular Economy work within the Department in 2020 included:

- Preparation of a high level Whole-of-Government Circular Economy Strategy which is intended to explain what the circular economy is; why Ireland needs to achieve a circular economy; and how national policy will develop further to support that goal into the future. The Strategy was launched for public consultation in 2021.
- Continued involvement in the OECD on the project 'The economics and governance of the circular economy in Ireland: a case study' which aims to support Ireland in its transition to circularity by identifying economic and governance challenges, as well as policy solutions towards the transition, in an effective and inclusive manner. Publication of the final report is expected in 2021.
- Delivery of a wide range of initiatives through the National Waste Prevention Programme (NWPP) 'Preventing Waste, Driving the Circular Economy' including those relating to the nominated priority areas of food waste; construction and demolition, plastics, agriculture, resources and raw materials and local waste prevention. Annual reports on the programme as well as videos, webinars and guidance are available at www.epa.ie. 2021 will see the further evolution of the programme to help accelerate Ireland's transition to a circular economy.

Green Government

The Green Government programme was developed by the Department in 2019 in response to a Government Decision relating to sustainable consumption which required that Government Departments and Public Bodies must lead the way in reducing our generation of single use plastics and waste. Each Government Department is tasked with completing a Resource Efficiency Action Plan (REAP) as part of this process. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic and a significant move to working from home, the Green Government programme continued in 2020 and saw increased support, webinars, reporting templates and official REAPs guidance being provided to each Department to allow them to renew their action plans in 2021.

Green Public Procurement (GPP)

Working closely with the EPA, the Department oversaw the development and provision of a Green Public Procurement (GPP) training programme for public procurement officials in 2020. The training programme will continue in 2021 and see the development of training for suppliers to the public sector. The Department also worked with the EPA on the revision of

the 2014 GPP Guidance for the Public Sector which is due for publication in 2021 and on the development of templates to measure and monitor GPP usage across Government Departments in line with DPER Circular 20/2019. Resources can be accessed at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/efa12-green-public-procurement-gpp/>.

Single-Use Plastics

Transposition and implementation of the Single-Use Plastic Directive (Directive (EU) 2019/904) will be a key deliverable for the Department in the short to medium term. Work on the transposition of the Directive commenced in 2020 and it will be transposed by July 2021. In order to meet the 90% separate collection requirement in the Directive, the Government has committed to introducing a Deposit and Return Scheme for plastic (PET) bottles and aluminium cans. The first step in this process was taken in 2020 with the launch of a first round of public consultation on the design options for a Scheme.

Extended Producer Responsibility

In 2020, Ireland's extended producer responsibility (EPR) schemes continued to operate successfully and enabled Ireland to reach our domestic and EU recycling targets. New legislation, SI 323 of 2020, introduced general minimum requirements which seek to establish a level of harmonisation to improve the transparency, governance and cost efficiency of EPR schemes. The Department initiated the implementation of these requirements through the approval renewal process of the farm plastics and packaging EPR schemes during 2020. The remaining EPR schemes (End of Life Vehicles (ELV), Tyres, WEEE and Batteries) will see these strengthened approvals in place as they fall due for renewal.

Education and Awareness

The Department continues to provide support to the Regional Waste Management Planning Offices which has allowed for the continuous development of the www.mywaste.ie web portal. Dedicated pages on the site, including downloadable resources, were added in 2020 on the management of business waste and on the anti-dumping initiative. Alongside the development of the www.mywaste.ie, a range of public information campaigns were run on various aspects of sustainable waste management.

The Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy contains a dedicated chapter on Citizen Engagement – Raising Awareness, Education and Behavioural Change. Following the

launch of the Plan in September 2020 work commenced on the various measures which will be delivered during the lifetime of the Plan.

Landfill Remediation

A total of €11.7 million was provided to Local Authorities to support landfill remediation work on 76 sites around the country in 2020. Most of these sites are old municipal landfills that operated prior to regulation and require engineering measures to ensure protection of the environment, air and water quality for local communities. A further €0.54m from the Environment Fund supported landfill closure works at Kilconnell landfill, Galway with the works contract completed in 2020.

Kildare County Council tendered for final remediation works and end use of a recreational park for the site at Kerdiffstown, which is the largest landfill remediation project in the State. The tender was awarded in October with work commencing in November 2020. The contract term is for 54 months with completion date scheduled in 2025. The contract is estimated at €19.2m (ex-VAT) and the Department is committed to supporting completion of the Kerdiffstown Landfill remediation project on an annual basis.

Diesel clean up

Remediation work at a smaller number of significant illegal landfills was also supported in 2020. Approximately €0.17 million of this funding supported the clean-up of diesel laundering site by Local Authorities.

Anti-Dumping Initiative (ADI)

€3 million was provided in support of the Anti-Dumping Initiative which resulted in the successful delivery of 304 projects across all 31 local authority areas. Delivery of the scheme was co-ordinated by the three Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authorities (WERLAs) and supported projects were selected on the basis of their impact on four key criteria - prevention, abatement, enforcement and awareness.

3.5 Ensure that adequate contingency waste management infrastructure capacity is available to mitigate risks to the effective management of waste

The Department continues to engage with the three Regional Waste Management Planning Offices and other environmental regulatory bodies on the issue of managing residual municipal solid waste and construction and demolition waste.

3.6 Ensure the conservation and sustainable development of our inland fish stocks

Total Expenditure in 2020: €32.9m

Current, €29.8m Capital, €3.1m

Outputs		Target	Delivered	100%
1	No. of inspections of Recreational Anglers for licence and/or permit	15,000	13,487	89.9%
2	No. of inspections of Other Recreational Anglers (non-licensed anglers - coarse, pike, trout and sea anglers)	15,000	16,247	108.3%
3	No. of fines issued/fixed charge notices	180	240	133.3%
4	No. of prosecutions concluded	75	60	80.0%
5	No. of angling structures actioned (either repaired, replaced or removed) following audit	350	386 ³	110.3%
6	Production of peer-reviewed scientific Publications	12	12	100.0%
Impacts		2020	2019	2018
1	No. of rivers assessed as part of the annual salmon management programme	144	144	143
2	No. of recreational salmon angling licence sales	14,171	17,281	16,755
3	No. of commercial salmon licence sales	85	85	125

The Department continued to implement Government policy to fully align the management of the wild salmon fishery with scientific advice and, to this end, a total of ten bye-laws and two Statutory Instruments were introduced taking cognisance of individual stock levels. A suite of regulations ahead of the 2021 salmon season was put in place by the end of 2020.

Implementation of the national eel management plan continued. Measures undertaken included operations for the trapping and transporting of eels around ESB hydro-stations on the Shannon, the Lee and the Erne and the undertaking of scientific sampling.

The majority of funds under the National Strategy for Angling Development (NSAD), Inland Fisheries Ireland's (IFI) capital grants scheme for angling infrastructure, were allocated over recent years. The scheme closed for applications following the round of allocations in 2020. The final tranche of NSAD funding was allocated to projects which will likely take another year or two to be fully completed. To date, almost €2million has been invested in the sector in capital projects designed to improve angling infrastructure and access including access for

anglers with a disability. Much of this work was contributed to by angling stakeholders and a range of other voluntary groups.

In 2020, 21 development projects with a total value of close to €363,000 were approved for funding by the Board of IFI.

3.7 Provide high quality and reliable geoscience information, through programmes such as INFOMAR and TELLUS, in support of the sustainable development of natural resources, environmental protection and spatial planning

INFOMAR (National Marine Mapping Programme)

In 2020 the INFOMAR programme completed 9,406 km² of seabed mapping to reach 62% completion, which is ahead of the targeted 58%. Near-shore mapping focussed on the south coast, mainly off counties Cork and Kerry, using five Geological Survey Ireland inshore mapping vessels: RV Keary, RV Mallet, RV LIR, RV Geo and RV Galtee. Offshore mapping was undertaken by Marine Institute vessels in the Celtic Sea, mainly off Cork. In addition UAV/drone-based mapping is being deployed to acquire data in intertidal areas.

Shipwrecks continue to be investigated and recorded as part of INFOMAR mapping, working in conjunction with National Monuments Underwater Archaeology Unit (UAU). In 2020 a total of 39 shipwreck surveys were carried out, including three resurveys of known wrecks (Lusitania, City of London and La Surveillante).

In 2020, a new Data Viewer was developed to allow access and download of shallow geophysical (sub-bottom profiler) data. This information, routinely acquired by INFOMAR vessels but not previously as readily available is of particular interest to those seeking to develop off shore, including the Offshore Renewable Energy industry. In addition, a new module on Seabed Mapping was delivered as part of the Maynooth University MSc in Earth Observation.

The data and knowledge gathered under the INFOMAR programme is utilised in a range of areas including: marine safety and charting; offshore energy; aquaculture; coastal protection; environmental protection; shipwreck heritage; marine tourism, emerging Blue Carbon analyses and research.

TELLUS

The Tellus airborne geophysical survey was completed over south central Ireland (Kilkenny, Laois, Tipperary, Waterford), totalling an area of 3,000 sq.km. The programme was behind the 6,000 sq.km target due to COVID-19 delays to the start of field operations, but has now reached 74% of airborne completion. Ground geochemical sampling resumed with surveys in Wicklow and Kildare, utilising a newly developed digital data capture method to improve efficiency and data accuracy.

In July, a suite of geophysical data for the southeast was released, while in October new soil geochemistry data results were released, reaching the milestone of 50% of national coverage completed.

In terms of added value projects, work continued on the Terra Soil project with Teagasc, examining development of agricultural services from Tellus data and materials. In addition further work was carried out on the new Earth Surface Resource Laboratory with Trinity College Dublin, which will launch in 2021.

Groundwater Programme

Groundwater mapping and assessment focussed on a joint project with Irish Water, the Group Water Sector and EPA to identify and characterise groundwater resources that should play a role in providing sustainable drinking water, especially in the face of climate change impacts. The project uniquely works on a surface water catchment basis to make the most of available quantitative water balance data, and also to better serve Irish Water, Water Framework Directive (WFD) assessments and abstraction licensing assessments. In 2020, 15 Aquifer Catchment Reports were produced, focussed on the Leinster area.

Groundwater and Turlough Flooding Programme

The initial phase of the Groundwater and Turlough Flooding Project resulted in the publication of karst groundwater flood maps (historic and predictive), which directly support OPW's commitments under the EU Floods Directive. The publication of the maps is accompanied by the project report and a web portal linked to live hydrometric water level data from the 18 permanent monitoring stations, all of which were operational by end 2020.

An advisory service has also been developed to assist Local Authorities in relation to Groundwater and Turlough Flooding issues.

The work of the Geological Survey Ireland in these programme areas was also communicated to the public through being featured on the RTÉ television series '*10 Things to Know about Flooding & Drought*' in 2020.

Geoscience Initiatives

During 2020, extensive mapping, data gathering and related geoscience work was carried out across the country. Key publications and by Geological Survey Ireland included:

- Data-rich 1:50k map and data package for the Cork GeoUrban area to support development and planning decisions was published.
- Updated subsoils mapping for east Galway published.
- Co. Wexford Geoheritage Audit report was launched with Wexford County Council and the Heritage Council.
- A new 3D geological model viewer was launched online.

Geotourism

A new project was initiated to develop an application for a UNESCO Global Geopark in the Joyce Country and Western Lake s area of north Galway and south Mayo. Partners include Galway and Mayo County Councils and Údarás na Gaeltachta. The initial phase of the project runs until end 2021 and is funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development.

Geohazards

Coastal Erosion: Geological Survey Ireland continued working on a new Coastal Erosion project with the European Space Agency to develop remote monitoring and mapping. This is also complemented by on-going work on the development of Coastal Vulnerability Mapping (CVI) based on the methodology developed between Geological Survey Ireland and Maynooth University. Both initiatives support Geological Survey Ireland's participation in the new Interdepartmental Coastal Change Strategy Group launched in late 2020.

Landslides: Geological Survey Ireland maintained and updated the National Landslide Database and landslide Susceptibility Mapping in 2020. It also provided assistance to two local authorities where significant landslides/peat failures took place during the year, including provision of data, co-ordination of follow up research and data acquisition and attendance at committees set up to deal with the incidents.

Geoscience Ireland

In 2020, member companies in the Geoscience Ireland Business cluster, mostly SMEs, increased to 42, and added net 69 jobs, despite difficulties in the sector due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The programme, which is delivered with Enterprise Ireland, also published a report 'The Formation and Maintenance of a Successful Business Cluster' which was launched in May 2020.

Geoscience Research

In 2020, Geological Survey Ireland's Research Programme supported a further 23 new projects for a total of 55 projects underway at year end. This included collaborations and co-funding with Irish and EU research bodies to result in an effective leverage of more than twice the research budget invested.

3.8 Foster the sustainable and productive exploration and development of Ireland's hydrocarbon resources under a robust, modern and transparent regulatory framework

Mineral Exploration and Mining: Policy Statement

Initial work on developing a policy statement for mineral exploration and mining was undertaken in 2020 with the intention to publish a draft policy statement for public consultation in 2021. The policy statement will set out the important role that the sector will play in contributing to national, European and international targets and commitments, including the transition to a circular economy and net zero carbon emissions.

A Social, Environmental and Economic Assessment of Galmoy and Lisheen Mines

The Department commissioned an independent study of the Social, Environmental and Economic Assessment of Galmoy mine in Co Kilkenny and Lisheen mine in Co Tipperary. These were the first mines in Ireland to be opened under modern mining, planning and environmental regulations.

The study, which was published in 2020, assessed the impact of the mine on the local communities.

According to the study, both mines contributed to public finances, including royalties, corporation tax, PRSI and PAYE. Galmoy contributed over €60 million, while contributions from Lisheen were much higher, at over €250 million over the duration of the mining activities.

Avoca

A public safety concern was identified during the monitoring of the Avoca legacy mine site and specifically at the 850 Adit⁴ at the end of 2019. This required specialist emergency repairs to be undertaken during 2020 at a cost of in excess of €900,000.

ObSERVE Programme

The ObSERVE research programme was commenced in 2014, with the aim of enhancing our knowledge and understanding of protected species and sensitive habitats offshore Ireland. This project will consist of multi-year Aerial surveys and high quality data collection that will support numerous policy and scientific objectives. An outreach programme to promote the programme continued in 2020, with participation at the 2020 BT Young Scientist Exhibition at the beginning of the year.

Geothermal Energy

Plans for developing a modern, robust policy and regulatory framework to support the increased use of geothermal energy in Ireland were advanced in 2020 with the publication of two papers, available at gov.ie

- An Assessment of Geothermal Energy for District Heating in Ireland; and
- Geothermal Energy in Ireland: A roadmap for a policy and regulatory framework.

The roadmap sets out the next steps in developing the framework, including the publication of a policy statement in 2021.

⁴ An adit is an entrance to an underground mine which is horizontal or nearly horizontal, by which the mine can be entered, drained of water, ventilated, and minerals extracted at the lowest convenient level.



Goal 4: Governance and Regulation

Be the best in class in creating the policy direction and the regulatory environment for our sectors, so as to ensure good governance, competitive markets, diversity, innovation and sustainable practices.

4 Goal 4: Governance

4.1 Ensure that the Irish regulatory framework is robust and clear, is in line with EU obligations, international best practice and promotes certainty, investment and sustainability, while delivering for citizens

2020 National Waste Enforcement Priorities

The National Waste Enforcement Steering Committee (NWESC) advises the Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authorities (WERLAs) and local authorities on strategic national waste enforcement priorities and provides guidance on how best to deal with serious criminal offences, including cross border issues and major illegal dumping in the State.

The WERLAs monitored progress made on agreed 2020 priorities throughout the year and provided interim updates on performance to the NWESC. A final report on progress made will be included in the WERLA Annual report for 2020 which will be published in 2021 and made available at <http://www.werla.ie/annual-report/>.

Local Authority Enforcement Measures Grant Scheme

The Department provides funding to support the provision of local authority waste enforcement staff under the Local Authority Enforcement Waste Measures Grant Scheme, with the intention of maintaining a visible presence of waste enforcement personnel on the ground. Over €7.6m was provided in support of the scheme in 2020 to support the recruitment and retention of 150 local authority waste enforcement staff across the country.

Development of New Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authority Structures

Local authorities are primarily responsible for the enforcement of waste management legislation in respect of illegal dumping and are assisted in their efforts by three Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authorities (WERLAs) covering the Southern, Eastern-Midlands and Connacht-Ulster Regions. Work continued during 2020 on the enhancement of the role, capacity and responsibilities of the WERLAs in order to position the local authority sector to better respond to emerging and priority enforcement challenges.

Kimberley Process

The Kimberley Process is an international trade regime consisting of governments, the diamond industry and NGOs with the goal of preventing the trade of conflict diamonds. As a participant in the Kimberley Process anyone wishing to import or export rough diamonds into or out of the EU must do so through a designated Kimberley Process Union Authority and comply with the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme. The Minister was designated through regulations as such an Authority in 2020.

While the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions resulted in limited access to the Kimberley Certificates and the tools to issue them, the Department continued to deal with all requests for export certificates and the impact was not significant.

Offshore Oil and Gas

The Programme for Government contains a commitment to end the issuing of new licences for the exploration and extraction of gas, on the same basis as the decision taken in September 2019 by the previous government in relation to oil exploration and extraction. The Minister made the Programme for Government commitment effective immediately: the Department no longer accepts new applications for exploration licences for natural gas or oil, nor will there be any future licensing rounds. This will be given legislative effect in 2021 as part of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill.

Gas Production

Corrib gas production met 36% of Ireland's gas demand in the 2019/2020 gas year (October 2019 to September 2020), with the Inch (Kinsale) and Moffat entry points providing the remaining 3% and 61% respectively. The Kinsale area gas fields (incorporating the Kinsale Head, Southwest Kinsale, Ballycotton and Seven Heads gas fields) ceased production in July 2020 after 42 years of operation. Following the cessation of production the decommissioning of wells and subsea infrastructure, for which Ministerial consent was granted in 2019, commenced.

Ministerial consent was granted in 2020 to an application for the decommissioning of certain facilities within the Kinsale Head Petroleum Lease area, which covers the complete removal of the offshore platform jackets (legs).

Exploration

A total of 13 Exploration Licences and 2 Licensing Options were relinquished during 2020 and no new petroleum authorisations were granted.

No consents for exploration activities were granted during 2020. Consent was granted to three applications for activities under Petroleum Leases – a rig site clearance survey in the Kinsale Head and Seven Heads leasehold areas; a shallow geological survey around the Kinsale Head production platforms; and an offshore pipeline survey and inspection & maintenance programme of offshore facilities related to the Corrib gas field.

Minerals

In 2020, Ireland ranked as Europe's 4th largest producer of zinc metal in concentrate and the 17th largest producer in the world. In addition, Ireland was Europe's 9th largest producer of lead metal in concentrate and 27th in the world.

There are currently 16 extant State Mining Leases/Licences for lead, zinc, gypsum, marble and fireclay. Two mines operated in Ireland in 2020; a lead-zinc mine at Navan, Co. Meath (the largest zinc mine in Europe), and a gypsum operation in Co. Monaghan. Approximately 600 people are directly employed in mining activities, along with additional contract staff.

67 Prospecting Licences were granted in 2020. At the end of 2020, there were 490 Prospecting Licences, held by approximately 45 mineral exploration companies, compared to 542 licences at the end of 2019.

The Department continued to monitor mining activities to ensure compliance with the conditions of State Mining Licences and Leases and adherence to best practice

Direct expenditure invested by prospecting licence holders in working on their licence areas amounted to over €15 million in 2020. Zinc and lead are the main minerals being explored for in Ireland; other minerals of interest include gold, silver, copper, lithium and barite.

The Celtic Interconnector Project

The Celtic Interconnector project is a proposed 575km long (500 subsea), 700MW electricity cable linking Ireland and France, at a cost of €1 billion. It is jointly proposed by EirGrid and the French transmission system operator, Réseau de Transport d'Électricité (RTÉ). In December 2020 the EU approved a grant of €530m towards the construction of the Celtic Interconnector. The grant was secured through the EU PCI process, meaning that it is an energy infrastructure project of the highest EU priority.

Extensive planning by EirGrid and a period of public consultation took place between November 2019 and February 2020 with regard to the development of interconnector infrastructure, following which decisions were reached on the interconnector's location in East Cork. A further decision was arrived at by EirGrid regarding the establishment of an enhanced community benefit scheme for impacted communities.

The Department continues to advocate for the inclusion of the project on the 5th EU Projects of Common Interest (PCI) list which will be established in Q4 2021, as well as fulfilling any requirements on behalf of the Member State under the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) grant agreement.

Policy Statement on the Importation of Fracked Gas

The Department continued to work closely with the Office of the Attorney General to implement the commitments in the Programme for Government on the establishment of a Policy Statement outlining Ireland's approach to fracked gas.

The Greenlink Interconnector

The Greenlink Interconnector is a 170km long, 500MW interconnector which will run from Pembroke, Wales to Great Island, Wexford.

Greenlink continues to progress and the planning applications were submitted in December 2020. The planning process is expected to be completed in 2021 with construction scheduled to begin in Q4 2021 if planning permission is granted.

National Smart Metering Programme

The National Smart Metering Programme is co-ordinated by the Commission for the Regulation of Utilities (CRU) with ESB Networks delivering the electricity meter rollout. This rollout commenced in September 2019, and over 239,000 meters had been installed to the end of December 2020.

Clean Energy Package

The EU Commission's Clean Energy Package for All Europeans sets out the EU electricity model for the next ten years. The Electricity Directive, which is part of the Clean Energy Package was transposed over the period to 2015. In 2020, transposition was progressed as regards several new obligations within the Directive and work is ongoing to transpose the remaining elements of the Directive, in keeping with a phased approach to its transposition.

Energy Security of Supply

The Department continued to participate in various working groups on energy security of supply and participated in a number of emergency response exercises conducted by both Gas and Electricity Transmission System Operators. This included:

- A Blackstart Emergency Communications Plan (BECPP) Exercise ran by Eirgrid to test its communications protocol in the event of an electricity emergency.
- A National Gas Emergency Exercise, ran by Gas Networks Ireland, simulating a gas supply deficit at Moffat, Scotland. This exercise was run in parallel with a national gas emergency exercise in Great Britain run by National Grid UK.

Oil Security of Supply

The Department continued to ensure the States oil security in 2020, providing oversight of the National Oil Reserves Agency (NORA) and their management of the States strategic oil reserve, equivalent to 90 days of net imports.

The Department updated contingency plans to allow for Government to respond to a major oil emergency in the State, in order to safeguard the well-being and safety of the general public in the event of the occurrence of serious oil emergency.

Research funding

The EPA provides a national coordination function for publicly funded climate change-related research in Ireland. The Department engages with the EPA research programme, for which there was a budget of €8.1 million in 2020. At the end of 2020 EPA was managing 230 on-going research projects covering topics in climate, water, health, waste, air, biodiversity, behavioural change and engagement. In the same period, the EPA published 54 research output reports and a second annual report of national climate research activities for the Climate Research Coordination Group.

The EPA research sought leading national academics to act as authors of the first Five Year Assessment Report (valued at €1.43M) in October 2020. This report will inform national Climate Action Planning and specifics for future policy interventions in climate adaptation and mitigation.

The EPA was part of a consortium that were successful in bidding for a €10M EU LIFE funded project to undertake enhanced restoration on former industrial bog harvesting sites.

Brexit

The Department participated in Brexit preparedness and contingency planning, covering key policy areas within the Department's remit, including energy markets and trade, environment, inland fisheries, communications and broadcasting.

The Department was responsible for a discrete part of the legislative provisions under Part VI of the Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union (Consequential Provisions) Act 2020 which dealt with the Fluorinated Gas Sector.

The provision for the Single Electricity Market (SEM) in the European Union (Consequential Provisions) Act 2019 Act was repealed following the ratification of the Withdrawal Agreement. This Agreement explicitly provided for the SEM in the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol 2020.

The EU and UK agreed the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) on 30 December 2020. This Agreement includes an Energy Title which includes a process for the development of replacement electricity trading arrangements which is intended to be finalised by April 2022. The Single Electricity Market continues to operate since 1 January 2021. The energy provisions of the TCA are broad in nature and provide for a range of cooperation obligations and the prospect of detailed arrangements being made between the parties at specified times in the future.

4.2 Ensure effective Governance and Oversight of the State Bodies operating under the aegis of the Department

The Department was responsible for 17 commercial, non-commercial and regulatory bodies prior to the transfer of functions in September 2020. A streamlined approach to corporate governance has been introduced across a number of areas relevant to State bodies, including appointments to State Boards, processing requests for Ministerial consents, developing appropriate oversight arrangements and financial monitoring. This approach to governance is helping to ensure that the relationship between the Department and its agencies is consistent and reflects best practice.

Governance arrangements are set out in the various statutes underpinning the State bodies and the 2016 Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies. The Department undertakes work annually to verify that its State bodies are in compliance with the Code.

Gender Balance on State Boards and Statutory Committees

Appointments to the State Boards and Statutory Committees under the aegis of the Department fall into a number of categories which include Government, Ministerial, Ex-Officio and Elected Employee Representatives.

During 2020, 28 appointments were made, of which 68% were men and 32% were women. Appointments to RTÉ and TG4 are included in this statistic; however these bodies, along with the BAI, transferred under the aegis of the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media in September 2020.

At 31st December 2020 the average gender balance in the serving membership of the bodies under the Department was 66% male and 34% female. Overall, by year-end, five bodies under the Department had met the Government target of 40% female representation in terms of serving members, and efforts will continue to address those bodies which have yet to meet the target.

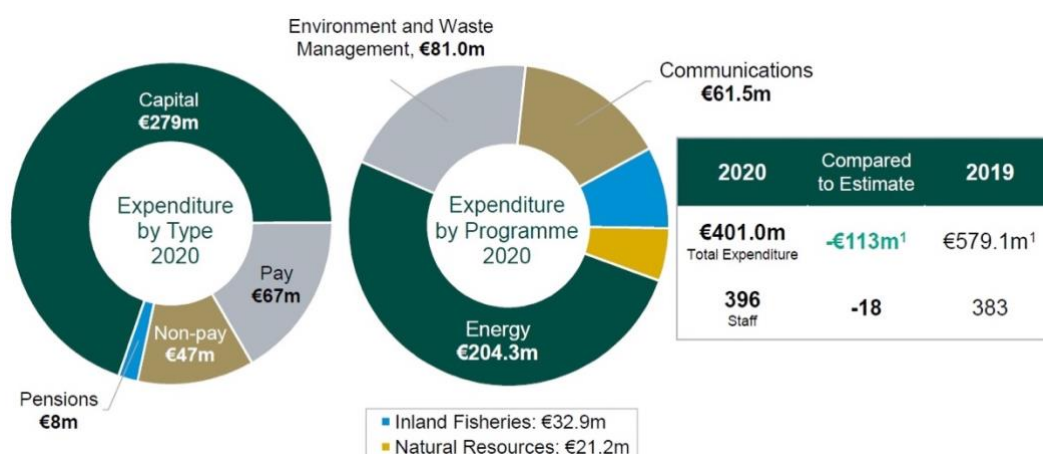
The Department will implement the recommendations of the Interdepartmental Group on Gender Balance on State Boards to promote better gender balance on the Bodies under its aegis.

4.3 The Departments Corporate Centre

The Department's corporate centre supports the Department's line divisions in achieving their sectoral business objectives and underpins the implementation of the Public Service Reform agenda and the Civil Service Renewal Plan, as well as the delivery of overall organisational effectiveness.

Financial resources:

The financial output for 2020 is as follows:



Workforce Planning

The Department's Workforce Plan was updated in 2019 and continued to form the basis of external recruitment and internal promotion competitions into 2020. These were designed to ensure that the Department can deliver key priorities in accordance with agreed timescales.

The Department continued to proactively engage with Civil Service Renewal and Reform in terms of HR initiatives, shared services and ICT enhancements. This included management of service level agreements with shared services for HR and Payroll and Learning & Development.

Attendance Management Policy

The Department's lost time rate for sick leave of 2.1% in 2020 is within the overall target rate of 3.5% across the Civil Service.

Performance Management

The Department continued to promote awareness and importance of the completion of all stages of the ePMDS across the Department and to support line managers, where necessary. The completion rate for PMDS within the Department in 2020 was 87%.

Learning and Development

The Department continued to implement a systematic approach to the analysis of Learning & Development needs and the prioritisation, planning, recording and evaluation of solutions, primarily through:

- the Learning & Development team;
- the continued implementation of Learning & Development educational support policies and procedures;
- close collaboration with OneLearning, the central Learning & Development Unit for the Civil Service;
- the One Learning, Learning Management system (LMS); and
- regular communication with staff on the changes through e-mails, online newsletter, intranet Learning & Development knowledge page, and presentation at grade fora and employee engagement workshops.

Protected Disclosure Policy and Guidelines document

In 2020, the Department's Protected Disclosure Policy and Guidelines were available to staff on the Intranet.

Communications

The Communications and Media Relations Division (CMRD) works to support central Government communications campaigns and activities. It also serves to provide a professional, best practice communications service to the Department.

Despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department delivered on several high profile initiatives and consultations throughout 2020, supported by CMRD communications and media campaigns.

In 2020 the Department also expanded its presence on social media platforms, and grew the reach and engagement of posts across Twitter and LinkedIn. This was underpinned by the development of a digital and social strategy that will target further social media growth into 2021.

Internal Communications and Staff Engagement

Internal communications was particularly crucial in 2020 as a means of maintaining contact with staff, keeping remote teams informed and connected, and supporting the wellbeing of staff. The Department's weekly newsletter was an important tool in keeping teams connected and sharing both business and informal news and updates. Health and wellbeing is a central focus, and staff talks and workshops were held on a regular basis. The Communications and HR teams worked closely with various staff fora to identify opportunities for facilitating more engagement across the Department. The Department's Intranet was leveraged to enable better communications, utilising video, podcast and print content to keep staff connected and informed.

Despite remote working, the Department also recorded an 85% response rate to the 2020 Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey, demonstrating strong engagement across the organisation.

ICT

From March 2020, the Department advised all staff to work from home until further notice in response to Government actions arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Information Systems Division (ISD) in conjunction with our shared service delivery partner, the

Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), supported staff working from home in the following ways:

- Provided all staff with full ICT functionality by remote access to our systems using secure Remote Desktop application;
- Laptops and peripherals distributed to staff for use at home;
- Rollout and administration of the web based video conferencing software (Zoom and WebEx) to staff to support remote communications.

Freedom of Information (FOI)

A total of 207 FOI requests and 44 AIE requests were processed during 2020.

Appendices



Appendix I: 2020 Legislation

Bills enacted

National Oil Reserves Agency (Amendment) and Provision of Central Treasury Services Act 2020, 29 July 2020

Statutory Instruments

S.I. Number	Title
23 of 2020	European Union (Restriction of Certain Hazardous Substances in Electrical and Electronic Equipment) (Amendment) Regulations 2020
56 of 2020	Electricity Regulation Act 1999 (Public Service Obligations) (Amendment) Order 2020
63 of 2020	Control of Fishing for Salmon Order 2020
82 of 2020	European Union (End-of-Life Vehicles) (Amendment) Regulations 2020
83 of 2020	European Union (Internal Market in Natural Gas) Regulations 2020.
122 of 2020	Wireless Telegraphy (Temporary Electronic Communications services Licences) Regulations 2020
130 of 2020	European Union (Waste Management) (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2020
189 of 2020	Environmental Protection Agency (Integrated Pollution Control) (Licensing) (Amendment) Regulations 2020.
190 of 2020	Environmental Protection Agency (Industrial Emissions) (Licensing) (Amendment) Regulations 2020.
191 of 2020	European Union (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Environmental Protection Agency Act 1992) (Amendment) Regulations 2020
264 of 2020	European Union (Restriction of Certain Hazardous Substances in Electronic Equipment) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2020
321 of 2020	European Union (Landfill) Regulations 2020
322 of 2020	European Union (Packaging) Regulations 2020
323 of 2020	European Union (Waste Directive) Regulations 2020
342 of 2020	European Union (Electricity Risk Preparedness) Regulations 2020
358 of 2020	European Union (Accessibility of Websites and Mobile Applications of Public Sector Bodies) Regulations 2020
365 of 2020	European Union (Renewable Energy) Regulations 2020
407 of 2020	Wireless Telegraphy (Further Temporary Electronic Communications services Licences) Regulations 2020

433 of 2020	European Union (Cross-Border Parcel Delivery Services) Regulations 2020
500 of 2020	Electricity Regulation Act 1999 (Public Service Obligations) (Amendment) (No. 2) Order 2020
524 of 2020	European Union (Renewable Energy) (Amendment) Regulations 2020
667 of 2020	Wild Salmon and Sea Trout Tagging Scheme (Amendment) Regulations 2020
668 of 2020	European Union (Retail Charges for Regulated Intra-EU Communications) Regulations 2020
704 of 2020	European Union (Internal Market in Electricity) (Regulatory Authority Matters) Regulations 2020
738 of 2020	Waste Management (Prohibition of Waste Disposal by Burning) (Amendment) Regulations 2020
745 of 2020	European Union (Security of Natural Gas Supply) Regulations 2020
755 of 2020	European Union (Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading) (Amendment) Regulations 2020

Inland Fisheries bye-laws

Bye-Law Number	Title
331 of 2020	Conservation of Salmon and Sea Trout (Closed Rivers)
979 of 2020	Conservation of Salmon and Sea Trout (Draft Nets and Snap Nets)
980 of 2020	Fermoy Weir Angling (No. 4 or Lismore District) (Munster Blackwater)
981 of 2020	Control of Sea Angling Methods for certain species of fish
982 of 2020	Angling Bye-law
983 of 2020	Conservation of Salmon and Sea Trout (Bag limits) of 2020
984 of 2020	Conservation of Salmon and Sea Trout (Catch and Release)
985 of 2020	Conservation of Salmon and Sea Trout (River Slaney)
986 of 2020	Conservation of Salmon and Sea Trout (River Suir)
987 of 2020	Conservation of Sea Trout

Appendix II: 2020 Green Public Procurement Report

In line with Circular 20/2019 Promoting the use of *Environmental and Social Considerations in Public Procurement*, details of procurement contracts valued greater than €25,000, signed in calendar year 2020, that include green criteria which are designed to ensure that the product or service procured will have a reduced impact on the environment are set out below:

Reference year 2020	A. Total number of contracts issued over €25,000 by priority sector	B. Total value of contracts issued over €25,000 by priority sector	C. Total number of contracts issued over €25,000 by priority sector which have incorporated GPP	D. Total value of contracts issued over €25,000 by priority sector which have incorporated GPP
Transport (road transport vehicles and services)	2	€212,959	2	€212,959
Construction (materials and site management)	-	-	-	-
Energy (electricity, combined heat and power and lighting)	1	€180,000	-	-
Food & Catering Services	-	-	-	-
Cleaning Products & Services	-	-	-	-
Textiles	-	-	-	-
IT Equipment (desktops, laptops and displays)	1	€500,000	1	€500,000
Paper	-	-	-	-
Other: Consultancy Services Framework for Environmental Assessments	1	€300,000	1	€300,000
Totals	5	€1,192,959	4	€1,012,959

Appendix III: Petroleum Authorisations

A total of 30 petroleum authorisations were extant at 31 December 2020. These comprised:

- 3 Petroleum Leases
- 4 Lease Undertakings
- 19 Exploration Licences (of which 2 were subject to follow-on authorisation applications)
- 2 Licensing Options (of which 2 were subject to follow-on authorisation applications)
- 2 Petroleum Prospecting Licences

One new petroleum authorisation, a Petroleum Prospecting Licence (PPL), was granted during 2020. Details of this new offshore authorisation are set out in the following table:

Authorisation No.	Authorisation Type	Licensee(s)
PPL 1/20	Petroleum Prospecting Licence	Woodside Energy (Ireland) Pty

Appendix IV: Bodies under the aegis of the Department Communications



Energy



Environment and Climate Action



Natural Resources



- Mining Board
- Irish National Petroleum Corporation (INPC)