

# National Policy Statement on the Bioeconomy

## Summary of main issues arising from consultation process July - September 2017

### *Introduction*

As part of the process to develop the National Policy Statement on the Bioeconomy, the Department of the Taoiseach held a public consultation process inviting submissions to inform drafting of the Statement.

This open consultation ran from 28 July to 15 September 2017 over which time 52 submissions were received from a wide range of stakeholders, including industry, academia, the public sector and members of the public.

To ensure stakeholders were informed about the consultation, the Department issued a press release and undertook a targeted awareness campaign.

A discussion document detailing ten key questions/issues arising in relation to the Policy Statement was used to guide the consultation process. A summary of the feedback and inputs received under each of these questions/issues is outlined below.

### *1. Definition of Bio-Economy*

Whilst several submissions concurred with the definition offered in the discussion document, others considered it limiting from one of two perspectives:

- it did not pay sufficient attention to **ecological concerns**, presuming that sustainability would be automatically engendered by a shift toward the bio-economy and neglecting how this might negatively impact on the environment;
- insufficient regard to **bio-technology** and the associated research strategies which develop this. Underplaying the role of biotechnology entails that undue emphasis is played on lower-value chains based around the use of waste and associated residues.

The Teagasc submission presented three different ideal visions for the bio-economy:

***A bio-technology vision***, which highlights biotechnology research and its application in different sectors;

***A bio-resource vision***, with a focus on the development of new value chains that process and upgrade biological raw material;

***A bio-ecology vision*** which highlights sustainability and ecological processes.

Although the vision of the bio-economy within the discussion document draws upon the bio-resource ideal, it is not incompatible with the others. As the bio-resources vision incorporates sectors in which Ireland already has a comparative advantage such as agriculture and food, and include spatial focus regarding rural/peripheral regions, it is reasonable that this ideal, drawing upon the others, would be most appropriate for Ireland.

## ***2. How can a high-level policy statement on the bioeconomy assist in progressing the development of the priority value chains identified?***

Many submissions saw the role of a national statement as offering an opportunity for greater specificity in terms of clear objectives and definitions, targets and timeframes. Others cautioned against using a National Statement to base targets on the value chains identified by the Bio-Éire projects on the basis that this may neglect more longer-term value chains which are currently uncertain.

Some submissions noted the importance of regional variation and adaptability whilst others called for recognition of particular products such as sustainable renewable gas or a national development fund for the valorisation of waste streams

## ***3. What lessons can Ireland take from the European approach, including to the Circular Economy?***

Denmark was mentioned as an example of increased coordination and synergy among initiatives and projects dealing with the bioeconomy.

The European commission is presenting its review of the European Bioeconomy Strategy and Action Plan on 16 November.

It was suggested that the bioeconomy might be considered in the context of the UN sustainable development goals.

Innovations such as Italy's banning of plastic bags mentioned.

## ***4. Given the cross-sector nature of the bioeconomy, how can a national policy statement best support development?***

Combination of support for the introduction of specific targets such as one for use of bio-based products over fossil-based and others tending to be more sector agnostic whilst recognising certain constraints.

Greater emphasis on cross-sectoral approaches and barriers that exist to co-operation between institutions whilst also supporting community engagement, e.g. development of wood by-products (Coillte) with alum sludge (Irish Water) and farming sector (Teagasc) to develop filters for agricultural drainage.

Support market development by recognition of need to enable scale-up from lab to demonstration scale

Issues around waste management and related legislation

***5. Can we identify a common set of principles, including in particular the application of the cascading principle, which will assist in the development of both the bioeconomy and circular economy?***

Some submissions concurred with the principles put forward, other suggested sustainability should be a cardinal one (with effects on natural capital incorporated), whilst others considered that the diversity within the bioeconomy sector didn't facilitate a one size fits all hierarchy.

A few submissions considered that a hierarchy for organic material streams should be defined which would set out what should be prevented and what could be promoted for further use.

***6. How can a national policy statement support local and regional cooperation around the use of renewable biological resources?***

Elaborate on comparative advantage accruing to certain regions, e.g. seaweed in coastal areas, animal feed in the midlands. Any high level targets should recognise this kind of diversity but proceeding this way could lay the basis for synergies.

The Environmental Protection Agency suggested identifying mechanisms to enable local action by bio-economy hubs which might be geographical or based on key value streams such as pharma/chem. This might include access to funding

***7. How can waste policy, including an examination of the definition of waste, best support developments in the bio and wider circular economy?***

A policy statement could benefit from some guiding principles centring initially on key value streams, which would identify straightforward examples of legitimate circular/bio-economy activities that could guide both potential applicants and regulatory bodies. In so doing, this would address the issue of waste classification being a barrier to further valorisation of waste which was raised by several submissions.

Other issues raised were a green procurement programme and promotion of the Renewable Heating Initiative.

***8. How can we stimulate market demand for bioeconomy products? What is in it for the consumer?***

The following issues were mentioned:

- Clear labelling and material passports;
- Awareness campaigns of the significance of the bioeconomy; use of standards to promote such goods;
- Carbon tax on fossil based products;
- Incentives for bio-based product producers via public procurement; and
- VAT reduction for based and biodegradable products

***9. What is the most appropriate mechanism to coordinate development and monitor progress?***

The approach to implementation adopted by Foodwise 2025 (DAFM) and the Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan (DCCAE) provide proactive approaches which could be adopted. In these cases, a lead department establishes an inter-departmental implementation group chaired by the Minister. Other submissions believed that any such working group should be chaired by D/Taoiseach.

***10. Are there any other issues to be addressed through a national policy statement?***

The following issues were raised in the submissions

- Important not to create a bio-economy that exploits and depletes natural environment, i.e. based on sustainability.
- Brexit and all-island nature of bioeconomy neglected.
- Omission of waste water from priority value-chains noted.
- Lack of a forum to bring actors together
- More on supporting start-ups/small businesses including sustainable financing
- insufficient consideration of the potential for production of high value bio-products
- Role that the bioeconomy plays in rural Ireland should be further emphasised in the national policy statement.