



Comhairle Contae Thiobraid Árann
Tipperary County Council

National Policy Statement on the Bio-Economy

Submission by Tipperary County Council

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1.0 Introduction

Tipperary County Council welcomes the preparation of a National Policy Statement on the Bio-Economy and looks forward to actively participating in the delivery of a Policy which embraces the opportunities offered by the bio-economy.

In preparing this submission, full regard has been had to the views and opinions expressed by the Elected Members of Tipperary County Council in its County Development Plan(s), and its Renewable Energy Strategy. These documents are outward looking, nationally and spatially focused, and informed by a strong evidence base of the strengths of our economy, our communities and our natural resources. The Council trusts that the submission will positively and proactively contribute to the preparation of a new National Policy Statement.

2.0 Ireland's Bio-Economy and Tipperary

The bio-economy may be simply defined as the sustainable use of our natural resources from traditional sectors (e.g. agriculture, forestry and marine) and non-traditional (e.g. food waste) to produce high value products. Natural resources are finite, and the development of the bio-economy is a European response to ensure we meet future global food supply requirements, ensure sufficient supplies of raw materials, energy and industrial products under decreasing fossil resources. The development of bio-economy is supported by the EU Bioeconomy Strategy and Horizon 2020. Ireland's comparative advantages in sustainable bio-resources provide a unique opportunity for Ireland to be a leader of this sector at an international level. Moreover, the EU anticipates that the value of this market could grow considerably by 2025¹. This will provide significant opportunities for job creation in rural Ireland where our bio-recourses can be harnessed. The National Policy Statement on the Bio-economy should, in this respect recognize the opportunities, identify the importance and support the development of this sector, especially to the economies of rural areas.

The development of the bio-economy in Ireland requires integrated cooperation between multiple stakeholders i.e. industry, research, policy makers, government agencies, NGOs, consumers, consumer groups and business associations. Tipperary is already leading the way at a national level, in that it has become a 'European Model Demonstrator Region of the Bio-Economy' and as such is positioned to drive research and development of Ireland's new bio-economy. This work is focused in Lisheen, where a 1,400 acre brownfield site has been identified. Equally important work is on-going within third level institutions in Tipperary and in the former Sugar Factory in Thurles.

The Elected Members of Tipperary County Council in the North and South Tipperary County Development Plans, have included policies in support of the bio-economy.

Policy CEF2 Bioenergy of the Plans states that *"It is the policy of the Council to support the development of the bioenergy sector for energy production, heat storage and distribution whilst balancing the need for new development with the protection of the environmental, cultural and heritage assets of the county."*

Policy CEF3 Commercial Bioenergy Development states that *"It is the policy of the Council to support and facilitate the commercial development of bioenergy/bio-technology facilities on appropriately zoned land in urban areas or on appropriate brownfield sites in rural areas. Commercial bioenergy plants should be located close to the energy source and the point of*

¹ www.paneuropeannetworks.com

demand, where they can be served by a transport network with sufficient capacity to safely absorb increased traffic movements. Such facilities will be assessed against the ability of the receiving environment to accommodate them without causing an adverse impact on residential or environmental amenity.”

These policies demonstrate that the Elected Members and the Citizens of Tipperary have had a conversation around the importance of the bio-economy to the future of the County and about the need to support and encourage its further expansion and development.

3.0 Tipperary’s role in the Bio-Economy and Energy Transition

The development of the bio-economy, the transition to a Low Carbon Economy and providing secure supplies of competitive and affordable energy to our citizens and businesses is not only one of the Country’s critical challenges, but also a valuable economic opportunity. In this respect, the growth and expansion of the bio-economy and the transition to a Low Carbon Economy should be core themes of Government Policy and be should be closely aligned with, and give effect to the National Development Plan, the National Planning Framework and the Government’s White Paper on Energy.

Tipperary County Council has long recognised the importance of the bio-economy, including bio-energy and bio-technology, together with low carbon energy transition, to the quality of life of citizens and the opportunities it brings in terms of rural economic growth and development. The County has a robust landscape and environment, and an abundance of renewable energy resources and therefore natural comparative advantage in the development of the bio-economy and in harnessing energy from renewable resources. Equally the commitment of Tipperary County Council, the Tipperary Energy Agency, third level institutions (LIT), business and communities has resulted in a innovative and growing bio-economic and energy sector in the county.

This partnership has led to some key achievements and initiatives, including:

- The Council, through a partnership approach is a leader in education and research, including developing the idea for a national ‘Energy in Agriculture’² event to promote the low carbon bio-economy in the agricultural sector.
- Tipperary is already leading the way at a national level, in that it has become a ‘European Model Demonstrator



² Teagasc, Tipperary Energy Agency, IFA and Gurteen College

Region of the Bio-Economy' and as such is a centre to drive research and development of Ireland's new bio-economy.

- The Council has met and exceeded national targets for energy efficiency in public buildings. Tipperary County Council is the owner of the largest solar installation in the county and has switched 90% of its heat use from fossil fuels to renewable combined heat and power.
- The Council is a signatory of the Covenant of Mayors and will be implementing a SEAP with ambitious energy targets and objectives across all sectors.
- The Tipperary Energy Agency (TEA) is internationally recognised, and in particular, is leading research and delivering exemplar community initiatives such as 'Superhomes', 'Better Energy Communities', 'Insulate Tipp' etc.
- Tipperary is home to Ireland's only community owned wind farm in Templederry.
- Cloughjordan eco-village is the first of its kind in Ireland under the EU CONCERTO Programme.
- Limerick Institute of Technology is committed to research and development through its ACORN Research Group and has developed strong links with industry in this respect.



One risk to the delivery of the bio-economy is the possibility of projects being appealed to An Bord Pleanála. Communities must feel empowered and have a sense of ownership in the delivery of these projects, especially large scale projects. One suggestion might be the development of a shared ownership scheme. Tipperary County Council recently participated in a research project, funded by the SEAI, entitled '*Legislative Mechanisms for Local Community Ownership and Investment in Renewable Energy Infrastructure*'³, This project recommends amendment to the planning policy framework and legislation in order to bring community investment into effect. The Council would welcome an opportunity to discuss this research with the Department. And the opportunities which it offers.

³ Other partners: Tipperary Energy Agency, Philip Lee Solicitors and Future Analytics

4.0 Research and Development

The Council recognises and supports the need for the National Policy Statement on the Bio-Economy. It is suggested that by the Policy Statement, should be fully reflected within the National Planning Framework, so that Ireland can maximise the opportunities offered in this area. This is especially important for the future of the rural economy.

The Bio-Economy Discussion paper raises the need for common and fundamental principles to guide the development of the bio-economy in a sustainable and efficient manner. The NPF in its Issue Paper discussed the need for the identification of national Strategic Energy Zones. A single co-ordinated message is required, building on locations where agencies, third level institutions and businesses have the knowledge, capacity and human capital to support the further development of this sector. In particular, a 'research and innovation hub' should be a key component of any Policy Statement.

Ireland's transition to a bio-economy, requires the development of a national centre of research and innovation to bring together industry, policy makers, academic partners and the local community. A national centre would provide a research and innovation pathway from basic research through to commercial exploitation, and would act as a knowledge base fostering innovation and cooperation and setting Ireland up as an early global leader in this emerging area.

The Discussion Paper correctly recognises that the bio-economy does not fall under the responsibility of a single department or agency and that there is a need to capitalise on opportunities across multiple sectors and disciplines. The bio-economy and its links with energy transition and climate change, should be rolled out and implemented in a strategic and co-ordinated manner. This is best achieved through the identification of a pilot location(s) where investment can be focused round the development of the strategic guiding principles which can be tailored to an Irish context.

Within Tipperary, there are a number of locations and sites which would be suitable. In particular, the County has a number of strategically located brown field industrial sites, in close proximity to the national transmission network and high capacity motorways, for example Lisheen and Thurles. The Council's experience in this area, bringing together various stakeholders and successfully achieving the status of a European Model Demonstrator Region, could be utilised in the development of the economic and environmental opportunities which arise in this highly dynamic and specialised area.

Actions:

- The Policy Statement should identify Tipperary as a pilot County to lead the development and expansion of the bio-economy and energy transition and for the development of the low carbon economy.
- The Policy Statement should support the identification of Research and Innovation Hub(s) in Tipperary, to incorporate research and development and to facilitate the achievement of a progressive bio-economy sector and develop secure sustainable energy supplies for the country.
- The Policy Statement should recognise European Model Demonstrator Region designation and support the development of the Lisheen site as a centre for research and development in renewable energy and the bio-economy.
- The preparation of a National Landscape Character Assessment should be prioritised, to provide a nationally consistent approach to the bio-economy and energy transition.
- The Policy Statement should promote the development of key linkages between Local Authorities, Government Departments, Third Level Colleges and commercial operators.
- The Policy Statement should recommend that County Development Plans contain clear policies and objectives to support the bio-economy.
- Renewable Energy Strategies prepared by Local Authorities should be encouraged to include a section on the bio-economy.
- Clear support for the bio-economy should be outlined in the National Planning Framework.
- Consideration should be given to the possibility of projects being brought to An Bord Pleanála, in the event that planning permission is granted. This would hold up the delivery of the bio-economy.
- The Policy Statement should examine the possibility of a community shared ownership scheme large for larger scale operations.
- Expertise should be put in place to advise and guide those accessing and drawing European funding. This could possibly be done on a shared service basis.
- The Policy Statement must clearly address the issue of certainty of supply and certainty of a market. Other schemes have suffered as a result of uncertainty in this area e.g. Miscanthus. The use of public bodies in ensuring market through national procurement could be examined. This could be done on a shared service basis.

5.0 Conclusion

The Discussion Paper points out that If Ireland is to be established as a global leader for the bio economy it can only be achieved through a strategic orientation that harnesses Ireland's natural resources and competitive advantage.

The County of Tipperary can play an important part in the future of the bio-economy in Ireland.

We believe that Tipperary County, its Council, communities, citizens, businesses and voluntary organisations have the vision, capacity, track record and drive to contribute positively to achieving the goals and ambitions of the National Policy Statement on the Bio-Economy.

Tipperary County has been reunited into a single entity and has demonstrated that by working together, a positive, modern Council can achieve and exceed targets which are given to it.

Tipperary looks forward to delivering under National Policy Statement, through our Corporate Vision - "Tipperary Together: Ambitious for our communities, demanding of ourselves and working to a shared purpose to deliver prosperity across the county".

