

Bioeconomy Consultation,
Department of the Taoiseach,
Government Buildings,
Merrion Street,
Dublin 2.

15 September 2017

Re: Discussion Document for the preparation of a National Policy Statement on the Bioeconomy

To whom it may concern,

The Irish Co-operative Organisation Society (ICOS) welcomes this opportunity to outline its views on the development of a National Policy Statement on the Bioeconomy – the part of the economy that uses renewable resources from land and sea.

ICOS is a co-operative umbrella organisation that represents, serves and promotes the interests of commercial co-operative businesses across multiple sectors of the Irish economy including the agri food sector. ICOS represents 130 co-operative societies that collectively have over 150,000 individual members, with a combined turnover of €14 billion and employ more than 12,000 people in Ireland. The majority of Irish dairy businesses are multi-purpose co-operatives with interests in milk processing, liquid milk, consumer foods, agri-trading and feed milling. There are 11 milk processing and 13 milk purchasing co-operatives located across rural Ireland. Irish dairy products are exported to 155 countries worldwide, valued at €3.38 billion in 2016. ICOS also represents over 60 livestock mart co-operatives and a range of societies including community and rural based enterprises and services.

First and foremost, it is important to recall that the three pillars of sustainability are economic, social and environment. These three pillars are closely aligned with the core co-operative ethos of better farming, better living and better business. **In order to truly develop the bioeconomy in a sustainable manner, the involvement of rural communities and opportunities for co-operation must be supported and harnessed.**

Further, ICOS would like to take the opportunity to provide a number of observations in relation to the development of a National Policy Statement.

Policy Coherence: ICOS supports the development of National Policy Statement on the Bioeconomy. An overarching policy statement will provide strategic direction and help drive developments in this area. The bioeconomy is a diverse sector and will require inter departmental agreement and co-operation on a wide range of issues.

Promotion of Growth & Jobs: ICOS believes that the bioeconomy can be a sustainable source of growth and jobs, especially in rural areas. The bioeconomy can be a driver of new business and innovation opportunities across agriculture, the marine and forestry sectors.

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Environmental Impact: The development of the bioeconomy in Ireland will help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. For example, soil management and afforestation are vital mitigation measures in the toolbox needed to reduce emissions associated with food production. Forestry and agriculture are fundamentally associated as every new hectare of woodland grown must come from agricultural land. Ireland has a target to increase forest cover from 11% of total land area to 18% by 2046. This will require an additional 450,000 ha under forestry by mid-century. There is real potential for afforestation in Ireland to offset farm based emissions. However, the targets established will not be achieved without a significant increase in planting.

The Circular Economy: The EU action plan for the circular economy identifies biomass and bio based products as a priority sector. This involves the maximum use of biomass waste and residues. For example, biogas from anaerobic digestion. The potential for biogas in Ireland should be further developed and incentivised including anaerobic digestion of wastes and agricultural slurries. It is a proven technology with significant potential to reduce emissions from stored slurry and manure, reduces nitrous oxide emissions and replaces fossil fuel as an energy source.

Research & Development: The EU provides funding to innovative bioeconomy activities through the Horizon 2020 programme and a range of other instruments. These funding streams should be targeted by Irish based research institutions and private enterprise to address technological and innovation challenges.

ICOS welcomes this opportunity to reply to the public consultation and looks forward to the development of a National Policy Statement for the Bioeconomy.

Yours sincerely,



Martin Keane,
ICOS President