

Coillte's Bioeconomy Submission

Coillte regards developments within the bioeconomy as a major opportunity for Ireland and welcomes the discussion document on the preparation of a National Policy Statement. Replacing fossil fuel resources with renewable biological resources is a key element of the transition to a low carbon economy. Ireland has significant strategic advantages in this area and could provide global leadership. A thriving bioeconomy in Ireland would not only help drive our transition to a low carbon economy but would also promote indigenous innovation, sustainable industrial development and employment in rural areas.

Addressing the specific questions contained in the public consultation;

<p>1. Does the broad definition outlined encompass the opportunities presented in the bioeconomy ?</p>
<p>The broad definition is positive in many respects however it does underplay the significant competitive advantages that Ireland has in developing a thriving bioeconomy. For instance Ireland has the best conditions in Europe for growing trees but the lowest level of forest cover and the age structure of our existing forest estate is such that total output will double by 2035. There is clear potential to develop a thriving forest bioeconomy which supports national land use carbon and rural development objectives. The definition should place more emphasis on Ireland's strategic advantages and it is reasonable and appropriate to set our ambition at global leadership.</p>
<p>2. How can a high-level policy statement on the bioeconomy assist in progressing the development of the priority value chains identified ?</p>
<p>Developing a vibrant bioeconomy will require coordination of multiple actors across various national and international networks. The process of developing a high-level policy statement could assist in developing a consensus on the direction of the Irish bioeconomy and strong communication of a policy statement will help signal direction and help cultivate the development of priority value chains.</p>
<p>3. What lessons can Ireland take from the European approach including the Circular Economy?</p>
<p>Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and Austria have national bioeconomy strategies and Ireland should prioritise development of a national strategy. Natural resources underpin all bioeconomies and a national strategy should include an integrated carbon based approach to land-use planning.</p>

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

A national policy statement can communicate a clear political vision and provide a framework within which to guide the development of the bioeconomy across multiple sectors. Development requires coordination and it is recommended that a national policy statement considers the establishment of a centre of excellence with coordination functions.

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 the circular economy.

The principles guiding development of a bioeconomy should be;

- maximisation of value (economic and public good),
- maximisation of carbon storage,
- adoption of a cascading use approach.

Cascading use is taken to mean that as far as possible feed material is used and reused multiple times before its end or life. Cascading should be considered from the perspective of the whole cycle taking the overall efficiency of reuse and recycling into account.

These principles provide guidance for future development however they are not presented in a prioritised order and they are not suggested as hard and fast rules. It is foreseeable that instances may arise where principles compete and trade-offs and balanced judgement will be necessary. They are however thought useful as general guides for development of the emerging sector.

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

Natural resources underpin all bioeconomies and a national strategy should consider the immense potential for regional and rural development. It is important that a national strategy includes an integrated carbon based approach to land-use planning and is guided by the principles of maximisation of value, maximisation of carbon storage and cascading use of renewable biological resources.

Renewable forest resources have a triple carbon benefit. Carbon is sequestered as forests grow. Forest biomass can be used to produce products which displace materials with high embedded carbon such as steel, aluminium and concrete. At the end of its useful life, products made from forest biomass can be converted into carbon neutral thermal energy and used for heating and/or electricity. Currently end of life wood products are landfilled and national waste policy should consider how this valuable resource can be productively used within Ireland.

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

The State has the ability to influence market pull through public procurement. A strong green procurement programme can help stimulate the demand for bioeconomy products. Fiscal mechanisms to promote the use of low embedded carbon products can help create a positive price differential.

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

A national policy statement can communicate a clear political vision and provide a framework within which to guide the development of the bioeconomy across multiple sectors. Development requires coordination and it is recommended that a national policy statement considers the establishment of a centre of excellence with coordination functions.

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

The COFORD publication 'Growing the Irish Forest Bioeconomy' (2017) provides a vision of a thriving, export led, forest bioeconomy in Ireland. Coillte strongly supports the 12 proposals for growing a vibrant forest bioeconomy contained in this publication.

Ireland's existing forest bioeconomy is thriving and the sector has the ambition and drive to grow further in the decades ahead. The gross output of the sector is set to double by 2035 against a backdrop of increasing carbon constraint and this creates a tremendous opportunity. The forest sector is ideally positioned to become one of Ireland's leading long-term sustainable industries and forestry should be a central pillar of a National Policy on the Bioeconomy.

Coillte strongly supports the development of a National Policy on the Bioeconomy and would welcome to opportunity to input further into any future policy development process.

Ciarán Fallon
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