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Date: 8<sup>th</sup> February 2019

### **NWRA - Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy – Public Consultation Comments from Atlantic Seaboard North, Climate Action Regional Office (CARO)**

The Atlantic Seaboard North Climate Action Regional Office (CARO), welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the public consultation on the NWRA Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

#### **1.0 Climate Action Regional Offices**

The four Climate Action Regional Offices have been established in 2018 in response to Action 8 of the 2018 National Adaptation Framework (NAF), to drive climate action at both regional and local levels. In recognition of the significant obligation to develop and implement climate action measures, the four regional offices are mandated to co-ordinate engagement across the varying levels of government and help build on experience and expertise that exists in the area of climate change and climate action.

The composition of the four Climate Action Regions has been determined by the geographical and topographical characteristics, vulnerabilities and shared climate risks experienced across local authority areas. The four CARO regions, constituent local authorities and associated lead authorities are as follows:

<b>Climate Action Regional Office</b>	<b>Local Authority in CARO Region</b>	<b>CARO Lead Authority</b>
Atlantic Seaboard North	Donegal, Sligo, Mayo, Galway City & County	Mayo County Council
Atlantic Seaboard South	Clare, Limerick, Kerry, Cork City & County.	Cork County Council
Eastern & Midlands	Carlow, Cavan, Kildare, Kilkenny, Laois, Leitrim, Longford, Louth, Meath, Monaghan, Offaly, Roscommon, Tipperary, Waterford, Westmeath, Wexford, Wicklow	Kildare County Council
Dublin Metropolitan	South Dublin, Fingal, Dun-Laoghaire-Rathdown, Dublin City	Dublin City Council

Each CARO will adopt an annual work programme with view to carrying out actions that:

- Provide expertise and capacity at local/regional level to contribute effectively to the national transition to a low carbon and climate resilient economy.
- Provide a more focused approach for how local government liaises centrally with relevant Government Departments/Regional Assemblies/Agencies on climate related matters and with sectors in the preparation of Sectoral Adaptation Strategies under the NAF.
- The development of partnerships with third level institutions to facilitate appropriate local research.
- Ensure efficient use of resources in the formulation of local authority adaptation strategies through elimination of duplication in preparation of individual strategies.
- Develop links with Regional Waste Management Offices, Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authorities, River Basin Management Committees, Flood Risk Management Offices, OPW, SEAI, EPA etc.
- Develop public awareness initiatives and contribute to the National Dialogue on Climate Action on a local and regional basis and lead on local/regional transition to a low carbon and climate resilient future acting as a regional focus for schools, NGOs and any others engaged in driving the climate action agenda, as agreed with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment. (DCCE, 2018)

Given the focus on geographical and topographical risk regions it is acknowledged that the CARO regional structure does not align with the Regional Assemblies regions.

Notwithstanding this, it is important and anticipated that the Atlantic Seaboard North CARO and the Eastern and Midland CARO will explore synergies further and collaborate in a meaningful manner with the NWRA. This provides, in the first instance, that local authority adaptation strategies / climate change action plans align with the provisions of the NWRA Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy and thereafter, ensures that a consistent, sustained and coordinated approach is maintained to drive climate action in the regions.

It may be appropriate to mention the role of the CAROs in the RSES and make reference to the office where appropriate, for example on page 45;

*“While the majority of direction will come from National government, responsibility will also fall on the NWRA as well **the Climate Action Regional Officers**, and our constituent local authorities (Climate Adaption Framework) to ensure that targets are being met.”*

## **2.0 Climate Change**

Climate change is already happening and is one of the greatest global challenges of our time. We support the approach taken in the draft RSES to engrain climate change issues across all sectors. Given the importance of climate change as an issue we suggest that Climate Change be added to the list of challenges identified in page 42 of the draft RSES.

## **3.0 Local Authorities – Climate Change Adaptation Strategies**

Ireland's first statutory National Adaptation Framework (NAF) was published in January 2018, as a requirement of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015.

It sets out the national strategy to reduce the vulnerability of the country to the negative effects of climate change and to avail of positive impacts. It outlines a whole of government and society approach, in which Local authorities share the responsibility for climate action and are key drivers of the energy transition and climate adaptation of communities to the impacts of climate change.

All local authorities are required to prepare Climate Change Adaptation Strategies for adoption by their members by 30th September 2019. The CARO's are assisting and supporting local authorities in the development of these local authority adaptation strategies, and work is ongoing in the 8 local authorities in the NWRA region. It is anticipated that each of the draft Climate Adaptation Strategies will be published for public consultation in early Q2 2019.

#### **4.0 Impacts of Climate Change for Consideration in the draft RSES**

Climate change has already impacted on all areas of society, the economy and the environment. Even with Paris Agreement ambitions on GHG emissions being achieved there will be increased risks and impacts from climate change that we need to adapt too.

The draft RSES does mention the need to adapt to climate change and to build resilience, the emphasis is predominately on mitigation and a move towards a low carbon economy. Emissions reduction efforts are already underway in both the public and private sectors, but adaptation remains a necessary and indispensable complement to mitigation.

Climate change mitigation and adaptation can bring multiple benefits to the environment, society and the economy. Tackled together, they open up new opportunities to promote sustainable local development. This includes building inclusive, climate-resilient, energy efficient communities; enhancing the quality of life; stimulating investment and innovation; boosting the local economy and creating jobs.

The work already carried out by Local Authorities on their Climate Adaptation Strategies has identified that the region is exposed to a range of climate hazards, and impacts on some assets services have the potential for cascading failure on other sectors across the region, particularly those reliant on power, water services and transport links.

From the work carried out to date by the Local Authorities in identifying existing and projected climate risks, extreme precipitation and flooding poses the greatest long-term risk from climate change, but the growing risk of heat, storms, water scarcity and slope stability caused by severe weather could also be significant in the future.

Local Authorities in the region shall, as part of the development plan process, consider the identification and mapping of Projected Climate Impact Areas. These should include areas subject to projected future climate change risks and related impacts, for example urban heating, urban cooling, coastal erosion, flooding etc. Those areas identified as Projected Climate Impact Areas could be spatially represented by Local Authorities in County Development Plans, Strategic Development Zone Planning Schemes and Local Area Plans, as appropriate.

The mapping of Projected Climate Impact Areas should directly inform the wording of policies, objectives and development management standards to inform the planning consent process. The identification of Projected Climate Impact Areas will take into account environmental safeguards and the protection of natural or built heritage features, biodiversity and views and prospects.

### **Sea Level Rise & Coastal Erosion**

The counties in the Atlantic Seaboard North have significant infrastructure, communities, habitats, cultural and heritage assets located in coastal areas that are exposed to both coastal flooding and to coastal erosion. Projected rises in mean sea level could increase the rate of erosion and number of vulnerable areas.

The Atlantic Seaboard North Region contains a population of 305,151 persons residing within 5km of the coastline representing 50 % of the region's population. When examined by county level Sligo has the highest percentage of population residing within 5km of the coastline (67%), following by Donegal (65%), Galway (47%) and Mayo (28%) therefore the importance of this issue in terms of the future development of this region cannot be under stated.

Projected changes in sea level in combination with projected increase in the severity of coastal storms is expected to exacerbate coastal erosion risk. It is thought that Ireland's coastal wetlands and soft sedimentary systems will be amongst the first in Europe to respond to storm-led sea level rise impacts. Coastal erosion currently represents a serious problem for Ireland, and this is particularly the case where infrastructure or ecosystem services are at risk.

Projected changes in sea level and in the occurrence of more intense coastal storms and surges mean that areas currently at risk will be at greater risk under projected changes in climate. Increasingly, human influence (urbanisation and economic activities) in the coastal zone has turned coastal erosion from a natural phenomena into a problem of increasing intensity. These impacts are likely to be further exacerbated due to 'non-climate' pressures arising from increasing population and development within the coastal zone. Human-induced factors of concern are the construction of hard-coastal defences (e.g. seawalls, dykes, breakwaters, jetties) which aim to protect assets landward of the coastline. However, these constructions can exacerbate the problem of coastal erosion by impacting upon coastal processes.

Important coastal habitats, such as salt-march and sand dunes that provide valuable natural buffering from wave energy, as well as importance for wildlife, are being impacted by both sea level rise and human activity. The widespread loss of these habitats, as they become squeezed between rising sea levels and man-made defence structures, will have implications for the long-term viability of coastal defences and communities they protect.

In the short term, ensuring no new development is put at risk, developing an understanding of coastal processes and baseline information on those areas at risk of coastal erosion will form part of the Local Authorities Climate Adaptation Strategies.

In the medium to long term, it is essential to adopt a strategic approach which is based on a thorough understanding of coastal processes and which aims to accommodate natural and coastal sediment processes.

Spatial planning will play a crucial and central role in both the short-term and long-term climate change adaptation and mitigation measures, particularly along the coastline.

***“The planning process provides an established means through which to implement and integrate climate change objectives, including adaptation, at local level.”***  
**[Project Ireland 2040]**

Planning and Development of the coastal zone may need to adopt set back lines, seaward of which no development should be allowed. A precautionary approach should be used to determine these buffer zones taking account of future sea levels, erosion and landward migration of coastal landforms.

Implementing an approach of shoreline realignment, or ‘managed retreat’, is likely to be contentious where economic losses are possible or where coastal archaeology or tourist sites exist. Nevertheless, the extreme of abandonment may represent the most economic strategy where the cost of implementing coastal defences exceed the value of the structure(s) being protected.

The sustainable development of marine and coastal areas, the integration of marine planning and spatial planning together with effective local community and stakeholder engagement should be incorporated into the RSES.

## **5.0 Conclusion**

The Atlantic Seaboard North Climate Action Regional Office welcomes the publication of the Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, and to working with the Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly, and the range of other identified stakeholders in the implementation of the final Strategy.

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