

**Submission by Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment
In relation to the Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Northern and
Western Regional Assembly**

Transition to a *Low Carbon and Climate Resilient Society* is a major theme of the *National Planning Framework (NPF)*. Directly related to achievement of this goal is the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, to combat climate change, and of carbon fuel imports. To meet these linked objectives will require further significant development of our renewable energy resources, as clearly recognised in the *National Planning Framework*, which states that:

The future planning and development of our communities at local level will be refocused to tackle Ireland's higher than average carbon-intensity per capita and enable a national transition to a competitive low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050, through harnessing our country's prodigious renewable energy potential.

Ireland's overall policy in respect of energy for the period up to 2030 was set out in the White Paper: *Ireland's Transition to a Low Carbon Energy Future 2015-2030*. Since publication of the White Paper, several initiatives have been undertaken to further develop policy. These include:

- Draft National Energy & Climate Plan (NECP) 2021-2030 (2018)
- Government approval of the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) High Level Design (2018)
- The National Adaptation Framework (2018)
- Project Ireland 2040 – The National Development Plan (2018)
- National Mitigation Plan 2017

In particular, in order to assist in the sustainable development of renewable energy resources, the Minister has undertaken development of a *Renewable Electricity Policy and Development Framework (REPDF)*, as recognised in the NPF. Work in relation to the REPDF is in hand including preparation of relevant environmental assessments (Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment). It is intended to publish a draft REPDF, plus Environmental Report and Natura Impact Statement, toward the end of 2019.

The REPDF is intended to underpin the proper planning and development of larger scale renewable electricity generation development on land. This plan will give guidance to those seeking development consent in relation to larger-scale onshore renewable electricity projects, and to planning authorities, statutory authorities and citizens. In particular, the REPDF will seek to broadly identify suitable areas in the State, where large scale renewable electricity projects can be developed in a sustainable manner.

It might be noted that the existing system for planning permission applications to local authorities or An Bord Pleanála will remain unchanged in respect of renewable electricity projects.

The Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment welcomes the strong policy statements in the draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy in relation to renewable energy, in particular, the specific recognition given to the forthcoming REPDF at Section 4.5.2.:

The forthcoming Renewable Electricity Policy and Development Framework will aim to identify strategic areas for the sustainable development of renewable electricity projects of scale, in a sustainable manner, compatible with environmental and cultural heritage, landscape and amenity considerations. The development of the Wind Energy Guidelines and the Renewable Electricity Development Plan will also facilitate informed decision making in relation to renewable energy infrastructure.

In this regard, it is considered that the REPDF could complement and inform the RSES, possibly at its next review. The Minister will consult the Regional Assembly at a later date in relation to the REPDF. In the meantime, we ask that specific recognition of the forthcoming REPDF be retained in the finalised RSES.