



South-East Regional Authority

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Submission to the Commission of the European Communities

on the

Green Paper

**“Adopting to climate change in Europe –
options for EU action”**

November 2007

Introduction

The South-East Regional Authority welcomes the publication of the Green Paper "*Adapting to climate change in Europe - options for EU action (COM(2007)354 Final)*". This consultation is opportune. Climate change is among the greatest challenges of our time. The debate is no longer about whether climate change is happening: we now know it is; evidence of the large influence of climate change is now stronger than ever before.

The South-East Regional Authority (SERA)

The SERA is one of eight NUTS¹ III Regional Authorities established on a statutory basis by central government in 1994. This was a small but significant step towards regionalisation in what is a largely centralised state in terms of government and public administration.

SERA, with its statutory base and democratic mandate, has a wide remit and general competence to act in the interest of the development of the South-East Region, and has played a valuable role in both articulating and bringing the needs and concerns of the region to the top of the political agenda. Working in close co-operation with local and public authorities, business, farming, employer and employee organisations, the third-level institutes and academia, the Authority has spearheaded efforts to have the overall concerns and requirements of the South-East addressed, particularly in the context of the National Development Plans 2000 - 2006 and 2007 - 2013 and the various EU support measures for Ireland. The continual focus has been to address the key issues that affect the overall development of the South-East region, particularly those that have traditionally inhibited its physical, social and economic welfare.

The South-East Region

The South-East Region covers an area of some 9,406 sq. kms (13.5% of Ireland). The current population of the Region is 460,838 persons (Census 2006) or about 11% of the national population. The South-East Region is predominantly rural in character with the main urban centres being Waterford City (population 49,213), Kilkenny City (22,179) and the county towns of Carlow (20,724), Wexford (18,163), Clonmel (17,008) and Dungarvan (8,362).

¹ Nomenclature of Territorial Statistical Units (NUTS) is the nomenclature established by the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat) in order to have a single and coherent territorial distribution and classification system for the compilation of statistics.

Establishment, Powers and Functions of Regional Authorities

Eight Regional Authorities were established on a statutory basis in Ireland with effect from 1st January 1994 under the provisions of the Local Government Act, 1991 (Regional Authorities)(Establishment) Order, 1993. This Establishment Order was made by the Minister for the Environment, with the consent of the Minister for Finance, under Sections 3 and 43 of the Local Government Act, 1991.

The powers and functions of Regional Authorities are principally set out in Part III of the Establishment Order. In addition, the Planning and Development Act, 2000 conferred on the Authorities the power to make Regional Planning Guidelines for their functional areas.

The principal functions of the Regional Authorities are:

- Promotion of co-ordination in the provision of public services in the region
- Promotion of co-operation, joint action etc. between local authorities, public authorities and/or others
- Reviewing the overall development needs of the region and the making of statements on them as appropriate, and keeping under review the provision of public services in the region
- Reviewing the Development Plans of local authorities in the region and in adjoining regions.

Issues for Consideration as part of the Review

In terms of the challenges detailed in the Green Paper with regard to adapting to climate change, the SERA recommends that:

- It is critical to take into account all policy areas linked to climate change and, in particular, transport, the environment, waste, energy, industry, commercial and services and agriculture.

Transport

The green paper should:

- ⇒ Include policies for a more integrated approach to travel and transport, i.e. changing the focus from investment in infrastructure alone to the development of more widely based strategies to encourage and facilitate increased public transport, walking and cycling as healthy and environmentally friendly options;

- ⇒ Include policies which support the concept of remote working (teleworking);
- ⇒ Include policies which promote the reduction in journey work times and supports the work-home relationship and general quality of life issues;
- ⇒ Recommend the reform of Vehicle Registration Tax (VRT) and motor tax so that private cars are taxed according to their pollution created per kilometre;
- ⇒ Recommend the purchase of additional buses to enable the full usage of the public transport infrastructure (e.g. quality bus corridors).

Waste

The green paper should:

- ⇒ Support and encourage reduce, recycle and reuse policies;
- ⇒ Invest in the long term development of innovative waste management strategies;
- ⇒ Ensure that the polluter pays principle is placed at the centre of the climate change strategy.

Energy

Much of the world's energy is created by burning fossil fuels, such as oil, coal and natural gas. This reliance is a result of historic use and established infrastructure as well as a belief that there is an abundance of fossil fuel resources. The South-East Region is almost totally reliant on imported energy supplies. It is evident that the residential sector is almost totally reliant on imported fossil fuels. Oil and natural gas are the principal fuels for the residential sector. As part of this Green Paper, the following should be considered:

- ⇒ In a strong economy with a growing population leading to increased demands, SERA advocates reducing demand through increased efficiency with ambitious efficiency targets being set to ensure increased efficiency;
- ⇒ Priority should be given to climate change research development.

- ⇒ It is imperative to develop the Bio-Energy sector (biomass, bio fuels) for use in the provision of transport and heat. National Bio-Energy Action Plans will assist this development. The SERA is furthermore developing a Regional Bio-Energy Implementation plan for the South-East which will increase Bio-Energy awareness and usage in the South-East;

Implementation

Local and Regional Authorities can play an important role in assisting in the implementation of EU and national plans at local level. All strategies and plans developed should take into consideration Regional Planning Guidelines developed at regional level;

Regional Authorities, by virtue of this statutory remit and overall co-ordinating role with respect to public services in their Regions, are ideally placed to play a valuable role in climate change policy formulation and implementation. The future White Paper should recognise the role that the Regional Authorities play in this regard and allocate adequate responsibilities and resources to them accordingly.

Does the Green Paper set out the right policy directions for adapting to climate change?

The Green Paper plays an important role in identifying the challenges and priorities to be addressed to adapt to climate changes in the EU and Ireland. It addresses the key themes such as future challenges, integrating adaptation when implementing existing and upcoming legislation and policies, expanding the knowledge base and involving the public sector.

Implementing climate change policies will require an integrated approach by all key stakeholders. Achieving the policy targets outlined in the Green Paper will require support from a number of different agencies and the development of close working relations between all relevant actors.

Conclusion

The Authority welcomes the opportunity to make this contribution and requests that the views contained herein be considered and taken into account, where appropriate.

The Authority would also welcome any further opportunity to elaborate on the views expressed herein.