



## **South-East Regional Authority**

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# **Submission to the Department of Communications, Marine & Natural Resources**

**on the**

**Green Paper**

**“Towards a Sustainable Energy Future for  
Ireland”**

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## **Introduction**

The South-East Regional Authority welcomes the publication of the Green Paper “*Towards a Sustainable Energy Future for Ireland*” and is pleased that it is providing the impetus for an intensive debate on energy policy in Ireland.

The Green Paper highlights the many challenges facing Ireland in the field of energy such as volatile energy prices, rising global market demand for energy, security risks for producers, increasing dependence on imports and limited diversification to date of energy sources and supplies. It provides an accurate assessment of the current energy situation and indicates ways forward to ensure security of supply, environmental sustainability and economic competitiveness for Ireland.

## **The South-East Regional Authority (SERA)**

The South-East Regional Authority (SERA) is one of eight 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 Plan 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 or about 13.5% of Ireland. The current population of the Region is 460,474 (preliminary Census 2006 results) persons 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 circa. 50,000), Kilkenny City (21,000) and the county towns of Wexford (18,000), Carlow (18,000), Clonmel (17,000) and Dungarvan (7,000).

## **Regional Planning Guidelines**

The National Spatial Strategy was published in 2002 with its main objective being the achievement of more balanced regional development. The Regional Authorities have been entrusted with the important responsibility of implementing the National Spatial Strategy at regional level.

The Regional Planning Guidelines developed by the Regional Authority represent a planning framework for the period 2004-2020 designed to achieve a better spatial balance of social, economic and physical development throughout the region. This is particularly important in view of the unprecedented socio-economic transformation of our country over recent years. The changing economic and social environment as a result of the high levels of economic growth experienced over a number of years has posed challenges for policy makers in ensuring that development is regulated and managed in a balanced and sustainable manner in the best interests of the Regions.

In preparing the Regional Planning Guidelines for the South-East, the Regional Authority worked in close partnership with key national, regional and local actors and stakeholders (e.g. the local authorities, public authorities, enterprise support agencies, community organisations etc.).

The Regional Planning Guidelines address the following areas, including Energy

- Employment and economic development;
- Population growth and settlement strategy;
- Transportation;
- Environmental issues, water services and waste management;
- Energy and Telecommunications;
- Education and health care;
- Agriculture, marine and rural development;
- Community development;
- Recreation, Amenity & Culture;
- Heritage and conservation;
- Inter regional issues.

The South-East region strongly supports national and international initiatives for limiting emissions of greenhouse gases and encouraging the development of renewable energy resources as set out in the Regional Planning Guidelines. Sustainable development in the Region will, among other things, mean minimising consumption of non-renewable resources like soils, groundwater and agricultural land.

The Region is committed to finding sustainable solutions to energy provision requirements through strategic assessment of energy needs and identification of renewable energy sources.

The Region has significant capacity to provide as much of its own energy through expansion of the existing Great Island power station and comprehensive provision of alternative energy sources such as wind.

The use of new forests in the Region to provide fuel for wood biomass energy production has significant potential for growth across the Region.

The South-East region actively seeks to implement a share of national targets for renewable energy. The local authorities in the Region will encourage best practice development to ensure the long-term success of these endeavours. Sustainable energy policies in the Region will seek to:

- Ensure security of supply in order to support economic and social development;
- Protect the Environment;
- Maximise efficiency of generation;
- Emphasise the use of renewable energy resources;
- Promote a culture of Energy conservation by all users;
- Minimise emissions of greenhouse gases and other pollutants both by clean generation and sustainable consumption;
- Maintain local air quality;
- Limit or reduce the Regional contribution to the national and global environmental problems.

### **Regional Bio-Energy Implementation Plan for the South-East**

The South-East Regional Authority, with part-funding from Sustainable Energy Ireland, is currently developing a Regional Bio-Energy Implementation Plan.

EU Directives and national initiatives can encourage the production and utilisation of locally produced renewable fuels. To date, a range of National resource studies and plans have been completed for renewable energy in Ireland. However, the reality is that these plans have to be implemented at local and regional level. There are increased opportunities for the development of renewable energy in Ireland. The South East Region is seeking to become a leading region in the area of bio-energy.

In the South-East of Ireland there has been some localised progress in bio-energy production but a structured regional framework is necessary to allow the region to play its part in national compliance with EU policy and to maximise the resource potential. The aim of this project is to establish such a structure through the development and implementation of a Regional Bio-Energy Implementation Plan.

Using the South-East as a pilot, the overall objective of the project is to raise awareness and to increase the production and consumption of bio-energy in the Region.

The Regional Bio-energy Implementation Plan will reinforce and monitor the implementation of the actions and strategies at local and regional level in close cooperation with the relevant stakeholders in the Region.

Among the target audience for the Regional Bio Energy Implementation Plan will be Government, Farmers, Developers, Producers, Suppliers, Public, Consumers, Local Authorities, (Planning, Environment and Housing Sections in particular)

The objectives of the Plan are as follows:

- To get all relevant actors in the Region including local authorities, farmers, suppliers etc. working in close cooperation to manage, develop and promote renewable energy in the Region;
- To provide a structured framework for the target audience to utilise the plan for coherent development and progress in the area of bio-energy;
- To gather data in relation to the scope and potential for bio-energy development in the region based on the availability of resources and technology;
- To identify and reduce barriers to the development of bio-energy in the Region.

The target audience for the Regional Plan will use the document in a number of ways.

- The document will be used by farmers to increase their knowledge and awareness of the opportunities and potential arising from the development of bio-energy as an alternative form of agriculture;
- Suppliers, producers and developers will have easy access to the plans for developing bio-energy in the Region and to the potential commercial opportunities in the area;
- There will be a consistent approach among Local Authorities in the Region to the planning development and management of bio-energy in the Region and developers will receive coherent information when seeking planning approvals for development;

The outputs of the project will be the following:

1. Publishable document titled '*Regional Bio-Energy Implementation Plan for the South-East*' for dissemination to relevant stakeholders;
2. A series of dissemination workshops/seminars targeting farmers, potential producers and users.

A Steering Committee has been established and comprises of representatives from the South-East Regional Authority, Sustainable Energy Ireland, Tipperary Energy Agency, Wexford Energy Management Agency Ltd., Waterford Energy Bureau, Carlow/Kilkenny Energy Agency, Local Authorities, Teagasc and the Environmental Protection Agency.

The South-East Regional Authority is also involved in another which is part-funded by the EU project under the Intelligent Energy Call for Proposals, namely the REGBIE project (Regional Bio-Energy Initiatives – Increasing the Market for Biomass in Europe).

The REGBIE project has the following aims and objectives:

- Aims to support and to strengthen local and regional actors to increase the market penetration of bio-energy heating systems;
- Remove market barriers and stimulate the market for bio mass heating systems;
- Support regional and local bio-energy initiatives in partner regions;
- Provide information, raise awareness of the uses of bio-energy sources;
- Stimulate investments in bio-energy heating systems;
- Involve key market actors for cooperation and market implementation;
- Support the implementation of EU Biomass Action Plan.

The partners in the project come from Regions in Germany, Sweden, Austria, Italy, France, Spain, UK and Ireland.

### **Security of Supply & Promoting the Sustainability of Energy Supply**

In terms of measures proposed in the Green Paper with regard to ensuring the security of supply and promoting the sustainability of Energy resources, the SERA recommends the following:

- It is important to take into account all policy areas linked to energy and, in particular, transport, the environment, research & development and external relations;
- In a strong economy with a growing population leading to increased energy demands, SERA advocates reducing demand through increased efficiency, ambitious energy efficiency targets being set to ensure increased efficiency. SERA welcomes the development of an action plan on Energy Efficiency as it

will contribute to many of the policy objectives outlined in the Green Paper, including reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, security of supply, sustainable transport, affordable energy, economic competitiveness, etc.;

- Priority should be given to Energy research development, technology and innovation as this is the key to delivering security of supply, sustainability and competitiveness. SERA acknowledges the funding to date of SEI on Renewable Energy Research;
- Ongoing and significant investment in Energy infrastructure is urgently needed in order to ensure security of supply, the short term availability and reliability of generating plants is a concern and must be addressed;
- Opening up of the gas and electricity markets to competition will be important in ensuring that prices are in line with supply and the reduction of market power held by any one player in price setting;
- It is imperative to develop the Bio-Energy sector (biomass, bio fuels) for use in transport and heat. The national Bio-Energy Action Plan will assist this development. The SERA, as outlined above, is also developing a Regional Bio-Energy Implementation plan for the South-East which will increase Bio-Energy awareness and usage in the South-East. If successful, this model should be adopted in other Regions;
- Local and Regional Authorities can play an important role in assisting in the implementation of national plans at local level. All strategies and plans developed should take into consideration the Regional Planning Guidelines which make specific reference to the development of the Energy Sector;
- 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 renewable and Bio-energy 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 security and sustainability of energy supply?**

The Green Paper plays an important role in identifying the challenges and priorities to be addressed to ensure security of supply in Energy in Ireland. It addresses the key themes such as changes in consumption patterns, the impact of increased demand, fossil fuel dependency in the supply mix, price volatility in oil and gas and the need for the development of competition in the Energy Market.

The SERA welcomes the research and many studies, handbooks and reviews that have been commissioned to provide input into strategies for the way forward, such as the All-Island Study to examine medium to long term gas security of supply, All Island Grid Study, Review of National Oil Stockholding Policy etc. These documents will have an important role in informing policy that will assist in diversifying the fuel mix for electricity generation, reducing dependency on oil and gas and ensuring adequate contingency measures are in place.

Implementing Energy policy requires 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. Encouraging new players to participate in developments will be a challenge but will mean ensuring that all consumers, producers, suppliers etc. are informed on policy developments and have an opportunity to participate.