

## **Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action**

**20 November 2019**

### **Opening Statement by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment**

I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to address it today.

The Government's Climate Action Plan, published in June of this year, identifies the need to plan appropriately to ensure that those most affected by our transition to a low-carbon, climate resilient society are supported and equipped to do contribute to this transition.

The Climate Action Plan recognises that the level of change required to decarbonise Ireland's economy cannot be avoided and nor can the taxpayer compensate for all the many actions which will have to be taken.

However, it is essential that the burdens borne are seen to be fair and that every group is seen to be making an appropriate and fair level of effort. This will be essential to maintaining the high level of political and civic consensus which has been built through the work of the Citizens' Assembly and in the Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action.

In its report, published in March of this year, this Committee identified, as a central concern, the need to ensure that climate action is fair, and that vulnerable citizens, workers and communities are protected. The Committee also highlighted the importance of exploring opportunities to green existing jobs, and create new jobs in areas such as energy retrofitting for buildings, sustainable forestry and peat land restoration. These are also core objectives of the Climate Action Plan.

The Government has committed, through the Climate Action Plan, to an increase in electricity generation from renewable sources from 30% to 70% by 2030. This is supported by a commitment to early and complete phase-out of peat and coal for electricity generation, and replacing this with increased generation from onshore wind, and also developing offshore wind. This will significantly reduce our CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from electricity generation, and put Ireland on the necessary pathway for complete decarbonisation of the sector by mid-century, in line with Ireland's commitments under the Paris Agreement.

The Government recognises that this will have a significant impact on the workers in these carbon-intensive sectors, their families, and the Midlands as a whole. The Government has, therefore, committed to delivering a whole-of-Government approach to addressing this

challenge, and to working with local stakeholders, to ensuring that people impacted can be best be supported.

In this context, the Government has prioritised a number of initiatives in the context of Budget 2020 including:-

- €6 million for a Just Transition Fund, targeted at the Midlands, to support the retraining and reskilling of workers and to assist local communities and businesses in the Region to adjust to the low carbon transition. In recognition of their longstanding relationship with communities in the Midlands, the ESB has agreed to contribute an additional €5 million to this fund bringing its total value to €11m. While details around the allocation of this fund are still being finalised, it is expected that it will support retraining and reskilling workers and assist local communities and businesses in the Midlands to adjust to the low carbon transition. There will be further consultation with the structures in place in the Midlands, including the Midlands Transition Team, on the application of the funding.
- €5 million for a National Parks and Wildlife Service bog restoration and rehabilitation programme to restore 1,800 hectares of bog to their natural habitat, ensuring the return of these bogs to carbons sinks once again and creating 70 to 100 jobs.
- €20 million targeted at the Midlands, to deliver a new model to group housing upgrades, as set out in the Climate Action Plan, which will support an estimated 400 direct and indirect jobs, as well as significantly upgrading the social housing stock in the region.

To ensure that the theme of just transition is sustained on a consistent basis, the Climate Action Plan provides for the establishment of a 'Just Transition Review Group' within the National Economic and Social Council (NESC). The objective of this group will be to review the ongoing transition and identify specific transition needs among cohorts of workers, enterprises, communities, and specific groups of people.

The Department has also been engaging with the European Commission to explore the potential for a support scheme, funded through a Public Service Obligation, for the enhanced rehabilitation of the Bord na Móna bogs over and above what Bord na Móna is obliged to do under its EPA licences. The proposal is to fund a scheme for the enhanced rehabilitation and restoration by Bord na Móna of its peatlands that have been used for harvesting peat for electricity generation. It is expected that about 200 employees will be engaged in this rehabilitation and restoration work.

The Government has also announced, on 8 November, the appointment of Mr Kieran Mulvey as Just Transition Commissioner. The purpose of the Commissioner is to provide a

co-ordinated and effective approach to Just Transition for communities and workers affected by the ending of peat harvesting for power generation in the Midlands region. The terms of reference for the Office of the Just Transition Commissioner have also been published by the Minister and the details in relation to the appointment are currently being finalised.

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