Roinn Cumarsáide, Gníomhaithe
ar son na hAeráide & Comhshaoil
Department of Communications,
Climate Action & Environment

Joint Committee on Communications, Climate Action and Environment
Topic: 'Waste Policy and Incineration'
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Opening Statement

Waste Infrastructure Provision

The role of the Minister is to provide a comprehensive legislative and policy framework through which the relevant regulatory bodies, such as local authorities and the EPA, operate. Waste management planning, including with regard to infrastructure provision, is the responsibility of local authorities under Part II of the Waste Management Act 1996, as amended. It is also important to recognise that, under section 60(3) of that Act, the Minister is precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to the performance, in specific cases, by a local authority of their statutory functions under the Act.

Waste Policy

National waste policy is set out in the policy document "A Resource Opportunity". European, national and regional waste policy is predicated on the *waste hierarchy*, as set out in the Waste Framework Directive. Under the waste hierarchy, the prevention, preparation for reuse, recycling and recovery of waste is preferred, in that order, to the disposal or landfilling of waste.

Reduction in Landfill

Ireland's waste management practices, infrastructure and regulation have improved radically over the last 20 years. Since 2012, there has been a clear government policy focus on waste as a resource, and the reduction in landfilling.

Ireland has made significant progress in improving our recycling and recovery rates and we are now among the top performing EU countries.

- The share of managed Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) that is disposed in landfill fell from 41% in 2012 to 26% in 2016.
- That means that about three quarters of MSW was recycled, used as a fuel or as cover material, instead of going to landfill.
- More residual waste is now used as a fuel (through energy recovery) than disposed in landfill.
- There are now only four landfills actively accepting municipal wastes in the State; whereas 18 landfills accepted waste in 2012 and 89 landfills were accepting waste in 1995.
- Similarly, nearly 1.5 million tonnes of MSW was landfilled as recently as 2010. By 2016, this amount had been more than halved, to approximately 700,000 tonnes.

Role of Waste to Energy

Thermal recovery activities sit on the "recovery" tier of the waste hierarchy and have a role to play in reducing our dependence on the disposal of waste to landfill. Thermal recovery activities include waste to energy, co-incineration, pyrolysis and gasification, where the principle use of waste is as a fuel to generate energy.

The most recent iteration of Regional Waste Management Plans set out how waste generated will be managed over the time period 2015-2021, in line with national and EU waste management policy. These regional plans support the development of up to 300,000 tonnes of additional thermal recovery capacity nationally, which includes waste to energy, out to 2030. This figure was determined, firstly, to ensure that there is adequate and competitive treatment capacity in the market, and secondly, to ensure the State's self-sufficiency requirements for the recovery of municipal waste are met. Furthermore, that level of thermal recovery capacity takes account of the requirement to achieve a recycling rate of municipal waste in excess of 60% by 2030, which is in line with new EU recycling targets for MSW.

Good waste management planning aims to maximise prevention and recycling and minimise the quantity of residual waste arising. It also recognises the need for sustainable infrastructure to deal with residual waste that we cannot prevent or recycle, as we move away from the less sustainable practice of landfilling.

European Union view on Waste to Energy

Finally, the European Commission published a communication on "The Role of Waste-to-Energy in the Circular Economy" in January 2017. The Commission acknowledged that the transition towards a circular economy requires striking the right balance when it comes to waste-to-energy capacity for the treatment of non-recyclable waste. The communication advised that waste-to-energy processes can play a role in the transition to a circular economy provided that the EU waste hierarchy is used as a guiding principle, as is the case in national and regional waste management policy in Ireland.