

Opening Statement by Simon Coveney, TD, Minister
for Enterprise, Trade and Employment

Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Environment and
Climate Action, Thursday 7th December 2023

A Cathaoirleach,

I would like to begin by thanking you and the Committee for inviting me here to speak. With me today are Joseph Cummins and Alan Dempsey from the Climate Action and Energy Policy Unit, in my Department. I am looking forward to engaging with the members, and discussing the role of my Department in accelerating the sustainable transition of our economy.

As you will know, the White Paper on Enterprise is our strategy document, setting out the future direction for Irish enterprise policy. It firmly establishes decarbonisation as a core pillar of the Department's work. We will measure ourselves going forward against carbon abatement objectives, alongside employment and productivity.

Climate change, and the transition to renewable energy, continue to shape the environment in which businesses operate. The transition is already underway, and irreversible. My Department and our enterprise agencies are there to help businesses prepare to thrive in a low-carbon economy. I recognise that urgent additional action is needed from my Department, its Agencies, across Government, and our enterprise sector, to ensure we are on a viable, navigable path to meet the targets we have set in terms of carbon abatement and renewable energy.

As you know, my Department leads on addressing emissions from our manufacturing industry, and on the commercial built environment, as well as enterprise policy broadly.

My Department will shortly publish two decarbonisation roadmaps, under the Heat and Built Environment Taskforce. An Industrial Emissions Decarbonisation Roadmap will set the trajectory to reducing emissions associated with heat used in manufacturing processes. The Commercial Buildings Decarbonisation Roadmap will set out how we will achieve

the emissions reductions from the buildings which enterprises operate in. Both Roadmaps will demonstrate the trajectory and ambition required to decarbonise these cohorts of emissions, and the actions that businesses and policy makers need to take to deliver them.

I am aware that many businesses have yet to embark on their sustainability journey. I am very conscious that businesses - particularly SMEs - have many competing priorities. I have been focusing on engaging businesses wherever they are currently on their journey, and demonstrating that there are simple, cost-effective things every company can do to get started. The Climate Toolkit 4 Business is always a good place to start.

This year, I and my Department have run eight ‘Building Better Business’ events throughout the country to promote the climate action and digitalisation agendas, with a final event in Dublin today. The response has been extremely positive, with a willingness in our enterprises to seize the opportunity and challenges of the transition. Enterprise Ireland, IDA, our

Local Enterprise Offices, and other state agencies such as SEAI, SkillNet Ireland, have significantly stepped up efforts to bring advisory and funding programmes to the attention of business.

Government does not expect businesses to act alone, we are mobilising significant support for decarbonisation. Grant support is already available for companies to invest in technologies to decarbonise their manufacturing processes and their space heating. I am encouraging all businesses to engage with Enterprise Ireland, IDA, Local Enterprise Offices, or the SEAI to start implementing a real program of decarbonisation solutions. Business can address both on-site and supply chain emissions, the Food Waste Charter is a great example of the latter.

I would like to thank you for the Committee's engagement following the Climate Change Advisory Council's report and recommendations during the summer. You will have seen my written response to those recommendations. I and my Department are actively progressing a number of the

Council's key recommendations, such as those around the public procurement of lower carbon cement, Modern Methods of Construction in our housing sector, and energy efficiency for SMEs.

I'll conclude by reiterating how central I believe the decarbonisation agenda is to enterprise policy, and Ireland's future competitiveness. The green transition will occasionally be difficult, but it will certainly be worth it. Policies we are implementing today, will make Ireland a greener, more sustainable, more prosperous country tomorrow. I thank the Committee again for the opportunity to discuss these topics with you.