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Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland

**Opening address to the Joint Committee on Social Protection,
Community and Rural Development and the Islands**

Wednesday 17th January 2024

Cathaoirleach, Committee members, thank you for the invitation to SEAI to attend this morning's meeting to discuss the important subject of **energy poverty and the retrofitting of homes in rural and urban areas**. This is our first time before this Committee, and we welcome the opportunity.

I am joined today by my colleagues:

- Brian O'Mahony, Head of Community and National Retrofit
- Ruth Buggie, Programme Manager, Sustainable Energy Communities
- John Randles, Head of Delivery, National Retrofit

Introduction

The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) is at the heart of delivering Ireland's energy revolution. Funded by the Government, through the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications and the Department of Transport, our total budget allocation in 2023 was just under €595 million.

Ireland has ambitious energy and climate targets to achieve against the backdrop of post-pandemic supply chain impacts, inflation, and the energy crisis. SEAI is driving Ireland's sustainable energy transformation for the benefit of society and our climate, and we passionately believe in this transformation. We do this by driving the reduction and replacement of fossil fuel usage and we are central to informing, implementing, and delivering government energy policy and national Climate Action Plans.

Our record of delivery continues at pace with our organisational achievements for last year documented in the information pack provided to Members ahead of this morning's hearing. Despite uncertainty in the global economy and energy sector due

to the ongoing geopolitical crisis, I am proud to report that SEAI has substantially achieved its targets for 2023, delivering significant growth across all aspects of our work.

Retrofitting

Ireland is a world leader in many areas of the transition to a low carbon economy, such as wind energy deployment and approaches to upgrading our existing housing stock. The challenges we face are not just Irish challenges, but global ones. SEAI's work is critical to bridging the chasm between the global challenge, Ireland's obligations, and the responsibilities of all of us as citizens on our journey to a low-carbon, climate-resilient, and environmentally sustainable society by 2050.

On retrofitting, SEAI has an excellent story to tell. Over recent years, as the National Retrofit Delivery Body, the record shows that we have made enormous progress on home energy upgrades. Since 2019 we have upgraded 132,720 homes across every county in Ireland. Of these, over 17,632 were energy poor homes. A breakdown per county is provided in the information pack. Indeed, in the last two years we are seeing real momentum as more and more homeowners embrace the multiple benefits.

In 2023 we delivered retrofits to almost 6,000 energy poor homes on the Warmer Homes scheme, up one third on the just over 4,400 homes delivered in 2022 and up 150% on 2021. At the same time the number of monthly applications more than quadrupled from a monthly average of 244 in 2021, to 1,165 in 2023. So, while scheme delivery has increased substantially pointing to its success, the exponential increase in applications brings challenges which we are happy to expand on during our discussion this morning.

Conclusion

The link between energy and climate action is inextricable. Reducing the use of energy, and using more renewable energy where possible, are the most cost-effective and accessible ways for citizens and communities to take action on climate change. And availing of renewable energy is a genuine opportunity for most.

Aside from meeting our targets, decarbonisation will deliver multiple benefits to Irish society, including healthier buildings and environments, employment opportunities across the country, and increased efficiencies and competitiveness.

In conclusion I would like to again thank the Committee for inviting SEAI here this morning and we look forward to a fruitful meeting.

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