



Submission to

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

from

EnergyCloud Ireland

www.energycloud.org

Joint Oireachtas Committee
on
Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands
Wednesday 21st February, 2024

Opening Statement by Chairperson of EnergyCloud Ireland

Introduction

Good morning, Chair and members of the Committee. On behalf of EnergyCloud Ireland, thank you for the invitation to discuss the important subject of energy poverty.

As you know, EnergyCloud Ireland was established as a not-for-profit social enterprise to specifically help to tackle energy poverty, by using surplus renewable energy.

We salute you, Chair and your committee for directing your work programme to this important topic.

Last week this Committee heard from the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications about how the key concern relating to energy costs is to protect the most vulnerable.

That is why EnergyCloud was created.

EnergyCloud - an overview

At EnergyCloud, our mission is to create solutions to use surplus renewable energy - which would otherwise be wasted - and redirect it to homes in fuel poverty.

EnergyCloud Ireland is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee and supported by EirGrid, ESB, Wind Energy Ireland, SSE Airtricity and Clúid Housing.

To date the organisation has been volunteer led and the process is underway to register as a charity.

To enable EnergyCloud Ireland to support more families in energy poverty across Ireland, we are putting a full time executive team in place.

Energy Poverty in Ireland

The ESRI report, *'Energy poverty and deprivation in Ireland'*, highlights that over 550,000 households (and increasing) are in energy poverty.

It illustrates the scale of the problem and the need for creative solutions to address the crisis. The energy price crisis hurts all consumers, but most of all, those who are already struggling and in energy poverty.

EnergyCloud and direct engagement with families in energy poverty

As successive ESRI and Government reports have illustrated, there has been significant energy poverty in Ireland for many years. The recent energy crisis has had a further adverse impact on this.

We have heard from the Society of St Vincent de Paul about people choosing between eating and heating.

Having to choose whether to eat or heat your home is not something we should tolerate as a society. We can and we must do more.

That is what motivates the volunteer team within EnergyCloud Ireland.

Surplus renewable energy in Ireland

In a separate document submitted, we have outlined the volume of surplus renewable wind energy in Ireland over the last number of years.

5,078 GWh of zero carbon renewable wind energy has been dispatched down since 2018.

In the first 10 months of 2023, 724 GWh of wind energy was wasted in Ireland.

The retail value of this wasted renewable energy is over a quarter of a billion euros.

Approximately 240 million tanks of hot water could have been heated with this energy.

Supporting families in energy poverty - progress to date in Ireland

In 2021, the first homes were connected to EnergyCloud in a pilot project with Clúid Housing, launched by Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Darragh O'Brien TD.

Working with Clúid Housing and the support of Amazon Web Services (AWS), a major expansion was launched in 2023 by Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications, Eamon Ryan TD.

Last summer, the first EnergyCloud project with a local authority (Fingal County Council) was announced.

In addition, SSE Airtricity has committed €2.5 million to EnergyCloud Ireland to support families in fuel poverty.

So what is the benefit for individual families? Throughout 2023, families in Clúid Housing, who are part of the EnergyCloud scheme, were able to receive a free tank of hot water on 115 separate nights.

This was the number of times last year that significant curtailment of wind energy took place.

All of this was possible because of the support of EirGrid, ESB and key partners such as Amazon Web Services (AWS), Bord Gáis, Prepay Power and SSE Airtricity who are supporting families in energy poverty through the EnergyCloud initiative.

EnergyCloud and the Climate Action Plan

EnergyCloud is fully aligned with the Climate Action Plan to deliver 80% of Ireland's electricity from renewable sources by 2030.

As a country with a focus on sustainable energy production, and that is committed to implementing Ireland's Climate Action Plan, we believe EnergyCloud provides the opportunity to make Ireland a leader in creating solutions for surplus energy rather than simply switching off wind turbines and solar panels.

Access to free renewable energy means that households that are part of the EnergyCloud project can simultaneously save money on electricity while reducing their use of fossil fuels.

This is a win-win-win.

EnergyCloud and the Energy Poverty Action Plan / National Retrofit Plan

The Energy Poverty Action Plan contains a range of measures to support and protect those in energy poverty or who are at risk of energy poverty. EnergyCloud should be part of the revised Energy Poverty Action Plan which will be published soon.

EnergyCloud will engage with the Department as part of their consultation on this.

We also believe that EnergyCloud should be a key component of the National Retrofit Plan.

Getting homes 'EnergyCloud ready', allows technology solutions to be deployed to homes at risk of energy poverty, thereby reducing renewable energy wastage, displacing oil/gas fired systems while delivering a social good to heat hot water in fuel-poor homes.

How can EnergyCloud work with others to help households in energy poverty?

From our perspective, EnergyCloud is a win-win-win for Ireland.

EnergyCloud can help Ireland's legally binding net-zero emissions targets under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021.

We are surrounded by vast natural resources in Ireland and working together we can reduce our reliance on fossil fuels, reduce our carbon emissions, while at the same time improving the lives of those who live in consistent fuel poverty across Ireland, by utilising surplus renewable energy.

We do this by utilising existing infrastructure and surplus renewable energy to help tackle energy poverty for thousands of families, helping to increase our overall percentage of renewable energy use and at the same time, helping to reduce our carbon emissions.

The energy is being produced (and discarded), yet every property in the state is connected and can use this energy. We have the technology to do this while targeting a very specific section of Irish society: those in fuel poverty.

To date, a large number of local authorities, approved housing bodies and charities have all signaled their intention to participate in a scheme to enable their homes to become 'EnergyCloud ready'.

Combined, there are approximately 75,000 homes now registered with EnergyCloud, with over 180,000 tenants.

In conclusion, we have also provided your Committee with a number of additional documents. The first is an overview of how EnergyCloud works, the second is from Clúid Housing with direct feedback from their residents benefitting from EnergyCloud, the third has details of the volume of renewable wind energy that has been wasted in Ireland in recent years.

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Twitter: https://twitter.com/EnergyCloud_org

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/energycloud1/>

Instagram: [energycloud_org](https://www.instagram.com/energycloud_org)

YouTube: <https://youtube.com/@EnergyCloud>

Facebook: www.facebook.com/energycloud.org

Email: info@energycloud.org

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