

Opening Statement

Introduction:

Programme B: Energy

Programme B in energy supports my Department in the transformation of Ireland's energy system for a net zero emissions future. We will do this by delivering energy-efficient measures across the residential, public and business sectors and by enabling the deployment of renewable energy infrastructure. This year the programme provides €18.4 million to cover the operational costs of the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) – a 50% increase on 2020. This funding will provide the additional staff resources required to deliver the programmes and drive the achievement of our retrofit targets following SEAI's designation as the National Retrofit Delivery Office.

An allocation of €277.7 million will fund sustainable energy programmes. This represents a doubling of the budget compared with 2020 and is the largest amount ever allocated for these schemes. The increased allocation is made possible through carbon tax revenue and additional Exchequer funding.

Within the programme budget allocation, €109 million capital funding is being provided to support lower income households to retrofit their homes and participate in the transition to sustainable energy usage. This represents an increase of €47 million on the 2020 allocation for energy poverty schemes and means that almost half of the total residential and community retrofit budget will support people vulnerable to energy poverty.

The balance of the residential and community retrofit budget (€112.5 million capital) will be spent on expanding existing SEAI grant schemes and introducing new initiatives including the National Retrofit Scheme to promote one-stop-shops, a Heat Pump Ready Homes campaign and an enhanced Community Energy Grant Scheme.

€38 million in capital funding is also being allocated to support energy efficiency and renewable energy projects in the commercial and public sector. This funding is almost double the allocation provided in 2020 and will focus on supporting investments that are in keeping with the government's commitment to reaching net zero emissions by 2050.

The energy programme also includes funding of over €18 million to invest in energy research and green energy alternatives as diversification from fossil fuels continues.

Programme C: Natural Resources

Programme C in natural resources manages Ireland's mineral, hydrocarbon and other geological resources in a sustainable and productive manner. Within this programme the Department provides high quality geoscience support for environmental protection and the sustainable development and regulation of Ireland's natural resources, and manages the health and safety implications of historical mining sites and the oversight of the large-scale offshore gas decommissioning projects.

The programme includes an allocation of almost €13 million for Geological Survey Ireland services, including €7.5 million for the Tellus and INFOMAR mapping projects. Geological mapping data from the Tellus project informs

land planning and usage while INFOMAR is Ireland's national seabed survey, managed with the Marine Institute, providing groundwater data and modelling on flooding to the Office of Public Works (OPW) and other relevant stakeholders. In 2021 the budget for the Tellus project will increase by €0.5m to reflect the resumption of soil sampling for the ground geochemistry component of the project and to support a range of product development projects within Tellus including smart agriculture, soil carbon research and collaborations on radon and pollutants.

A budget of €2.75 million has been allocated to mining services which will include maintenance and rehabilitation works at historic mining sites.

Programme D: Inland Fisheries

Ireland's inland fisheries are a precious natural resource which forms part of our cultural, environmental and economic identity. Programme D provides grant funding of €33.3 million to Inland Fisheries Ireland, which is responsible for the conservation, management and regulation of Ireland's inland fisheries resource.

The Department is focused on developing a comprehensive and modern policy framework for inland fisheries and launched a roadmap in January of this year to set out the next stages in this policy development and involve stakeholders in the re-imagining of our relationship with this national resource.

Programme E: Environment and Waste Management

Programme E covers climate, environment and waste management. My Department provides the lead, within Government, in driving the climate

agenda by providing the overarching policy and legislative framework and by working with Government Departments and State Bodies in the development and implementation of policies and measures to ensure that Ireland is on a pathway to climate neutrality. Programme E also includes promoting the transition to a resource-efficient circular economy in support of ecologically sustainable development, growth and jobs, the protection of our natural environment and, through this, the health and well-being of our citizens.

This programme includes funding of €50 million towards the current and capital costs of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to further enhance the delivery of its statutory mandate to protect the environment in areas including environmental licensing and enforcement; monitoring, analysis and reporting on the environment; research; and waste management.

The programme includes increased grant funding of €26.2 million for the remediation of environmentally-degraded landfill sites operated by local authorities and private landfills taken into State ownership. A significant proportion of this allocation will be directed towards further remediation works on the landfill site at Kerdiffstown in Co Kildare, one of the most complex sites in the programme.

The programme also includes an allocation of €10.2 million for waste management initiatives to increase awareness of the necessity to minimise waste and increase recycling.

In the area of climate initiatives, as the Committee will be aware, the Government recently approved a landmark Climate Bill which will deliver net-zero emissions by 2050, and a 51% reduction in emissions by the end of this

decade. The Bill will provide the framework for Ireland to meet its international and EU climate commitments and to become a leader in addressing climate change. The bill underpins the transition to a climate resilient, biodiversity-rich, environmentally-sustainable and climate-neutral economy.

Within the 2021 Estimates, an allocation of €8.1 million has been made to fund a range of climate initiatives including technical research and modelling, regional climate offices and national dialogue. An increased budget of €11 million is being provided for the Just Transition fund in 2021 to support innovative projects and the wider midlands region as it transitions away from peat and into a new, green and sustainable economy. Projects will be supported in areas such as sustainable communities, the development of alternative uses of our peatlands and the development of green energy enterprises.

Appropriations-in-aid

Appropriations-in-aid are income receipts of the Department other than from the Exchequer, totalling €11 million. Receipts mainly comprise mining and petroleum income of €5.2 million and also include €3 million in receipts from additional superannuation contributions on public service remuneration and GSI income of €0.3 million.

I'm very happy to take questions from the committee members on any detail in relation to the Estimates for Programmes B to E within my Department.