



Sinn Féin Submission to Green Paper on Energy

**Aighneacht Shinn Féin i dtaca leis
an bPáipéar Uaine maidir le Fuinneamh**



Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Empowering Energy Citizens	6
Markets, Regulations and Prices	10
Planning and Implementing Essential Energy Infrastructure	13
Ensuring a Balanced and Secure Energy Mix	15
Putting the Energy System on a Sustainable Pathway	17
Driving Economic Opportunity	23
Summary	23

Réamhrá

Fáiltím roimh chinneadh an Rialtais chun Páipéar Glas ar Pholasaí Fuinneamh in Éirinn a eisiúint. Seo rud atá mé ag éileamh ó ghlac mé cúram mar urlabhraí Cumarsáide, Fuinneamh & Acmhainní Nádúrtha orm féin. Bhí sé ráite go sonrach leis an Rialtas agam roimhe sin - in éagmais straitéis chuimsitheach, shoiléir maraon le polasaithe & reachtaíocht - gurb iad na Comhlachtaí Fuinneamh seachas an Náisiún agus pobal na tíre a bhainfidh an tairbhe is fearr as ár acmhainní.

Tacaíonn Sinn Féin le leas iomlán a bhaint as foinsí fhuinneamh inathnuaite. Caithfidh muid gearradh siar ar a bheith ag brath ar bhreosla iontaise agus ar fhoinsí bhreosla iompórtáilte. Caithfidh muid cinntiú áfach, go mbeidh tograí fuinneamh (ach go h-áirithe tionscnaimh riachtanacha infreastruchtúr) tógtha i gcompháirt leis na pobail logánta. Tá lá an 'mhionchomharliúchán' leis na pobail caite. Muna bhfoghlaíonn muid ó bhotúin ar thionscnaimh ar nós Tobar Gáis na Coiribe agus an Fheirm Gaoithe Lártíre leanfaidh muid de shíor a bheith ag déanamh na botúin sin. Creideann muidne gur chóir cosc a chuir ar aon fhorbairtí tionsclaíocha muilte gaoithe nó go mbeidh an polasaí seo curtha in áit.

Tá buntáiste ollmhór amháin againn mar Náisiún agus muid ag ullmhú ár Straitéis, Polasaithe, Cleachtais agus Rialacháin d'fhuinneamh in Éirinn - tá an t-am againn chun scrúdú ceart a dhéanamh ar na foinsí reatha fuinneamh agus iad sin atá ag teacht chun cinn sula ndéantar cinntí faoin meascán is fearr do na foinsí don Náisiún. Caithfidh muid dlús a chuir freisin le h-iarfheistiú foirgintí chun an éileamh ar fhuinneamh a laghdú. Tá iliomad foinsí fuinneamh dhá mheas agus dhá n-oibriú go h-idirnáisiúnta. Tá am againn foghlaim ón taithí idirnáisiúnta - céard a oibríonn go maith agus cé na botúin gur féidir linn a sheachaint.

Tá aighneacht s'againne dírithe ar sprioc shimplí amháin - cinntiú go bhfuil soláthar fuinneamh na hÉireann glan, slán, ar phraghas réasúnta agus go dtugann sé an luach saothar is airde do mhuintir na hÉireann. Dearbhaíonn muid arís go bhfuil muid glan i gcoinne aon mholtaí chun Scoilteadh Hiodrálach (Fracking) a chur chun cinn ar oileán bheag s'againne, ina bhfuil lonnaíochtaí scaipthe pobail agus fíor-eacnamíocht atá ag brath go mór ar ghnó Agráibhia agus Turasóireacht. Impíonn muid arís go gcuirfí cosc ar fhorbairtí Feirmeacha Gaoithe nó go mbeidh an Bhille um Rialú Tuirbíní Gaoithe (Leasuithe) 2014 in áit.

Beidh tionchar shuntasach ar an méid a chinnfear anois ar thodhchaí na nglúnta de shaoránaithe a thiocfaidh inár ndiaidh - agus caithfidh muid an rud ceart a dhéanamh.



Michael Colreavy TD,
Sinn Féin Spokesperson
Communications, Energy
and Natural Resources

Introduction

I welcome the Government's decision to publish a Green Paper on Energy Policy in Ireland. This is something I have called for since I took on the brief of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources. I had previously pointed out to Government that – in the absence of a comprehensive and coherent strategy, and policies and legislation - the Energy Companies rather than the Nation and its people would be the primary beneficiaries.

Sinn Féin supports the maximum use of renewable energy sources. We must reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and our dependence on imported energy sources. However, we must ensure that all energy projects (and indeed any critical ones) are carried out in partnership with host communities.

The day of minimalist “consultation” with communities is gone. Unless we learn from the mistakes of projects like Corrib Gas and Midlands Wind Farm developments we will simply continue to repeat those mistakes. We believe that there should be a moratorium should be placed on industrial wind turbine developments until a policy is in place.

We as a Nation have one great advantage in preparing our Strategy, Policies, Procedures and Regulations for energy in Ireland – we have the time to properly explore various existing and emerging energy sources before deciding on the most appropriate mix of sources for the Nation. We must also accelerate the retrofitting of buildings to minimise the energy demand. There is a great variety of energy options being considered and being operated internationally. We have the time to learn from this international experience – what works well and what mistakes can we avoid? Our submission is geared towards one simple objective – to ensure that Ireland's energy supply is clean, secure, affordable and provides maximum return to the people of Ireland. We repeat our opposition to any proposal to introduce Hydraulic Fracturing (Fracking) in our small island with dispersed population settlements and with a real economy that is so dependent on Agri-Food and Tourism.

What we decide now will significantly impact on this and future generations of citizens – we have to get it right.



Michael Colreavy TD,
Sinn Féin Spokesperson
Communications, Energy
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Empowering Energy Citizens

The successful implementation of the government's energy strategy will be largely dependent on the way it communicates its plans to the public. Enhanced consumer awareness and understanding of how we meet our future energy needs are essential requirements that are necessary in order to allow citizens to properly grasp the importance of developing sustainable energy policies.

A core aspect of Sinn Féin's submission on the government's Green Paper on Energy Policy in Ireland is to promote greater public awareness of the issues and challenges that lie ahead in order to generate a better understanding of the potential benefits of having a sustainable and progressive energy strategy.

Empowering citizens so that they become more energy aware is an important prerequisite that will encourage the public to become engaged in a process that will provide a framework for the Irish State to develop sustainable energy policies.

A second key tenet of the Sinn Féin submission is to put forward practical proposals that, if implemented, will protect the most vulnerable in our society from fuel poverty, so that every citizen can live in an adequately heated home.

Public Consultation

For informed and educated 'Energy Citizens' it is essential that the public are listened to and their concerns addressed and this will necessitate a fundamental change in the way decisions are implemented and imposed upon communities. Public participation at every stage of a project would foster partnership rather than opposition. The past decade has witnessed a number of controversies that have resulted in strident opposition to projects that were designed to enhance the State's capacity to generate and export energy. These have ranged from the Corrib gas project, electricity pylons and hydraulic fracturing to industrial wind turbines.

As part of any future energy policy that attempts to engage citizens in the way the State produces, transmits and consumes energy, public consultation must be placed at the heart of the process when formulating future government policy. From an early stage, there must be clear and direct lines of communication established between government, industry and host communities.

In Sinn Féin's Wind Turbine Regulation Bill 2014¹, currently awaiting Committee Stage in the Oireachtas, meaningful public consultation with host communities and government departments, investors and stakeholders was central to the legislation. A similar approach should be adopted for all pieces of major infrastructure development that are needed for the production or transmission of energy.

Underpinning Sinn Féin's Windturbine Regulation Bill is the importance of having a clear and open process of public consultation that engages and informs host communities at every stage of the infrastructural development that affects their immediate environment. It is an approach that should be adopted for all similar infrastructural projects which have a direct impact on the living environment of citizens. To illustrate this point, the following is an excerpt from section 4 of the Wind Turbine Regulation Bill which deals with the issue of public consultation:

Every person applying for permission under the Act of 2000 to construct a wind turbine or wind farm shall be obliged to place a notice in a local and a national newspaper, and in a prominent place on the proposed site that is accessible to the public view, outlining the following information;:

(a) a description of any changes to the proposed site, outlining the physical and technical characteristics of the

¹ Wind Turbine Regulation Bill 2014 <http://www.oireachtas.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=/documents/bills28/bills/2014/1914/b1914d.pdf>

proposed wind turbine development;

(b) a formal assessment in writing and a non-technical outline of the effects of the proposed development on the local environment must be lodged with the local Council and public library for public consultation outlining at a minimum the following information—

(i) an ordinance survey map showing the location of each turbine relating to all planning applications for that area to be held by the Planning Authority,

(ii) the potential impacts of the proposed construction on the physical and mental health of the host community,

(iii) the physical effects on the natural environment, the vista and landscape, the cultural heritage, and

(iv) the measures proposed to prevent or reduce such effects;

(c) the envisaged length of the construction works; and

(d) the planning gain of the proposal.

The bill also proposed that any company or individual applying to construct a wind turbine shall place a notice in the local press and include an ordinance survey map showing the exact location of each turbine. They must also use the local broadcast media to inform people of their plans.

Another provision contained within the Sinn Féin Bill is that the company or individual which plans to erect wind turbines is obliged to inform residents living in the immediate surrounding area and arrange for public meetings at all stages of the project to be held so that local residents have an opportunity to express their views on the project. The minutes of these meetings should be submitted to the local planning authority and An Bord Pleanála and be available for public inspection.

A similar approach to the practical measures outlined in the Wind Turbine Regulation Bill should be included in legislation for other energy infrastructural projects. While it is important to note that not all energy projects are the same, or necessarily cause a similar level of intrusion into the lives of host communities, public consultation should remain a guiding principle that is at the heart of the planning process.

That decisions made by planning authorities directly affect the value of land in a negative way is a long accepted principle in the Irish planning system and comparable jurisdictions. In the 26 Counties, the concept of allowing the wider community to share in the wealth created by planning decisions, by taking account of the potential sizeable uplifts in land value, has been recognised in statute since 1963, when section 26 of the Local Government (Planning and Development) Act 1963 first gave local authorities limited powers to levy financial contributions.²

Major pieces of infrastructure that may be required to develop energy projects can often cause issues for local residents. Providing that planning permission is given for a project to proceed doesn't automatically mean that all the concerns of the local community have been satisfied. Therefore, planning gain, agreed with the local authority can provide funding for structural and community projects in these host communities.

A case example of where engagement with the community seriously failed is the Corrib gas project and the effect this had on the community of Rosspoint. Rosspoint is important because it is a dispute about ownership and use of natural resources; because it illustrates the threats posed to local communities by a powerful coalition of state and capital, and as a consequence it raises questions of scalar politics and power.³

Locals opposed to the development, frame their opposition in terms of safety and health. They claim that the pressure of unprocessed gas in the pipeline will be too high, that the pipeline will be too close to people's homes and that the environmental effects of gas transportation and processing will be devastating to the place, people and wildlife. They want the gas to be processed offshore.⁴

² Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee On Development Contributions. April 2007. <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Planning/FileDownload,5140,en.pdf>

³ 'Border thinking: Rosspoint, Shell and the Political Geographies of a Gas Pipeline' in Political Geography, Vol 28, Issue 5, 2008, p274

⁴ 'Border thinking: Rosspoint, Shell and the Political Geographies of a Gas Pipeline' in Political Geography, Vol 28, Issue 5, 2008, p279

Local opposition sparked major controversy about the manner in which the main company involved in the development, Shell, behaved towards the local host communities. Landowners, who took issue with a high pressured pipeline running through their land, protested against what they believed to be an infringement of their rights. As a result, in March 2005, Shell applied to the High Court for an order restraining landowners from interfering with the laying of the pipeline. An injunction was given and as a result five local people were imprisoned for interfering with the work of Shell. These became known as the Rosspoint 5.⁵

Many maintain that the government were complicit in the failure to engage with the local community. Local people feel that they were ignored by government and that private business was allowed a free hand in developing energy infrastructure as it wished.

A key lesson to learn from the Corrib gas controversy is that public consultation is not just the sole responsibility of the private companies; government and local authorities must also play an active role in engaging with citizens. The Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources must learn from the mistakes of the Corrib project and ensure that they are never again repeated.

Fuel Poverty

Fuel poverty is in many respects a matter of distributive injustice⁶ as it is the poorest in society who are often those who suffer greatest from the lack of adequate heat and warmth in their homes.

The consequences of fuel poverty are clearly evident. Not only does a lack of adequate heating make conditions more uncomfortable for those who must live in fuel poverty households, it can have a direct impact on their physical and mental health. Fuel poverty can also play a role in deprivation levels in other areas of the household, for example where a family are forced into a 'heat or eat' situation, and they must make a conscious decision whether to feed themselves or their children, or provide an adequate level of heating in the home.⁷

Research shows that changing energy supplier is an effective means of reducing energy costs. Energy companies do not reward loyal customers; instead those who remain with the same company benefit the least from possible savings on tariffs.

Those who tend to be least aware of potential saving are those in low income households, vulnerable people, and the elderly, often the very same households who are at risk of fuel poverty.⁸

The Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) should take a greater role in educating households about the benefit of switching tariffs. There are already a number of websites that demonstrate to the public the savings that they could make if they change their energy supplier. The CER could aid in tackling fuel poverty by making the public more aware of these facilities.

Fuel poverty must also be tackled at a European level. To date, policy from Europe has been piecemeal with no specific policy package addressing fuel poverty. European Council Directive (2009,ab) both acknowledged that fuel poverty exists and require affected member states to develop action plans; however, the European Union (EU) has stopped short of providing a common definition of the problem, which might give fuel poverty better visibility at the member state level.⁹

⁵ 'The Great Corrib Gas Controversy' in Fiosrú, Vol 1, No 2, 2005, p43

⁶ 'Fuel poverty as injustice' in Energy Policy 49 (2012) p69

⁷ 'Fuel poverty as injustice' in Energy Policy 49 (2012) p70

⁸ 'Tackling fuel poverty through facilitating energy tariff switching' in Public Health 127 (2013) p895

⁹ 'Quantifying the prevalence of fuel poverty across the European Union' in Energy Policy 52 (2013) p564

The Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources should work with their European counterparts at the European Council of Ministers to develop a European wide definition of fuel poverty and a policy package to address the issue.

An EU wide recognition of fuel poverty is essential in tackling the issue due to the fact that wider energy issues are being addressed at a European level. Member states have signed legally binding agreements to increase the amount of energy from renewable sources that they consume. Member states are also obliged to reduce their CO2 emission output. It is essential that fuel poverty is not forgotten during European discussions on energy.

Despite enduring relatively mild winters, Ireland and Britain have the highest rates of seasonal mortality in northern Europe, and it has been shown that such mortality rates result, in no small part, from the inadequately protected, thermally inefficient housing stocks in these countries.

There are also strong associations between inadequately heated homes and increased rates of morbidity; higher incidences of various cardiovascular and respiratory diseases have been associated with chronic cold exposure from within the home through living in fuel-poor conditions. The problem of fuel poverty occurs, therefore, when a household does not have the adequate financial resources to meet these winter home-heating costs, and because the dwelling's heating system and insulation levels prove to be inadequate for achieving affordable household warmth.¹⁰

It is important to note that fuel poverty does not have equal consequences across different social and demographic groups. For example, fuel poverty is often linked to the phenomenon of 'excess winter deaths' i.e. the peak of deaths that occurs in cold weather every year; and the majority of these deaths occurs in older people.

Older people may require more home heating than others, for physical reasons and if they spend more time at home than working people, and thus affordability problems may have a greater impact.¹¹ It is essential that supports such as the National Fuel Scheme and Household Benefits do not suffer from the sword of austerity. The rationale for these social payments, especially to older people and those with disabilities, is that not only are they more likely to receive a lower income, they also require more heating due to physical reasons.

In 1995 an All-Party Fuel Poverty and Energy Efficiency Group was established in the British parliament. Working together, this group brought about the passing of the Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act 2000. A similar group should be established in Leinster House, made up of TDs and Senators, with the support of the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources and the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Transport and Communications.

Large parts of Ireland are outside of the natural gas grid network. Counties Donegal, Tyrone, Fermanagh, Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon, Longford, Kerry and Wexford do not have access to a Bord Gáis Network natural gas supply. Research shows that properties off the gas grid have higher energy costs, and households in those properties are more likely to be fuel poor compared to on-grid homes.¹²

This makes a case for extending the natural gas grid network to provide for a much greater geographical spread. The Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources should undertake a study to determine the feasibility of extending the natural gas network.

Retrofitting of homes is an obvious means of tackling fuel poverty. Fuel poor households are concentrated in the worst buildings in terms of thermal insulation. Rural houses in particular suffer greatly from poor insulation and rural

¹⁰ 'Quantifying the severity of fuel poverty, its relationship with poor housing and reasons for non-investment in energy-saving measures in Ireland' in Energy Policy 32 (2004) p207

¹¹ 'Fuel poverty as injustice' in Energy Policy 49 (2012) p71

¹² 'Fuel Poverty and energy efficiency obligations' in Energy Policy 62 (2013) p1201

households are at a higher risk of being fuel poor. A higher proportion of fuel poor households live in non-cavity houses.¹³

Sinn Féin, in its 2014 Pre-Budget Submission, put forward the proposal that a Green Bank be established, where the state, along with the pension industry, would invest in the retrofitting of homes. This in turn would see a marked increase in the number of homes retrofitted. It would also generate stable returns, higher than Government bonds, for the pension industry.¹⁴

Recommendations:

1. That government bring the Wind Turbine Regulation Bill 2014 to committee and remaining stages.
2. That public consultation proposals outlined in the Wind Turbine Regulation Bill be applied to other energy infrastructure projects.
3. That government accept the failure to engage with the local community in Rossport and ensure that the same mistakes are not repeated.
4. That the CER make the public aware of the possible tariff reductions from switching energy supplier.
5. That the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources should work with his or her European counterparts at the European Council of Ministers to develop a European wide definition of fuel poverty and a policy package to address the issue.
6. That supports such as the National Fuel Scheme and Household Benefits are not cut.
7. That an all-party group on fuel poverty and energy efficiency be established.
8. That the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources should undertake a study to determine the feasibility of extending the natural gas network.
9. That a Green Bank be established, where the state, along with the pension industry, would invest in the retrofitting of homes.

Markets, Regulations and Prices

Regulation

Energy is essential for all production and consumption activities. It is necessary whether in the home or in the workplace. The supply of most energy is subject to regulation to ensure that there is continuity in the flow of electricity, petroleum and fuel.

Regulation plays an important role in the energy industry, and the impact of regulation reform and the relationship between the level of regulation and performance have been continually debated.¹⁵

Regulation is an important tool for government and policy makers. It allows the government to assert a level of control over an industry which in recent years has witnessed major liberalisation and privatisation measures. This has allowed governments the opportunity to assert some form of authority in an area of great importance to its citizens. The level of influence which governments may or may not have is dependent on the strength of regulation and this is reflected in the importance government and policy makers place on the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER).

¹³ 'Fuel Poverty and energy efficiency obligations' in Energy Policy 62 (2013) p1201

¹⁴ Sinn Féin Alternative Budget 2014, p27 <http://www.sinnfein.ie/files/2013/Pre-Budget2014Submission.pdf>

¹⁵ 'Effects of regulation and economic environment on the electricity industry's competitiveness' in Energy Policy 72 (2014) p121

With greater liberalisation and the creation of new energy companies, it is essential that the CER is equipped to deal with the future challenges that arise from the changes listed above. For example, Ireland no longer sources its gas and electricity from one major supplier. Instead there are now several companies competing in both these areas and the CER is tasked with ensuring the companies that supply these forms of energy are compliant with regulation. In Britain, where the gas market was subject to 'light-touch regulation', the regulator was not equipped to oversee the liberalisation of the market and therefore came under strain.¹⁶ It is essential that the State does not repeat these mistakes, so the CER must be adequately resourced and staffed with experienced personnel.

Policy makers must be wary of government spin that propagates the view that deregulation will lead to greater efficiency in the energy market and allow for the reduction of prices. The reality is quite different, with most research showing that, in countries with similar demographics to Ireland, where there is a high level of energy intensity and deregulation, this may lower competitiveness because of exploitation by private monopolies and oligopolies.

In Britain, where the energy market is fully privatised, energy retail profits increased from £223m in 2009 to £1.1bn in 2012 with no clear evidence of suppliers becoming more efficient in reducing their own costs. Moreover, average dual fuel (electricity and gas) prices increased by 24% between 2009 and 2013 - nearly double the rate of inflation of 13.8%.

It is essential that transparency in energy pricing is an integral part of the system of regulation. Energy companies resist greater levels of transparency which is hardly surprising as they do not wish to pass information on to others that could have an impact on their profit margins. It is therefore essential that the CER ensure there is a consistent level of transparency in energy pricing and that consumers have full knowledge of what energy costs. This is not just beneficial to energy consumers, but also to government and policy makers as the more information that is made available to the public, the greater the options available to them are.

Privatisation

The Gas Regulation Act 2013 resulted in the sale of Bord Gáis Energy. This was the privatisation of a semi-state run business that was established in 1975. The government claims that the sale of Bord Gáis Energy was part of the deal formed with the Troika. It is also however part of a wider liberalisation and privatisation agenda that has swept through Europe.

Energy companies often fall victim to privatisation which has consequences for the consumer and wider implications for the state. Bord Gáis Energy was sold to a multinational consortium.¹⁷ This had an important impact on the economy due to the fact that, when profits were made by energy companies, these profits were transferred out of the country. When the energy supplier is domestically owned, some of the profits are transferred back to the consumer in the form of dividends. Conversely, when the energy supplier is owned by a foreign multinational, those profits are usually moved out of the country.¹⁸

The privatisation of electricity networks has a direct correlation with increasing energy costs for consumers. An example of this can be seen from recent attempts in Germany to take the electricity grid that serves Berlin back into public ownership. The electricity grid network was fully privatised in 2009 and sold to a multinational company. As a result, electricity consumers in the state of Berlin witnessed their electricity bills rise by 21%.¹⁹

In Britain there is an oligopoly known as the 'Big Six' where the six biggest private energy companies dominate the energy market. This has resulted in 'tacit coordination' between these companies to ensure that savings made by energy companies are not passed on to the consumer. In fact, the intensity of competition between the big six diminished; price announcements were then aligned so that energy prices far outweighed the cost to the supplier.²⁰

Sinn Féin believes that energy should remain in public ownership for the benefit of Irish citizens - there should be no further sale of state energy assets.

¹⁶ 'The British Gas market 10 years after privatisation' in Energy Policy, Vol 25, No 4, p389

¹⁷ <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/484b235e-b3f7-11e3-b891-00144feabdc0.html#axzz36ssClluv>

¹⁸ 'A counterfactual price analysis of British electricity privatisation' in Utilities Policy 9 (2000) p42

¹⁹ <http://www.democracyatwork.info/articles/2013/03/referendum-movement-in-berlin-aims-to-democratize-entire-energy-sector/>

²⁰ <http://touchstoneblog.org.uk/2014/06/energy-consumers-lose-in-public-to-private-monopoly/>

Integrated Energy Market

The introduction of an all-Ireland Single Electricity Market (SEM) in 2007 enabled all energy generators on the island to contribute to a single pool which provided opportunities for more efficient business planning and corporate savings. All Ireland harmonisation should in theory deliver efficiencies through elimination of duplication of resources and lower energy prices to consumers.

To help achieve this, it is essential that those involved in the SEM Committee, the Utilities Regulator in the north, and the CER in the south, act together for the benefit of energy consumers in both jurisdictions. The SEM project should form part of the North-South Ministerial Council, with ministers on both sides of the border working together to ensure that consumers receive the best deal possible.

At EU level attempts have been made to establish an integrated energy market by the European Commission. The issue with a European network is that access to such a network is fraught with distortions and complexities. Each country in the European Union takes varied approaches to transmission lines, generation of energy and valuation of pricing.

A fully functioning integrated energy market would require a common approach to the valuation of assets and network pricing across the entire EU. EU States adopt different approaches in the way assets are owned, and have regulated returns on which energy companies rely.²¹ The State's Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources should work with the European Commission to investigate how an integrated energy market would work, assess if an integrated energy market would benefit Ireland, and the positive impact this would have on Irish citizens.

Recommendations:

1. That government ensures that the Commission for Energy Regulation is fully resourced with adequate staff to deal with a more liberalised market and that the energy industry is not subject to light touch regulation.
2. That government ensures that the CER maintains a consistent level of transparency in energy pricing and that consumers have full knowledge of what energy costs.
3. That government does not privatise any further state energy assets.
4. That the North-South Ministerial Council takes responsibility for the SEM project, with ministers on each side of the border working together to ensure that consumers receive the best deal possible.
5. That the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources should work with the European Commission to investigate how an integrated energy market would work, how it would impact on Ireland and to assess if an integrated energy market would be in Ireland's favour.

²¹ "The European framework for energy and climate policies" in Energy Policy 64 (2014) p31

Planning and Implementing Essential Energy Infrastructure

Energy infrastructure is essential to economic development. It is needed to deliver power to industry and to households. However, the need for the development and expansion of infrastructure cannot nullify the rights of communities to live in a comfortable and safe environment.

Recent years have seen energy infrastructure become embroiled in controversy. The expansion of the electricity grid with the use of giant overhead pylons, which are to be stretched across vast areas of the west, south-east and north-east, has caused a massive outcry in the communities affected.

The Corrib gas controversy has been a national scandal with the state failing to live up to its responsibility to protect the rights of those in the community. Sinn Féin's submission makes recommendations as to how government should proceed with electricity, oil and gas infrastructure.

Electricity Infrastructure

Sinn Féin cannot support EirGrid's determination to use overhead pylons and wire for the entire length of these routes while ruling out the underground option. It would appear that, despite the clearly expressed opposition of thousands of families living close to the proposed routes of these power lines and their support pylons, EirGrid remains fixed on its overhead approach to these projects.

It is essential that we recognise the reality of the outworking of the Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Act 2006. This legislation facilitates forcing through these types of projects, regardless of the expressed wishes of communities and their impact on the natural environment.

Sinn Féin recommends a revisiting of the act by the Minister. We need to ensure that there is compliance by all wishing to see major projects undertaken and to ensure that communities and citizens have the right to engage as objectors as part of the planning process.

Communities are quite rightly concerned about the visual impact on their environment of the proposed unsightly string of pylon structures stretching across scenic areas. These regions are areas steeped in heritage with scenic landscapes, mountains, rivers and various heritage sites.

Householders and landowners will likely see the value of their property drop significantly and the environmental impact will impinge on tourism which authorities across the regions have identified as a key economic driver. Agriculture is a key economic sector in Ireland, worth approximately €9 billion in agri-food exports alone. There is no doubt that the 43 metre high voltage power lines are a significant source of intrusion and invasion onto farmers' lands. The presence of such pylons will make it more difficult to labour in some farmlands as farmers will have to work around poles and pylon.

These challenges cannot be easily dismissed. Planning restrictions will result from the sterilisation of land over a radius out from these pylons. The proposed routes for the pylon structures contain large farming communities, highly populated with livestock and wildlife habitats.

There is general agreement that undergrounding cables is significantly more reliable than erecting overhead pylons, whether in conditions of planned or forced outages. Failures in underground cables are significantly lower than in overhead lines, which are permanently affected by the climate and environmental conditions, and so the components age.

Transmission losses can be reduced by undergrounding cables. Transmission losses represent a loss in value and an increase in fuel burn and environmental impact. In Europe, transmission losses are estimated to be around €12 million annually.²²

In June 2014, EirGrid announced that they had drawn up a proposed route for undergrounding part of the Grid-West project, linking north Mayo to a strong point on the national grid. This announcement was a new departure for EirGrid and opened up a debate on the possibility of undergrounding the GridLink project and the North/South Interconnector.

Currently the Independent Review Group, established by the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources in January 2014 is assessing the possibility of undergrounding cables along some of the route.

It is essential that the concerns of communities affected by pylons are addressed by the independent expert panel. Under the terms of reference, the independent expert panel will examine the potential environmental impacts, technical efficacy and cost factors in regard to placing electric transmission lines overhead or underground. However, the potential impacts of Electro Magnetic Fields will not be taken into consideration by the independent expert panel.

For the public to have confidence in the outcome of this review, all of the uncertainties that have been expressed about the erection of pylons must be addressed. The independent expert panel must also look at the long-term impact of the project when examining the cost of undergrounding versus overhead lines. The long term economic impact for the state in erecting pylons through a vast corridor of its countryside must be reviewed as this will surely have an impact on two of our most important industries – industry and tourism.

Oil Infrastructure

Whitegate, Co. Cork, is the State's only oil refinery. Given the importance of the oil in Irish energy production and consumption it is essential that security of supply is guaranteed with sufficient infrastructure. This infrastructure must be of the highest standard, and the safety of those working within the facility and those living in its vicinity are protected.

In 1979 a major accident occurred at the oil terminal on Whiddy Island in Bantry Bay as oil was being unloaded from a tanker. Fifty people lost their lives in the tragic accident. The theory of the cause of the disaster suggests that excessive compressive stresses were set up at deck and sheer-strake level owing to the manner in which the ship was ballasted.²³

A tribunal into the disaster concluded that the petroleum company involved had taken 'deliberate decisions' not to maintain the infrastructure to a sufficient standard, which ultimately resulted in the accident.²⁴

Given the prominent role which petroleum companies play in the supply of oil to Ireland, it is essential for all concerned that the government ensures that the highest safety standards are maintained and that a tragic accident like the one that occurred at Whiddy Island never occurs again.

The state still owns and maintains the Bantry Offshore Jetty at Whiddy Island. However, this jetty is not in use at present.²⁵ The government should investigate whether this jetty could be brought back into use as part of a strategy for oil infrastructure.

²² The Askon Report on Undergrounding, Summary and Recommendations. 2008. P8

²³ Disaster at Whiddy Island, Bantry, Co. Cork. Report of Tribunal of Inquiry. May 1980, p22

²⁴ Disaster at Whiddy Island, Bantry, Co. Cork. Report of Tribunal of Inquiry. May 1980, p23

²⁵ Parliamentary Question 26953/14

Gas Infrastructure

The Corrib gas pipeline controversy has been one of the most contentious energy infrastructural projects in the State's history. In May 2014 the longest tunnel ever built in Ireland, stretching 4.9km, was completed. This tunnel will bring unprocessed gas from the Corrib gas field to a processing terminal in Bellanaboy. The decision to allow this pipe to be brought through the community of Rosspoint was fundamentally wrong. This pipe could potentially endanger the livelihood and possibly even the lives of those living near to its location. Sinn Féin has continuously stood with the community and stated that the processing terminal should be placed at sea.

Recommendations:

1. That government underground the transmission cables in the GridWest, GridLink and North/South Interconnector where possible.
2. That government ensures that the independent review group takes account of all studies carried out into pylons.
3. That government ensures that oil infrastructure is maintained to the highest possible standards to ensure that a disaster such as occurred on Whiddy Island never happens again.
4. That government investigate the possibility of reopening the Bantry Offshore Jetty.
5. That gas from the Corrib gas field is processed at sea.

Ensuring a Balanced and Secure Energy Mix

Ireland is heavily reliant on imported fossil fuel for our energy supply and Sinn Féin's submission addresses the lack of non-renewable options available to the Irish government.

Ireland's offshore oil and gas remains a largely untapped potential source of energy and Sinn Féin has consistently called for the establishment of a state petroleum company. The option of fracking for unconventional gas should not be pursued by the state as it has potentially disastrous consequences for the environment and people's health. Ireland should also remain nuclear free.

Indigenous Resources

Ireland's offshore oil and gas reserves have the long term potential to be a significant source of revenue for the economy. According to a 2006 report carried out by the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources there are approximately 10 billion barrels of oil equivalent off our western coast, composed of 6.5 billion barrels of oil and 20 trillion cu. ft. of gas. At current oil prices, this equates to a value of approximately €540 billion. While it is true that the actual amount of oil and gas brought ashore has been small, those reserves exist. At present there is very little gas and no oil being extracted from Irish waters, but this does not reflect the potential that Ireland's reserves hold.²⁶

Companies that discover oil or gas in Irish territory are not obliged to supply these resources to the Irish market. Not only that, our licensing terms are so weighted in the industry's favour, they do not require the companies to bring a single drop of our oil or gas ashore in Ireland.

²⁶ Liquid Assets. Shell to Sea, p8

The State's licencing terms do not award the country fuel security. When the government gives an oil and gas company a licence, ownership and control of Irish oil and gas is transferred to that company. Under the current licencing terms, the government cannot guarantee that the oil and gas will be sold to the Irish market, that the oil and gas will be landed in Ireland, or that the companies use Irish workers. Irish consumers must pay in full the international price for oil and gas found off Ireland's coast. In a period when the world is nearing peak oil production, it is imperative that Ireland secures its fuel supply.

Under the 1992 and 2007 Licencing Terms a 25% tax on the net profits of oil and gas is applicable. Against this, oil and gas companies can write off 100% of costs against tax, including costs incurred up to 25 years before field production begins and including the cost of any unsuccessful wells the company has drilled anywhere in Irish waters in that 25 year period.

Under the 2007 Licencing Terms a Profit Resource Rent Tax (PRRT) was introduced. PRRT is payable on a profit ratio calculated by the cumulative after tax profits on the specific field divided by the cumulative level of capital investment in the specific field. The PRRT has been recently adjusted so that larger finds will pay a 55% tax rate. This falls far short of recommendations made by the Joint Committee on Communications, Natural Resources, and Agriculture that PRRT should be on a rolling scale of 40%, 60% and 80%.²⁷

Sinn Féin supports the establishment of a state petroleum company, based on the Norwegian model, to develop our offshore oil and gas reserves. Sinn Féin also believes that the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources should adopt the fiscal approach outlined in the report compiled by the Joint Committee on Communications, Natural Resources and Agriculture.

Fracking

The use of fracking as a means of extracting unconventional gas has become more common in recent years yet it remains a highly controversial method of extracting gas. Sinn Féin believes that it is totally unsuitable and unsafe on a small island with a dispersed population. The process could also endanger the agri-food and tourism industries, a crucial part of the nation's economy.

Shale gas production is technically complex, capitally intensive, and financially expensive. It contributes to the risk of cost overruns for projects, can lead to accidents and leakage, and may make future development contingent on uncertain technological breakthroughs in carbon capture and storage technology.²⁸

The fracking process involves pumping large volumes of water, chemicals and sand into the ground in the hope of creating fractures in the earth to release the petroleum. Biocides and dyes are often used in the fracking process. This can have a major impact on the surrounding environment and host communities.

The water that is pumped into wells during fracking is significant. The companies aim to extract this water and dispose of it, and serious questions have been raised as to how much of this water is lost into the soil. The water mixed with chemicals is possibly already toxic when it is pumped into the ground and when the flow-back is collected it is likely to bring with it toxins from the ground beneath.

Shale gas development can contribute to environmental degradation involving water, air, and the release on radio-nuclides, and the social degradation of public health, climate change, and the displacement of cleaner forms of energy.²⁹

²⁷ Report on Offshore Oil and Gas, Joint Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Natural Resources and Agriculture. 2012

²⁸ 'Cornucopia or curse? Reviewing the costs and benefits of shale gas hydraulic fracturing' in Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews 37 (2014), p255

²⁹ 'Cornucopia or curse? Reviewing the costs and benefits of shale gas hydraulic fracturing' in Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews 37 (2014), p256

In March 2013 the New York State Assembly voted to block fracking until 2015. They have cited the need for further study into the process before they can lift the moratorium on the process. Studies are currently underway in other countries that will take many years to complete. To compound matters further, the future health implications in humans could take years to become manifest.

Sinn Féin believes that fracking should be banned outright anywhere on the island of Ireland.

Nuclear Power

Nuclear power has been a very controversial subject and is likely to remain so into the future. There has never been commercial nuclear power generated in Ireland and currently there are no plans to develop a nuclear power plant on the island.

The recent Fukushima nuclear power plant disaster in Japan served as a wake-up call for the proponents of nuclear power. Prior to the disaster at Fukushima, nuclear power provided 31% of electricity in Japan.³⁰ The disaster highlighted to the world the potentially disastrous outcomes that can emerge from a nuclear accident.

Ireland should remain nuclear free. The Irish government should also seek to communicate to the British government the risk that nuclear power plants such as Sellafield pose to Ireland.

Recommendations:

1. That the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources adopt the PRRT tax measures of 40%, 60% and 80% on offshore oil and gas fields, as outlined by the report by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Natural Resources and Agriculture.
2. That the government establish a state petroleum company, based on the Norwegian model.
3. That the use of fracking should be banned anywhere on the island of Ireland.
4. That Ireland should remain nuclear free.
5. That the government communicate to the British government the risk that nuclear power plants such as Sellafield pose to Ireland.

Putting the Energy System on a Sustainable Pathway

Sinn Féin is fully committed to the development of renewable energy in Ireland. As a state we are heavily reliant on imported fossil fuels to meet our energy demands. It is imperative that this government act to ensure that it develops a progressive renewable energy policy, which not only complies with EU targets but also ensures the State's energy security far into the future.

Regrettably, the current model that the government is pursuing relies primarily on wind energy to meet targets which is insufficient. Wind, on its own, is not a secure form of energy and should be developed as part of a wider renewable strategy that includes alternative sources such as wave, tidal and biomass.

Sinn Féin supports the use of wind energy, but it is an industry that must be properly regulated. As part of this submission, Sinn Féin has highlighted other forms of renewable energy that should be developed in order that Ireland reaches its renewable energy goals.

³⁰ 'Post-Fukushima Japan: The continuing nuclear controversy' in Energy Policy 68 (2014), p199

Wind Energy

Around 16% of global energy requirement is currently met through renewable sources. 19% of electricity generation comes from renewables³¹. That places the challenge and opportunity facing this country in context and it is also noteworthy that the vast bulk of electricity from renewables is generated from hydro rather than wind. This has implications for Ireland which has an undeveloped hydro sector despite the significant potential that exists for generating off-shore energy.

No country has developed self-sufficiency in electricity generation from wind. Denmark now generates over 30% of its electricity from wind and also exports over 12 billion kWh a year.

Achieving self-sufficiency in electricity from renewables should be a key target for this country. There are, however, critiques of the economics of the electricity exports including in Denmark which may be relevant to planning for the future here.

The 26 Counties were ranked 17th of 27 EU member states in 2011, with just 5.43% of electricity requirements met from renewables. Of that figure, by far the biggest contributor was wind which supplied 4.38%. Hydro was just 0.71% and biomass 0.34%³².

A target of 40% of electricity from renewables, chiefly wind, has been set for 2020. That would constitute a doubling of the current supply, and would help to put Ireland considerably ahead of the overall 16% renewables target set by the EU. To achieve the 40% target will require an added renewable capacity growth of 275MW per year. The Irish Wind Energy Association estimates that this would involve an investment of €4.7 billion with the potential to create thousands of jobs as well as benefitting the economy through lowering dependence on imported fossil fuels.

Another key aspect of the development of electricity generation from renewable sources will be the increasing of storage capacity within the grid, so that energy generated from intermittent renewable sources such as wind can be stored for future use.

At present there is very low storage capacity but various technologies exist which will make this more feasible and economically cost effective in the future. The state needs to promote the development of storage capacity and one option is to produce hydrogen by electrolysis which can then be fed into the gas network.

There are just over 200 wind farms in the state, the largest being Meentycat in Donegal with a capacity to generate 84.96MW. One argument regarding wind farms here, and one of the factors behind local opposition, is that farms tend to be smaller and more dispersed rather than in Scotland where there are fewer wind farms but on a larger scale.

The largest wind farm in Scotland, and indeed in Europe, at Whitelee, generates 322MW per year. Overall Scotland generates 2GW of electricity from wind, with plans to install another 7GW. Scotland aims to be 100% self-sufficient in electricity generation by 2020, and then become a major exporter with an estimated capacity of 159GW which vastly outstrips its own maximum requirement of 10.5GW.

The Scottish model is therefore regarded by many as the optimum one to follow, and has been taken as the model by Sinn Féin and the Stormont Executive. There are however, several issues that need to be considered. For example Scotland generates 25% of Europe's potential wind generation from onshore and offshore sources. This country is also well-favoured in that regard, but is years behind the Scots in developing capacity.

³¹ REN21 (2009). Renewables Global Status Report: 2009 Update, Paris

³² Eurostat, April 2013

There are also issues with the placing of wind farms close to where people live. Not only does Scotland have a lower population density, but it is also a more urbanised country with a concentration of people in the south. It has greater scope to install onshore wind farms well away from where people are living. The fact that the Scottish model favours fewer and larger farms also helps to ensure less proximity, and therefore less public opposition.

In January 2013 the Irish and British governments signed a Memorandum of Understanding that would facilitate the exporting of wind energy from the Irish midlands to Britain.³³

The talks that later resulted from this Memorandum of Understanding did not produce an official agreement but it has been suggested that fresh attempts will be made to renew talks. Sinn Féin opposed this Memorandum of Understanding for two main reasons. Firstly, it would have resulted in massive industrial wind turbines being erected throughout the midlands, in close proximity to people's homes. There was an outcry from the communities affected, who felt that their homes and futures could be put in danger by this industrial development. Secondly, Sinn Féin maintained that it was fundamentally wrong for Ireland to be exporting renewable energy when the majority of the energy consumed in Ireland comes from fossil fuels.

As a result Sinn Féin introduced the Wind Turbine Regulation Bill 2014 to the Dáil and it is currently waiting to be brought to committee stage. This legislation, if accepted, would implement coherent regulations regarding the erection of wind turbines and the use of the energy which they produce. The bill would ensure that wind turbines, which are of a height that is greater than 25 meters, shall not be located not less than ten times the height of the turbine away from any dwelling.³⁴ The current guidelines that are in place require turbines to be just 500 meters away from a home.

The export of renewable energy would be curtailed under this piece of legislation, until such time as Ireland's energy demands are met. With the state importing the vast majority of its energy every year in the form of fossil fuels, it is essential that renewable energy is used in Ireland with the aim of reducing the energy bills of consumers and ultimately making Ireland self-sufficient in its energy production.

Wave and Tidal Energy

In 2007 the then Minister Eamonn Ryan set a target of 500MW electricity to be generated from wave and tide by 2020³⁵.

Recently WestWave, a wave energy project, was awarded funding by the European Commission. This is a project led by the ESB, a semi-state company, and is a step in the right direction in terms of developing tidal and wave energy. There is even greater potential in ocean energy than wind given the island's access to the sea, and in particular on the west Atlantic coast. It has been estimated that Irish waters have the potential to generate 525TW annually. When it is considered that annual electricity usage in the state is around 26TW, the massive potential is clear. A 2011 report forecast that an all-Ireland ocean energy sector could be worth about €9 billion. Much of that would be in the export of excess capacity.

The report commissioned by SEAI forecast that over 50,000 jobs could be created in wave and another 17,000 in tidal energy by 2030, and 1,400 by 2020 if the target of 500MW from wave energy is met. However, the report also pointed to the need for a large research input by Irish universities, and for a large level of investment including from the state³⁶.

³³ <http://www.dcenr.gov.ie/Press+Releases/2013/Irish+and+UK+Energy+MOU.htm>

³⁴ Wind Turbine Regulation Bill 2014

³⁵ White Paper for Energy, 2007

³⁶ Economic Study for Ocean Energy Development in Ireland, SEAI and Invest Northern Ireland (2010)

The report refers to the substantial costs involved but claimed that the lower range capital costs for wave and tide installations at between €1,050/kw and €1,265kw are lower than the capital costs for offshore wind farms, at between €2,000/kw and €2,200/kw³⁷.

Tidal generation has a significant advantage over many other forms of renewable generation as it is almost perfectly forecastable over long time horizons. Thus, incorporating tidal generation into an electricity system should be less challenging than other forms of renewable generation which are relatively unpredictable.³⁸

The required technology is not as yet fully developed and the UK Energy Research Centre has forecast that large installations capable of generating up to 100MW will only become operational after 2020³⁹. However, that is all the more reason why support needs to be given to and capital invested in research and development now.

Ireland has the capacity to be a world leader in ocean energy. Some of the recognised cutting edge research and design is being conducted at Cork and Belfast. Both centres have also been involved in testing, with links to existing or planned ocean testing sites. A potential disadvantage is the lack of a manufacturing capacity for the equipment required although the north eastern heavy engineering sector could be geared towards that. Other deficiencies requiring to be addressed are the current inadequacies of the ports, and a lack of the skills needed in installing and maintaining the installations and cables.

The first commercial tidal power station was the SeaGen facility in Strangford Lough, capable of generating 1.2MW of electricity to power 1,000 homes. Experts in the field believe that similar tidal rather than wave installations present the best prospect for this island.

Grid connection and underwater cable maintenance represent a huge proportion of costs, and the creation of 'ocean farms' has been suggested as a means to share and lower costs. The necessity of ocean energy development being led by Irish capital and innovators has been stressed by those who said that otherwise we will end up as with other energy resources in having to buy back what is ours. That is also why a proper licensing regime is essential. The potential here has been recognised by others. Recently a Russian company Martex submitted a proposal to Down District Council for a combined tide and wave dam to be constructed across Strangford Lough⁴⁰. They claim it would create thousands of jobs and with a total capacity of 250MW. The Council have agreed to hear the proposal from company representatives.

A report by a committee of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly found that Ireland and Britain possess probably the most significant marine energy resource in Europe. The coasts and surrounding sea areas under Irish and British jurisdictions contain extensive and high energy wave and tidal environments. For example, Ireland alone has over 7,500km of coastline and Britain considerably more. The works being done by both countries in terms of resource assessment and surveys, technology testing, licensing and collaboration with industry can be pooled more intensively with compromising commercial privacy.

It is possible that the opportunities are being lost in both jurisdictions as a result of the absence of an intensified collaborative effort.⁴¹ However, it was recognised that both countries face problems in developing tidal and wave energy due to the fact that industry has not taken a lead in technological developments in this area and governments in both countries have failed to step in.⁴²

37 Economic Study for Ocean Energy Development in Ireland, SEAI and Invest Northern Ireland (2010)

38 'The economics of tidal energy' in Energy Policy 27 (2009), p1914

39 UKERC Roadmap (2010)

40 Belfast Telegraph, October 17, 2013

41 British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly Committee. Report on Renewable Wave and Tidal Energy, p6

42 British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly Committee. Report on Renewable Wave and Tidal Energy, p6

One of the key benefits associated with increased tidal generation is the additional capacity it adds to the system. The extent to which tidal generation can substitute for conventional generation without reducing the reliability of the system is given by the capacity credit of tidal.⁴³

Biomass

Biomass refers to cellular material from living or recently dead organisms. It is a widespread resource and can be divided into wastes and purpose grown material. Waste produce can come from agriculture, forestry, household and sewage. Purpose grown material consists of crops which can be grown quickly for the purpose of creating biomass.⁴⁴ Ireland has a strong agricultural sector but its contribution to renewable energy production from biomass and waste has been below the EU average.⁴⁵

A recent partial merger of Bord na Mona and Coillte should aid in the development of Irish biomass production.⁴⁶ This is an area that should be taken seriously as a source of energy production and one which could provide a sustainable supply of energy and could also provide jobs.⁴⁷

A report carried out by BW Energy into alternatives to relying on wind energy to reach renewable energy targets found that the existing power station at Moneypoint, Co. Clare could provide a solution to Ireland's energy needs if it were to use biomass. Moneypoint, the largest fossil fuel power generation in Ireland (915 MW generation capacity) currently supplies around 25% of Irish power generation demand. It therefore plays a key strategic role in the Irish power system with associated implications for how the 2020 renewable power generation target is met.

Biomass boiler technologies and the international biomass market are well established. Both biomass co-firing and full conversion are proven as technically viable and economically attractive for large coal fixed power stations such as Moneypoint. Following the scaling up of the international biomass market and technical advances in boiler design, co-firing with biomass or conversion to biomass generation at the key Moneypoint coal station should now be evaluated as real options to meet the 2020 target.⁴⁸

As part of an energy strategy, it is important that government investigate the possibilities of biomass and the potential it could hold for Irish energy consumers.

Geothermal

Geothermal energy is the energy stored in the form of heat below the earth's surface. This heat comes from the core of the earth and arrives at the surface mainly through fault lines and through drilling bore holes into the soil. Geothermal heat is used today for the supply of hot water for district heating schemes and to generate electricity. Geothermal-generated electricity was first produced in Italy in 1904. Geothermal electricity currently provides a significant contribution to the total electricity demand in Iceland (25%), El Salvador (22%), Kenya, the Philippines (17% each) and Costa Rica (12%). However, in absolute figures, the United States produces the most geothermal electricity and China has the highest use of geothermal heat.⁴⁹

Geothermal energy has both its pros and cons. Energy that is produced from geothermal is clean and potentially unlimited. However, the technology involved in harnessing geothermal energy requires the drilling of boreholes. These boreholes can cause rocks below to fracture and may lead to minor seismic activity. This could potentially cause structural damage to homes or infrastructure nearby. The government is due to bring the Geothermal Energy Development Bill before the Dáil in 2015. While recognising the potential that geothermal may have as a renewable source, government must also be aware of the impact geothermal drilling could have on communities in surrounding areas.

43 'The economics of tidal energy' in Energy Policy 27 (2009), p1918

44 Briefing Note on Biomass. SEAI. 2002

45 Evaluation of Grid Link Stage 1 Report. BW Energy, p3

46 <http://www.dcenr.gov.ie/Press+Releases/2014/Bioenergy+Plan+agreed+by+Government.htm>

47 http://www.siptu.ie/media/pressreleases2014/featurednews/fullstory_18289_en.html

48 Review of the Irish Government's Strategy for Compliance with the European Directive 2009/28. BW Energy, p6

49 'Geothermal technology in Australia' in Energy Policy 39 (2011), p6302

Solar

Two forms of energy are available from solar. One is solar heat and the other is solar electricity. Solar heat can be used in buildings for heating and hot water. Solar electricity uses technology to convert sunlight to electricity which can be fed back into the grid.

Currently there are no solar farms in Ireland. However, the price of solar technology is falling and there may be an opportunity to develop solar farms in Ireland.⁵⁰

What is more likely in the short term is the continued growth of solar technology in people's homes. Solar technology provides a practical solution to households which are attempting to reduce their energy bill while also helping the environment.

Currently, under the Better Energy Homes scheme, a grant of €800 is available to households for the installation of solar thermal systems. This is a positive approach to solar energy that should be maintained into the future.

Microgeneration

Microgeneration allows energy consumers to become energy producers. Microgeneration can vary in definition but ESB Networks define it as a generator that produces up to 11kW of energy when connected to a three phase portion of the grid.

Microgeneration can play an important role in allowing energy consumers to play their role in tackling climate change while also supplying energy to either their homes or to the national grid.

The Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources should encourage and assist households who wish to take part in microgeneration.

Recommendations:

1. That government place a moratorium on wind turbine developments until the Wind Turbine Regulation Bill 2014 is passed.
2. That government do not pursue talks with the British government regarding the export of renewable energy from Ireland to Britain until such a time as Irish energy needs have been satisfied.
3. That government promotes tidal and wave energy projects being led by semi-state bodies such as the ESB, where private industry has failed to invest.
4. That government investigate the conversion of Moneypoint into a biomass power station.
5. That government ensures that Coillte and Bord na Mona work closely for the development of a serious biomass industry in Ireland.
6. That government bring the Geothermal Energy Development Bill before the Dáil.
7. That government is aware of the impact geothermal drilling could have on communities in surrounding areas.
8. That government ensure that grants to homes for solar technology be continued into the future.
9. That the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources should encourage and assist households who wish to take part in microgeneration.

⁵⁰ http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jul/07/solar-has-won-even-if-coal-were-free-to-burn-power-stations-couldnt-compete?CMP=fb_gu

Driving Economic Opportunity

Sinn Féin in its Job Plan document 'Investing in Ireland's Future: Create Jobs Create Growth' outlined a number of areas where jobs can be created in the energy sector.⁵¹

Recommendations:

1. That government invest €1 billion in renewable energy. It is estimated that this industry has the capacity to create 50,000 jobs over 15 years and we would explore how this can be done in a community-friendly fashion.
2. That the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources and the Commission for Energy Regulation work to curtail rising fuel costs. Rising energy costs were identified as a factor in businesses fighting for survival.
3. That government encourage, and invest in, semi-state companies such as Bord na Mona, Coillte, and the ESB to take the lead in developing renewable energy projects.

Summary

People must be put at the heart of any energy policy that is drafted by government. Sinn Féin's submission to the Green Paper on Energy wishes to put the people of Ireland at the heart of the submission. The approach of this government, so far, has allowed energy companies to pave the direction of energy policy in this country. The aim of Sinn Féin's submission is to highlight a refocussing of policy to cater for the needs of the Irish people.

The first step the government can take in this refocussing is to rectify the current situation regarding the erection of wind turbines. Sinn Féin's Wind Turbine Regulation Bill 2014 should be brought to committee and remaining stages. This will see proper regulations regarding the construction of wind turbines implemented and give communities peace of mind.

Fuel poverty is also an issue that government must take seriously if they are to put people at the heart of energy policy. There are practical steps that the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources and his fellow cabinet ministers can take in tackling fuel poverty.

These include ensuring that there are no cuts to the National Fuel Scheme and Household Benefits. The government should work to increase the number of homes that are retrofitted for insulation. The minister should also work at a European level to make fuel poverty a central issue across all member states. The Commission for Energy Regulation should be given every assistance possible to ensure that there is a fair, transparent and a consumer friendly energy market in Ireland.

Sinn Féin believes there must be an All-Ireland approach to energy, as it will be for the benefit of people both north and south. The importance of the SEM project means that it should be given the priority it deserves. Sinn Féin believes that the North-South Ministerial Council should take responsibility for the SEM project. This would benefit consumers on both side of the border and open up a discussion as to how we should proceed with energy policy on a 32 county basis.

⁵¹ 'Investing in Ireland's Future: Create Jobs - Create Growth' Sinn Féin, 2012

Energy infrastructure should form part of this all-Ireland discussion. The North/South Interconnector, along with the GridLink and GridWest projects, is controversial. Sinn Féin believes that these transmission cables should be placed underground. It is imperative that all energy infrastructures are compliant with the highest possible safety standards.

Ireland's natural resources must be for the benefit of the people of Ireland. The Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources must adopt a progressive approach to our offshore oil and gas reserves. Sinn Féin calls on the minister to introduce progressive tax rates of 40%, 60% and 80% dependent on the size of the oil or gas field. It is demonstrably clear that fracking should not be used anywhere on the island of Ireland. It has yet to be proven that the process of extracting unconventional gas by means of fracking is anyway safe for human health or for the environment. Ireland should also remain nuclear free.

Sinn Féin is committed to renewable energy. However, we feel that the current approach being taken by government is too heavily reliant on wind energy and there should be a mix of renewable sources brought on stream. Sinn Féin has identified tidal/wave and biomass energy as two possible rich sources of renewable energy in Ireland. Semi-state bodies must take the lead in developing renewable energy in Ireland. The ESB, Bord na Móna and Coillte have all been identified by Sinn Féin as potential leaders in the field of renewable energy production. With proper focus from government, there is potential to create jobs, create energy and ensure a balanced and secure energy supply into the future.



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