



Border, Midland & Western
Regional Assembly
Shaping the Region

**Response to Green Paper:
Towards a Sustainable Energy Future for Ireland**

November 2006

1. Overview

The Border, Midland and Western (BMW) Regional Assembly is very pleased to be given an opportunity to make a response to the recently published Green Paper *Towards a Sustainable Energy Future for Ireland* (hereafter referred to as the Green Paper). This Green Paper is the first comprehensive Government policy document on Ireland's requirements and sources of energy and addresses a number of important energy-related environmental concerns and sets out the way forward for the further exploitation of renewable sources of energy. It is a comprehensive document with ambitious targets, some of which are lacking information on how they will be reached. This submission sets out a number of issues and proposals relating to the need for more targeted policies and some suggestions in relating to their implementation. It responds to many of the broad policy issues raised in the Green Paper and also provides a regional perspective on these issues.

2. Background to the BMW Regional Assembly

The BMW Regional Assembly was established in 1999 and was designated as the Managing Authority for the Border, Midland and Western Regional Operational Programme (O.P.) in the Objective One region, comprising of 13 Counties. The main roles of the Assembly are to:

- manage the BMW Regional Operational Programme, as set out in the EU structural fund regulations
- monitor the impact of all NDP/CSF Programmes on the BMW Region in order to ensure balanced regional development
- co-ordinate the delivery of public services in the region, highlight issues of regional concern and ensure that national policies take the regional dimension into account.

The BMW Regional Assembly has made numerous submissions on policy issues affecting the Region and plays an important role in promoting the sustainable and equitable development of the region. The BMW Region is viewed typically as one with a high environmental quality, low population densities and low levels of industrial pollution. There are however also serious environmental risks facing the region, such as water contamination, increased emissions and general pressures on environmental resources through increased construction and economic activity generally in both rural and urban areas. The BMW Region, like the rest of the country is increasing its energy consumption, whilst its ability to produce energy is limited in the current framework. The potential for the development of renewable energy in the region is huge, particularly wind, wave and bio-fuels in some areas. The development of such sectors in the region would not only help to reduce emissions and develop alternative energy sources, but also would be a good source of employment and stimulate sustainable economic development in the region.

Whilst energy policy and programmes are primarily the remit of the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources and the relevant semi-state bodies and SEI, the Regional Assemblies as Managing Authorities for the ERDF co-funded Regional Operational Programmes, are currently drafting new programme documents for the 2007-13 programming period that may include sustainable energy initiatives.

3. General Issues arising in the Green Paper

This section briefly sets out some of the broader issues arising in the Green Paper, which we believe are not sufficiently addressed.

- Ø The Green Paper does not place sufficient emphasis on fact that a **large proportion of our energy supply (87%) is currently imported** (EU average is 50%). This figure is rising as our indigenous natural gas supply declines (SEI 2006). A percentage target for energy self-sufficiency should be set.
- Ø Overall the Green Paper places a large proportion of its emphasis on electricity production and industrial and domestic consumption, without sufficiently addressing the need for reform in the sources and levels of **energy consumption in the transport sector**. Fuel consumption in this sector has increased by 151% in the last 15 years and this sector is almost completely reliant on imported oil.
- Ø 2008 will be first year of operation of Kyoto threshold and whilst the Green Paper refers to this, it does not specifically demonstrate how Ireland will meet its **emissions reduction target**.
- Ø Whilst energy is primarily a national concern, Green Paper makes no reference to **regional differences** in supply, availability or consumption of energy and the implications of this.
- Ø Overall, the Green Paper is an aspirational paper with some good targets and it sets a clear overall direction for energy policy in Ireland, but in some sectors it is **lacking tangible information** on strategies, policies and programmes to achieve these targets. Details of these are outlined in the next section.

- Ø The paper does not include a clear contingency plan for the supply of energy in the event of an emergency e.g. in the event of a sudden decline in gas supplies, a stock pile of a year's supply of coal could be stored.

4. Renewable Energy

4.1 Overview

The development and incentivisation of renewable energy generation is crucial to the security and sustainability of energy supply going forward. Ireland currently lags behind many developed countries in its percentage of energy sourced from renewable resources. The BMW Regional Assembly welcomes the introduction of targets for 2010 and 2020 of 15% and 30%, but notes that these targets are still considerably behind many other EU countries, such as Austria which has a target of generating 78% of electricity from renewable sources by 2010. Whilst Ireland's targets are relatively low in EU terms, they are still an improvement on the current situation where only 6.8% of our electricity currently is sourced from renewable sources. The Green Paper however fails to set out a comprehensive strategy of how such targets are to be reached and refers to the future publication of other strategies and documents such as the National Bioenergy Action Plan and the All-island Grid Study. It would have been beneficial if the Green Paper had set out a clearer strategy and outlined how current barriers to renewable energy production were to be removed or overcome. The Green Paper fails to develop a clear shift in strategic thinking or a new policy focus which is crucial to the effective development of the renewable energy sector. There is an urgent need for far better liaison and strategic co-ordination of public policy to drive the growth of the alternative energy sector. There is also a need for more tangible support to the renewable energy sector including the promotion of the community model.

The BMW Regional Assembly also views the exploitation of renewable energy as an important enabler of regional development, both as a means of encouraging economic activity and employment in the region and also as a way to increase the security of supply of energy in the region and reduce dependency on largely imported fossil fuels. The employment potential of renewable and sustainable energies is far greater than conventional energy production systems. This has very positive employment and economic benefits for indigenous employment in the energy sector (broadly defined), as outlined in Annex 5 of the EU Energy Green Paper.

In the sections below, we set out some specific points in relation to the development of renewable energy.

- Ø National Energy Efficiency Plan

4.2 Development of Energy Crops

: There is a need for more joined up thinking in relation to the development of energy crops in Ireland, as alternative land uses to food and fodder production. Consideration should be given to establishing a single agency to promote production, processing,

market development etc in an integrated manner. The economic potential of biomass or energy crop production is not yet fully appreciated in rural areas and there has been insufficient extension services (e.g. Teagasc) dedicated to this. An opportunity exists to utilise arable land for the production of bio-mass and other energy crops in areas such as the catchments of former sugar growing areas near Carlow and Mallow. Under the current system farmers and land-owners receive afforestation grants, but these do not cover energy crops such as Willow or Miscanthus. The Green Paper contains ambitious targets for bio-fuel production in Ireland, but does not provide specific information on how these are to be reached. The provision of establishment grants to farmers and supports towards the purchase of harvesting and processing equipment by suppliers, coupled with demand stimulation measures would enhance this sector.

Ø Mainstreaming of pilot projects such as Eco Ola in Galway or Cork City Council initiative.

4.3 Electricity Production and Wind energy

Ireland and particularly the Western Seaboard has one of the best wind resources in the world and it is particularly strong on the Western Seaboard, much of which is in the BMW Region. Currently only 4.1% of electricity in Ireland is produced through wind energy (SEI 2006). It is estimated that with more efficient electricity storage facilities in the longer term 50% of Ireland's total energy consumption could come from wind (IRO 2006). It is envisaged that wind power will make the most significant contribution to the national and EU targets for renewable energy. The wind potential in Ireland is huge, with a wind turbine in Ireland typically producing twice as much electricity as one at a typical German site. Recent developments in the sector have helped to reduce the costs, making it more competitive and to overcome some of the potential negative environmental impacts (noise, landslide, impact on wildlife etc.). The off-shore capacity is also largely undeveloped and is not promoted in the Green Paper. Off-shore sites such as the one off the coast of Arklow can be very successful and represent a resource which should be exploited further. Similarly the proposed off-shore Oriel windfarm in the Irish Sea near Dundalk, which will have a capacity of 250MW and involve an investment of €380m could be a significant supplier of electricity in both the Republic and Northern Ireland. The introduction of the all-island electricity market in 2007 and the prospect of an Ireland-UK connector by 2012 could enable Ireland to export electricity into Europe during peak early morning time. There is however a need for greater investment in the transmission network to speed up new generation connections and enable Ireland to become an electricity exporter.

Recent developments in the wind energy sector have helped to reduce the costs, making it more competitive and to overcome some of the potential negative environmental impacts (noise, landslide, impact on wildlife etc.). The Green Paper acknowledges the prominence of wind-powered technology in the short term and predicts that a majority of the 2010 renewable electricity target of 15% will come from land based wind farms. There are however still numerous obstacles to be overcome in the financing and administration of wind-powered energy, such as grid access, financial incentives,

planning issues and awareness-raising. Some of these are detailed in the paragraphs below.

The REFIT scheme introduced in 2005 is an improvement on the AER programmes, but smaller wind producers are finding it difficult to compete at the relatively low fixed prices offered under the scheme. Specific sectors however such as the wood bio-mass sector have been unable to compete in the scheme because the fixed prices under it are too low to mobilise commercial investment (COFORD statement).

This is linked with the issue of access to the national electricity grid, which is a major constraint for new entrants. The current grid infrastructure was built at a time when electricity was under public ownership and it facilitated access for large power plants. New grid codes were introduced in 2004 and a group processing approach for grid connection was put in place. After the first connection offers (Gate 1), there is still a total capacity of 3000MW remaining in the queue. Currently there are several hundred MW of renewable capacity with planning permission and a Power Purchase Agreement but no signed connection agreement. There is also concern that the planning permission may lapse in the meantime (IRO 2006). Similarly there are many cases where there are signed grid agreements and planning permission but no PPA. Such issues are not adequately addressed in the Green Paper and it is imperative that mechanisms are put in place to ensure that such administrative constraints are overcome in order to allow for the development of renewable energy in order to meet the ambitious targets for 2010 and beyond. In a 2005 report on progress on meeting renewable energy targets, the EU Commission concluded that more than half of EU member states, including Ireland were still not giving enough support to renewable electricity. As well as social and financial obstacles, the report pointed at administrative barriers and lack of transparency in grid access as key deterrents.

Ø Off-shore capacity especially in wind untapped. Ireland has huge off-shore wind capacity – such as site off Arklow. Not mentioned in Green Paper.

There are also many barriers in place preventing the widespread deployment of domestic scale wind energy generation. This has the potential to reduce the demand for imported energy supplies and has particular potential for use in rural areas and by farmhouses where the visual effects of the domestic turbines on neighbouring properties would not apply. Similarly, public utilities in remote areas e.g., rural water treatment plants and pumping stations could be largely powered using small scale wind turbines. This technology is now highly developed, but is unlikely to be widely taken up without having enabling metering systems that allow the electricity produced to be fully integrated with the public supply. The Assembly welcomes the recent clarification on the issue of exemption for planning permission for certain domestic wind turbines. Unlike most EU countries however, there are currently no grants available in Ireland for the installation of such turbines.

Ireland also has substantial tidal resources that can be tapped for the production of tidal/wave energy. Many of the large estuaries in the vicinity of cities in Ireland may be

suitable for tidal generation schemes. Some pilot projects are currently underway. Due to the anticipated increase in the price of fossil fuels, tidal/wave energy may now be a cost effective energy source. There is a need to now develop appropriate guidelines relating to planning, designation of suitable sites and facilitating grid access.

5. Other Issues

Ø **Energy costs** in Ireland (electricity and gas) are particularly high – not sufficiently addressed. Electricity prices to industry rose by 51% between 2000 and 2004, the largest increase in the EU15. They are now the second highest in the EU (after Italy). The increases in household electricity costs have also been higher in Ireland than any other EU country. (see SEI Energy in Ireland 1990-2004) This is affecting Ireland's competitiveness and particularly the regions, which have more limited access to ports and markets and other infrastructural constraints. The establishment of the Single Electricity Market between Ireland and Northern Ireland should hopefully help to create more competitive prices. More detail is needed however on how such a market will be regulated and what measures will be put in place to ensure more competitive prices for both industrial and domestic consumers.

5.1 Energy costs

Energy costs in Ireland (electricity and gas) are particularly high compared with other EU countries, an issue which is not sufficiently addressed in the Green Paper. This is not only placing an extra burden on domestic and commercial consumers, but is also affecting Ireland's competitiveness. Electricity prices to industry rose by 51% between 2000 and 2004, the largest increase in the EU15. They are now the second highest in the EU (after Italy). The increases in household electricity costs have also been higher in Ireland than any other EU country (SEI 2006). This is affecting Ireland's competitiveness and particularly that of the regions, which have more limited access to ports and markets and other infrastructural constraints. The establishment of the Single Electricity Market between Ireland and Northern Ireland should hopefully help to create more competitive prices. More detail is needed however on how such a market will be regulated and what measures will be put in place to ensure more competitive prices for both industrial and domestic consumers.

5.2 Transport sector

Given its important role in contributing to greenhouse emissions, there is surprisingly little emphasis in the Green Paper on the role of the transport sector and the need to reduce emissions in reaching Kyoto targets. The statement in the paper (p.81) that the planned upgrading of the national road network will play an important role in improving the energy efficiency of the transport sector is questionable. In the BMW Region in particular, there are major deficits in the public transport infrastructure and whilst Transport 21 does address some of these (e.g. reopening of the Western Rail Corridor), there is still considerable scope for improvement, particularly for commuter routes, which account for a large proportion of car journeys. In the BMW Region the delay in the construction of Park and Ride facilities (e.g. in Galway), the lack of cycle lanes and the

absence of efficient public transport geared towards commuters (requiring appropriate timetabling and ticketing structures) has not helped to reduce the number of car journeys. Similarly due to the rural nature of the region, there is a higher dependency on private cars as the primary means of transport, thus leading to higher emission levels and a greater dependency on imported fossil fuels. Ireland has a very poor record in terms of the numbers of journeys taken by car and in 2006 no Irish city or town was eligible to take part in the European Car Free Day initiative (compared with 19 Irish towns and cities in 2004).

Government policy should not only be focused on limiting the number of car journeys, but should also contain specific targets and strategies for the development of the bio-fuels sector. As discussed in the section on renewable energy, there is great scope in Ireland which has a large land resource to produce enough bio-fuels to make a significant contribution to national fuel supply. The Green Paper refers to the 5.75% target for bio-fuels market penetration by 2010 and outlines a few initial steps which have been taken, such as the 2005 pilot mineral oil tax relief scheme. More incentives and proactive initiatives are required in order to reach the target. One simple mechanism could be to make it mandatory for all public service vehicles to be run on green energy. Such schemes are already in operation in some local authority areas such as the Eco Ola scheme in Galway City, which collects vegetable oil from restaurants in the county to produce biodiesel for Galway City Council's fleet of vehicles. Similarly in Cork City Council, 17 light commercial vehicles were modified to run on pure rapeseed oil (IRO 2006). Such schemes should be further developed and mainstreamed to all local authority areas. Similarly Bus Eireann and Dublin Bus should be obliged to set out a timetable for running all of its city services on green energy. Similarly initiatives are required to make bio-fuels more available and attractive to private motorists.

The prevailing trends in terms of settlement patterns and commuting are further contributing to unsustainable levels of energy consumption in private transport. The full implementation of the National Spatial Strategy would reduce CO₂ emissions and energy consumption by concentrating new settlements in locations more accessible to employment and public services. This would need to be complemented by investment in the provision of regional public transport networks and in public transport services within and between designated provincial gateway towns. In peri-urban areas and in the vicinity of schools and colleges greater emphasis needs to be placed on the provision of high quality safe cycle paths to reduce school-run car use. Incentives should also be provided to encourage car-pooling particularly in congested urban areas.

Response to Energy Green Paper

There are some important regional and rural dimensions to energy policy that should be taken into account in the Green Paper:

5.3 Heating

Domestic and non-domestic heating systems are another area in which great energy savings could be made and emissions reduced. Given our relatively damp climate and

short summers, Ireland's heating requirements are much greater than some other EU countries, particularly in the Mediterranean. The Green Paper fails to introduce sufficient targets or set out a clear strategy for increasing renewable energy and energy efficiency in the heating sector. A number of schemes are in operation in which companies and domestic consumers are encouraged to be more energy efficient (e.g. SEI Energy Management Action Programme, the Greener Homes Scheme, the Power of One Campaign), which are positive developments and are helping to increase consumer awareness as well as providing financial incentives. A target of 5% of fuel for heat purchases should be from renewable resources by 2010 is outlined in the Green Paper. There are few details as to how this might be achieved and what further targets could be set. It is stated however that a National Bioenergy Action Plan will be finalised by the end of 2006, which should hopefully provide more clarification on how the targets are to be achieved.

It is also to be noted that there are currently many constraints to the full implementation and development of alternative energy in the heating sector, such as the scarcity and unreliability of supplies (e.g. woodchips), the limited knowledge and reluctance of trades people and planners/architects to install and maintain such systems, the lack of training and accreditation of installers (e.g. under the SEI list of installers of alternative energy systems, no specific training is required). It has been argued that Ireland implemented a grants scheme to develop the domestic heating and energy sector, but without ensuring that the relevant trades people had enough awareness and training to implement the scheme. In some cases, faulty installation or maintenance is leading people to believe that the technology is faulty and thus further discouraging its development (Irish Examiner 24/10/06).

5.4 Energy Efficiency and the Built Environment

The construction sector in is one of the major contributors to the Irish economy and one of the primary sources of employment with over a quarter of a million people employed directly in the industry. Ireland is now producing 19.6 houses per 1,000 inhabitants, compared with 3.4 houses per 1,000 in the UK (CSO 2006). With all the new technologies available and awareness of energy efficiency in building, this is a prime opportunity to ensure that all new houses are built to high energy efficiency standards. The Green Paper outlines a number of steps to be taken in line with the EU Energy Performance in Buildings Directive, including revision of building standards for domestic and non-domestic buildings. The details of how exactly the standards are being improved and what standards will be mandatory are not specified. Whilst many of the schemes referred to are to be commended, there does not appear to be sufficient regulation of the sector, which would make it mandatory to comply with high energy efficiency standards for all types of building, including large-scale housing developments, one off houses and non-domestic buildings. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on the overall construction sector and the current energy inefficiencies that exist in many construction methods, such as block construction, low insulation levels, water wastage in plumbing systems, lack of renewable energy generation in new houses, poor geographic positioning (e.g. majority of windows facing north) etc.

There is also a need to significantly improve the insulation performance of pre-1980 housing, particularly in the BMW region where a higher proportion of the housing stock falls into this category. Similarly, social housing units owned by local authorities require continued investment to upgrade their energy efficiency and all new social housing units should comply with the highest possible energy ratings. This would have important social inclusion benefits and would minimise persistent fuel poverty in low income household reliant on social housing.

Consideration should be given to making it compulsory for all new public buildings (schools, colleges, public offices, hospitals, libraries, swimming pools) to be energy efficient and to use renewable energy heating systems (passive heat, solar panels, heat pumps, woodchip heating systems), in particular where natural gas is not available, i.e., in large parts of the BMW region. Where feasible, many new public buildings could be better designed to avail of passive heat, thus reducing the dependency on heating and energy systems.

5.5 Sustainable Energy and Local and Regional Authorities

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (2006) has set out a guide for local and regional Governments on how energy savings can be made. It contains a number of principles and examples of good practice, which could be adapted to the Irish context. These include *inter alia*:

- Ø Appoint a sustainable energy officer or department to each authority, who can ensure the buildings are run in an energy efficient way and can also enthuse and have impact within the community
- Ø Encourage energy efficiency measures in social housing
- Ø Implement a green mobility plan for the whole community, including a green vehicle fleet for the public service vehicles
- Ø Revolving funds can be used to invest in energy efficiency measures where e.g. the energy department pays for the investment of €20,000 for thermal insulation of a school roof and the school pays back the amount of their energy savings.
- Ø Include energy efficiency criteria in purchasing and service contracts.
- Ø Participate in EU Initiatives such as the Display Campaign and the European Mobility Week to raise awareness in the community
- Ø Promote solar oriented urban planning and promote renewables in all new buildings.
- Ø Promote mixed use urban settlements (balance between housing, services and jobs)
- Ø Where feasible, purchase energy and fuel produced locally
- Ø Review and assess the use of all energy e.g. is all lighting necessary (e.g. lighting of monuments? Should it be limited to certain times?), is public lighting run with energy saving bulbs?
- Ø Encourage the production and use of green energy in all public buildings (e.g. Dundalk IT currently producing its own energy – other institutions could be encouraged to do the same)

- Ø Local authorities should be obliged to develop a coherent energy strategy for their local authority area e.g. the Donegal energy strategy developed by Donegal County Council.

5.6 Sustainable Energy Zones

1. The BMW Regional Assembly welcomes the introduction of Sustainable Energy Zones and regrets that they were not included as a core instrument of energy policy in the Green Paper. Employment potential of renewable and sustainable energies is far greater than conventional energy production systems. This has very positive employment and economic benefits for indigenous employment in the energy sector (broadly defined), as outlined in Annex 5 of the EU Energy Green Paper
2. There is a need to significantly improve the insulation performance of pre-1980 housing, particularly in the BMW region where a higher proportion of the housing stock falls into this category. Similarly, social housing units owned by local authorities require continued investment to upgrade their energy efficiency and all new social housing units should comply with the highest possible energy ratings. This would have important social inclusion benefits and would minimise persistent fuel poverty in low income household reliant on social housing.
3. Consideration should be given to making it compulsory for all new public buildings (schools, colleges, public offices, hospitals, libraries, swimming pools) to be energy efficient and to use renewable energy heating systems (passive heat, solar panels, heat pumps, woodchip heating systems), in particular where natural gas is not available, i.e., in large parts of the BMW region
4. There are many barriers in place preventing the widespread deployment of domestic scale wind energy generation. This has the potential to reduce the demand for imported energy supplies and has particular potential for use in rural areas and by farmhouses where the visual effects of the domestic turbines on neighbouring properties would not apply. Similarly, public utilities in remote areas e.g., rural water treatment plants and pumping stations could be largely powered using small scale wind turbines. This technology is now highly developed, but is unlikely to be widely taken up without having enabling metering systems that allow the electricity produced to be fully integrated with the public supply.
5. The prevailing trends in terms of settlement patterns and commuting are contributing to unsustainable levels of energy consumption in private transport. The full implementation of the National Spatial Strategy would reduce CO2 emissions and energy consumption by concentrating new settlements in locations more accessible to employment and public services. This would need to be complemented by investment in the provision of regional public transport networks and in public transport services within designated provincial gateway towns. In peri-urban areas and in the vicinity

of schools and colleges greater emphasis needs to be placed on the provision of high quality safe paths to reduce school-run car use.

The Sustainable Energy Zones pilot initiative currently underway in an area south of Dundalk, County Louth should be extended as soon as possible to other major towns, particularly gateway towns that will be expanding significantly in the coming years.

6. Energy Supply and Transmission Issues

The BMW Regional Assembly welcomes the improvements that have been made to the transmission and supply of electricity in the region. These include the uprating of a number of 110kv lines in areas such as Mayo, Leitrim and Donegal and the installation of Capacitors in key locations in the region. The Assembly is also pleased to see the development of the all island energy market by 2007 and the delivery of the second North-South connector by 2012 and hopes that such an initiative will help to deliver greater security of supply, open up competition in the electricity market and help to reduce prices for consumers. In order to speed up the process however, it could make more sense to run the cable for the new inter-connector under the Irish Sea rather than over land, as proposed.

Whilst vast improvements have been made to the electricity supply in the BMW Region, a number of smaller issues remain to be resolved. These include:

- Ø 3 phase connections are not available to small industries in all rural areas, which is having a knock-on effect on the ability of small industries to operate in certain areas
- Ø There are often long delays in new connections, which has been acknowledged by ESB Networks (Presentation to BMW Regional Assembly 23/06/06)
- Ø Electricity infrastructure planning (e.g. National Grid Transmission Development Plan) needs to take the longer term electricity generation needs into account, including demand issues and future generation and consumption issues. This is particularly relevant to the BMW Region, where higher electricity generation capacity may be necessary in order to attract more industry to the region.

Regional electricity infrastructure planning should also be linked to future generation. A stated policy of the Green Paper is to increase renewable electricity generation, which will put a greater emphasis on our indigenous resources. This in turn could mean that less developed regions will be given an opportunity to provide for their electricity needs and export to other regions through the exploitation of their natural resources such as wind, wave bio-mass etc. A potentially significant project in the BMW Region is the recent proposal of Mayo Power (www.mayopower.ie) to develop a Combined Heat and Power plant in the former Asahi plant in Killala, using a combination of wood, peat and coal. Whilst the plant will use some non-renewable sources (peat and coal), it will have a thermal efficiency conversion of 85%, compared to 35% of traditional coal/peat fired plants. Such a plant will not only contribute greatly to electricity transmission in the area (one of the weakest in the country), but will also represent a capital investment of €140

million into North West Mayo and will create over 250 jobs in an area suffering from economic decline and relatively high levels of unemployment.

The BMW Regional Assembly also welcomes the recent announcement of the inclusion of a number of towns along the Corrib gas pipeline to the gas network. This should provide a major boost to such towns and the Assembly hopes that the second phase will include many more towns from the region and that towns in Donegal and Sligo will also be connected.

7. Conclusions

The BMW Regional Assembly broadly welcomes the Green Paper and views it as a first important step in producing a coherent and comprehensive energy policy, which had been previously been lacking. As outlined above, there are a number of weaknesses and deficiencies in the paper and overall there is not sufficient firm commitment to the full development of the renewable energy sector and there are still numerous constraints and obstacles that need to be addressed.

The Assembly would also like to emphasise the enormous potential of the renewable energy sector (wind, bio-mass, bio-fuels, hydro etc.) to the BMW Region, both in terms of decreasing our dependency on imported fossil fuels and becoming more energy self-reliant, but also as a means of stimulating development and providing alternative sources of employment in agricultural regions currently in transition.

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