

# ENERGY RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND DEMONSTRATION

## CONSULTATION PAPER

### DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATIONS, MARINE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

#### Response from:

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- 1) This is a personal response from the Research Director, as we have not been able to assemble a response based on a wide range of views across the Centre.
- 2) The response is based on experiences with building, and starting to operate, the UK Energy Research Centre. I have no special knowledge of the energy research situation in Ireland other than that obtained through the documentation linked to this consultation through discussions with Bob Hanna of DCMNR in late 2004 and a more casual acquaintance with individual Irish researchers. This should be taken into account in considering this response.
- 3) The UK Energy Research Centre was fully established in October 2004 and we have recently built up to full strength with the appointment of around 45 staff based in university departments and at research institutes across the UK. UKERC is funded by three of the UK's research councils who are responsible for supporting research at UK universities and certain research institutes. Its own research activities are focused at the "R" end of the "RD&D" spectrum, but it has a wider remit to bring coherence to a broad, and fragmented, "R&D" effort across the UK.
- 4) Institutional and Governance Options. On the face of it, Option 2 as favoured by DCMNR, appear to have much to offer. Like the UK, Ireland appears to have energy research competences spread around a range of institutions. The way to access these skills rapidly is to co-ordinate action rather than create new institutions from scratch. This also ensures that those involved remain grounded in institutions that can deliver the other functions associated with a healthy RD&D infrastructure, e.g. education, research training, knowledge transfer etc.

- 5) A co-ordinating function can also make a useful contribution where there are multiple, existing funding sources. Establish a new funding agency (option 3) would entail dismantling existing funding streams which is inevitably time-consuming. A co-ordinating function is also likely to be lightest in resource terms.
- 6) However, a “co-ordination council” will have an impact only if it commands the respect of those institutions charged with funding and delivering RD&D. It is therefore essential that such a council has buy-in from, and membership representing, key energy RD&D organisations. Such a council should aim to develop a distinct identity and establish itself with sufficient authority to influence the priorities and decisions of funding agencies. A senior and respected Chair for such a body would appear crucial.
- 7) Unless such as a council is sufficiently well-serviced through an effective secretariat, it is unlikely to have impact. By itself, a forum where senior figures engage on a quarterly basis, may not make a difference. Ideally, there should be an individual with an executive role to take forward the council’s functions (co-ordination, representation external to Ireland), supporting and the council and, in turn, being supported by it.
- 8) Environment Given that environmental drivers play a key role in energy policy, any new institutional arrangements must reflect this. I do not know enough about the Irish situation to comment on this. UKERC has a memorandum of understanding with its twin Centre, the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change, and engages the Dept for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in an advisory role.
- 9) Short/long-term balance In our experience, it is important to be clear about the respective roles of “R”, “D” and “D” in the overall RD&D landscape. In the UK, there is a growing tendency for “R” to take place at the UK national level, while increasing amounts of “D&D” (especially demonstration) take place under remit of the devolved administrations and regional development agencies. Different governance structures in Ireland might suggest different solutions. However, it would be important for any new institutional arrangements to reflect the priorities attached to the various RD&D functions.