

Initial Consultation – Ireland’s National Energy & Climate Plan 2021-2030



FOREST FRIENDS IRELAND SUBMISSION 31/10/18

CONSULTATION: This consultation document and the process of inviting submissions hopefully will be productive and ideas and suggestions taken into consideration and on board. However the Aarhus principles have not been fully taken on board by government although possibilities exist for its full implementation. The People’s forum has been a welcome innovative tool for consultation. While the present document is welcome and has identified a vast array of headings and subject matter within the energy topic, it is arguably laissez faire and not sufficiently innovative. New leadership and more daring approaches are now needed locally and globally, moving away from constraints self- imposed or imposed from without. The debate is over on climate change which has now the proportions of climate chaos. We need to move away from the present dialogue to one of action and implementation, in order to meet the challenges within the relatively short window of opportunity that exists.

THE POLITICAL CONTEXT: It is generally agreed now that the 2018 budget was a lost opportunity for making significant progress in quite a number of areas. The present political tight rope makes it difficult to make progress in certain areas but in many instances the political situation would not have militated against progress being made. The matter of making significant progress in the rolling out of micro energy initiatives has the potential to provide significant employment opportunities and involve people at the local level, giving them the opportunity to play a significant role in the process. The opportunity exists for innovative entrepreneurship. This could be coupled with more generous grants made available for innovation with regard to the production of materials for solar, wind, retrofitting,

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LIMITATIONS OF THE PRESENT SECTORAL APPROACH:

The sectoral approach based on Transport, Agriculture, etc. rather than overreaching strategies based on specified goals and objectives in the spheres of health, ecology, decarbonising energy, eliminating particulates, has severe limitations. The effects of particular strategies on life supporting systems, biodiversity, and ecosystem preservation need to be spelled out in greater detail.

COMMODIFICATION-ENERGY TRADING: A paradigm shift is necessary at this point in time with a re-examination of Tesla’s concept of free energy.

HEALTH AND QUALITY OF LIFE OVERRIDING TEST: The health of the nation is a primary consideration and should be regarded as the test whether with regard to food, water, agriculture, horticulture. Pesticide and herbicide could be replaced by organic processes. Fundamental to the energy debate should be the goal of achieving clean and renewable energy and this should be the overriding factor in the debates and in the rolling out of specific objectives. .

INORDINATE CORPORATION AND SECTORAL INTERESTS AND LOBBYING: It is necessary to stand back from these so that sectoral interests do not dominate the debate. Also the limitations of the present conceptual framework and the lack of vision and aspirations free from sectoral interests have to be envisioned and spelled out. At present sectoral and corporate interests have an inordinate influence and militate against outcomes in the interest of the common good.

PARADIGM SHIFTS NEEDED: A key sector in the climate change debate is the matter of trees and forestry. The time may be ripe for the shift to take place from the monoculture of non-native exotic spruces which necessitate pesticides such as Lindane, Permasect or Cypermitrin. These are persistent, carcinogens, damage the immune systems and seriously affect the spawning grounds in many of our rivers. They are washed into our waterways with unknown or not fully accessed effects. The opportunity now exists for significant advances in agro

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forestry beginning at the level of the family farm, utilising the principles of permaculture, silvaculture and continuous canopy.

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BIOMASS: It is commonly believed that biomass has intrinsic values regardless of the effects on environmental eco-systems at home or abroad. For example Europe is using product from the US forests increasingly which is not acceptable. Also the introduction of trees and other plants which add virtually no environmental value added such as Eucalyptus or Elephant grass should be reviewed. The Eucalyptus has virtually no ecological value and is highly inflammable. Our own willow trees are much more desirable in terms of biomass. They are fast growing and ecologically providing very significant biodiversity.

FOREST FRIENDS IRELAND: Forest Friends Ireland have played an important role in consultative processes, have an innovative project, ‘The Peace Forest Ireland Project, have developed small community based gardening and herb biodiversity projects at Arts and Business Centre Drumcondra and at 400 North Circular Road. These are demonstration projects to create community awareness of what is possible. Forest Friends participate in the national biodiversity week, the Dublin Culture night Heritage Week and National Tree Week. We strongly advocate a paradigm shift away from monoculture forestry.

METHANE: While the main emphasis in the energy debate has been on CO₂ the opportunity has been lost of having a full debate on the methane factor. Methane is thirty times more heat retentive than CO₂ and this fact should help to focus the debate and help to make the case for the preservation of our bogs.

OPPORTUNITIES MISSED: The 2019 budget afforded the opportunity to make considerable progress, for example: retrofitting buildings, solar panel installations, micro wind, micro hydro, and offshore wind

DECARBONISING: It is possible and should be an objective to make gas, coal and oil redundant within specific time scales. They are among the root causes of the problems of air pollution micro-plastics and plastics in general.

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CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE: Ireland could have been but has missed the opportunity of becoming a centre of excellence for innovation in the sphere of energy although it has unique resources in terms of hydro, (river and sea and lake), and wind. Some of the innovative plans which have been produced such as the potential use of lake water gravity have not been seriously assessed and advanced. Such plans should be seriously re-assessed. A good example here is the Spirit of Ireland project which is a proposal to build pumped-storage hydroelectricity reservoirs in valleys in Ireland's west coast combined with large-scale wind farms to reduce Ireland's dependence on imported energy and fossil fuels. While the large scale wind farms along the scenic west coast would not be desirable, Forest Friends Ireland feel that a full debate take place about the potential of the other innovative aspects of this project adapted as necessary based on present thinking and technologies'. A feasibility study is highly desirable at this stage since a lot of thinking and research has been done and the technologies have been tested and utilised abroad.

SMALL CHANGES: While there is need for a major paradigm shift in thinking and identifying possibilities for change, much more progress can be made just now in the matters of zero waste and food production. There is insufficient incentives to assist innovative projects in the area of grow your own food at the individual house level. Innovations such as Forest Friends Director Peadar Rice with his enterprise 'Small Changes' at the Arts and Business Campus in Drumcondra could be replicated throughout Ireland .

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