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Leitrim County Council,  
Aras an Chontae,  
Carrick on Shannon,  
Co. Leitrim.

By email to: [lcdc@leitrimcoco.ie](mailto:lcdc@leitrimcoco.ie)

Date: 17<sup>th</sup> August, 2015

**Re: County Leitrim Economic Development Strategy 2015-2021**

Dear Leitrim County Council,

The Irish Wind Energy Association (IWEA) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the **County Leitrim Economic Development Strategy 2015 – 2021**.

As this Strategy will aim to direct the future growth of County Leitrim over the medium to long term and assist in the assessment of growth and development pathways, including of the county's renewable energy resource, IWEA very much welcomes the opportunity to comment on the proposed strategy, and remains at the disposal of the Leitrim County Council should you wish to contact us in relation to any specific aspect of this submission.

IWEA would like to welcome the County's positive support of renewables and wind energy in particular. Renewable energy development is a vital part of Ireland's strategy to tackle two major challenges facing us today – ensuring a secure supply of energy and combating climate change.

We thank you for the opportunity to contribute,

Yours sincerely,

*\*sent by email, bears no signature*

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Brian Dawson,  
Communications Manager,  
Irish Wind Energy Association.

## **Introduction**

The Irish Wind Energy Association (IWEA) is Ireland's leading renewable energy representative body and, as such, it has an active interest in the potential for sustainable energy. IWEA is committed to promoting the use of wind energy in Ireland and beyond, as an economically viable and environmentally sound alternative to thermal or nuclear generation. IWEA also promotes awareness and understanding of wind power as the primary renewable energy resource. Wind energy is delivering for Ireland, and already the first seven months of 2015 has seen a quarter of our electricity demand met from indigenous wind energy.

Renewable energy development is a vital part of Ireland's strategy to tackle two major challenges facing us today – ensuring a secure supply of energy and combating climate change. Wind energy, in particular, has a key role to play in meeting these challenges. IWEA supports a strategic and transparent approach to proper planning and sustainable development, and recognises that development of wind energy projects must take account of the full range of environmental and community issues.

Relevant strategic policy documents, such as the County Leitrim Economic Development Strategy 2015 – 2021, must assist in enabling Ireland to develop its natural green energy resources and meet our EU2020 and developing 2030 targets. IWEA members are involved in developing more than 85% of the wind farm capacity that is planned to be built from now to 2020 and we continue to contribute proactively and positively to the development of local, regional and national strategic planning.

## **EU Commitments and DCENR's RES-E target**

At the outset, we all must acknowledge Ireland's need to support renewable energy, which also stems from its EU commitments. These include EU Directive 2009/28/EC on the Promotion of Renewable Energy Sources, which came into force in April 2009 and which establishes a binding target of 20% of overall EU energy consumption coming from renewable sources by 2020. Ireland's target under the Directive is for renewable resources to account for 16% of total energy consumption by 2020. Failure to meet these targets could result in EU sanctions. In line with these commitments, DCENR has a target for electricity from renewable energy sources (RES-E) of 40% by 2020.

The European Union is also now in the process of agreeing the framework for a further series of targets for renewable energy towards 2030. In October 2014, Ireland agreed to new EU 2030 targets, which seek a 40% reduction in Green House Gas (GHG) emissions and a binding EU target for renewable energy of "at least 27%".

As the vast majority of new renewable capacity will be provided by on-shore wind, the 40% electricity target is a significant challenge for the Irish wind industry as a whole. An approximate doubling of wind capacity will need to be installed on-shore in Ireland within the coming years if we are to meet our 2020 RES-E target. The expansion of the Irish wind industry will be an extremely positive economic development for the entire Country and, indeed, for County Leitrim. It will result in direct local investment, job creation, as well as increased local authority income through commercial rates and development contributions. At the same time, new wind energy development will also bring about a reduction of GHG emissions and help tackle global climate change.

## **The Economic Development Strategy and Renewable Energy**

The current Leitrim County Development Plan on which this Economic Strategy rests includes policies and objectives that offer support to wind energy development, and raises clearly the benefits around both reducing the county's CO2 emissions and also attracting direct investment to the county.

Objective 3 of the County Development Plan 2015-2021 states:

*"It is an objective of the Council to: - a) Leitrim County Council will make significant reductions in their fossil fuel consumption, with corresponding reductions in carbon dioxide emissions from Council Buildings and public buildings within Leitrim; b) Increase Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) wind industry activity, with the Council proactively seeking leads in collaboration with the Industrial Development Agency (IDA)"*

EirGrid and ESB installed wind energy figures sourced by IWEA demonstrate that Co. Leitrim boasts just under 70MW of installed wind energy capacity to date. Of these wind farms, Leitrim can also be proud to host the only wind farm in Ireland which is owned by the international furniture giant IKEA with Carrickeeny wind farm in north-west Leitrim, which illustrates the potential of the country to be a renewable energy leader.

IWEA welcomes the Sector Specific Actions on Energy Supply & Green Economy set out under the draft strategy, which IWEA considers puts Leitrim at the forefront of positive actions on the promotion of green economy, and positions Leitrim as a leader in utilising the county's renewable resource, and also in learning from international best practice as per action 5 in this section.

IWEA also warmly welcomes action 7 within the Energy Supply and Green Economy section which states *"LCC will encourage inward investment in wind energy and renewable energies in Leitrim, in partnership with the IDA and EI."* IWEA consider that this kind of partnership approach will position the county in an excellent position for ensuring the renewable energy capacity of the county is realised.

Furthermore, IWEA welcomes action 9 within the Energy Supply and Green Economy section, which states *"LCC will facilitate meeting the needs for growth of renewable energies through training programmes and skills development locally."*

IWEA has, through the Wind Skillnets programme supported and provided range of training opportunities for the wind and renewables sectors in Ireland. Our members can attest to the clear need for training and skills development opportunities in renewable energy. Developing these kinds of skills locally means greater possibilities of local employment in support of local renewable energy projects.

The preparation of a clear economic development strategy for Leitrim, which lays side-by-side with the recently adopted strategic planning function of the County Development Plan 2015-2021, provides a positive and clear direction for the county, and especially in the field of renewable energy. This kind of policy coherency supports and installs confidence towards inward investment, the creation of jobs and works as an enabler for clean energy powered Foreign Direct Investment, as shown recently with the €850m investment by Apple in Athenry, Co. Galway, with a datacentre to be powered by 100% renewable Irish electricity.

IWEA are clear that the inclusion of specific policies and objectives in the draft Economic Development Strategy, that promote the further development of renewable energy will enable Leitrim County Council to:

- Develop a sustainable, wind energy industry employing construction and professional service providers and attracting significant capital investment;
- Enhance the vibrancy of the county as a renewable energy leader;
- Support rural development in a sustainable manner;
- Deliver significant community benefit and,
- Deliver significant commercial rates revenue to County Leitrim annually.

## **Conclusion**

IWEA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the County Leitrim Economic Development Strategy 2015 – 2021 at this early stage and considers that the new strategy should continue as drafted to contribute to supporting the sustainable and strategic development of the wind and renewable energy resource in the County.

This new Economic Development Strategy is a valuable opportunity for Leitrim County Council, by taking a proactive approach, to realise, in an appropriate manner, the renewable energy development potential of the County and to adopt policies and objectives that enhance sustainable development.

The importance of adopting clear policies and a detailed strategy using a logical methodology and with the benefit of the statutory process is immeasurable. This approach brings a greater degree of clarity for those proposing projects, local communities as well as for the planning authority.