

FRAMEWORK TO ADAPT TO CHANGING CLIMATES

The new National Adaptation Framework, launched in response to observations which have shown that Ireland's climate is changing in terms of sea level rise, increases in average temperature and weather extremes, also includes €10m in funding to set up four Local Authority Regional Climate Action Offices. Report by Grace Heneghan.

Local authorities are at the frontline of responding to the effects and challenges of climate change now facing Ireland, particularly in the aftermath of severe weather events, as recently as February when 'Storm Emma' wrought havoc across the country.

And now Ireland's first statutory National Adaptation Framework (NAF), which includes the provision of funding to the tune of €10m, will see a regional structure of four expert teams established to position the local government sector to meet that challenge.

Ciarán Hayes, local government representative on the National Dialogue on Climate Action and the Climate Change Advisory Council's Adaptation Committee, said that local authorities have been advancing Climate Change Adaptation and

Mitigation measures for some time.

"They have been to the forefront in advancing smarter travel options of walking, cycling and public transport, implementing energy-saving schemes, promoting waste reduction through recycling and composting, working with other agencies to install flood defences and coastal protection measures and advancing greenways, blueways and environmentally-sustainable tourism," said Hayes, who is Chief Executive of Sligo County Council, where the framework was launched in late January.

However he considered the nature and scale of the climate change challenges would require addition competencies within the local authority sector. He told 'Council Review' that the funding will enable the sector to further develop their competence to deal more comprehensively with climate change.

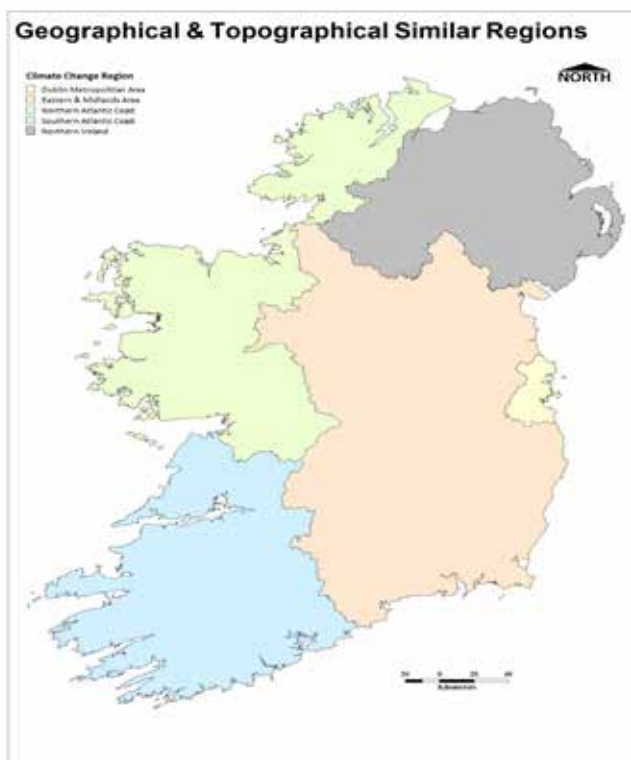


Pictured at the launch of the NAF were (l-r): Paul Dunne, CEO of the LGMA; Denis Naughten TD, Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment; Sligo County Council's Cathaoirleach Cllr Seamus Kilgannon and Chief Executive Ciarán Hayes, who is the local government representative on the National Dialogue on Climate Action and the Climate Change Advisory Council's Adaptation Committee.

Local Government – Future Structure

Regional Approach

- Four Regional Teams
 - Two on Atlantic Coast
 - One in Midlands
 - One in Major Urban Centre
- Teams to develop specialist expertise
 - Coastal Protection
 - Fluvial Flooding
 - Major Urban issues
- Expertise transferable within sector



“It facilitates the establishment of expert regional teams and the formulation of adaptation and mitigation plans appropriate to each county and region, engagement with the university sector in appropriate research and development with the application of the results of the R&D through the planning process.

“It will also be used in collaboration with government departments and agencies to facilitate the further development and rollout of the alternate energy sector and to advance behavioural change that will be so vital to the success or otherwise of our combined efforts to deal with the challenges of climate change,” according to Hayes.

UNPRECEDENTED CHALLENGES

Although the scale and rate of change is considered consistent with regional and global trends, these changes are projected to increase over the coming decades. Climate change is projected to have a diverse and wide ranging impact on Ireland’s environment, society and economic development – including managed and natural ecosystems; water resources; agriculture and food security; human health and coastal zones.

Prepared under the Climate Action and Low Carbon

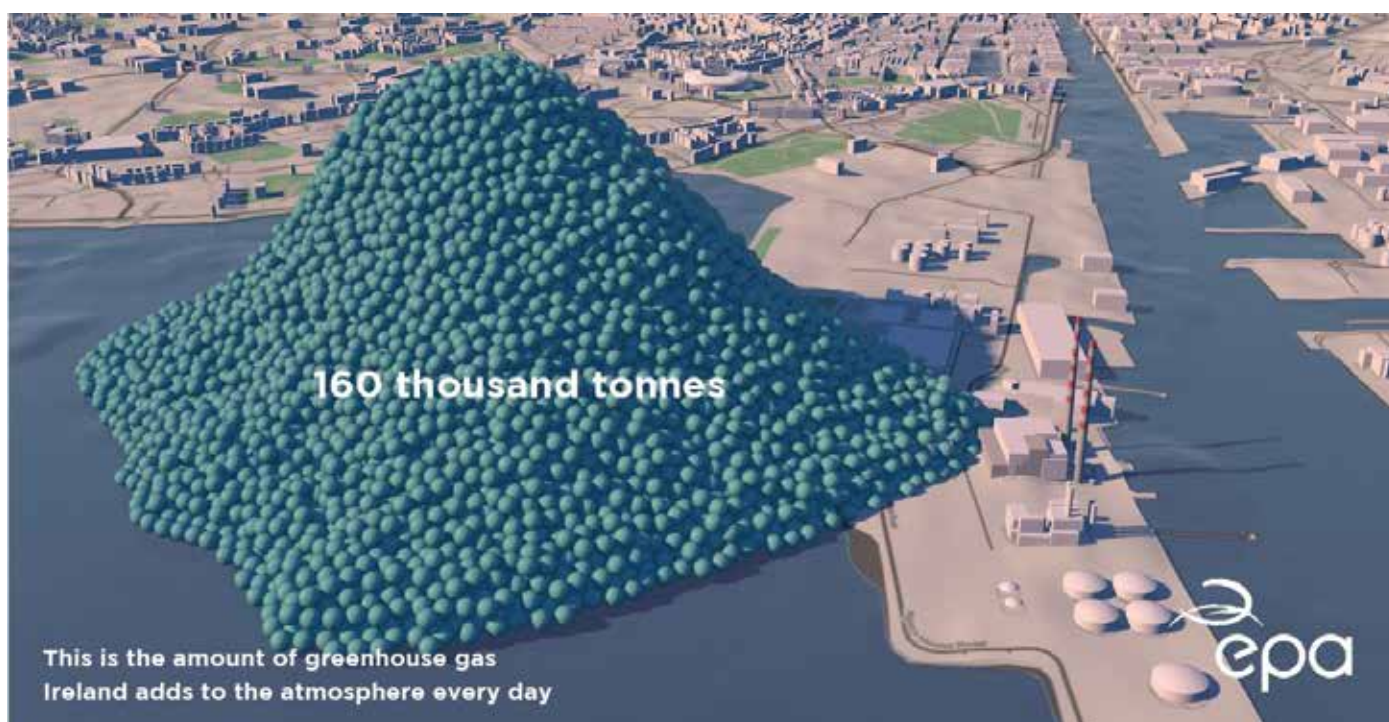
Development Act 2015, the NAF sets out potential implications and specifies the development of adaptation measures for key sectors and local authorities.

Local authorities will also prepare adaptation strategies to assess their key climate risks and vulnerabilities; while enabling resilience actions to be mainstreamed into all local, regional and national policy making.

Speaking at the launch of the NAF at Sligo County Council in late January, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment Denis Naughten TD, said: “The challenges presented by climate change are unprecedented, both in terms of scale and transformation required to prepare for them. Our response to climate change is not just about dealing with future impacts – we must also be prepared for the here and now. We’re taking another vital step in enabling our transition to a low carbon and climate resilient economy and society by 2050,” he said.

Under the NAF, Government departments will be required to prepare Sectoral Adaptation Plans (SAPs) for key sectors including agriculture; forestry; biodiversity; transport; and flood risk management.

CLIMATE CHANGE



MULTI-SECTORAL RESPONSE

Ciarán Hayes described the National Adaptation Framework on Climate Change as “a multi-sectoral response” that requires all government agencies and departments to contribute to the country’s response to the climate changes and challenges now facing us.

“From the local authority perspective the issue is how we respond and position ourselves to engage with other agencies, such as the OPW, Iarnrod Eireann, Met Eireann, the Department of the Marine, Inland Fisheries Ireland and the Marine Institute in Galway.

“So, we have to devise adaptation measures that are particular to each of our own cities and counties, in association with these agencies. For example, Met Eireann is in the process of establishing an expert Flood Forecasting Centre and when up and running, will require close liaison and communication with the local authorities on the ground to ensure an appropriate and timely response to the weather event.”

He said that local authorities will be centrally involved in all aspects of Climate Change comprising adaptation, mitigation and remediation “My own view is that we also need to have a considerable role in the area of behavioural change, as it’s only through such change that we’re going to see success in dealing with the challenges facing us.”

FOUR REGIONAL OFFICES

The €10 million in funding, announced by Minister Naughton, will go towards the establishment of four regional climate change offices – two on the Atlantic Coast, one in the Midlands and one in Dublin – to support the implementation of national climate policy. The funding will be available over a five-year period.

According to Ciarán Hayes, the regional offices will ensure a certain level of consistency, and will be linked in very closely

with a third level institution in their region. “Mayo County Council will take the lead from the North West to Galway, in collaboration with NUI Galway; Cork County Council will take the lead from Clare to the Cork Coast, in association with UCC and the MaREI Institute; Kildare County Council will take the lead for the counties in the Midlands, where the main concern is fluvial flooding, and it has linked up with Maynooth University; while from an urban perspective Dublin obviously will take the lead and Dublin City Council is closely aligned with Codema.

“So, whatever lessons arise from this will be all transferrable within the local authority sector. Clare’s west coast has an issue with the Atlantic and coastal flooding and erosion while the impact on East County Clare arises from fluvial flooding. However the regional team structure will ensure that the expertise will be available within the system to address all aspects. ”

MITIGATION TO MEET OBLIGATIONS

He highlighted one aspect of mitigation that will go a long way towards meeting our national obligations and emission targets, is to transfer the entire public lighting network towards the LED standard.

“After that, changed practices will be needed. The private car industry is presently competing with itself as to which company is going to come forward with the new generation of electric cars, but the change to electric vehicles will require the provision of a national network of charging points, an issue that the local authority sector will be heavily involved in.

“Such a network will be required immediately and will range from fast charging points in public car parks to private sector developments being conditioned to provide for an appropriate charging infrastructure.

“Equally, fossil fuels will be phased out and more alternative

CLIMATE CHANGE

energy projects will come on stream, be they solar/wind farms or offshore wave energy. Again the local authority Development Plan and planning process will be key to the growth of green energy options. Everyone has accepted the concept of alternate clean energies, but there isn't necessarily a uniformed acceptance by the public for wind or solar farms.

"Generally speaking, green energy solutions are something that people agree is good for the environment, but it can be difficult to secure local agreement and ultimately, it's acting locally that will make the difference!"

RECRUITMENT CAMPAIGN

Local authorities need to encourage and facilitate the delivery of a core network of renewable energy systems which will not be simple, he said. "And within our urban spaces, apart from dealing with the electric charging points, we have to give more of our scarce rural space to smarter travel options – walking, cycling and public transport. From a behavioural change point of view, we have a job of work to do to encourage people to leave their cars behind and move over to public transport or to walk or cycle.

"The publication of the Framework has now kick-started the process and the clock is, in effect, ticking! Climate change needs to find its way into every aspect of a local authority's operations. The four regional teams will lead the local authorities within their areas to ensure their plans are consistent and can be adapted to their own areas."

And in conclusion, Ciarán Hayes said that with the €10m funding now in place, each of the four lead local authorities will roll out their own campaigns to recruit scientists, planners, engineers and administrators within each of these four regional teams, "so that they can disseminate their expert knowledge within the realm of climate change throughout the sector".

KILDARE HOSTS MIDLANDS CLIMATE CHANGE OFFICE

Kildare County Council takes great pride in being one of four local authorities nationwide to host a Regional Climate Change Office, according to Joe Boland, Director of Services. "We will work closely with our counterparts in Cork County, Mayo and Dublin in making the initial arrangements, including the recruitment of specialist staff, in order to establish these regional centres at the earliest possible stage," he told 'Council Review'.

This new Framework sets out the strategy, which aims to reduce Ireland's vulnerability to such factors. It also prescribes the role of key sectors including, in particular, local government in developing climate resilience in a co-ordinated way. In this context Kildare County Council will have a lead role in co-ordinating the work of 17 local authorities in the region in preparing their adaptation plans.

A key ingredient in the council's success has been its partnership with Maynooth University (MU), which hosts the Irish Climate Analysis and Research Unit (ICARUS), noted Kildare's Chief Executive Peter Carey, who is also Chairperson of the City and County Management Association (CCMA).

"The local government sector looks forward to working collaboratively with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, the government and other stakeholders in continuing to tackle climate change challenges and ensuring the best outcomes in partnership with our citizens as well as the voluntary and business sectors," he said.

"This is a national leader in this area in providing integrated research, data and advice to policy makers and the scientific community. It's one of a number of ongoing collaborations with Maynooth University; other examples include the socio-economic analysis carried out by its All-Island Research Observatory (AIRO) to underpin Kildare County Council's Local Economic and Community Plan."

This will involve the construction of an outreach building in Naas, and this innovative hub will assist the development of SMEs. Another critical success factor, according to Carey, has been the foresight of the council to set up a dedicated flood alleviation unit in 2009 which, in the interim period has progressed a number of key projects to the value of approximately €20m.

In this context, it has also established a considerable level of expertise from working closely with the OPW. Kildare's Director of Services Joe Boland said this is now of crucial importance, given that each of the four lead authorities will have to develop specialisms, with fluvial flooding assigned to the Kildare office, which will also be based in County Hall.

"There is also a sense of excitement on the part of the staff and elected members of Kildare County Council in progressing this key national initiative. It fits well with our growing image as an innovative and progressive county, which is host to a range of modern industries such as Intel, Hewlett Packard, Kerry and Pfizer," Boland concluded.



Kildare's Chief Executive Peter Carey is also Chairperson of the City and County Management Association (CCMA).