

# SOUTHERN REGIONAL UPDATES ON SPATIAL AND ECONOMIC STRATEGIES

The Southern Regional Assembly is preparing to publish the draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, after engaging in a huge volume of work since October 2017, which will shortly go to public consultation. David Kelly, SRA's Acting Director, discusses the importance of strategies for regional development and growth with Olivia Kelleher.

**T**he Southern Regional Assembly is in “ongoing dialogue” with the key stakeholders in the region and particularly with the local authorities to translate the National Planning Framework to Regional Level, according to its newly-appointed Acting Director.

David Kelly says they are currently in the process of identifying the key main economic drivers in the region, in a bid to create the environment and to build on the potential of the region. “And for the local authorities this will enable them to develop their plans and strategies at local level to realise the potential of their own regions,” he tells ‘Council Review’

Kelly, who recently stepped into the SRA Director's position in an acting capacity following the retirement of Stephen Blair over the summer, says that the work is ongoing and intense and the Assembly is moving to a fairly critical stage.

“Over the last number of months we have been putting together these blocks of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, and are getting to a stage where we will publish the draft, which will then go to public consultation. I hope it will happen within the next month.”

He says it is very rigorous and challenging because the southern region generally has three cities and a very strong network of towns and villages. “It also has a very strong rural environment with very strong agri-sector etc, but due to the vast array and the scale of the region it also brings forward competing challenges in terms of getting the balance right and ensuring that there are opportunities for all regions across the big region.”

The SRA's Acting Director claimed that regional policy in Ireland has never really evolved to the same extent as it has across the rest of Europe. “There are very strong regional governments across Europe, but this hasn't really evolved in Ireland. The regional authorities here in the mid-1990s were set up at the request of the EU to have a role in planning and monitoring of EU funds. Then at the start of the noughties, there were two regional assemblies, again with the prime function of managing EU-funded programmes.”



## STRONG LEGISLATIVE BASIS

Now with the three new assemblies in place with their own Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, there is a real strong legislative basis behind the regions, he claims.

“There is also the fact that the funding will now follow the policy. So, I think there has been a strengthening of it recently with the MPF and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.”

Kelly says the streamlining of regional authorities to regional assemblies to represent our interests in Europe is positive in that it now links spatial planning with economic planning. “You have that marrying of the two, which is again the first time that

has really happened in Ireland. So, you are looking at it in that holistic context. “

The Offaly native says it vital to bring key stakeholders from all backgrounds around the table in terms of planning. “It is not being done in isolation. This has been very much and will be very much a collaborative approach across the board with all the key stakeholders, particularly with the local authorities.

“We are working very closely with all the chief executives, the directors of services, and senior planners to develop this strategy that reflects the priorities and the needs at the regional level while also translating the key principles of the National Planning Framework.”

The SRA's Acting Director claims it's important to reiterate the fact that it all has a legislative basis. “Everybody will be required now to ensure that their strategies and plans are aligned with the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies.”

### REGIONAL ASSEMBLY BACKGROUND

Established on 1 January 2015, the Southern Regional Assembly (SRA) is one of three such Assemblies in the Republic of Ireland, following the dissolution of the Border, Midlands and Western (BMW) and Southern & Eastern Regional Assemblies (SERA).

The former eight regional authorities and two regional assemblies were consolidated under the Government's regional reform process under the Local Government Reform Act 2014 to form the Southern Regional Assembly (SRA), the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) and the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA).

The three new Assemblies incorporate the functions of both the former regional authorities and assemblies, with significant enhancement of some powers, particularly in relation to spatial planning and economic development. Each one is charged with preparing new Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies for their regions.

### TRANSNATIONAL PROGRAMMES

Each Assembly also plays a role in a number of transnational programmes collectively called European Territorial Co-operation Programmes (ETCP). These programmes are co-funded by the ERDF and were formerly known as INTERREG programmes.

The programmes are an integral part of the EU's Cohesion policy. The Assembly's role ranges from managing the programme to acting as the Irish contact point or providing the first level financial control function.

The SRA was the managing and certifying authority for the Ireland Wales Territorial Co-Operation Programme (2007-2013), and has continued in its role as the programme partner for the Ireland-Wales programme during the 2014-2020 period.

As the prescribed body under the Planning Acts, this means that the Southern Regional Assembly must be consulted on certain strategic infrastructural proposals. When assessing any such proposals the Assembly has regard to the general welfare, strategic planning and sustainable development requirements of the region.

### FACTFILE – DAVID KELLY

*David Kelly, who has almost 20 years' experience in managing EU funds and regional development, was appointed Acting Director of the Southern Regional Assembly (SRA) in July 2018 following the retirement of Stephen Blair.*

*He first joined the Assembly in 2001 as a Programme Executive and was appointed Assistant Director in 2008. He has been responsible for managing ERDF co-funded Regional Programmes and acted as the managing authority for the Ireland-Wales Maritime Cross-Border Programme (2007-13).*

*David currently co-chairs the Ireland Wales Programme Project Steering Committee, and represents Ireland on the North-West Europe European Territorial Co-operation Programme Monitoring Committee. He currently chairs this programme.*

*He was also responsible for co-ordinating several INTERREG projects in which the SRA was a project partner. Prior to his employment with the Assembly, he worked for a local development company in Westmeath, managing the LEADER Programme. An Agricultural Science Graduate from UCD, David Kelly originally hails from Tullamore, Co. Offaly.*



**EU-FUNDED PROJECT UPDATES**

**Here's an update on the four main EU-funded programmes and projects, with which the Southern Regional Assembly is directly involved with its stakeholders.**

**EMPOWER:** A technical workshop on energy monitoring, regulation and management will be held in Almada, Portugal on 25-26 October as part of the EU-funded EMPOWER Project, which aims to reduce greenhouse gases through monitoring energy efficiency. The project has been running since January 2017.

The SRA – one of the partners of an inter-regional project – will attend the workshop along with Brian Cassidy, Cork City Council (one of the SRA stakeholders for this project), who will present on the rationale for monitoring energy efficiency.

This technical workshop will be a knowledge-sharing opportunity for all partners to identify the difficulties, find solutions and learn from mistakes to ensure the success of the policy objectives. This will form a part of the final action plan under the EMPOWER project.

**MARIE:** The MARIE Project, which is helping to create responsible research and innovation policies, will participate in the 'Responsible Innovation Summit' in Croke Park on 16 October and will address Mainstreaming Responsibility into Innovation Policy.

This summit will allow the SRA and its stakeholders to be part of the conversation and influence how European projects can be used to integrate responsible innovation into public policy.

Participants will also have the opportunity to reflect on the projects presented at the summit and how MARIE hopes to influence the policy framework for innovation and how responsible innovation can be made a reality at public policy level.

**MATCH-UP:** This is a newly-approved and exciting Interreg Europe project to encourage the use of low carbon means of transport by improvements to modal interchange between walking, cycling, public transport, trains and green vehicles.



With increasing levels of air pollution, emissions and traffic congestion the development of sustainable multimodal mobility is a key challenge for the EU. The inter-regional and multi-level exchange of experience processes through staff exchanges, site visits and the involvement of local stakeholders will increase the skills and knowledge among policy makers. This will influence their capacity to promote new initiatives towards sustainable mobility.

The MATCH-UP project partners include the University of Bologna, Italy (the lead partner), two regional government partners (Southern Regional Assembly, Ireland and County of Northheim in Germany), and two municipal partners (Municipality of Funchal, Portugal and Timisoara Municipality, Romania).

This new project offers an opportunity for the SRA to identify international good practices that could assist Ireland in meeting its European emission targets. The SRA will shortly launch a call for interest to invite local bodies to become members of the MATCH-UP stakeholder group.

**FIRESPOL:** This project seeks to boost regionally-specialised and decentralised renewable energy private investment through shared best practice and innovation within regional operational programmes. FIRESPOL aims to create inside operational programmes, new supporting schemes such as Financial Instruments that are capable of unlocking the great potential of private investment by overcoming the financial, legal and administrative barriers in decentralised investment for both Renewable Energy Source (RES) generation and storage.

In July 2018, the FIRESPOL kick-off meeting was hosted in Spain by the lead partner AGENEX. This was the first inter-regional event of the project. Participants included the six partner organisations from Spain, Ireland (SRA), Poland, Latvia, Germany and Croatia, as well as banking entities and promoters of renewable energies in the Extremadura region, who, as stakeholders of the project, have offered their vision on the financing of renewable energies. Similar events will be hosted by each partner over the course of the project. For further information visit [www.interreurope.eu/firespol/](http://www.interreurope.eu/firespol/)