



The need for a step-change in Government investment in the capacity of the state and civil society in order to accelerate and deliver an environmentally-sound energy transition

**A joint pre-budget statement by the renewables industry and environmental NGOs
September 2023**

1) Introduction

Environmental NGOs and the renewable energy industry each support the need for urgent action on both the climate crisis and biodiversity crisis. It has never been clearer that the state must accelerate the energy transition, rapidly moving to renewable energy sources and phasing out fossil fuels in accordance with Ireland's legally-binding pollution limits, the national carbon budgets adopted by the Oireachtas in 2022. To ensure that the energy transition is implemented in the most effective way, which fully supports environmental protection, it is vital that more funds are allocated both to relevant state bodies and environmental NGOs.

The delivery of 9 GW of onshore and 5 GW of offshore wind energy, as well as 8 GW of solar energy, as set out in the 2023 Climate Action Plan, and the associated delivery of grid infrastructure, is critical to meeting the electricity sector's emissions ceiling for 2030. It is also essential to radically reduce dependency on expensive and polluting gas, coal and oil.

This urgency of action must equally involve immediate, coherent and comprehensive measures to improve environmental protection and monitoring. Renewables and grid development must go hand in hand with significantly enhanced nature protection and restoration, and improved community engagement. Funding environmental research, monitoring, protection and restoration is integral to the delivery of the state's commitments in relation to renewable and grid infrastructure. This is especially acute, given new obligations and targets set out in the incoming EU Nature Restoration Law, and the extensive monitoring and reporting that reaching these targets will entail.

Substantially increased resources at all levels of Government are needed to meet national and international obligations to protect and restore biodiversity, as detailed in the 2023 recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly on biodiversity loss.¹ Moreover, there are weaknesses in the capacity of state agencies and Government departments to effectively perform their role as competent authorities and advisory bodies by simultaneously accelerating the energy transition and ensuring nature protection. In many cases, there is a lack of skills in environmental assessment in order to allow renewable energy and grid developments to take place in a timely manner, as well as to ensure compliance with environmental law.

Given their extensive expertise and deep roots within civil society, environmental NGOs also have an important role to play in informing the development and planning of renewable energy and grid infrastructure required for the energy transition. However, many NGOs with significant expertise and insights are prevented from substantively engaging in relevant state processes due to their lack of resources. Their engagement is also hampered by a lack of access to standardised environmental data.

The planning system also needs to keep pace with the scale of renewable and grid deployment needed if we are to meet Ireland's targets. This requires further investment in the planning system itself, particularly specialists in ecology and environment. Moreover, NGOs need adequate resourcing to engage in planning and the development of renewable energy and grid projects.

The Government stands at a significant crossroads, given the projected €65 billion Budget surplus projected over the coming years. This Joint Statement sets out recommendations on how Government must invest urgently in environmental capacity, both within the state system and in civil society, in order to deliver renewable energy and grid infrastructure necessary for the transition to zero-carbon electricity in a timely and environmentally sound way.

In the context of deliberations on Budget 2024, we call on the Government to support the following:

Recommendations

State capacity for an environmentally-sound energy transition

- In partnership with relevant Government Departments and state agencies, such as An Bord Pleanála, the NPWS, MARA and local authorities involved in planning and environmental assessment of renewable energy, agree the number and type of staff they will need to achieve Climate Action Plan targets, in particular new ecologists and EIA specialist positions.
- Based on this review of staffing needs, increase funding for relevant Departments and agencies and also resource a fast-track recruitment process for key state bodies that are on the critical path to delivering a zero-carbon electricity system and protecting and restoring nature.

¹ See in particular recommendations 32, 40, 41, 132 and 147 in the 2023 [report](#) of the Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss.

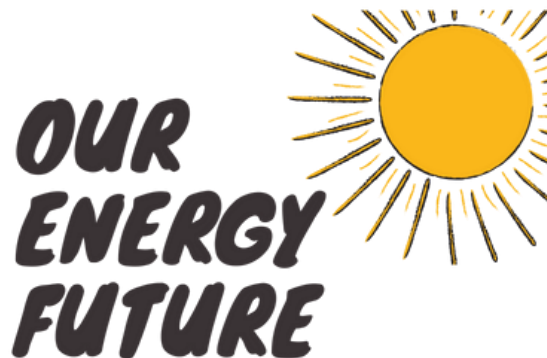
- Introduce a dedicated new funding stream to support training and upskilling of existing staff in public bodies involved in carrying out environmental impact assessment.
- Develop a dedicated training and education programme at 3rd level to promote environmental protection, ecosystem restoration, and renewables development to school leavers and, for example, those changing careers or returning to work after a career break.

State financing for nature and marine protection

- Maintain the trajectory of NPWS funding increases so it can coordinate the national response to biodiversity loss and increase staff capacity.
- Ensure at least €7 million is allocated in 2024 to reach the target of fully protecting 10% of Ireland's ocean and seas and ensure at least €55 million is provided to support longer-term designation of Marine Protected Areas and ongoing management until 2030.
- Target additional resources to centralise and make available standardised environmental data from relevant authorities and ensure that it is easily accessible to practitioners in a timely manner.
- Establish a dedicated state Climate and Nature Restoration Fund from windfall corporation taxes to finance climate and nature infrastructural and capital investments, including nature-based solutions.

Financing NGO capacity to support an environmentally -sound energy transition

- Establish a new funding stream for science and research focused conservation organisations to enable them to fund staff posts so that they can meaningfully engage in ecological research, active conservation, infrastructure consultation and planning processes.
- Increase annual funding to the Irish Environmental Network by €1million in order to improve the ability of environmental NGOs to engage in environmental planning and policy.



This Joint Statement builds on initial discussions among eNGOs and industry representatives through workshops facilitated by Friends of the Earth as part of the [Our Energy Future project](#).