

SUBMISSION: PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT 2020-2024

DATE: 07 May 2020

Introduction

This document is a contribution to the discussion of emerging policies being developed by all political parties at present in advance of the formation of a new government. It sets out two main policy areas which the Irish Mining and Quarrying Society (IMQS) believes are crucial to the recovery and development of Ireland's economy and Irish society following the current pandemic.

1. Housing and Infrastructure

A reliable and sustainable supply of aggregates (crushed rock, sand and gravel) and related products such as ready-mix concrete and blocks, is essential to enable Ireland to address its housing shortage. Project Ireland 2040 will require the production of approximately 1.5 billion tonnes of aggregates; of which, 220 million tonnes (Mt) of aggregate will be required to meet Ireland's projected housing requirements.

The current National Planning Framework (NPF) 2040 states:

"Extractive industries are important for the supply of aggregates and construction materials and minerals to a variety of sectors, for both domestic requirements and for export. The planning process will play a key role in realising the potential of the extractive industries sector by identifying and protecting important reserves of aggregates and minerals from development that might prejudice their utilisation. Aggregates and minerals extraction will continue to be enabled where this is compatible with the protection of the environment in terms of air and water quality, natural and cultural heritage, the quality of life of residents in the vicinity, and provides for appropriate site rehabilitation."

IMQS proposes that similar objectives be included in any forthcoming NPF. It is essential that appropriate planning guidelines are included in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies being developed by the three regional planning authorities

Some County Development Plans (CDPs) have specific aggregates-related policies. CDPs should be informed by the regional and national guidelines referred to above.

For the past 30 years IMQS has urged local and national authorities to **limit procurement of construction aggregates and products to operations which have appropriate planning consents and practices in place**. It is proposed that this objective be part of any future NPF, national and regional infrastructure and development plans.

2. Climate Change

Mineral extraction and processing has significant environmental impacts. Mitigation of these impacts is a key IMQS objective. The skills required to find and develop minerals in a sustainable way include geological investigations and resource estimation; an understanding of hydrogeology and water systems; environmental impact assessment and the provision of safe and efficient working conditions. These skills are relevant and transferrable to a number of technologies outlined below, which are essential to achieve national climate change objectives.

Geothermal energy has significant potential in an Irish context. Policy in relation to ownership and delivery of geothermal resources requires development. A draft Geothermal Bill prepared by DCCA between 2007 and 2011 can form the basis of such policy. Technical skills such as deep drilling and hydrogeology studies are readily available in Ireland. Geological Survey Ireland (GSI) and the Irish Centre for Research in Applied Geoscience (iCRAG) have research programmes in geothermal energy studies.

Several **minerals are critical for the development of battery technologies** needed for Electric Vehicles and energy storage. These include zinc, copper and lithium. Ireland has significant output of zinc concentrate and potential for more zinc mines. Discovery and development of new zinc resources requires the application of seismic techniques designed to locate deep lying deposits; this technology was used successfully in the discovery of the “Tara Deep” orebody near the existing Tara Mines in Co Meath. A national seismic survey is proposed which would enable identification of similar deep zinc deposits.

The areas beneath former peat extraction sites in the Irish Midlands have considerable potential for both geothermal energy and zinc deposits. Funding such projects are ideally suited to the **Just Transition framework** needed following the cessation of peat extraction and peat fired power stations.

The development of **Offshore Wind Energy** (OWE) is a crucial element in Ireland’s climate change policy. While major elements of OWE will require large scale manufacturing capabilities not currently available in Ireland, other elements of the supply chain can be met locally. These include geotechnical and environmental engineering and construction supplies and services. Ireland’s OWE targets are ambitious (**3.5 GW by 2030**) and will require an appropriate planning framework. This can be provided by the Marine Planning and Development Management Bill (the General Scheme of the MPDM Bill was approved by Government in December 2019). IMQS urges the incoming Dail to expedite this measure, without which Ireland will fail to meet its Climate Change targets.

IMQS remains available to discuss these proposals and to support all parties in providing impartial and objective advice.

Nicola Nixon
President | Irish Mining and Quarrying Society