

To: NPF Submissions, Forward Planning Section

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I am responding to the invitation to make further comment on 'Ireland 2040 - Our Plan'.

My focus is on **County Donegal**.

The 2016 Census results found that there was a decrease in population in just two Counties. Donegal was one of the two Counties and it was the one with the biggest decrease.

The very clear message conveyed by the Census is that present policies have not and are not working and with Brexit looming, what more can Donegal expect? - probably an acceleration in the disparities between it and the rest of the country. The combination of current policies plus Brexit will have reduced Donegal to an economic wasteland long before 2040.

There is an urgent need to recognise that Donegal is *uniquely disadvantaged*. Some of the disadvantage is attributable to natural features but, undeniably, some of the most serious barriers to development result from decisions made on big national questions, without regard to their impact locally, on Donegal (*partition* in particular). Those decisions were imposed on Donegal.

Donegal's *unique* difficulties are to a great degree the result of history and geography. By way of illustration, were it not for a narrow corridor at Ballyshannon, in the far south of the county, there is no direct land connection between Donegal and the rest of the State. One national road, N56 connects Donegal with the State. All other connections are via Fermanagh, Tyrone or Derry. The maintenance, never mind the development and improvement of the roads in those counties falls outside the remit of not only Donegal County Council, they fall outside the remit of the Irish Exchequer.

All those past difficulties will be compounded by Brexit. Brexit is an even greater threat of even greater isolation and decline than most of what went before.

Governments have a number of core responsibilities. Among them is a duty to maximise the conditions for economic and social development.

This responsibility will be met by adopting a policy that sets out in a coherent way, the measures needed to revitalise DONEGAL. It is very important for public confidence that provision is made for periodic external review, thus ensuring the policy is pursued and implemented. The questions for consideration at the review stage can be set now first, is the policy being implemented consistently throughout the area? Second, how successful is the policy in attracting investment and, third, are job creation targets being met?.

An outline of the measures needed in a policy position follows. Some new thinking will also be required. The policy must be supported by compelling evidence of the particular problems. In addition, the measures and actions needed to implement the policy must be very well resourced, and there must be certainty about funding in the medium to longer term. It is being presumed that funds will come from national and EU., probably as part of a Brexit deal.

In many instances, the measures required in Donegal are also required in other areas. But, all regions cannot be supported at the same level by the Exchequer. In the first Place, the cost to the Exchequer would be prohibitive. But more important, the two key features of a policy that targets issues unique to Donegal would be lost,

- The policy must be built on the matters that are actually necessary to put Donegal on a level footing with the rest of the country AND
- Government must defend the selection of measures and must commit to resource the delivery of the policy to a level that is appropriate. The test for 'appropriate' is established in the context of the need identified in Donegal, and similarly, the level of resources to be committed will be determined by what is needed in Donegal. Allocations must not be made on the 'little bit for everyone' principle, if that means denying Donegal some of the resources it would have used if available to it.

We can therefore add 'Ministerial' courage to the basic ingredient.

Main Issues

(a) The policy must identify access as a major priority, whether its by road or to ports, airports.

which can lead the upgrading in the education and training areas. However, it must itself be upgraded and its range of courses needs to be extended. Collaborations in research and in staff and student exchanges with well established colleges at home and abroad and with industries located in Donegal should be a priority. The IT must identify itself as a vehicle for the development of the County.

- There is a clear need for development at Letterkenny Hospital. By population criteria, the hospital probably doesn't qualify as a location for a variety of services, but the alternative is having to travel to Derry or Sligo or, much more likely, Dublin or Galway.-- all involving road journeys lasting up to five hours by ambulance. The criteria need to be adjusted to take account of the on-the-ground reality.
- In the context of Brexit, Ireland must seek further favourable tax incentives for industry with particular emphasis on places like Donegal. The incentives should be based on activities that will stimulate and strengthen local enterprise and that will, where possible; utilise local resources.
- Donegal is a vast area of ground. The trend to centralise most major services in Letterkenny has lead to uneven development and is too distant from much of the south and west of the county. A second 'hub' needs to be developed. Donegal Town is an ideally situated and should be designated as the second 'hub' in the County.
- Economic activity must be supported by a skilled workforce. We must, therefore, build our education and health services. They are essential in building a social and economic framework that attracts and retains qualified persons.

Current policies have failed. As always, there are choices to be made. The current approach can continue but it will ultimately see Donegal written-off. An alternative approach, such as the one outlined in this short paper provides a workable approach that is likely to bring Donegal to a level of economic performance comparable with the rest of the country. Brexit presents enormous threats, but lets not overlook the fact that for a short time, during the EU -UK negotiations there will be a time when Ireland may, in effect have a veto, That is surely an opportunity to pursue.

Thank you


HUGH BOYLE

