

## **Ecopower submission to Ireland 2040 Our Plan – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017**

### **Introduction**

Ecopower is an independent Irish owned on-shore wind energy development company, based in Kilkenny and operating for over 20 years. We own and operate 4 on-shore windfarms - two in Mayo, one in Donegal and one in Kilkenny.

### **Contribution of Ecopower on-shore wind to the Rural Economy**

We directly employ 12 people full time in craft and professional jobs in both development of new projects and Operational & Maintenance of our existing farms, with an annual salary payment of €550,000. The windfarms are mostly on private local landowners' lands, thirty in all, with some Coillte lands also involved. The total annual lease income paid to our windfarm landowners is €320,000 per annum, the vast majority of which is dispersed locally in Mayo, Donegal and Kilkenny. The total annual commercial rates payment is €230,000 to the three local authority areas, which is also dispersed locally. That is a total contribution to the rural Irish economy of €1.1million every year.

Ecopower has a development pipeline of on-shore wind projects of 150MW in Tipperary, Waterford and Donegal. Building out these projects will involve an investment of ~€210 million and will involve construction (civil and electrical) and professional (legal, accounting, financing, environmental) jobs.

### **Regional & Rural Issues**

There are 212 windfarms dispersed throughout every county in Ireland and although there is a vocal minority in opposition to on-shore wind, opinion polls consistently show over 70% of the public support on-shore wind farming as a clean electricity source. Windfarm income from annual lease and commercial rates payments are substantial and along with the construction, maintenance and professional support jobs, mostly based in rural Ireland. Currently 4,500 people are directly employed by on-shore wind companies in Ireland. This economic activity generated in the rural economy is now making a significant contribution to the sustainability of small land holdings (particularly on marginal lands) and on rural villages and towns in every county in Ireland.

### **Strategic energy infrastructure and climate change issues**

Over 24% of Ireland's electricity is currently being generated from on-shore wind energy with targets to 2020 of 40% wind energy on the system. Onshore wind energy is now the cheapest new electricity generation coming onto the National Grid. On-shore wind still has potential to grow and be managed through smart grid technology which can enable the use of excess power to charge electric vehicles, run heat pumps and manufacture gas, that can be used in industry and heating when it is required. The penetration of renewables in the electricity sector is already expected to meet targets, however using the excess wind electricity can enable the penetration of renewables in the transport and heating sector also. We have National, European and UN targets for renewable penetration of the energy sector, put in place to address what is acknowledged as the most serious threat facing our planet – climate change. On-shore wind can play its part in a

cost effective and efficient manner.

### **Ecopower Submission based on the above rationale**

On-shore wind should be encouraged throughout Ireland by requiring that all counties make their contribution to designating areas 'Strategic' for wind energy developments. Clear policy statements are needed to discourage situations where individual counties are introducing unrealistic and unnecessary set back distances from houses for wind turbines.

The benefits of on-shore wind, dispersed throughout Ireland, needs to be acknowledged and encouraged with clear policy statements, so that it's development will continue to deliver the following benefits to the local and national economy per;

- Craft and professional employment in rural areas
- Land lease payments to rural families
- Commercial rates payments to rural counties
- Cheapest new power on the National Grid
- Avoidance of EU fines for failure to reach renewable energy targets

On-shore wind energy will also benefit the environment through the avoidance of greenhouse gas emissions. At present on-shore wind energy on the island of Ireland is estimated to reduce CO<sup>2</sup> emissions by over 3.7million tonnes per annum.

On-shore wind is of great benefit to the economy, rural areas in particular, and to the environment. Policy statements encouraging this activity are required if we are not to lose the opportunities afforded by the bountiful resource that blows over every county in Ireland.