

**Submission Paper to the
Draft National Planning Framework
March 2017.**

**Draft National Planning Framework –
“Ireland 2040 our Plan”.**

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Introduction

From the outset I wish to state that I am disappointed that the Draft National Planning Framework (NPF) document in terms of the approach to rural Ireland. Regrettably, the measures contained are not adequate and many of the proposals I have read can only be described as a missed opportunity in terms of tapping into the potential of our rural communities and revitalising rural Ireland as a whole.

The draft NPF utilises a population projection and jobs growth projection up to 2040 provided by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). The population projection of 5.75 million people living in the State by 2040, 1 million additional people, 660,000 additional jobs and more than 0.5 million new homes by 2040 are essentially the axis upon which this strategy is set.

Given the projected population growth outlined above, we have an opportunity to ensure sustained and balanced regional development throughout the duration of this strategy.

This submission is not overly technical or complex. I am using this opportunity to point to a number of key areas for strong consideration under this consultation process. This is a unique opportunity for the entire island of Ireland to put in place a planning framework that will secure a country where people are happy to live, work, study, receive good public services, play and raise a family.

Long term planning and investment in same is the cornerstone of achieving a sustainable future. Looking beyond short term political demands is crucial to setting out long term goals and charting a clear route forward.

1. Balanced Regional Development

The NPF must take a balanced regional perspective on the future development of the country.

This means developing economic counter weights to the increasing dominance of Dublin.

The aim of the NPF should be to enable growth across all regions while reducing regional disparities.

The term ‘balanced regional development’ has its critics but I believe the concept of reducing regional economic disparities, while not hindering across the nation growth, is very achievable. In reality this means that we would achieve growth in all areas, but while attempting to reduce the share of national growth concentrated in high growth areas, such as the Greater Dublin Area.

Many critics of any potential move toward balanced regional development say the strategy will result in a trade-off between regional equality and national growth. However, there is an apparent need for both and the key to achieving under this strategy is in striking a balance between the two ensuring balanced growth benefitting the whole of the country and not just the Dublin and Leinster areas. The NPF’s approach to regional development cannot be solely focused on our existing large cities as growth centres. For example, such a strategy would see zero development gains in whole North-West and Midlands of the country, with the exception of tourism.

To adopt such a narrow minded focus on existing Cities would leave one third the geographic area of the country with no designated growth clusters. Such a focus could not be received as a reasonable or an ambitious regional plan. In reality, it would be received by the populations of the rural communities outside of the main settlements as a clear message from government that they are not serious, nor believe in, the potential for bolstering growth in the regions.

It has been the long held view of my party that reducing regional disparities would not entail a negative impact on aggregate output in Ireland, or in high growth areas like the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), but would have a positive impact on national growth and make overall growth more sustainable. As a rurally based T.D, I support the belief of my party – and this is supported by international evidence on regional growth disparities – that at Ireland’s high level of development reducing disparities in economic terms should have a positive impact on overall national economic output. This is a powerful argument and should be at the heart of what the National Planning Framework is trying to achieve.

2. Broadband

While I agree and support the aims and ideals of the National Broadband Plan, its rollout has been an unmitigated disaster. Timelines have been consistently broken, then extended. I personally believe it has come to a stage where the public, especially those living in areas marked yellow designated for ‘State intervention’ have lost all confidence in the delivery of adequate broadband to their community.

The digital divide in this country is synonymous with the economic divide between rural Ireland and our main cities. We will never revitalise our struggling town centres or reopen the boarded up shop fronts if businesses in rural Ireland cannot rely on the same broadband service their competitors have in the urban towns and cities.

We must ensure that areas of the country outside of the cities are given a fair chance and an equal platform to generate growth in their SME’s and stimulate their local economies.

We must, as a national objective within the NPF, expedite the roll out of the National Broadband Plan to ensure that all parts of the region can access high speed broadband.

Broadband connectivity is not only of critical importance for attracting investment, facilitating economic growth and stimulating innovation - it is fast becoming a necessity of

everyday life. In rural Ireland technological advances will continue to allow more diverse economic activity. Investing in adequate broadband will be critical to keeping rural communities' alive and prospering.

3. Planning

Any proposed amendments to current planning law or specification should not prohibit the following:

- **Community Development** - People with social and economic ties to an area should not be prohibited from or discouraged against returning to their home town, village or community to build a house on land which they own, have inherited or received as a gift from direct or extended family.
 - **Rural Town & Village Development** - Entrepreneurs should be encouraged to start, develop, grow and sustain business in our smaller towns and villages. Planning laws which encourage entrepreneurs to create employment in their local area, as opposed to moving to the cities to start a business, will sustain growth in our smaller rural economies.
 - **SME Development** - Entrepreneurs should be encouraged to start businesses located in the centre of their home towns and villages. We should not be ushering SME's into large industrial estates on the outskirts of our regional towns and villages but rather encouraging them to locate in the heart of their local town or village to sustain the local economy and create employment.
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4. Kilkenny County Boundary

Finally, I want to conclude by expressing my very strong views on the continuous proposals to extend the county boundary of Waterford into County Kilkenny. This absurd proposal is put forward continuously on a ten year basis and each time the people of South Kilkenny are forced to live in fear, under a cloud of uncertainty, while the powers that be establish a commission to examine the proposal. It is not only cruel and unusual to expect people and communities to endure such uncertainty on a consistent basis but also abhorrent that such proposals for examination are continuously brought forward and approved for examination by politicians with the sole motivation of singular political gain.

I am clearly stating, in the strongest possible terms, my unequivocal opposition to the any future proposal to extend the boundary of Waterford into County Kilkenny. I do so as a Teachta Dála, former County Councillor, a member of the Aylward family and most importantly a man who was born and bred in South Kilkenny. There must be a measure included in the National Planning Framework to prevent such proposals being brought through on a consistent basis by such disingenuous figures. For instance, if a county boundary, such as the one between Kilkenny and Waterford has been examined and the commission responsible recommends that no such extension occur, then the boundary should be legally prohibited from further such examination for at least a fifty year period. This will ensure that a further €100,000 (approx) is not consistently squandered to establish a commission of examination every ten years or so.

Members of my family have represented the people of Kilkenny on the County Council since 1945 and on every single occasion that this proposal has been tabled in the past it has been vehemently opposed by each generation. As I am sure you are aware the last extension was granted in 1955 and Kilkenny County Council pledged, at the time, that this would never happen again.

Having been elected to the Kilkenny County Council in 1992 where I remained until I took office in Dáil Éireann in 2007, I can personally vouch for the colossal levels of local authority investment in Belview Port and the surrounding industrial area which proved to be mutually beneficial to both counties.

It is within this spirit of economic development for the South East that both local authorities have collaborated on such vital regional projects as the M9 Motorway, the Waterford Bypass, the Municipal Waste Water Treatment Plant, continued development of Belview Port, the community secondary school in Ferrybank, provisions for a University for the South East and others.

From a practical viewpoint, the loss of approximately 8% of the population and 8000 acres of land would result in an estimated €2 million loss in rates to the local authority. This would severely damage the future prospects of an area which, arguably, has the greatest potential for further economic growth in the county apart from Kilkenny City. The loss of rates, planning and development contributions, LPT Tax and other fees and charges would unfairly incur a damaging financial loss to County Kilkenny.

From a community perspective, this proposal has the potential to divide, parishes, towns, business, farms and even families into two counties. GAA clubs and other local sporting organisations will also be significantly damaged by this proposal. The thousands upon thousands of signatures that were collected on petitions from the GAA and other sporting clubs, which have been submitted to this committee, are testament of the depth of absolute opposition that exists.

I understand and wholly accept that this area of the South East needs to grow and expand on both sides of the boundary lines. However, we can only strive to reach our common goals through co-operation as opposed to conflict.

The near 30 years of unified purpose for this cause, which I have personally witnessed, proves that we in Kilkenny are more than happy to offer a hand of friendship to our good neighbours in Waterford to serve the common good of the region.

The most recent Waterford Boundary Committee was established to examine the current boundary and to make consequential recommendations in respect of the metropolitan district of Waterford while giving strict consideration to the interests of effective and convenient local Government. This purpose cannot be served if the population of the Piltown Municipal District (approx. 23,600) is transferred to the municipal district of Tramore & Waterford City West which has a population of approximately 22,900. This unbalancing of the populations of the respective districts would directly contradict current local government policy and the benefits to local government that this committee was commissioned to investigate.

As a public representative of County Kilkenny in Dáil Éireann, I can state with the utmost belief and confidence, that the people are totally and utterly against this proposal. This traverses constituency and provincial borders and the island of Ireland is built on identity of community and we in Kilkenny are hugely proud of the culture, history and heritage of our county and our loyalty to the black and amber colours.

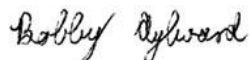
The NPF must contain measures to ensure that the sanctity of the county boundary between Waterford and Kilkenny, which is sacrosanct to our people, remains completely untouched and unchanged.

The cost of the most recent examination was in excess of €87,500. Meanwhile it is the people of south Kilkenny who have been left worrying and wondering what the future holds for them. It's completely unfair that they are expected to deal with this nonsense for almost two years while a commission adjudicates. This issue appears to crop up every 10 years or so. From what I am hearing on the ground, people on both sides of the boundary are sick and tired of it.

Fianna Fáil fought the issue in my father's time, my brother Liam Aylward's time and I personally fought the issue previously as a member of Kilkenny County Council. The sentiment expressed in the past resonates strongly with the people today. They do not want to see this proposal implemented.

We have unlimited potential for growth on both sides of the boundary and we need to tap into that through cohesive work at local Government level. The people of Kilkenny and Waterford can benefit greatly from additional jobs in the tourism and retail sectors in particular. I am hopeful that we can finally put this very contentious issue behind us as quickly as possible and then public representatives on both sides of the boundary can now renew our focus on working together to ensure that both counties prosper and thrive through collaboration and cooperation. We can make a positive difference for people by working together, not by changing our county and administrative borders

Sincerely,



Bobby Aylward T.D

Knockmoylan,

Mullinavat,

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Fianna Fáil Spokesperson on Farming & Skills

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