

Sustainable Energy Ireland reports significant progress in drive to reduce CO₂ and greenhouse gas emissions

SEI publishes annual report for first eight months of activity

Sustainable Energy Ireland (SEI) has today reported significant early progress in the drive to reduce the environmental impact of energy production and use and the levels of harmful greenhouse gas emissions. The announcement was made in conjunction with the launch by SEI of its first annual report, outlining key activities and progress made by the agency in its first eight months of operation.

Formed as an independent statutory authority in May 2002 under the aegis of the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources, Sustainable Energy Ireland is charged with promoting and assisting the development of sustainable energy.

During the period of its five year strategy Sustainable Energy Ireland will deliver programmes covering the built environment, industry, the public and commercial sectors, transport, consumers and renewable energy. SEI also advises the Government on policies and measures aimed at stimulating sustainable energy actions by public bodies, the business sector, local communities and individual consumers.

Speaking in Dublin, Professor Frank Convery, Chairman SEI, said, "In its first eight months of operation, Sustainable Energy Ireland has already seen vigorous progress. With regard to programme delivery, four new programmes were launched across a range of sectors including the Renewable Energy R&D Programme and the Low Income Housing Programme. The Public Sector Programme also achieved notable success, under which €12.7 million in Government funding has been made available to improve energy efficiency in non-commercial public sector buildings. To the end of 2002, 29 design studies had been completed, and support had been approved for 33 model solutions which will see the incorporation of best available technologies into public sector buildings. The 2006 target of 100 completed designs is most certainly achievable".

He continued, "Businesses in Ireland are now facing an intensification of competitiveness pressures both domestically and globally. Getting our performance right as regards energy is a pre-requisite if Ireland is to prosper. The role of a national agency such as SEI is to enable us to be smart in how we produce and use energy, by informing us all about choices and their implications, by experimenting with and fostering innovation, and by helping address market failure".

Other significant achievements by SEI to date include:

- the establishment of the Energy Policy Statistical Support Unit (EPSSU) which is responsible for developing and maintaining comprehensive national and sectoral energy statistics covering production, transformation and end-use.

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- the establishment of the Large Industry Energy Network as a voluntary networking initiative, aimed at reducing the energy usage and related emissions from large industry in Ireland.

Commenting, David Taylor, Chief Executive, SEI, said, "Sustainable Energy Ireland has set itself ambitious targets and I am delighted that we have achieved so much already. SEI programmes are designed to encourage early action and leverage investments by industry, consumers and the public sector. We will continue to seek the highest possible market uptake of sustainable energy practices in a manner that will have enduring economy-wide impact and which will contribute to security of energy supply for the future."

One important area of achievement for SEI has been the completion of a pilot project for Negotiated Agreements in industry, the findings of which were published last September in a national report. The pilot project found that Negotiated Energy Agreements with industry in Ireland have the potential to reduce a company's exposure to carbon tax, and to achieve a reduction in CO₂ emissions twice that achieved by a tax alone, thereby protecting the competitiveness of Irish industry.

Commenting, Mr. Taylor stated, "It is clear that a business-as-usual approach will not deliver Ireland's greenhouse gas abatement commitments. A programme of incentives that recognises the cost of energy related greenhouse gas emissions and that stimulates abatement through fuel switching and energy efficiency will be required. Carbon taxes have been used widely and successfully abroad and could be an effective addition to the mix of mechanisms to be employed in Ireland. The key issue for Ireland is the design of the carbon/energy tax to stimulate and reinforce behaviour change across all sectors of the economy. This will imply the application of some of the revenue raised to achieve further reductions in energy use and to mitigate any undue disadvantage or burdening of individuals or sectors".

This year Ireland will consume 15 million tonnes of oil equivalent (MTOE) of energy, costing consumers over €7 billion and emitting over 45 million tonnes of CO₂. This has grown from €4 billion and 30 million tonnes of CO₂ in 1990. Ireland's energy-related CO₂ emissions arise from transport (28%), housing (27%), industry (25%), other buildings (16%) and agriculture (3%).

The Government's National Climate Change Strategy identifies a 15.4 million tonnes target reduction in annual CO₂ emissions for 2008-2012, over two thirds of which (10.9 million tonnes) is scheduled to be delivered by actions in the energy supply or energy use sectors. Sustainable Energy Ireland will continue to be central to the delivery of programmes towards achieving these targets.

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Editors Notes:

About Sustainable Energy Ireland

Sustainable Energy Ireland (SEI) was established on May 1st, 2002, as a statutory authority charged with promoting and assisting the development of sustainable energy. SEI is funded by the Irish government under the National Development Plan 2000-2006 with programmes part financed by the European Union.

SEI's remit is to improve energy efficiency, advance the development and competitive deployment of renewable energy sources of energy and combined heat and power, and reduce the environmental impact of energy production and use, particularly in respect of greenhouse gas emissions.

SEI operates programmes which offer support for projects aimed at reducing the level of energy consumption and CO₂ emissions by a wide range of energy consumers.

The agency has offices in Dublin, Cork and Sligo and offers a national service from the Renewable Energy Information Office in Bandon, County Cork.