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Opening address to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage

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Chairperson and Housing, Local Government and Heritage Committee members, thank you for the invitation to attend the meeting today to discuss Carbon and Energy within the Construction Industry.

I am joined today by my colleague:

- Orla Coyle, Programme Manager, Public Sector and Regulatory Programmes

Thank you for the opportunity for me to make my opening statement.

Introduction

The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) is at the forefront of delivering a low carbon economy through measures and activities focussed on the transition to a smarter and more sustainable energy future. SEAI is funded by the Government of Ireland, through its parent Department, the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications and the Department of Transport. In 2022 our budget allocation is more than €440 million.

SEAI puts citizens, communities, suppliers, and other stakeholders at the heart of everything it delivers. We focus on developing collaborative partnerships, strong engagement, and smooth customer journeys for the public we serve. At SEAI we are acutely aware that the energy transition must be a just transition. This is carefully considered across our programmes of delivery, our research, and our policy advice.

We provide expert advice to drive positive change through our analysis, modelling and support for policymaking. We are catalysts for action through grant and incentive programmes we deliver and through our capacity-building processes with citizens, communities, and the business and public sectors. Pursuing our mission, we collaborate closely with a wide range of stakeholders, including Government departments, state agencies, and the private sector. We have had a major and transformative impact on the Irish economy. In the last decade our actions have underpinned more than €1.2 billion in energy savings.

Ireland now has even more ambitious targets and we have been scaling up our operations to meet the challenge. SEAI is at the heart of delivering the Government's Climate Action Plan 2021. The Plan sets

ambitious goals for the Built Environment to 2030, including: 600,000 heat pumps; 500,000 B2 home upgrades; large emission reductions in our public services and enterprise sectors; and increased investment in research and innovation.

In terms of carbon budgets, every sector will have its own targets to achieve, and will be held to account for allocations which are being defined in 2022. Buildings contribute to 36% of energy-related greenhouse gas emissions in Europe, with the European Commission targeting that our building stock will be zero emissions by 2050. This target is the subject of European policy directives currently under stakeholder consultation. SEAI are working with our colleagues in the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, and the Department of Environment, Climate, and Communications, in preparation for the changes to the Energy Performance of Buildings and Energy Efficiency Directives.

These will include the following high level requirements:

- All new buildings are to be zero emission from 2027 for public buildings, and 2030 for all others
- The whole lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions will be calculated for all new, large buildings greater than 2000m² from 2027 and all other buildings from 2030
- Minimum energy standards on all buildings
- A requirement for whole lifecycle carbon assessments of buildings as part of green public procurement
- And inclusion of lifecycle Global Warming Potential resulting from construction for sustainable financing for buildings greater than 5000m².

We welcome the ambition emerging in these directives. As highlighted through national and international research, as we reduce our operational carbon in our new building and the retrofit of existing building stock, the influence of carbon from materials increases. SEAI have recently commissioned a research study investigating lifecycle carbon impact of new and renovated buildings. It is hoped that some of the outputs of this research, including the development of Lifecycle Assessment methodologies and tools, will assist those in the construction industry. In addition, SEAI have been tasked with the development of a standard calculation methodology under the Climate Action Plan.

SEAI consider that there is a significant role for Green Public Procurement to assist in the task of reducing embodied carbon. The Public Sector can play a lead role, setting an example, requesting lower embodied carbon solutions in any buildings and services procured in the future.

A vision for the future

The way in which we live must change. But it will be a change for the better. This change will mean our buildings will be warm, comfortable, and not heated by oil or gas, our communities will be leading the generation of renewable energy, our transport fleet will be electrified charged by a renewable energy powered electricity system. Sustainable energy needs to be the norm. The quicker we achieve this, the

sooner the broad range of benefits will flow to Irish citizens and businesses in the form of cheaper to run, warmer and healthier buildings, improved air quality, increased competitiveness, improved security of energy supply and many others.

Conclusion

The benefits of the sustainable energy transition far outweigh the costs, particularly when the multiple benefits (financial, economic, employment, health, security of supply, and environmental) are considered. We passionately believe the clean energy transition must happen urgently; and we stand ready to support all of Irish society on this journey. Our approach is based on insights, research, and expertise from two decades of programme delivery. The challenges ahead require us to work at pace and to deliver ever greater results, learnings, and improvements in collaboration with key stakeholders.

In concluding, I wish to thank our colleagues in the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications, and the Department of Transport, for their ongoing support, particularly in the context of the actions assigned to SEAI under the Climate Action Plan 2021 and the National Development Plan. I would also like to thank the Officials in the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage for their continued support to SEAI.

I welcome discussion with the Committee, and I am happy to answer any questions you may wish to raise.

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