



Minutes of the 408th NESC Council Meeting, 21st March 2014

The meeting took place in The Clock Tower, Department of Education and Skills, Marlborough St, at 10 am.

Attendance: Martin Fraser (Chair), Michael Ewing, Karin Dubsy, Siobhán Egan, Oisín Coghlan, Bob Hanna, Frank Allen Seán Ó Riain, Seámus O'Donoghue, Jim Walsh, Ian Talbot, Caroline Fahey, James Dorley, Seán Healy, John McCarthy, Mary Walsh, Tom Parlon, David Hegarty, Shay Cody, Sally Anne Kinahan, Manus O'Riordan, Eileen Kehoe, and Gavan O'Leary.

Secretariat: Rory O'Donnell, Larry O'Connell, Anne-Marie McGauran, Jeanne Moore, Noel Cahill, Helen Johnston.

Apologies: Brid O'Brien, Mary Daly, Danny McCoy, Anna Davies Mike O'Sullivan, Pat Smith, John Murphy Tony Donohue, Edgar Morgenroth, Niamh O'Donoghue, and John Moran.

Minutes of the Meeting of February 2014 were approved. The chair welcomed John Mc Carthy, the newly appointed Secretary General of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

1. **Matters arising:** none.
2. **Wind Energy:** Jeanne Moore gave a presentation of the main findings from the study on 'Wind Energy in Ireland: the Challenge of Community Engagement and Social Support'. She outlined five conclusions and five questions for members to consider.

The chair invited Bob Hanna of the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources to respond. He commended the study and welcomed further engagement with NESC on these issues He invited NESC to make a formal submission to the consultation process that would follow the forthcoming Energy Green Paper. The Council welcomed the study as a particularly timely piece of work. The following are among the issues that were brought up in a wide ranging discussion. The Green Paper now provides an opportunity for genuine national engagement; this needs to go beyond inviting submissions. Good governance requires genuine engagement by all stakeholders in a deliberative process before decisions are made. The importance of engagement on broad energy questions, appropriate framing of issues and good communication were all emphasised. Reference was made to examples of effective processes of engagement including the Constitutional Convention, the consultation process on the White Paper on Irish Aid, the process of developing a wind turbine at the Dundalk IT and the community engagement practises used in social policy. There is a need for participation rather than simply consultation, but there is a lack of skills in running participatory processes. Members noted the contrast between Ireland's high level of volunteering and local community involvement, on the one hand, and the lack of trust in state institutions, on the other. The recurring problems opposition to large investment projects raises the question as to what the system is doing wrong; although, it was also noted that all changes have some degree of opposition. Attention was drawn to the economic benefits of wind energy (including primary and secondary effects) so that wind can be viewed from the perspective of local economic development. The potential of co-ops in this area was pointed out, but current structures do not facilitate collective investment. In concluding the discussion, the Chairman noted that wider governance issues had been raised and that the Secretariat would address the specific issues raised in a revision of the draft Council paper. It was agreed that this would be finalised by written procedure.

3. **Jobless households:** It was agreed that this paper, analysing and discussing the nature of the issue, would be published subject to some final amendments by members. There was agreement on the proposal in the document, that NESC work in this area would focus on capacitating services that support participation. A more detail design of that work would be brought forward by the Secretariat.

The next meeting was set for: **Thursday 17th April**, Clock Tower, 10.00 a.m.