



Tionól Réigiúnach
an Deiscirt
Southern Regional
Assembly



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine



MTU
Ollscoil Teicneolaíochta na Mumhan
Munster Technological University

Bioeconomy Ireland Week 2023

Communities Regions and Cities: The *Bioeconomy in Action* in your region

Event Report





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Introduction

Co-hosted by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the Southern Regional Assembly, the launch event for Bioeconomy Ireland Week 2023 took place in Assembly House, Waterford on Monday 16th October 2023.

The event, titled *Communities, Regions & Cities – The ‘Bioeconomy in Action’ in your Region*, served to highlight ongoing bioeconomy research to support regional governance advancements; to examine ongoing policy, scientific and industrial efforts supporting the bioeconomy; and to discuss activities and actions which could address key challenges in scaling up the bioeconomy at a regional and local and community level.

The event was attended by over 40 delegates, including Martin Heydon T.D., Minister of State with special responsibility for Research and Development, Farm Safety and New Market Development at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and Cllr. Terry Shannon, Cathaoirleach of the Southern Regional Assembly.

The launch event in Waterford was the first of 18 events that took place during Bioeconomy Ireland Week 2023, which ran between 16 and 23 October. Details on all events can be found at www.irishbioeconomy.ie

Opening address & launch of Bioeconomy Ireland Week 2023

Cllr. Terry Shannon, Cathaoirleach of the Southern Regional Assembly



Cllr Terry Shannon, Cathaoirleach of Southern Regional Assembly opened the event by highlighting the important role that the Southern Regional Assembly has in forging links between the EU, nationally and at regional and local levels. This narrative reinforced the objective of the day’s event. Cllr Shannon highlighted the strengths that the southern region of Ireland possesses to support the growth of a sustainable and circular bioeconomy. He highlighted that the region has enormous potential to use its resources “to inform

and lead the way for the bioeconomy in Ireland, while supporting a key Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) objective to transition to a low carbon economy”



Martin Heydon T.D., Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine



Martin Heydon, T.D., Minister of State with responsibility for Research and Development, Farm Safety and New Market Development underpinned the sentiments of Cllr Shannon, describing the important role that the bioeconomy will play in our national economy in the years ahead: “Changing from a reliance on fossil fuels to a bio-based economy will become more important as we move towards achieving our national commitment to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions by 51% by 2030 and achieving net zero by 2050.” He continued by saying that “it is now clear there are green biobased opportunities that can deliver both climate and environmental benefits, and develop innovative, higher added value biobased products and services.”

To unlock this environmental and economic potential, the Minister highlighted some key actions that his Department had undertaken to support bioeconomy development. This included the imminent publication of a Bioeconomy Action Plan, and the provision of significant levels of funding, including €35m towards research and piloting and demonstration projects since 2018 and a further €10m anticipated in 2024 for two more demonstration projects through the EU Just Transition Fund.

In his concluding remarks, Minister Heydon T.D. stressed to delegates the vital role that collaboration, networking, and events such as the Waterford launch event and Bioeconomy Ireland Week can play: “Successful deployment of the bioeconomy needs continuous and improved stakeholder engagement and policy development and implementation at all levels, to bridge policy work with local and regional realities and opportunities.”

The Bioeconomy in Action

Following the conclusion of opening remarks, the event continued with ‘rapid-fire’ presentations which demonstrated practical examples of the bioeconomy ‘in action’ in the Southern region. Researchers from four, separate bioeconomy research projects gave insights into their work:

ROBIN project- Rebecca Walsh, Southern Regional Assembly

Rebecca Walsh is currently working on the Horizon Europe ROBIN Project with the Circular Bioeconomy Research Group (CircBio) in Munster Technological University. The project aims to empower “Europe’s regions to adapt their governance models and structures to accelerate the achievement of their circular bioeconomy targets while promoting social innovation in different territorial contexts” and the presentation outlined why a territorial approach is followed, where the regional governance models will be deployed, and how the consortium plans to achieve these objectives.





INFORMBIO, Mainstream BIO and Farm Zero C projects- James Gaffey, Munster

Technological University and CircBio Research Group

James Gaffey is Co-Director of the Circular Bioeconomy Research Group (CircBio) at Munster Technological University. James gave a brief overview of a selection of research projects that the CircBio group is involved with, in particular, those that play a direct role in developing and empowering the circular bioeconomy within the Southern Region.

Further to highlighting the many national and European-funded projects the group has led and participated in, James outlined how these projects are adding to an expanding knowledge base of bioeconomy research. This knowledge will be critical to underpin the continued development of the circular bioeconomy by informing and supporting stakeholders, including primary producers.



CABBBIE project- Dr Archishman Bose, University College Cork and SFI MaREI Centre for Energy, Climate and Marine

Dr Archishman Bose described the exciting SEAI DAFM-funded project that he is coordinating. The project, titled 'Developing Cascading Biomethane Biochemicals and Biofertilizer Systems for a Circular Bioeconomy in Ireland' (CABBBIE), aims to develop sustainable biomethane and biobased products for a sustainable future. Within a developed circular bioeconomy, there is significant potential to utilise high-quality biomass available in the southern region to produce biomethane and biobased products via anaerobic digestion and biorefinery. Such activity could lead a reduction of natural gas and diesel usage, as well as supporting new income streams for farmers and new business models for industry.



CABBBIE, through its research, endeavours to overcome existing barriers in meeting the sustainability criteria of the EU Renewable Energy Directive, Recast (RED-II) for biofuels. Dr Bose outlined how the project aims to achieve this through sustainability assessments, multi criteria analyses, business model development, scale-up piloting, dissemination, and capacity building, as well as research into the policy area of biomethane.



The Irish Bioeconomy Foundation- *Stephen Napier, CEO.*

Stephen Napier presented on the innovative work of the Irish Bioeconomy Foundation (IBF). The IBF is a not-for profit organisation funded and supported by Enterprise Ireland, the Irish Government, and Circular Bio-Based Europe funding programme. It already works closely with these partners but plans to broaden its relationships through further public collaborations and projects. The Irish Bioeconomy Foundation is based at the former Lisheen mine near Thurles in Co Tipperary and is currently in the process of rehabilitating the site and developing it into a 'National Bioeconomy Campus'.



Stephen outlined how the campus aims to be a 'Centre of Excellence' for Inter-disciplinary research, entrepreneurial growth, stakeholder engagement and lead in societal knowledge and awareness of the bioeconomy.

Panel session

Dermot Keyes of Green Acre Marketing facilitated a stakeholder panel session which served-up more details on how the bioeconomy landscape in Ireland changing.

The panel represented views from a policy, industry, regional and local authority perspective:

- Dr Karl Walsh, Head of Research Division, Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine.
- Mr John Brosnan, Bioeconomy Executive, ICOS.
- Mr Kevin Lynch, Asst. Director, Southern Regional Assembly.
- Ms Elaine Cullinan, Economic Development Officer, Tipperary County Council.

Panel participants were asked about the activities they are currently undertaking, and their future planned actions, to support the growth and the development of the bioeconomy at national, regional, and local level. These views were expanded to show how such activities could positively affect primary producers, bioeconomy stakeholders and local communities in the region and across Ireland.

The discussion also highlighted the importance of raising awareness of the bioeconomy and how society needs advocates for the bioeconomy, needs industry to show by example, and ultimately needs to demonstrate practical examples of the 'bioeconomy in action'.



Workshop



Through the lens of the ROBIN project, Munster Technological University and the Southern Regional Assembly, facilitated a hybrid workshop. Delegates were first asked to outline supports that are currently available, and supports that would be required, to grow the circular bioeconomy within the Southern Region. The workshop, which was developed in collaboration with Ireland's Knowledge Centre for Carbon, Climate and Community Action (IKC3), then asked delegates to consider the linkages that exist, and the linkages that would need to be developed between bioeconomy stakeholders at national, regional, and local level to accelerate bioeconomy development.

Outcomes

Participants highlighted a variety of supports currently available in the region and nationally, including the Irish Bioeconomy Foundation, Science Foundation Ireland, Circular Bioeconomy Cluster Southwest, National Bioeconomy Campus at Lisheen, Dingle Hub, Ludgate Hub, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, various other government departments, climate action and biodiversity officers, county council thematic groups, and the Southern Regional Assembly.

Additionally, policy and strategy documents were identified as providing an important foundational framework for development. Documents mentioned included the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region, Local Authority Climate Action Plans, County Development Plans, Regional Waste Management Plans, and Ireland's forthcoming Bioeconomy Action Plan.



Financial supports like the EU Just Transition Fund offered by DAFM, the Shared Island Bioeconomy Demonstration Fund, other EU Funding through mechanisms like the CBE JU, EU Innovation Partnership, EPA Funding, Gas Networks Ireland Funding, and the Enterprise Ireland Green Start Programme were viewed as essential. It was pointed out that the funding brochure¹ produced by the Irish Bioeconomy Foundation and DAFM, detailing available funding opportunities for bio-based stakeholders including companies, was a useful tool for all types of stakeholders seeking financing for bio-based initiatives.

When discussing the additional supports that would be required to grow the bioeconomy in the region, various themes were identified. Questions were raised around logistical support. How do we address the demand for Biomass? Do we have sufficient access to primary producers? Are Government Policies facilitating bioeconomy development? Have Local Authorities designated Bioeconomy Officers in place?

¹ [gov - Bioeconomy Funding & Finance Options \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie)



Funding

Although participants highlighted numerous financial supports, they also suggested additional mechanisms were required in this area. Providing capital grants, bridging funding gaps, increasing government grants for farmers, supporting grassroots organizations, and incorporating bioeconomy-focused initiatives in the next round of LEADER funding were considered as additional financial support measures that would be of significant benefit.

Education & Skills

Capacity is another challenge area that requires attention. Ensuring there are skilled personnel on the ground, enhancing bioeconomy education, knowledge, and skills capacity, conducting targeted training as per the Bioeconomy Action Plan, and fostering increased interest among undergraduates were deemed imperative to provide the necessary capacity to support a developing bioeconomy.

Awareness Raising

Communication was viewed as another important area. Events and knowledge-sharing initiatives should be increased with local communities, farmers and businesses, while awareness raising is also particularly crucial. Organizing study visits to share infrastructure knowledge and facilitating input from local stakeholders would facilitate more meaningful communication.

Improving trust between grassroots organizations and the national government, bridging the support gap between research and scale-up, securing additional agricultural advisors, and providing support for Biomethane-related output were also suggested as additional considerations.

Linkages

While the Circular Bioeconomy in the Southern Region benefits from diverse stakeholders, effective communication strategies and improved collaboration between these stakeholders along the bioeconomy value chain will serve to further catalyse growth by fostering trust and awareness among key stakeholders.



To this end, linkages between bioeconomy stakeholders was also examined by participants. The question focused on strengthening linkages at a national, regional, and local level and how this could aid in the further development of a sustainable and circular bioeconomy across the Southern Region.

From a national perspective cross governmental alignment was noted as an essential first step as a position of leadership to guide regional and local strategy and ensure policy alignment.

At a regional level, coherence across the county boundaries was seen as a critical aspect for development. The Southern Region encompasses nine diverse counties from the west to the east coast of the country. It was noted that *'the challenges do not stop at country boundaries'*, and coordination of regional stakeholders and policy makers to the common goal was vital.

Locally, participants felt it was key it was key for local level agencies to work together, aligning with mechanisms such as the LEADER programme, which aims to support local development of Ireland's rural areas.



Conclusion

Overall, the workshop proved to be thought provoking and highly collaborative among delegates. The ROBIN project gained valuable input from key stakeholders towards developing regional support actions for the Southern Region's circular bioeconomy and the event overall aided the further development of the Irish Bioeconomy Network.

A full breakdown of Workshop outcomes can be found in Appendix 1 and 2, below.

IRISH BIOECONOMY NETWORK

Irish Bioeconomy Week, is coordinated by the Irish Bioeconomy Network.



In pictures: a selection of photographs from the event in Assembly House





Appendix 2. Workshop outcomes

What supports are currently available to support bioeconomy development at a regional and community level?		
Stakeholders	Documents	Financial
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Irish Bioeconomy Foundation Science Foundation Ireland Circular Bioeconomy Cluster South West National Bioeconomy Campus at Lisheen Dingle Hub Ludgate Hub Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine & other government departments Biodiversity officers County Council thematic groups Southern Regional Assembly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy Climate Action Plans County Development Plans Bioeconomy Action Plan Regional Waste Management Plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Just Transition Fund Shared Island Fund EU Funding EU Innovation Partnership EPA Funding Gas Networks Ireland Funding Enterprise Ireland Green Start Programme IBF & DAFM funding brochure detailing funding available for bio-based companies
What supports are needed to support bioeconomy development at a regional and community level? What linkages are needed between national, regional, and local level bodies to ensure successful bioeconomy implementation?		
Logistical Support	Government Policy	Financial Support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How will the demand for Biomass be met/delivered? Need to access primary producers Need to identify Challenge/opportunity areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need for assigned bioeconomy officer in Local Authorities Need to confirm the outcome of actions before putting out legislation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capital Grants Close the gap in funding opportunities More government grants for farmers Funding grass roots organization to connect them to the overall business LEADER - next round of funding should have supports for enterprises who are working on the bioeconomy going forward / desire to be working with them



Capacity	Communication	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skilled personnel on the ground to run facilities will be critical • Education/ knowledge/ skills capacity is going to be a key part - e.g. processing high volumes of technical planning applications • Targeted training - Bioeconomy action plan-skills and knowledge • Effort to increase interest among undergrads 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear communication- there has been a legacy of mixed messages • Effective communications (positive/impactful solutions) is key to 'linking' investors to entrepreneurs/ researchers • Communications to highlight/present a tangible, impactful 'angle' to engage the public - Open days/TV/Newspapers? • Share knowledge/host events with local communities/business • Increased awareness for bioeconomy in general & specific supports • study visits to share knowledge about what infrastructure exists, and what could be implemented • trying to get input from local stakeholders, e.g., coordination and support actions. • could do more to inform people about bioeconomy SMEs in local areas - more positive PR required • ensuring knowledge generated has longer lifespan - knowledge hub so information can be hosted beyond project lifetime on central knowledge platform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved trust between grassroots organisation and national government • Trust level legacy of ever-changing messages to farmers, Improve conformity • Current supports gap between research and scale-up - How do we 'de-risk' • Additional Agricultural advisors required • Additional support for biomethane related output