

Press Release
Friday, April 28, 2023

Ministers endorse launch of EU Fund that brings new investment for a Just Transition in the Midlands

Irish communities have the potential to ‘reimagine and transform’ themselves after the ending of commercial peat production and peat-fired power generation.

Cllr Robert Power, Cathaoirleach of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA), made the comments at the launch today of the Programme for the EU Just Transition Fund, which will be managed by the EMRA.

The new EU Just Transition Fund (JTF), worth up to €169 million, will support economic development in regions most negatively affected by the ending of commercial peat extraction and peat-based energy production as part of Ireland’s transition to a low-carbon economy.

The Programme was launched today by the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications, Minister Eamon Ryan at the Corlea Trackway Visitor Centre in Kenagh, Co Longford. Longford is one of several counties including Offaly, Laois, Westmeath, Roscommon, and parts of Galway, Kildare and Tipperary, which form the EU JTF Territory.

Also in attendance today were Sofia Alves, Director at the European Commission’s Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG Regio); Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Foreign Affairs with special responsibility for EU affairs, Peter Burke T.D.; Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Pippa Hackett; Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage with special responsibility for heritage and electoral reform, Malcolm Noonan T.D.; Minister of State at the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth with special responsibility for disability, Anne Rabbitte T.D.; and Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs with responsibility for International Development and Diaspora, Sean Fleming T.D.

The EU JTF will facilitate projects and initiatives which help address the adverse social, economic and environmental effects of the climate transition for regions previously reliant on fossil fuels. It also sets out Ireland’s investment strategy for the funding, with up to €84.5 million financed by the EU matched by up to €84.5 million from the Government of Ireland. The plans and targets are in accordance with the Government’s National Climate Action Plan and the European Green Deal.

EMRA was appointed as Managing Authority of the Fund in December 2021. Since then EMRA has been working alongside the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communication (DECC) to produce the integrated programme that will deliver the Fund.

The Programme will focus on three strategic priorities for investment. These are:

- Generating employment by investing in the diversification of the local economy
- Supporting the restoration and rehabilitation of degraded peatlands and regeneration and repurposing of industrial heritage assets
- Providing smart and sustainable mobility options to enable local communities to benefit directly from the green transition.

Between now and 2027, a range of initiatives will be supported and a number of funding calls will be run for different types of organisations. Beneficiaries of the fund will include micro-enterprises, SMEs, research institutions, local authorities, and community organisations. First funding calls will be launched soon with others to follow in the near future. Delivery bodies who will help implement the funding will include the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, the Department of Transport with the National Transport Authority and Zero Electric Vehicles Ireland, Fáilte Ireland, National Parks & Wildlife Service, and Pobal.

Commenting, **EMRA Director Jim Conway** said: *“Today marks a success for collaboration and bringing together a wide range of key stakeholders and actors to address our challenges on the climate front which are acutely felt by the community of the JTF Territory. That community shares these challenges with others across the EU. Europe has recognised this and addressed it through the EU Just Transition Fund.*

The appointment of EMRA as Managing Authority of the EU JTF in December 2021 recognised the importance of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies made by the Assembly members in 2019. The pillars of Climate Action, Healthy Placemaking, and Economic Opportunities reflect the provisions of the National Planning Framework and when incorporated within Local Authority County and City Development Plans, provide an alignment from UN through the Sustainable Development Goals to EU, national, regional and local scales.”

Mr Conway, on behalf of the EMRA, also thanked the Office of Public Works, which manages the Corlea Trackway Visitor Centre for hosting today’s launch of the EU JTF by Minister Ryan.

Sofia Alves, Director at the DG Regional and Urban Policy (DG Regio), European Commission said:

“The Just Transition Fund is a key driver of the European Green Deal, which pushes the green transition towards more inclusive and innovative accomplishments. We are moving away from peat and other fossil fuels in the Midlands because people once dependent on them deserve a reshaped future with new prospects. A total of 169 million euros will kick-start this process through local initiatives.”

Cathaoirleach of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly Cllr. Robert Power said:

“This new EU fund is an essential tool to realise the great potential for the wider Midlands area. This is a pivotal time in our economy. The EU Just Transition Fund is the lever which will help the regions most impacted by climate adaptation to action the generational change needed to become a sustainable, climate-neutral economy by 2050.

The Fund demonstrates just how valuable EU funding is to the implementation of local and regional economic and spatial planning strategies that support an inclusive and sustainable transition for the benefit of local communities.”

Notes:

ABOUT EMRA:

Following on from the enactment of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 a number of changes were made to the regional structures in Ireland where the eight regional authorities were dissolved. Three new Regional Assemblies came into effect on 1st January 2015, namely the Southern Regional Assembly, the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly and the Northern & Western Regional Assembly. The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly comprises of 42elected Members nominated by the 12 constituent local authorities and including members of the Irish delegation to the EU Committee of the Regions. The main roles of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly are to prepare, adopt and implement the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Region; ensure consistency with RPG/RSES in relation to the Local Economic and Community Plans of the 12 constituent Local Authorities; participate on EU programmes monitoring committees; identify, participate and co-ordinate EU projects; support the national delegation to the Committee of the Regions; support the work of the National Oversight and Audit Commission. For further details on the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly see www.emra.ie

Designated Territory

The Territory designated for the Fund has had regard to the 2020 European Semester recommendations of the European Commission on the scope and territorial coverage for the EU Just Transition Fund, the Structural Reform Support Programme consultancy undertaken during 2021 to support the development of the Territorial Plan, to the reports of the Just Transition Commissioner for the Midlands region, statistical analysis by People and Place, as well as territory encapsulated by National Just Transition Fund.

Territorial Plan and Programme

In 2021, Ireland prepared a draft Territorial Just Transition Plan which set out the impacts on the most negatively affected territory, as Ireland moves away from fossil fuels, and identifies development needs for the territory in order to address these negative impacts.

Public consultation on the draft Territorial Plan was held early in 2022 and feedback gathered through an online survey and participative public workshops, including one targeted at young people aged 16-24 who are living, working, or studying in the region.

Following submission of public feedback, the Plan was finalised, setting out Ireland’s targeted sectors and regions. It was approved by government on 29th November 2022 and adopted by the European Commission in December 2022.

The Just Transition Programme sets out the investment priorities and proposed allocation of expenditure to address the negative impacts identified in Ireland’s Territorial Plan. Ireland’s allocation for the 2021 – 2027 period amounts to €84.5

million, and with national co-financing, total funding will amount to €169 million over the period. It sets out the monitoring and governance arrangements to underpin this investment that in compliance with the CPR.

The Fund will provide support for investments in the following areas:

- Bottom-up initiatives supporting priorities of refreshed Local Economic and Community Plans and Regional Enterprise Plans, aligned with the EU Just Transition Fund Regulation
- Restoration and rehabilitation of Natura 2000 wetlands sites.
- Decarbonisation of existing transport routes and fleets and the installation of fast-powered EV charging points in community centres.
- Development of a centre of excellence to undertake research on farming on peat soils in the Midlands, building on the European Innovation Partnership schemes run by the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine.
- Development of 'Bioeconomy Districts' and 'Living Labs' to support circular bioeconomy value chain development within the Region.
- Implementation of regional tourism strategies, supporting the development of trail networks on re-purposed sites and supporting businesses in this sector to develop products and services and to build their capacity.

Ireland's Just Transition Territorial Plan and Programme and supporting material can be found at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/4d421-eu-just-transition-fund/> and eufunds.ie.

Managing Authority Function

The Managing Authority is responsible for managing and providing information on the Programme and assisting in the selection of eligible projects and monitor implementation. Its functions are set out under the Common Provision Regulation (2021/1060) and include:

- selection of operations/projects
- carry out programme management such as management verifications, forecasts of payment applications and so on
- support the work of the monitoring committee.
- record and store electronically, data on each operation for monitoring, evaluation, financial management, verifications, and audits
- communications activities in relation to the programmes

For further information on the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly and its role as Managing Authority email: eujtf@emra.ie or phone: 01-8074482.

Launch Venue – Corlea Trackway visitor centre

Today's launch at [Corlea Trackway Visitor Centre | Heritage Ireland](#) Kenagh Village, Longford, is facilitated by the Office of Public Works. The visitor centre includes a "togher" or Iron Age road, which was built in 148 BC. Known locally as the Danes' Road, it is the largest example of its kind to have been uncovered in Europe.

The trackway was built from heavy planks of oak, which sank into the peat after a short time. While this made it unusable, it also ensured it remained perfectly preserved in the bog for the next two millennia.

Inside the interpretive centre, an 18-metre stretch of the ancient wooden structure is on permanent display in a hall specially designed to preserve it. This was part of a routeway of great importance. It may have been a section of a ceremonial highway connecting the Hill of Uisneach, the ritual centre of Ireland, and the royal site of Rathcroghan.

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