



Draft Bioeconomy Strategy 2026 – 2030 (BioScale 2030: Advancing a Sustainable Bioeconomy for Ireland)

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) welcomes the preparation by the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment (DCEE) of the [Draft Bioeconomy Strategy 2026–2030](#), which aims to provide a framework for the development of Ireland’s Bioeconomy over the next four years.

The submission set out hereunder contains recommendations on behalf of the Regional Assembly. This submission has been prepared by the executive and approved by the Cathaoirleach on behalf of the Assembly.

1.0 Overall Context

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) is part of the regional tier of governance in Ireland and is one of three Regional Assemblies. It is primarily focused on driving regional development through the formulation, adoption and implementation of the Regional, Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES), oversight and coordination of City and County Development Plans and Local Economic and Community Plans, management of EU Operational Programmes, EU project participation, and the implementation of national economic policy. As a strategic policy body, EMRA also participates in the consultation processes of other relevant strategic plans and policies.

The role and function of the Regional Assembly (the Assembly), including the scope of the RSES 2019-2031, was provided for in the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, which included support for and alignment with the economic policies and objectives of the Government. However, this legislation has been superseded by the Planning and Development Act 2024, as amended, which was signed into law on 17th October 2024. The provisions of the Planning and Development Act 2024, as amended, relevant to the Regional Assemblies commenced on 2nd October 2025. The Planning and Development Act 2024, as amended, expands the scope of the RSES and the functions of the Regional Assembly. The Regional Assembly is further mindful of its obligations, as a ‘relevant body’, as prescribed under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, as amended, to perform its functions in a manner consistent with the need to achieve Ireland’s national climate objective.

The three Regional Assemblies are currently undertaking statutory reviews of their respective RSESs in accordance with Section 30 of the Planning and Development Act 2024 (as amended). The review process provides an opportunity to ensure that updated regional policy reflects national priorities.

1.1 Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES)

The current Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region was made by the Elected Members of the Assembly in June 2019, and it is a strategic plan and investment framework to shape future growth throughout the Region. The overall vision of the Strategy is to create a sustainable and competitive Region that supports the wellbeing of people and places in the Region, from urban to rural, with access to quality housing, travel and employment opportunities for all.

A primary statutory objective of the RSES is to support the implementation of the National Planning Framework (NPF), achieve alignment of investment priorities with those of the National Development Plan (NDP) and the National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF), and thus Project Ireland 2040, by coupling new development with the requisite investment in services and infrastructure. In doing so, the RSES supports the spatial, economic and climate policies and objectives of the Government by providing a long-term strategic planning and economic framework for the Eastern and Midland Region. The RSES also sets the context for local authorities within the Region to develop their City and County Development Plans (CDPs), and Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs) in a manner that will ensure alignment between national, regional and local plans.

The RSES presents a Spatial Strategy, devised and informed by a complementary Economic Strategy, which provides a framework for future growth, ensuring the delivery of effective regional development through the realisation of viable and vital places. This includes championing the capital city of Dublin as a smart, climate resilient and global city region; securing Athlone, Drogheda and Dundalk as Regional Growth Centres, acting as regional economic drivers and supports for their wider catchment areas; and promoting a network of large economically active Key Towns that provide employment and services to their surrounding areas. All of this is supported by self-sustaining growth towns, self-sustaining towns and a network of multifaceted rural places.

The vision of the RSES is supported by sixteen Regional Strategic Outcomes (RSOs), that are aligned with National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs) of the NPF and framed around the three key principles of Healthy Placemaking, Climate Action and Economic Opportunity. Of relevance to the Draft Bioeconomy Strategy are the following RSOs:

- RSO 2 – support ‘Compact Growth and Urban Regeneration’
- RSO 3 – support ‘Rural Communities’, strengthening rural networks, economies and communities
- RSO 4 - support ‘Healthy Communities’, insofar as it supports clean environments, water quality, and healthy ecosystems that underpin the bioeconomy
- RSO 7 – ‘Sustainable management of water, waste and other Environmental Resources’, greater resource efficiency and realising the benefits of a Circular Economy
- RSO 8 - seek to ‘Build Climate Resilience’
- RSO 9 - support the ‘Transition to Low Carbon and Clean Energy’

- RSO 10 - seek to protect and enhance ecosystem services through 'Enhanced Green Infrastructure'
- RSO 11 - conserve and enhance 'Biodiversity and Natural Heritage' and protect the landscape
- RSO 12 - support a 'Strong Economy Supported by Enterprise and Innovation' for economic growth
- RSO 13 - 'Improve Education Skills and Social Inclusion' to attract employers, retain talent and ensure opportunities for quality jobs
- RSO 15 - support 'Enhanced Strategic Connectivity' and regional accessibility for economic development/ resilience, strengthen rural communities, the blue-green economy and tourism
- RSO 16 – 'Collaboration Platform', a regional framework for collaboration and partnerships to support opportunities

1.2 Interreg Europe ORIGINN Project

The Regional Assembly is a partner on the [Interreg Europe ORIGINN project](#) which seeks to promote the economic and social transformation of rural areas through innovation, with a particular focus on the agri-food sector. The focus of the project has been on the Midland counties of Longford, Westmeath, Offaly, and Laois. EMRA is participating in ORIGINN with a view to informing the review of the RSES with learnings from the project including several good practices in innovation-driven rural development, from across Europe, under the themes of:

- Digitalisation (including STEM education and remote work);
- Green Economy (including bioeconomy and green tourism);
- Social Innovation (including social enterprise and citizen engagement); and
- Soft Innovation (including creativity as a driver of innovation and clustering).

The project is exploring effective policy interventions to address key challenges in our rural communities including the retention of young people; people leaving the agri-food sector; adding value that stays in local communities; and maintaining rural Ireland's clean, green image. A strong bioeconomy offers solutions to these challenges, driving innovation for the diversification of rural employment, creating new revenue streams and business models for the agri-food sector, developing new local and regional value chains, and supporting the green transition. Through extensive stakeholder engagement and the transfer of good practices from partners in other European regions, ORIGINN is advancing a more robust approach to regional bioeconomy policy development for the Eastern and Midland region.

2.0 Submission

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) welcomes the publication of the Draft Bioeconomy Strategy and recognises its important role in supporting Ireland's transition to a climate-neutral, circular and competitive economy. The Strategy is strongly aligned with the objectives of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region, both of which provide an established policy framework to support the

sustainable development of Ireland's bioeconomy. As set out in Section 1.0 above, EMRA (alongside the other Regional Assemblies) is undertaking a review of its RSES in line with the requirements of the Planning and Development Act 2024, as amended, and the revised NPF. A revised RSES will be published by the end of 2027, setting out the framework for regional development over the next 10-20 years, including setting the policy framework for regional economic development consistent with national economic policy. The Assembly would welcome continued engagement with the Department during the finalisation and implementation of the National Bioeconomy Strategy to ensure its appropriate integration and reflection within the revised RSES.

At the national level, the NPF recognises the bioeconomy as an important contributor to balanced regional development, climate action and sustainable resource management. The Strategy aligns particularly with National Strategic Outcomes relating to strengthened rural economies and communities (NSO 3), enterprise, innovation and skills (NSO 5), the transition to a low-carbon and climate resilient society (NSO 8), the sustainable management of water and environmental resources (NSO 9), and education, research and skills development (NSO 10). This is further reinforced through several National Policy Objectives (NPOs) including explicit support for the bioeconomy and circular economy (NPOs 23 and 53), together with policies promoting resource efficiency, climate action, biodiversity protection and sustainable water management (NPOs 56, 57, 58 and 60).

The current RSES similarly recognises the bioeconomy as a key enabler of sustainable regional growth, particularly within the wider Midlands, where opportunities exist to build on regional strengths in agriculture, forestry, food production, renewable energy and the circular economy. The RSES contains explicit policy support for the bioeconomy through Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) that promote sustainable rural economies (RPO 6.7), support implementation of the National Policy Statement on Bioeconomy and the identification of regional bioeconomy opportunities (RPO 7.34), and advocate for the preparation of a regional bioeconomy plan to support the transition to a low-carbon energy system (RPO 7.37). More broadly, the RSES promotes smart specialisation, innovation, research collaboration, enterprise development and the principles of a Just Transition, all of which provide a strong foundation for bioeconomy development across the Region.

The Assembly considers that the Draft Strategy would be strengthened by recognising the role of existing regional policy and delivery frameworks in supporting implementation. In particular, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, together with the Regional Enterprise Plans (REPs), provide established mechanisms for identifying regional strengths, coordinating investment, supporting innovation ecosystems and fostering collaboration between local authorities, enterprise agencies, higher education institutions and industry. Embedding these place-based regional structures within the implementation of the Strategy would help ensure that investment in the bioeconomy reflects regional opportunities and contributes to balanced regional development.

The Department will be aware that in April 2025, the Minister of the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment (DETE) announced that the Regional Enterprise Plans (REPs) will be fully integrated into the RSEs. This followed an independent review of the Regional Enterprise Plan initiative. Furthermore, DETE is also preparing a new regional enterprise policy strategy (Enterprise 2035) which will map out the regional enterprise policy landscape and facilitate better alignment of the REPs with the activities of other regional stakeholders. As such, the Assembly would recommend that the Department engages with DETE to ensure that the final Bioeconomy Strategy reflects these developments.

Furthermore, the Assembly's experience through the EU Just Transition Fund and other EU-funded initiatives, including European regional development programmes and place-based bioeconomy projects, provides a strong foundation from which to contribute to this consultation. Drawing on the expertise within EMRA and its extensive network of regional, national, and European partners, the Assembly is well placed to help shape and support the implementation of a bioeconomy that is innovative, regionally grounded, and aligned with EU policy objectives.

The Assembly welcomes the overall direction of the Strategy. The Assembly further considers that the bioeconomy presents significant opportunities for indigenous enterprise development, farm and forestry diversification, innovation, climate action and regional economic resilience. These opportunities are most likely to be realised and sustained where bioeconomy development operates within environmental limits and strengthens the natural systems upon which future prosperity depends.

The Draft Bioeconomy Strategy sets out five strategic objectives. Accordingly, this submission is structured around these objectives, with relevant public policies highlighted and observations and recommendations provided where appropriate.

The five strategic objectives are as follows:

1. Scale Ireland's bioeconomy infrastructure, technology and investment
2. Strengthen the market demand for bio-based products
3. Leverage Ireland's innovation, knowledge and skills
4. Acknowledge the bioeconomy as a tool for climate action and circularity
5. Improve our governance, cooperation and partnership approach

2.1 Scale Ireland's bioeconomy infrastructure, technology and investment

The effective implementation of the Regional Enterprise Plans (REPs), as delivery mechanisms that complement the RSEs, provides an important mechanism for delivering this objective. The REPs identify regional sectoral strengths, coordinate investment priorities, and foster collaboration between enterprise agencies, higher education institutions, research organisations and industry. In

doing so, they support the place-based approach promoted by both the NPF and the RSES. Currently, there are four REPs in the Eastern and Midland Region (EMR) - Dublin, Mid-East, Midland and North-East (which includes Louth, hence relevant to EMR). The current Mid-East REP includes an action relating to a Circular Economy Cluster and the Midlands REP references a European Innovation Hub that focuses on the bioeconomy. The Assembly therefore recommends that the Bioeconomy Strategy recognises the role of Regional Enterprise initiatives such as the REPs in identifying regional bioeconomy opportunities, coordinating infrastructure investment and supporting regionally significant bioeconomy clusters.

Regarding EMRA's role as Managing Authority for the EU Just Transition Fund, awards of €5 million each through the Bioeconomy Demonstration Initiative were recently announced to support two bioeconomy projects (BIOCHAR and TRANSFORM) with collaboration across the Midlands. In an independent report commissioned by the Assembly, economic consultants highlighted the Midland region as an area of opportunity, created by the shift away from peat production, for bioeconomy and circular economy projects linked to renewable energy.

The RSES promotes smart specialisation as a key mechanism for building regional competitive advantage through innovation, research collaboration and enterprise development. The National Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) explicitly identifies Bioeconomy/Renewable Energy as one of the principal sectoral strengths and emerging opportunities in the Eastern and Midland Region. In this context, the Bioeconomy Strategy should recognise the role of EU funding, the REPs and Smart Specialisation in supporting the development of regional bioeconomy clusters, strengthening bio-based value chains, accelerating technology adoption and commercialisation, and attracting investment in regionally significant bioeconomy infrastructure. Leveraging these established regional structures would help ensure that bioeconomy investment is coordinated, place-based and aligned with the objectives of effective regional development.

Furthermore, the Assembly considers that the Bioeconomy Strategy should recognise the opportunities presented by existing regional and cross-border economic initiatives, including the Dublin–Belfast Economic Corridor. As a gateway for Northern Irish, UK, Irish, EU and international markets, the Corridor is a key strategic location for cross-border trade, serving as the only region in the world able to trade goods freely with both Great Britain and EU markets. It provides an established framework for collaboration in innovation, research, enterprise development and strategic infrastructure investment. The Corridor presents opportunities to strengthen cross-border bioeconomy value chains, support collaboration between higher education institutions, research organisations and industry, and facilitate investment in areas of shared regional strength, including agri-food, advanced manufacturing, the circular economy and the bioeconomy. Recognising the role of the Corridor within the Bioeconomy Strategy would reinforce the importance of place-based and cross-jurisdictional collaboration in scaling Ireland's bioeconomy.

The Assembly notes that sustainability outcomes can change significantly as activities scale up. Many bioeconomy activities may be highly sustainable at an early stage because they rely on wastes, residues or low-impact feedstocks. However, as demand increases, additional pressures can emerge, directly or indirectly, including:

- Habitat conversion
- Impacts on carbon-rich soils
- Increased fertiliser use
- Water-quality deterioration
- Biodiversity loss
- Impacts on food security

The Assembly considers that the bioeconomy should not be viewed solely as a growth opportunity. Biological resources are finite and future demand is likely to increase competition between food production, materials, energy, biodiversity, carbon sequestration, water-quality objectives and ecosystem restoration. Sustainable biomass availability is limited and environmental carrying capacity must be treated as a fundamental consideration in bioeconomy policy. At the same time, the finite nature of biological resources reinforces the importance of innovation, resource efficiency and higher-value uses of biomass.

The Assembly strongly supports the Draft Strategy's commitment to cascading use principles and considers that these should be embedded throughout implementation and investment decisions. Effective management of natural resources can strengthen both environmental outcomes and long-term regional economic opportunities. Decisions regarding biomass mobilisation should recognise that land and natural resources are subject to competing demands and that these trade-offs need to be explicitly assessed.

Equally, the Assembly recognises that many bioeconomy pathways have the potential to strengthen food-system resilience through improved nutrient recycling, better soil management, diversification of farm incomes and more efficient use of biological resources. The transition from sustainable to unsustainable use can occur relatively quickly once environmental thresholds are crossed. For this reason, the Assembly considers that bioeconomy development should be supported by ongoing monitoring, adaptive management and evidence-based decision-making throughout implementation.

2.2 Strengthen the market demand for bio-based products

The Assembly notes that the climate and environmental benefits of substituting fossil fuels for biomass can vary considerably depending on the feedstock, location, scale and wider land-use impacts involved. It therefore considers that the Bioeconomy Strategy should address the need to ensure that bioeconomy interventions are subject to robust ex-ante assessment, lifecycle analysis, ongoing monitoring and appropriately resourced safeguards from the outset to ensure that negative

unintended consequences for biodiversity, carbon stocks, water quality, food production and ecosystem resilience are avoided.

The Assembly recognises that where robust sustainability criteria are met, bioenergy and biomethane pathways can contribute to emissions reduction, resource efficiency and the beneficial use of wastes, residues and unavoidable by-products, provided that these pathways remain consistent with wider biodiversity, climate and land-use objectives.

The Assembly welcomes the inclusion of an awareness campaign under Objective 2 and would encourage the Strategy to leverage existing engagement and communications initiatives delivered through the EU Just Transition Fund Programme. A range of projects funded under the Programme have already raised awareness of circular economy principles, sustainable resource use and bio-based innovation within communities, enterprises and educational institutions.

2.3 Leverage Ireland's innovation, knowledge and skills

The Assembly welcomes the Strategy's recognition of the importance of developing the knowledge and skills required to support Ireland's bioeconomy (at Action 3.2.1) and considers that the Strategy should acknowledge and leverage existing national and regional skills structures, including the National Skills Council and the network of Regional Skills Fora. These established mechanisms should provide an effective platform for identifying current and future skills needs, strengthening collaboration between enterprise, education and training providers, higher education institutions and public bodies, and ensuring that workforce development is aligned with regional economic priorities. The Regional Skills Fora also play an important role in supporting the implementation of the REPs, helping to align skills provision with regional enterprise needs and emerging sectoral opportunities. Recognising these complementary regional structures within the Strategy would reinforce a coordinated, place-based approach to bioeconomy development, ensuring that skills, innovation and enterprise supports are aligned to regional strengths and investment priorities.

The Assembly further welcomes the recognition of enterprise agencies within Action 3.3.1 and considers that the role of Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) and the REPs should also be acknowledged as key regional delivery mechanisms. Through their established links with SMEs, education and training providers, enterprise agencies and regional stakeholders, the REPs and LEOs are well placed to identify emerging bioeconomy skills needs, facilitate employer engagement and support the delivery of targeted upskilling initiatives that reflect regional strengths and smart specialisation priorities.

2.4 Acknowledge the bioeconomy as a tool for climate action and circularity

The Assembly notes that a functioning bioeconomy ultimately depends upon the health of the ecosystems that produce biomass (biodiversity, soil health, water resources, agriculture, forestry,

marine systems etc.) and that farmers, foresters and fishers will play a central role in managing these resources and delivering the bioeconomy. The Assembly considers that supporting viable livelihoods and creating new market opportunities for primary producers should remain an important part of the Strategy, provided these opportunities are aligned with sustainability objectives and environmental stewardship.

The Assembly notes that increasing drought risk, declining soil moisture, changes in hydrological systems and wider climate impacts have the potential to reduce future ecosystem productivity and biomass availability and therefore considers that the Bioeconomy Strategy should address the need to ensure that future assessments of biomass potential should consider climate resilience alongside resource availability.

The Assembly considers that well-designed bioeconomy pathways can support ecosystem recovery, resource efficiency and climate action simultaneously, provided environmental safeguards are integrated from the outset. The Assembly further notes that ecosystem restoration, peatland rewetting, biodiversity recovery, carbon farming and other nature-based approaches can generate significant societal value through climate mitigation, improved water quality and increased resilience. The Assembly therefore considers that the Bioeconomy Strategy should address the need to ensure that where restoration objectives require changes to biomass extraction or land-management practices, these considerations should be reflected in biomass mobilisation and resource-allocation decisions.

2.5 Improve our governance, cooperation and partnership approach

In assessing bioeconomy development and investment priorities, the Assembly considers that such priorities should have regard to whether they support balanced regional development, strengthen rural towns and communities, build upon regional strengths and contribute to sustainable economic development. Alignment with existing and planned transport and renewable energy infrastructure should also be considered. Embedding these spatial considerations within governance arrangements will help ensure that bioeconomy development is coordinated, place-based and environmentally sustainable. As such, the Assembly recommends that the governance framework include a spatial planning dimension to support evidence-based decision-making and ensure that bioeconomy development contributes to the objectives of the NPF and the RSES.

One of the most important implementation measures in the Strategy will be the development of a comprehensive monitoring and reporting system. The Assembly recognises that research, innovation and demonstration projects will play an important role in helping Ireland identify more sustainable and higher-value uses for biological resources, while reducing environmental pressures and supporting economic development.

In this regard, the Assembly supports the inclusion of sustainability indicators that are consistent, where possible, with regional monitoring systems and wider natural capital and wellbeing frameworks. The Assembly considers that monitoring should not focus solely on economic activity or biomass production but should assess the extent to which bioeconomy development is contributing to wider sustainability objectives.

Priority indicators should include:

- Biomass use and material consumption
- Greenhouse-gas emissions
- Circularity and resource efficiency
- Natural capital condition
- Biodiversity status
- Water quality
- Soil condition and soil moisture
- Climate resilience and drought risk
- Progress towards climate, biodiversity and water-quality targets
- Alignment with environmental thresholds and planetary boundaries

The Assembly considers that the monitoring framework should also assess whether bioeconomy pathways are supporting or undermining broader environmental objectives. In the Assembly's view, the success of the bioeconomy should ultimately be evaluated by its capacity to deliver sustainable environmental, social and economic outcomes within ecological and planetary boundaries. The Assembly emphasises that environmental protection, economic opportunity, innovation and regional development should be recognised as complementary and mutually reinforcing objectives rather than competing priorities. Accordingly, the monitoring framework should demonstrate the extent to which the bioeconomy is contributing simultaneously to enhanced biodiversity, climate resilience, food security, rural livelihoods and the protection and enhancement of natural capital.

The Regional Development Monitor (RDM)¹, which provides a series of mapping and visualisation tools related to socio-economic and environmental data, may be of assistance in identifying and hosting indicators. It is a collaborative project between the three Regional Assemblies and the All-Island Research Observatory (AIRO) at Maynooth University.

Multi-level governance with Regional Assemblies, Local Authorities & Cities

The Assembly welcomes the Draft Strategy's emphasis on place-based development, regional bioeconomy clusters, the role of local authorities and community participation. In the Assembly's view, regional approaches provide an opportunity to better align local biomass resources, enterprise

¹ The Regional Development Monitor (RDM) Hub will soon move to www.regionalmonitor.ie

opportunities, natural capital assets, research capacity, infrastructure investment and community priorities, supporting more integrated and place-based bioeconomy development.

The Assembly's experience through EU Just Transition Fund-supported projects demonstrates the value of regional demonstration facilities, innovation ecosystems and collaborative delivery models in translating strategic objectives into practical outcomes. The Assembly considers the lessons and evidence emerging from these initiatives provide a valuable resource for informing the implementation phase of the Strategy and supporting the development of effective regional approaches to the bioeconomy.

The Assembly welcomes the Strategy's commitment to creating an enabling regulatory framework, particularly in relation to planning for bioeconomy infrastructure. The Assembly supports the exploration of innovative approaches to addressing regulatory barriers, including the use of targeted regulatory sandboxes where appropriate. The Assembly considers that such approaches could also provide an opportunity to support a more place-based approach to bioeconomy development, enabling regulatory challenges to be explored in the context of specific regional opportunities, infrastructure requirements and local circumstances.

Regional Bioeconomy Clusters

The Assembly welcomes Action 5.4.1 of the Draft Strategy and recommends that its implementation explicitly builds upon existing regional enterprise and innovation structures. The Regional Enterprise Plans (REPs) already provide an established mechanism for identifying and developing regional clusters, informed by national priorities including the National Smart Specialisation Strategy, enterprise and innovation policy, and the RSES, which translates these national priorities into a regional context.

Through this framework, the REPs identify regionally significant sectoral opportunities, foster collaboration between enterprise, higher education institutions, research organisations and public bodies, and coordinate actions to support innovation and investment. The Assembly considers that leveraging these existing governance and delivery structures would provide a coherent, place-based approach to developing bioeconomy clusters.

In this context, the Assembly also welcomes Action 5.1.1 to upgrade the Bioeconomy Implementation and Development Group to an interdepartmental and interagency Bioeconomy Development Group (BDG), including relevant local and regional actors. Through the ORIGINN project the Assembly has identified the Catalan regional bioeconomy strategy, ECB2030, as an exemplar of good regional governance. Its robust governance structure is cross-sectoral and multi-level. The Assembly considers that the inclusion of key local and regional stakeholders (for example, the Regional Assemblies, Climate Action Regional Offices, Regional Waste Management Planning Offices, and local innovators

such as the Cube Low Carbon Centre of Excellence in Portlaoise) in the upgraded BDG would enhance multi-level governance and strengthen coordination, alignment and place-based implementation of the Strategy.

The Assembly also welcomes Action 5.2.2 to embed Bioeconomy Ireland Week as a regional activity, with each Regional Assembly and Local Authority aligning with local universities and education bodies hosting an annual cluster of events. EMRA has previously actively engaged with Bioeconomy Ireland Week, hosting an online event as part of the ORIGINN project in 2024 and participating on the Bioeconomy Ireland Week Planning Group. The Assembly welcomes the opportunity to continue supporting awareness, collaboration and knowledge exchange around the bioeconomy at regional level.

Key Sectors - Biobased Construction

Given Ireland's housing and retrofit requirements, the Assembly considers that biobased construction represents one of the clearest opportunities for the bioeconomy to make a meaningful contribution to climate action. The increased use of timber, engineered wood, natural fibres and other sustainable biobased materials has the potential to reduce embodied carbon emissions, increase long-term carbon storage, support regional enterprise development, create new value chains and reduce reliance on carbon-intensive construction materials.

The Assembly considers that biobased construction should remain a key strategic priority within the Strategy. It also represents an opportunity to support regional supply chains, create additional value from sustainably managed biological resources and contribute to housing and retrofit objectives.

Global Engagement

The Assembly considers that bioeconomy development should take account of its potential impacts beyond Ireland. Growing demand for biomass has the potential to transfer environmental pressures elsewhere through land-use change, deforestation, biodiversity loss and resource depletion in other countries.

The Assembly considers that the Strategy should seek to ensure that its direct and indirect international impacts are consistent with Ireland's wider overseas development and sustainability commitments, and that bioeconomy development does not contribute to the displacement of environmental or social pressures onto developing countries.

3.0 Recommendations/Observations

The Regional Assembly requests that the Department takes account of the following issues in the preparation of the Bioeconomy Strategy 2026-2030 to ensure consistency with Project Ireland 2040 (National Planning Framework, National Marine Planning Framework and National Development

Plan), the Climate Action Plan 2025, the Regional Spatial Economic Strategy (RSES) and any future RSES, and other relevant policies.

The Assembly makes the following recommendations:

Recommendations:

1. The Assembly recommends that the Department engages with the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment (DETE) on the finalisation of the Bioeconomy Strategy.
Reason: To ensure alignment with the economic and enterprise policies of the government, including any new regional enterprise policy strategy.
2. The Assembly recommends that the Bioeconomy Strategy places a stronger emphasis on its contribution to balanced regional development and the diversification of rural economies in alignment with the Government's rural development policy.
Reason: To ensure alignment with national policy.
3. The Assembly recommends that the governance framework includes a spatial planning dimension to support evidence-based decision-making and ensure that bioeconomy development contributes to the objectives of the National Planning Framework and the RSES.
Reason: To ensure full alignment between national, regional, and local policies.
4. The Assembly recommends that the Bioeconomy Strategy builds upon existing regional enterprise and innovation structures and recognises the role of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSEs) and Regional Enterprise Plans (REPs) in identifying regional bioeconomy opportunities, coordinating infrastructure investment and supporting regionally significant bioeconomy clusters.
Reason: To ensure consistency between national and regional policy and to recognise the role of Regional Enterprise initiatives in identifying regional bioeconomy opportunities, coordinating infrastructure investment and supporting regionally significant bioeconomy clusters.

Observations:

The Assembly makes the following observations:

1. The Assembly considers that the Bioeconomy Strategy should address the need to ensure that bioeconomy interventions are subject to robust ex-ante assessment, lifecycle analysis, ongoing monitoring, and appropriately resourced safeguards from the outset.
Reason: In the interest of best practice to ensure that any negative unintended consequences for biodiversity, carbon stocks, water quality, food production and ecosystem resilience are avoided.
2. The Assembly would encourage the Strategy to leverage existing engagement and communications initiatives delivered through the EU Just Transition Fund Programme, as well as acknowledging the role of existing national and regional skills structures, including the

National Skills Council and the network of Regional Skills Fora, as well as the role of Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs).

Reason: In the interest of best practice.

3. The Assembly refers the Department to the Interreg Europe [ORIGINN project](#) which is working to promote the economic and social transformation of rural areas through innovation, with a particular focus on digitalisation, green economy, social innovation, and soft innovation in the agri-food sector.

Reason: In the interest of best practice.

4. The Assembly considers that key local and regional stakeholders should be included in the upgraded Bioeconomy Development Group (BDG).

Reason: To enhance multi-level governance and strengthen coordination, alignment, and place-based implementation of the Strategy.

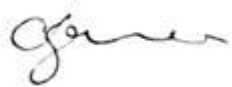
5. The Assembly wishes to draw attention to the [Regional Development Monitor](#) (RDM)² which provides a series of mapping and visualisation tools which are intended to be of assistance to policy and decision makers in gaining a greater insight into social, economic and environmental trends to aid better monitoring.

Reason: In the interest of best practice.

4.0 Conclusion

The Regional Assembly welcomes the opportunity to engage in the process of preparing the Bioeconomy Strategy 2026 - 2030 (BioScale 2030) and looks forward to continuing engagement with the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment in this regard.

Regards,



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Director
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17 August 2026

² The Regional Development Monitor (RDM) Hub will soon move to www.regionalmonitor.ie