



Date 19th August 2021

Submission on the DECC RESS-2 Consultation of June 2021

from

Nationwide Community Energy Ireland CLG (NCEI)

Introduction

Nationwide Community Energy Ireland CLG is the representative organisation for 100% community owned renewable energy generation facilities in Ireland. The three founding members of the organisation are

Templederry Energy Resources Ltd.	operational since 2012
Galway Community Renewables Ltd.	successful in RESS-1 2020
Fuinneamh Greinne na hEireann Teoranta	successful in RESS-1 2020

We are joined by various communities around Ireland who are currently preparing for RESS-2 and subsequent power auctions. We are members of REScoop.eu (www.rescoop.eu) - the European federation of citizen energy cooperatives. We liaise closely with both REScoop.eu and Community Energy Scotland in matters relating to community owned energy generation projects and frameworks.

We welcome both the DECC RESS-2 Consultation and the opportunity to make this submission. Our submission, on this occasion, is confined to the community category i.e. question 10 in the consultation document – reproduced below.

10. Community Category

The RESS 2 Terms and Conditions now include a requirement that community projects must be 100% community owned.

- a. Do respondents have specific ideas on how the RESS 2 Terms and Conditions can maximise the delivery of community projects participating in the competition?

We would state as follows

Item 1 - 100% Community Ownership - We welcome the Ministers decision of 4th February 2021, that all future RESS community category applicants must be 100% community owned. As community activists on the ground, we can confirm that the Ministers announcement was very well received by community groups and community-oriented individuals across the country. In fact, the announcement came as a relief to many communities who felt pressurised by some developers - to forsake a portion of the community equity in future RESS projects.

Notwithstanding the Ministers announcement, we understand measures are afoot to continue pressurising communities. Consequently, we would request the Minister and his Department continue to maintain the status quo whereby RESS community category applicants have to be 100% community owned. Given how divisive the previous equity share arrangement was in terms of sowing discord within communities, we would request the Minister to explore mechanisms whereby the decision of 4th February is copper fastened into the future.

We are fully supportive of the rationale underpinning the Ministers decision as outlined in page 15 of the consultation. We would go further and suggest that a proliferation of 100% community owned energy generation projects will increase the public buy-in to the 2030 and 2050 climate change targets.

Item 2 – Planning Permission - Currently community category projects require planning permission to enter the RESS Auction, in addition to a grid offer. Inordinate planning delays can have the effect of stymying the community effort. We believe if the planning requirement to enter the auction could be replaced with proof that a valid planning application has been lodged and is in train, this would provide a massive fillip to



communities on two levels. Firstly, to persevere with their RESS plans and secondly to encourage other communities to “take the plunge” and commence their RESS journey.

Item 3 - Grid Connection Costs & Mechanisms – As we all know grid connection costs can vary widely, for a given project size, for a multitude of reasons. We are of the view that a fixed cost per Megawatt per Kilometer for community category projects would simplify, enhance and encourage communities to undertake the RESS journey. It would also have the effect of letting all communities know that they can be players in the energy transition in a real, tangible and effective way. By way of analogy, a standard letter posted in Dublin, Donegal, Bere Island or Blarney costs the same. Perhaps a suitable method could be devised whereby the grid connection costs in the community category could be standardised per MW/K – given that each project will have a max capacity of 5MW and hence cannot avail of “economy of scale” to ensure viable projects. Could a small portion of all TSO & DSO upgrades be reserved for communities ?

In our experience communities find it challenging, having paid the grid assessment application, to raise the 10% grid offer deposit to keep the grid offer alive as they proceed on their RESS journey. If payment of the grid offer deposit could be rolled into the main grid offer payment this would have the effect of easing the immediate financial burden and financial worry on communities. We believe, in such a scenario the delivery of community category projects would be greatly enhanced.

In our recent experience we note, that it is common where no further capacity exists on a particular “node”, that a Community Project (i.e. less than 5 MW) could be scuppered by an additional Grid Development charge of €3m or €4m.

Item 4 – Funding – We understand funding mechanisms for the community category are under active consideration by the Minister and his Department. If items 2 & 3 above were taken on board by the Department, the funding requirement to reach the RESS auction would be lessened. In which case the Scottish loan/grant funding model may become more

feasible for the Department. In any event our members across the country look forward to the announcement of the community category funding package in the near future.

Items 5 – Open Days – Prior to the onset of the covid pandemic in January 2020, we commenced a series of community focused field trips to Templederry Community Windfarm in Co. Tipperary. Given the very positive uptake and feedback to the site visits we will be recommencing same in the near future as the covid lockdown is lifted. In addition, we will be adding the Galway Community Renewables Solar Park to the itinerary in 2022, and thereafter the Claremorris Community solar facility as well.

We would like to make the Department aware of the availability of site visits given their catalysing effect on the visiting communities. Perhaps the Department should consider availing of same as a means to maximise the participation and subsequent delivery of community category projects.

We are happy to expand on any of the above points if the Department requires further clarification.

Yours sincerely

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