

2. Factors Influencing Decisions

Ireland is at the periphery of Europe and is poorly endowed with fossil energy resources. Its main indigenous energy sources are peat (turf) and natural gas. For oil it is dependent entirely on imports. The country's electrical and natural gas grids are isolated from the rest of Europe, though plans are underway to connect the gas grid via underwater pipeline with the United Kingdom's natural gas system. Once this interconnection is complete, and with the likely prospect that new offshore deposits of natural gas will be found and developed, there is the possibility of expanding natural gas's share in all the consuming sectors. Over the longer term, there is a possibility that renewable energy sources, such as wind and wave energy, may be exploited on a large scale.

Ireland is remote from the major industrial areas of Europe, and thus it enjoys a relatively unspoilt environment. Although the environment is a less political issue than in some other countries, recent opinion polls show an increasing awareness and public concern over environmental matters. The warmer and drier weather of the last two years, in particular, have drawn attention to the sensitivity of the country's lush pastures and teeming fresh-water fisheries (tourism is an important industry) to slight changes in climate.

3. Relevant Studies

The Government's position on global climate change is set out in a White Paper by the Department of the Environment, *An Environment Action Programme* (Dublin: An Roinn Comhshaoil, January 1990). A series of expert studies to establish the specific implications of possible climatic change for Ireland have been commissioned and were to have been completed by the end of 1990. These studies will deal, *inter alia*, with changes in sea levels, the effects on crops and forestry, and the implications for the energy sector.