Welcome Address by Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Pat Rabbitte T.D.

To the Strategic Energy Technology Plan Conference 2013

IRELAND, NORTHERN IRELAND AND SCOTLAND LAUNCH ‘ISLES II’ STUDY INTO GRID INTERCONNECTION FOR MARINE RENEWABLE ENERGY

Royal Hospital, Kilmainham

7 May, 2013

Commissioners Geoghegan-Quinn and Oettinger, Deputy Assistant Secretary Yoshida, distinguished guests, welcome to Ireland, welcome to Dublin.

It is my very great pleasure to welcome you all here today for this important event in the Irish Presidency of the Council of Ministers.

The Strategic Energy Technology Plan was a bold initiative when it was first conceived some seven or so years ago. A joint initiative between two Directorates-General of the European Commission, DG Research and DG Energy, the SET-Plan very sensibly brings together the resources of those two DGs in order to provide a focussed programme of work to develop the role of energy technologies in meeting our energy and climate change goals, targets and aspirations.
Now that some time has passed, we are starting to see tangible outputs and benefits from work initiated under the SET-Plan. We have the well-established European Industrial Initiatives and the European Energy Research Alliance, with hundreds of person-years of collaborative effort being directed towards important issues of energy and climate change.

We see the funding programmes, including FP7, Horizon 2020 and NER300, increasingly taking their strategic direction from the SET-Plan.

I anticipate with great interest what Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn will say about future European Research and Innovation Policy, and what Commissioner Oettinger will say when he announces the Commission’s Communication on Energy Technologies and Innovation.

These statements will be formative for all of us in this room and for those whom we represent across Europe. The energy technology strategy for Europe is being announced here today.

In terms of what the European experiment was supposed to be about, when it was conceived so long ago, the work fostered and implemented under the auspices of the SET-Plan is an excellent example that demonstrates what can be achieved.

I would like to record here and now that Ireland has been an enthusiastic supporter of the SET-Plan since its inception; indeed, the very first workshop held under the auspices of the SET-Plan was a joint UK/Ireland Workshop on Ocean Energy. Ocean Energy –
and indeed Marine Renewable Energy in general – has been an undervalued sector in European technology policy to date.

You will understand that, as a country whose national territory is 10% land and 90% sea, Ireland has a particular interest in harnessing the significant energy resources available in our territorial waters. One of the world-class and world-scale energy research clusters we have in Ireland is the Beaufort Centre in Cork. We hosted the International Conference on Ocean Energy last year, the first time it has come to Europe, and over 900 delegates attended.

As a result of sustained efforts by Ireland, with enthusiastic support from the U.K. and, in more recent times, from other Member States and from industry, the potential for Marine Renewable Energy to contribute, through innovative energy technology, to the kind of energy future we all aspire to has finally been appreciated. There have been events at the last SET-Plan Conference in Warsaw in 2011 and in various fora in Brussels in the past 18 months to raise the profile of the sector.

I am pleased, therefore, to note that it has been recognised in the last two meetings of the SET-Plan Steering Committee that Marine or Ocean Energy is worthy of accreditation as a priority technology area within the SET-Plan, and that an ERA Plus project in Ocean Energy is in the process of being established.

I could not leave this topic without recording my personal appreciation for the very significant support we in Ireland have received from the Scottish Government to progress this issue of common interest; this will be addressed further by the Scottish Cabinet Secretary at the Gala Dinner tonight.
The relationship between Ireland and Scotland has developed to encompass other areas of energy common interest which also involve the Commission. Scotland, Northern Ireland and Ireland have just completed two major projects of regional significance, which were both supported by the EU’s INTERREG programme. One is BioMara, which looked at the potential for energy from marine algae. You will hear more about this project when the final reports have been completed.

The second project, ISLES, is the subject of a presentation from the Project Director, P. J. Rudden of the RPS Group, tomorrow. It was a feasibility study into how to optimally interconnect the Scottish, Northern Ireland and Irish grid systems in a way which would facilitate the development of offshore marine renewable energy projects. It was a wide-ranging study with technical, economic, environmental and regulatory workstreams, and its reports have value and application right across Europe.

I am pleased to announce today that our three administrations have decided that the process of collaboration on the ISLES project, as much as the results of that study, were so valuable that the work is worth continuing. Consequently, the three governments have obtained further INTERREG support to take the regulatory and environmental workstreams further. I am, today, formally announcing the launch of the ISLES II project, and I hope that it is as successful as the original ISLES project was.

I mentioned earlier one of Ireland’s significant energy research clusters. Two others with an energy technology focus are the Electricity Research Centre at University College Dublin, examining issues relating to electricity transmission and distribution systems, and the International Energy Research Centre established by United Technologies at the
Tyndall Institute in Cork, to look at energy and ICT convergence in buildings and manufacturing processes.

Both these clusters are, and will continue to be, significant Irish-based contributors to the European research effort in what are both priority areas within the SET-Plan. You will note from your conference programme brochures that both of these centres are holding their annual conferences in Dublin on Thursday as associated events to this Presidency conference.

One of the priorities for the Irish Presidency and for Irish Energy policy is to address the under-representation of energy efficiency and the demand side in general within the SET-Plan and in national thinking. I am pleased that one of Europe’s leading manufacturers of electrical appliances, the Irish company Glen Dimplex, has chosen this conference as the venue to showcase its new, intelligent storage heater technology product.

I also think that it is important to record that there are alliances between Glen Dimplex and our conference partners EirGrid and SSE to develop projects which will connect grid system operators and domestic level demand side appliances for the first time in a genuinely intelligent fashion. This is a tangible and important practical contribution to the new understanding in the SET-Plan administration that it is increasingly important to adopt an overall integrated energy systems approach to energy technology development and application.

The SET-Plan Steering Group met in Dublin yesterday, a public holiday here – that’s a measure of the commitment of my administration to this work. Two of the items on a very
busy agenda were a review of the SET-Plan and a review of the Terms of Reference of the Steering Group itself.

As I said earlier, the SET-Plan is now a very substantial body of work and it is good governance practice to assess how it is working and how it is overseen. Some of you in this room will have contributed to the Commission-led review of the operation of the SET-Plan; in parallel, Ireland has been leading a review of the Terms of Reference of its Steering Group. This is evidence of the increasing collaboration between the Commission and the Member States that we are being encouraged to develop.

We are, collectively, looking at ways in which we can align our national and European energy research support mechanisms. Colleagues are testing the ability of the existing EUREKA and ERA-NET models to handle joint projects across Member States – you will hear about this in the conference. I would like, at this point, to pay special tribute to the architect of the so-called "Berlin Model" for joint actions, Dr Knut Kübler, who is here at my invitation to lead and inspire us as we try to turn vision into reality.

Getting innovative energy technologies into everyday use is not just a matter of energy technology research and development. Attracting financial instruments which fit the needs, and ensuring the availability of sufficient numbers of appropriately skilled people, are big challenges for Europe. I welcome the inclusion in this conference of dedicated sessions to address these important issues.

This SET-Plan Conference is a joint undertaking between the Irish Presidency and the European Commission; it has been jointly planned and organised by committees comprising Commission officials and key members of the Energy family here in Ireland. I
would like to thank the many people who have worked so hard to get us all to this point, to say a grateful thanks on behalf of the (austerity) Presidency to our sponsors and partners, to signal my appreciation for all of you who have prepared presentations and posters to inform and educate us, and to commend all of you for coming here to participate in this significant, interesting event.

I hope that you have a very productive two days here at the SET-Plan Conference, and that you will feel that your time here has been worthwhile. I hope that meetings and conversations that happen here today and tomorrow will lead to creative alliances and to collaborative energy technology research, development and demonstration work in the future, which will assist people like me and my colleagues throughout Europe to deliver the sustainable energy future that we have promised for our citizens.

I am sorry that the duties of government prevent me from staying here with you throughout the conference, but I will get a full report on the proceedings from my officials, and I hope to join you at the Gala Dinner tonight.

I also hope that you enjoy your time here in Dublin, wherever you have come from. If this is your first visit to Dublin, I do hope that you have time to explore this interesting and historic city.

It is an honour and a privilege to open this SET-Plan Conference.