

## Waste infrastructure deficiencies continue to affect Ireland's competitiveness

Ireland continues to perform poorly in meeting the waste management needs of enterprise, according to Waste Management Benchmarking Analysis and Policy Priorities, a report issued by Forfás today (Wednesday 28 May 2008). Despite improvements in Ireland's waste management and recycling performance over the last decade, Ireland still has high waste costs and limited waste management infrastructure compared to competitor countries.

According to Martin Cronin, Forfás Chief Executive, "In areas such as recycling and the implementation of the WEEE directive Ireland has proved it can respond flexibly to important waste issues. There is now a critical need to take action on the issues which are impacting on enterprise in Ireland, namely the cost of services and the availability of appropriate waste management infrastructure. These issues were also highlighted by the OECD in its recent review of the public sector in Ireland."

"To improve Ireland's waste management performance and deliver cost competitive, environmentally friendly waste management services to business, we must address as a matter of priority the barriers to infrastructure rollout and the high level of uncertainty that persists about the future direction of waste policy. In view of slowing economic growth it is vital that policy decisions in areas such as waste management support national competitiveness as well as environmental sustainability policy objectives", he added.

To enhance the delivery of competitive waste services in Ireland, we need to coordinate multiple regional waste management plans, create policy and regulatory certainty, reduce planning lead times and ensure that waste services are competitively priced. Government and enterprise need to continue to work together to ensure that Ireland matches comparator countries in reducing the amount of waste generated.

### Key Conclusions

The areas where action is needed are set out below:

- In view of Ireland's heavy reliance on landfill, the availability of alternative waste infrastructure is critical. Ireland's comparatively poor performance on key benchmarking indicators such as costs and capacity can be traced back to the continued lack of key waste management infrastructure in recent years. In particular, Ireland needs thermal treatment capacity for non-hazardous and hazardous waste as well as additional biological treatment capacity.

- Ireland has ten waste regions of varying sizes which means that decisions on the rollout of infrastructure are primarily made at regional or county level. This regionally based waste planning framework is hindering the delivery of cost effective, commercially viable waste treatment options as it tends to result in smaller scale, less commercially viable facilities than would be the case if infrastructure planning were done at a national level. Regional waste management plans need to be coordinated at national level to maximise economies of scale and enable the market to offer more competitive pricing to businesses and households.
- There is currently a high level of uncertainty about the future direction of Irish waste management policy due to the delay in reaching a decision on the regulation of the sector (the public consultation on the matter was concluded in late 2006) and due to the current review of the waste sector. As the NDP envisages that most waste infrastructure will be provided by the private sector, it is critical to have policy and regulatory certainty which brings about private investment in waste infrastructure which creates alternatives to landfill.
- The landfill levy is due to increase from €15 per tonne to €20 per tonne in June 2008. It is critical that further increases in the landfill levy are not introduced until adequate alternative waste treatment facilities are operational. We also need to ensure that alternative waste treatment options in Ireland are competitively priced and not set with reference to current landfill costs which are among the highest of the benchmark countries.
- The introduction of the Strategic Infrastructure Act 2006 is welcome. Its effectiveness in reducing the lead time to get waste projects approved should be assessed in due course. The provision of resources to fast track judicial reviews of strategic infrastructure projects needs to be prioritised.
- Businesses also have an important role to play by taking steps to reduce the amount of waste produced. Given that many organisations are already working with companies on a range of energy efficiency, pollution prevention or resource conservation initiatives, the opportunity to develop a more integrated approach across a range of related issues should be exploited to create greater awareness among companies, particularly SMEs, of the benefits of waste reduction and prevention.