

Opening Statement by the Secretary General
Joint Oireachtas Committee for Agriculture, Food and the Marine
Statement of Strategy of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine 2023-2026

I would like to thank the Chairman for this invitation to address the Committee regarding the Department's Statement of Strategy 2023-2026 .

The agriculture, food and marine sectors are extraordinarily important in an Irish context. In 2023 they accounted for 6.5% of employment, or more than 173,000 jobs, and €18,28 billion in exports. The activities associated with these sectors, and the people engaged in them, are a critical part of the fabric of rural and coastal Ireland.

The Public Service Management Act, 1997, requires government departments and offices to produce a strategy statement once every three years, or within six months of the appointment of a new Minister.

The appointment of a new Taoiseach on 17th December 2022, triggered a requirement for a new Statement of Strategy, notwithstanding the fact that there was no change of Minister in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

The Statement of Strategy agreed at that point, for the period 2023 to 2026, was the subject of extensive consultation. The priorities outlined were aligned with the commitments in the Programme for Government. The document outlines five high level strategic goals. These are:

- To promote and safeguard public, animal and plant health, and animal welfare, for the benefit of consumers, producers, the economy and wider society;

- To provide income and targeted supports to farmers and others in the agri food sector, to underpin the rural economy and environmental sustainability;
- To provide the optimum policy framework for the development of the agri food sector;
- To deliver a sustainable , competitive and innovative seafood sector driven by a skilled workforce, delivering value added products in line with consumer demand;
- To maintain and develop strategic, operational, regulatory and technical capacity to deliver excellent services plans in all these areas, and plans for strategic investment in research and development, the creation of new market opportunities and improved health and safety outcomes on Irish farms.

These goals are delivered through a variety of instruments, including the CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027, Food Vision 2030, the Climate Action Plan, the National Forestry Programme, and Seafood Programmes.

The department's remit extends from policy development, to representing Ireland at EU and international level and negotiating access for Irish agri-food goods to third country markets.

It is also responsible for the provision of economic support to its sectors, elements of food and feed safety, of animal health and welfare, and forestry, seafood development, fisheries infrastructure and environmental sustainability.

The Department also plays a vital role in terms of Ireland's overseas development aid, and has a close relationship with the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, and with the World Food Programme.

The Department also has an extensive operational engine.

Over the next few years, the Department's work in all of these areas will be shaped by a variety of external policy developments. For example, the publication, in due course, of proposals for a Common Agricultural Policy and a Multi annual Financial Framework for the post 2027 period, will have a profound impact on the way the Department does its business.

Ireland will hold the Presidency of the European Union in the second half of 2026, at a time which is likely to be critical for some of these developments. The Department is already working with other Government departments to make preparations for that task.

And, of course, the election of a new Government, whenever that might happen, will trigger a requirement for a new statement of strategy, and this will reflect the priorities in a new Programme for Government, and the developing policy and legal framework at EU level.

I look forward to discussing the Department's Statement of Strategy with the Committee. Before I do, I should conclude by recognising the contribution of the almost 4,100 staff in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and those in the department's agencies, who work with great dedication and diligence to support the work of the department and the sectors it serves.

ENDS.