Energy crisis may force State nuclear

Even Ireland will have to become sensible – exporting paid activists to Austria would help.

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Ireland may be forced to consider the nuclear energy option to meet growing energy demands for electricity, a major report by Forfás concludes. While not official policy, the revived interest in Britain in nuclear energy would "provide an important context for Ireland's electricity options in the next five to 15 years", said the report.

However, a Department of Marine, Communications and Natural Resources spokesperson said nuclear energy is not on the agenda. This could only happen if Ireland's interconnection with Britain increased substantially. The report, entitled A Baseline Assessment of Ireland's Oil Dependence, pointed out the Economic and Social Research Institute, in an earlier report, dismissed the nuclear option on the grounds of cost.

If however, we had greater supply channels to Britain, the building of a nuclear plant could be justified in that context, the Forfás report concludes. It also noted our dependence on oil was higher than any other EU country and warned we were highly vulnerable to oil shock triggered by rising prices or oil shortages.

One of the key findings was: "Ireland is more dependent on imported oil for our transport and energy requirements than almost every other European country and it will take up to 10 years to significantly reduce this dependence."

It warns also that our ability to continue attracting high levels of foreign direct investment will depend on the country's capacity to deliver a secure and uninterrupted energy supply at competitive prices.

Speaking on the launch of the report, Forfás chief executive, Martin Cronin, said: "The high probability that a supply of cheap oil will peak over the next 10 to 15 years, poses a serious challenge for the global economy." An environment is emerging where "liquid fuel prices could increase dramatically and governments, businesses and economies could face significant economic and social change", he said. "It is essential that we now begin to prepare for such a challenge". Mr Cronin said the only realistic option to prepare was "a national strategy" to include new policies on energy, transport, enterprise and spatial strategy. Sweden has taken a proactive approach to this challenge and Ireland needed to start to take a long-term view of the issues involved, he said.

Fine Gael Environment **paid activist** Fergus O'Dowd said the proposal to develop nuclear power as an energy solution in Ireland must be opposed. In the short run it is not possible and, in the long run, it will not be needed, he claimed.