Irish Rural Link

28th June 2017

**Irish Rural Link attend National Economic Dialogue**

Irish Rural Link – the national network representing the interest of rural communities is calling on Government to invest in social service providers such as Meals on Wheels suppliers and the Rural Transport Programme among investment in other areas at the National Economic Dialogue taking place today, Wednesday 28th and tomorrow, Thursday 29th June.

With an ageing population, the Government must start budgeting for and investing in the services needed now and in the future to meet growing demand. Representing the Meals on Wheels Network, IRL are purposing the Health Service Executive take sole responsibility for the delivery of Meals on Wheels services in Ireland through a guaranteed and standardised funding support through a service level agreement. HSE funding under section 39 Grants should be increased to meet the modern costs associated with service provision such as rent, food produce/ingredients, wages etc.

Rural transport remains an important issue that must be addressed. IRL is calling on government to increase current supports to the Rural Transport Programme. There is a need to re-organise the method of finance allocation under the free transport programme. As it is currently constructed, it fails to be of benefit to the vast majority of people on social welfare in rural areas who are entitled to it.

Better regional investment is needed to ensure there is more balanced growth across the country. New National Framework Plan for regional development needs the required budget to ensure once published must be fully implemented and tie in with the Action Plan for Rural Development to ensure the development of sustainable communities and that smaller towns and villages will also reap the benefits of growth.

Irish Rural Link continues to identify rural broadband as a priority for rural areas. The lack of adequate broadband is preventing the rural economy from reaching its full potential. Rural areas require sufficient infrastructure to allow them to compete with urban centres for quality jobs, creation of new enterprises and for existing businesses to compete on a global scale.

The quality of jobs in rural areas continues to be in low paid sectors. The Government must ensure job creation in rural areas provide a living wage for families.

Ireland are currently behind in achieving its targets on Climate Action. Irish Rural Link continues to call for poverty and rural proofing of Climate Change Policy.

*-Ends-*

**For further information, please contact (anytime):**

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**About Irish Rural Link:**

Irish Rural Link represents the interests of locally based rural groups in disadvantaged and marginalised rural areas by highlighting problems, advocating appropriate policies, sharing experiences and examples of good practice. It has a membership of over 600 rural community groups dedicated to sustainable rural development and represents rural communities at a national and international level.