

[Ref No.: 11930/17]

* To ask the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the skills of the implementation of a motion that was passed by Dáil Éireann regarding the north south interconnector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. - Niamh Smyth.

* For WRITTEN answer on Tuesday, 7th March, 2017.

(1137 Received on 2nd March, 2017.)

On 21 December 2016 An Bord Pleanála granted planning permission for the North-South Interconnector project in Ireland. The decision concluded a lengthy planning process which included an Oral Hearing completed over eleven weeks from March to May last year. The planning process in Northern Ireland is ongoing, with the planning inquiry concluding on 27 February 2017.

The North-South Interconnector is important to the efficient operation of the Single Electricity Market and the increased security of electricity supply across the island of Ireland.

I am well aware of views that have been raised by communities across Cavan, Meath and Monaghan that the transmission lines should be laid underground, rather than built overhead. However, all evidence available to me indicates that developing the project underground would cost substantially more and deliver less. In particular I would highlight the Independent Expert Commission report of 2012 that estimated the cost of building the project underground would be three times the cost of the overhead solution.

In light of the motions passed by Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann, I have requested officials in my Department to prepare a proposal for an updated independent report that would consider any changes in cost and technology in the five years since the 2012 report by the Independent Expert Commission. I intend that such a report would be completed this year in advance of the scheduled commencement of construction of the North-South Interconnector in 2018.

I would like to reemphasise the Government's continued strong support for this project.