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Tel. No [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

To The Domestic Solid Fuel Consultation Process,

We must save our traditional hearth and fireside.

The very fact of the holding of this most welcome consultation process underlines the Government's commitment to a clean air strategy. No one argues with that objective however it must be achieved in a way that does not remove the comfort and joy, the pleasure and relaxation of a real glowing fire in the grate or glass-fronted stove of the living room throwing a warm gentle glow on the faces of all those gathered around it. Assurances have been given that the Government have no intention of ending this. Yet while fine words are to be admired, deeds always speak louder and far more convincingly. If the Government has no policy of abolishing the traditional solid fuel fire that has alone brought warmth and comfort and indeed maintained the survival of generations across the ages, yet why is it that new local authority housing developments have been and continue to be constructed without fireplaces? The choice of having a fire to brighten and make cosy the living rooms of residents is taken away from them. They are presented with a blank and cheerless fait accompli.

It was once stated by the revered art historian Lord Kenneth Clark that given the choice between a speech made by a housing minister and the buildings erected in their time, that he would believe the buildings. So therefore the policy of forever quenching the shimmering brightness of a real home fire is there and clearly established by the pointed omission of fireplaces from houses being built under the remit of the public authorities and even from private apartment and housing developments that have been and are being built in recent years under the current planning regulations.

What does this lead to? In March 2018 when much of the country was blanketed with snow in a storm that has passed into popular memory as The Beast From The East, widespread power blackouts occurred. There is reliable anecdotal evidence that many people living in new apartment buildings certainly in the Cork City area and perhaps elsewhere, found themselves completely without any means of warming themselves. They had no fireplaces and their central heating systems had failed completely. Shivering and desperate to find some source of heat, they lit their barbecues indoors and even risked carbon monoxide poisoning just to keep warm and to survive. People will do anything to find and make a source of heat when they are driven to extremes.

Moreover new housing developments come with greatly increased levels of insulation and multiple glazing that leads not to internal comfort but conditions that are stuffy, oppressive and

airless. I am reliably informed that even in new housing estates just recently completed the build-up of mould and mildew has already become a serious problem necessitating further painting and redecoration. But this will not solve anything for these homes suffer from inadequate ventilation. Now we are told by all the health experts that we need good ventilation and access to fresh air to help ward off the present coronavirus. As we look forward to hopefully much better and healthier times post-pandemic, ventilation will remain a crucial factor in the maintenance of good health. For the more hermetically sealed our homes become, the more they become breeding grounds for infection and the cause of asthma and allergies in the young and the not so young together with the dampness and mould as already mentioned.

Houses are homes that must be allowed to breathe just like the people who live in them. Just like ourselves houses must have air. And they must have it through open windows not merely from ventilation shafts where the bracing quality and freshness is so greatly dissipated and diminished. This is the age of the Green Agenda seeking to bring us back to nature. Yet by a supreme irony that very same agenda that is seeking to cut us off from the freshness and vigour of the natural world and confine us all inside stuffy, stale, unventilated, airless shells where no one can breathe and feel happy and comfortable.

The relevance of all this stems from the alternative form of domestic heating that is being set before us: soulless and useless heat pumps at the heart of retrofitted houses. These systems relying as they do on absorbing the latent heat of the surrounding atmosphere to warm our homes through the damp and chills of the Irish winter, need as an absolute prerequisite the installation of thick insulation and the sealing of windows to have any chance of raising temperatures. They are totally reliant on electricity and in the event of severe storms and blizzards with the likelihood of prolonged power outages, they fail utterly and completely. Moreover they have to be kept on all year round even in warm summer conditions: unlike conventional oil-based central heating systems which can be left turned off during the summer months, heat pumps while they can be turned down, cannot be turned off and therefore represent a wasteful and inefficient drain on the country's finite electricity supplies.

They provide the ideal scenario for a repetition of the sort of nightmarish problems that some blacked out residents underwent during the snowstorm of 2018. It is foolish and unwise in the extreme to have all forms of domestic heating left solely dependent on the power grid. For when all else fails, there is then nothing else to fall back on.

I have never forgotten the appalling experience my brother and I went through following the devastating Storm Darwin in 2014. For five days we had no power which also meant no water. Our only source of warmth, our sole lifeline during those dark and shivering days, was our solid fuel stove. Fired by coal, timber blocks and peat briquettes, this glowing fire so radiant and reassuring in our living room was all that sustained us. Being a freestanding unit and not connected to any form of boiler-back central heating, we were still able to use it when all else had failed. This is the bottom line. Everyone must have ready access to a form of heating that is NOT exclusively dependent on uncertain electric power supplies and which can still provide some measure of warmth and comfort albeit however basic when all else has failed. And whether one likes it or not and even against all the clamour of Saving The Planet, this reality of life must be faced up to and accepted even by those in Government and in all positions of authority. A plumber of vast experience in his work has said that

in the next few years that in house where no fireplaces have been installed, you will see residents making openings to admit bent-elbow side-chimneys for stoves because their necessity will become so overwhelming and pressing. Moreover it is a shame that the super fuel-efficient kerosene central heating systems of today that at the mere press of a switch provide quick and reliable heat when needed and can be left switched off during the warm summer conditions are to be superseded and abolished in favour of these worthless heat pumps. Never before in history has an attempt like this been made to change and alter the mode of essential heating in the privacy of people's own homes by political edict.

Moreover heat pumps in order to install and fit and get them up and running are frightfully expensive running into figures of fifty or sixty thousand euro or perhaps even more. These astronomical costs cannot be contemplated and still less can they be borne. I have seen advertisements promoting low-interest loans of four per cent to fund such works presented in such a casual off-hand manner: the proverbial belt of your cap. It is easily known that these ideas are the idle fantasies of people in exalted highly-paid positions who have no idea how ordinary people live and struggle to get by. To think that you would seek to saddle such added debt burdens on young families who are already bending the knee under colossal mortgages and retired persons living on modest pensions is unthinkable and bizarre. Such loans are being provided by the credit unions apparently without need of guarantor. This is giving approval to new forms of reckless and irresponsible lending and we know where that got us as a country back in 2008 and in the subsequent years when building boom had turned to broken bust. It is a non-runner and a non-starter and the sooner this is clearly understood and accepted the better for all concerned.

Solid fuel made our past. Our forebears all lived and survived by it. But now we are told that this staple of our lives must be abolished and swept away for the new era of heat pumps and zero carbon. Are there serious issues with climate change and global warming? Indubitably there are. But Ireland's contribution to these is miniscule and negligible to say the least. The main offenders are China, America, Russia, India and Brazil.

China alone is responsible for thirty per cent of all the pollution in the atmosphere. After a brief hiatus following the Covid outbreak, latest reports tell us that pollution levels over China have now significantly exceeded pre-pandemic levels. True we are told the Chinese Government are committed to climate action but their deeds belie their words for they seem far more interested in building a navy to rival that of the United States and play the Great Power game than to clean up the smoke and grime with which their vast country is enveloped. We see Brazil with its wretched people teeming with unchecked infection and its jungles cleared, burned and destroyed for the insatiable greed and acquisitive instincts of the rich and brutal supporters of Jair Bolsonaro. The smog over India and its capital New Delhi is appalling even as the city's mountain of rubbish has reached such a gargantuan height that it now requires warning lights for low-flying aircraft. Even the magnificent white facing of the Taj Mahal has become stained with air pollution and the river flowing by it choked with rubbish. At least with the United States, after four years of a President who denied the whole issue as fake news, now at least the Biden Administration seem prepared to act positively and constructively. In Russia however the regime of Vladimir Putin denies human involvement in climate change and seems oblivious to the escape of potentially huge amounts of poisons from the melting permafrost of Siberia.

If you want to solve a problem, it stands to reason that you need to go to the root of it and deal with those countries through concerted international action with their irresponsible governments who are spewing vast and ever growing quantities of pollutants into the atmosphere. But that is too hard and too difficult because it means taking on very powerful political and business interests. It is so much easier to go after the overburdened people in Ireland to oblige them to install vastly expensive heat pump systems and their various ancillaries.

About smokeless coal opinions as to its heat generating efficacy are markedly divided. Peat briquettes have always been a marvellous source of warmth and their passing is a cause of regret although of course it is undeniable that even setting aside the environmental issues involved, the bogs could not sustain an indefinite supply. Timber must and will remain a fuel mainstay for if in its burning the carbon stored in the wood is released into the atmosphere, it is quickly reabsorbed by an ever growing number of trees as our acreage under forestry steadily expands in one of nature's most beautiful acts of recycling.

Keep The Home Fires Burning was a popular song of the Great War era just over a century ago. It speaks of the hope and yearning for the peace and comfort of home and fireside where people can belong and find rest and serenity. After the Second World War, the wistful melody of *We'll Gather Lilacs In The Spring Again*, tells of the hope of love in the evening firelight's glow bringing security, healing and redemption after the horrors of war. The composers of these beautiful songs and those who sang and performed them, knew that at the centre of every home there must be a glowing hearth and a place of warmth and togetherness. It is something just so basic and primal.

As our late Father of cherished memory used to say, 'you cannot sit to a rad' (radiator). I see our cat coming to lie down and sleep before the fire in a picture of comfort and restfulness: he is so much wiser than the so-called experts. It is not entirely insignificant that when the makers of Old Time Irish marmalade tried to remove the black cat from the labels of their jars, there was an outcry until the restful feline was restored. Why? Because people recognised in it something of themselves: something that speaks of comfort and home and belonging. There is something so cheerful and inviting about a real fire, something delightful and reassuring. No soulless and impersonal heat pump can ever take its place and I am certain it will last long after those who would quench it forever have themselves vanished into the grey mists of forgetful time. We are not ready to give back the secret of Prometheus to the gods just yet. And I don't believe we ever will.

I make this submission to you and wish you well with wisdom, discernment and right judgement in your work.

kindest regards,


