

BIODIVERSITY MANIFESTO

ENVIRONMENTAL PILLAR



BIODIVERSITY ELECTION

The Environmental Pillar is an advocacy coalition of 32 environmental NGOs who work together to develop and promote sustainable policy in Ireland.

For Election 2020, the Pillar is asking our political parties and candidates to be ambitious in their commitment to protecting biodiversity and to turn the tide on climate inaction.

As part of this larger commitment to transforming Ireland into a nature and climate friendly society, we have identified 10 critical yet straightforward reforms to ensure that our biodiversity gets the protection it deserves.

All of these elements can form part of a Green New Deal for Ireland to ensure a Just Transition for both our natural world and the Irish people into the new dawn of a zero-carbon world.

#IVoteNature #BiodiversityManifesto #GE2020

Karen Ciesielski

KAREN CIESIELSKI

COORDINATOR

ENVIRONMENTAL PILLAR



#1 GREEN NEW DEAL FUNDING

In Budget 2020, the Government announced a €6 increase in the carbon tax, rising from €20 to €26. The €90 million raised from the €6 per ton increase will be ring-fenced to fund the Just Transition.

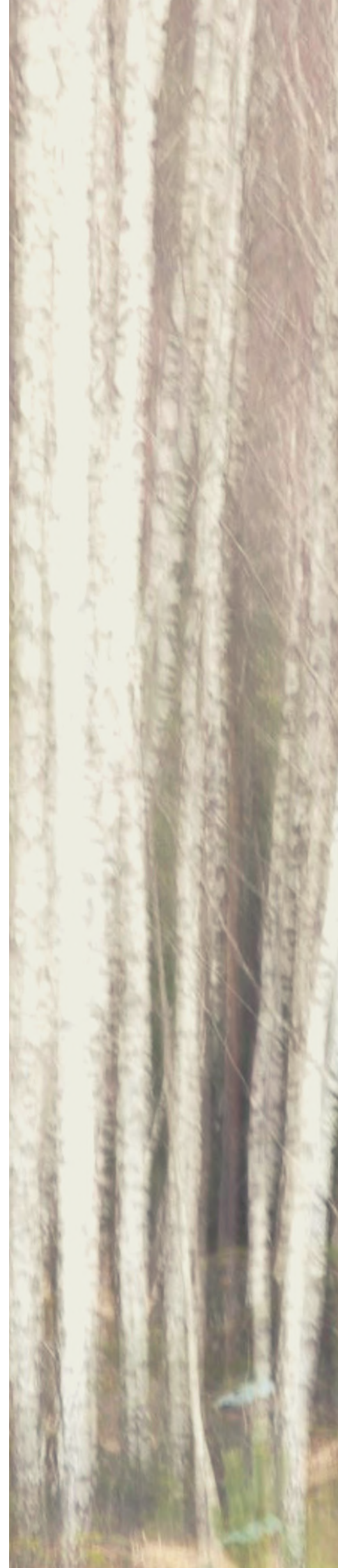
Yet, the €400 million raised annually from €20 per tonne of the carbon tax will remain in exchequer funding. The next Government must ensure all revenue is ring-fenced to support Irish people to transition to a low-carbon and circular economy and this must be underpinned by legislation.

Any meaningful carbon tax must be supported by a foundation of social justice, with revenue used to rapidly move to a carbon-free society, including significant investment in peatland restoration, reskilling for green jobs, ecotourism, deep retrofitting and rural transport infrastructure.

This in turn will allow us to move away from peat and coal burning for electricity earlier than planned and push on with supporting national retrofitting schemes for warmer homes and jobs in the green economy.

Funding should also be set aside as seed money to kick-start renewable energy projects led by communities and farmers across the island.

Funding for circular economy initiatives through the likes of “bio-economy” projects that use biological resources will also be to everyone’s benefit by eliminating waste, supporting biodiversity and bringing in fresh skills and employment to the Midlands and other affected areas.



#2 BIODIVERSITY RESOURCES

For decades, the bodies responsible for protecting our biodiversity have been heavily under-funded, under-staffed and under-resourced.

To reverse this worrying trend, significant resources must go to the National Parks and Wildlife Service to ensure that its staff can do their job effectively, having seen its funding drastically cut in recent years.

In addition, the future of the National Biodiversity Data Centre must be secured with a clear rolling multi-annual budget, including commitment to provide long-term funding for the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan.

We also need to boost the dwindling Environment Fund that supports environmental activities such as EPA enforcement, anti-littering schemes, and funding for the environmental NGO community to ensure biodiversity is protected at the grassroots level. Additional funding should also be made available to support a move to a circular economy model.

We also need the next Government to ensure that each planning authority has a full-time qualified ecologist in their planning unit to review the potential ecological impacts of planning proposals.

All of these issues and many more should be discussed in detail through a Citizens' Assembly to address biodiversity loss as was promised when the Dáil declared a climate and biodiversity emergency in May 2019.



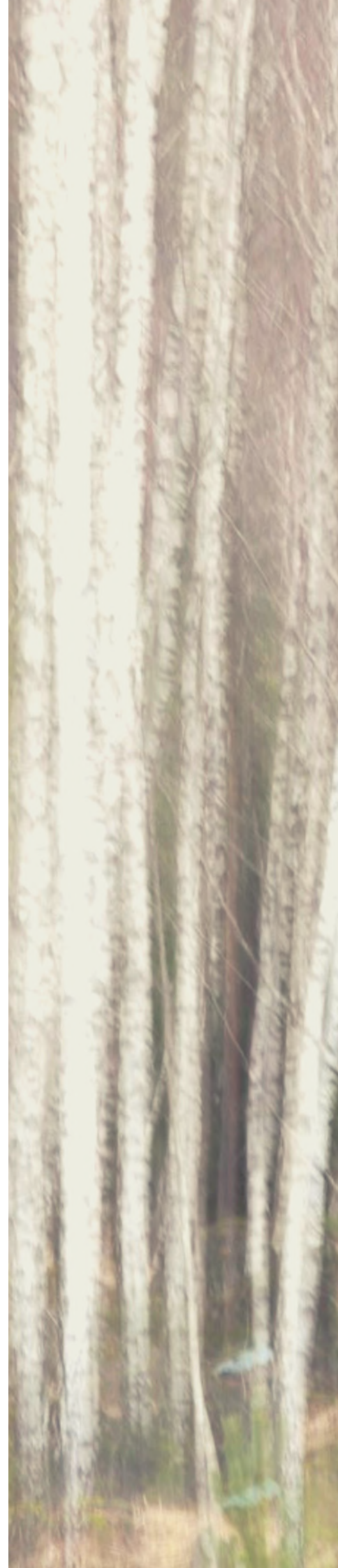
#3 NATURE & CLIMATE DEPARTMENT

At present, responsibility for the environment is spread across various Ministerial briefs. In particular:

- Water is with the Department of Housing;
- Waste, environmental awareness and climate are with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment;
- Nature and wildlife are with the Department of Culture, Heritage & the Gaeltacht; and
- Forestry is with the Department of Agriculture.

Clearly, we need a unified department under one cabinet minister to ensure coherence across the climate and biodiversity spheres.

The most straightforward option is to move forestry, water, nature and wildlife to the Department of Climate Action and Environment and for communications to move to the Department of Culture.



#4 PROTECT OUR WATER

Life at sea is just as tough for our flora and fauna as it is on land, with the likes of over-fishing leaving species and the rural coastal communities they support on the brink.

In order to change this dynamic, we need the next Government to stand up for marine biodiversity and coastal communities and commit to greatly expanding out minuscule network of Marine Protected Areas, ending over-fishing and fully implementing the Common Fisheries Policy.

Key European Directives to protect our freshwater sources from pollution and invasive species and to ensure good water quality and healthy rivers, lakes and groundwater must be fully implemented as soon as possible.

Hard engineering solutions to tackle flooding that only sends the problems further downstream need to take a backseat to nature-friendly solutions, with long overdue regulations needed in order to control and manage physical alterations to our watercourses.

We also need a bump in secure funding for Irish Water and local authorities to eliminate sewage as a significant water pollution issue and to achieve compliance with numerous EU Directives.



#5 OPERATION TRANSPORT TRANSFORMATION

Our fossil-fuel powered private car transport system must swiftly move to a low-carbon public, active transport and vehicle-sharing model.

This can easily be achieved with a reversal in the ratio of investment in road infrastructure and public transport in line with recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly on Climate Action.

We need an increase in cycling and walking investment to 20 per cent of the transport budget in line with UN recommendations, to include greater promotion of the use of second-hand bikes under the Bike2Work scheme.

Investment must have a strong focus on the creation of active transport corridors linking our rural villages, towns and cities, as well as linking our growing network of sprawling satellite suburbs to Dublin city centre.

The Government also needs to seriously consider equalising the cost of diesel and petrol. The excise on diesel in Ireland is well below that of petrol, yet diesel emits more greenhouse gases than petrol.

We also need to see movement on taxes for aviation fuel as emissions from this sector continue to grow.



#6 CIRCULAR ECONOMY KICK-START

Europe is moving toward a circular economy model where waste will become a thing of the past. Ireland, with our very poor track record in how we deal with waste, must keep up.

The proposed Circular Economy Action Plan needs to go beyond the concept of waste to envisage a holistic shift in the economy that promotes sustainable production and consumption, instead of solely focusing on the management of waste.

In line with the European Green Deal, a circular economy should provide the basis for the future of the Irish economy, including key sectors such as industry and agriculture.

We also need greater resources to support circular economy initiatives at a community level and to encourage the roll-out of reuse and repair workshops and zero-waste and up-cycling businesses, particularly in rural areas where jobs can be created and communities up-skilled.

The next Government must also immediately bring in a deposit and refund scheme for plastic bottles and cans, as well as push forward with levies on disposable, single use items.

We also need a stronger crackdown on illegal dumping, especially in important sites for nature, as well as year-round public awareness raising campaigns to educate the public.

Ambitious plans are also needed to monitor the wider impacts of micro- and nano-plastics in our environment and food chains.



#7 SUSTAINABLE FARMS & FORESTS

In line with the recommendations of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action, we must ensure food security on our small island in the face of climate change and reform our export-driven model.

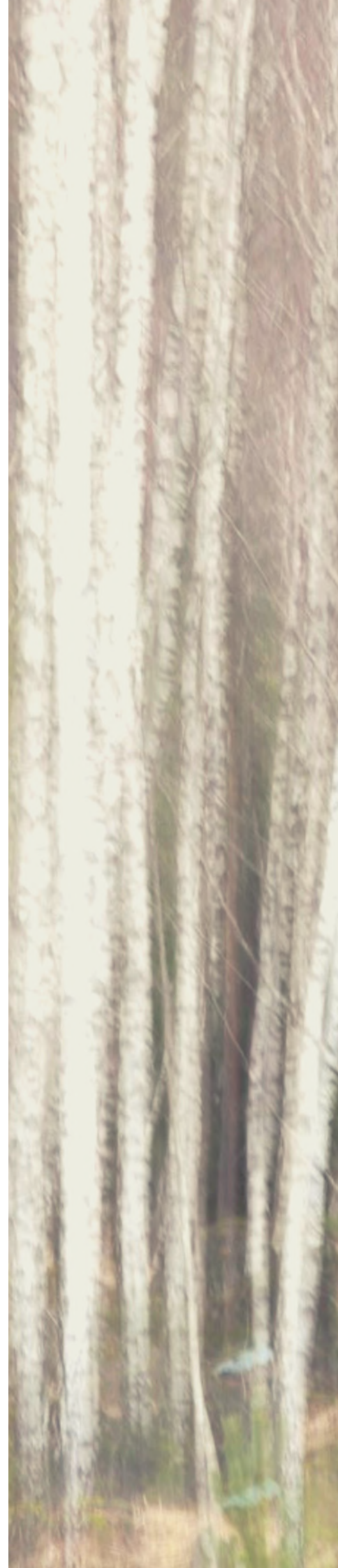
We must reward biodiversity and water quality protection in line with our climate and sustainable development commitments, with support for affordable, locally produced food at the heart of future plans.

To support the vast majority of our family farms who want to do their bit for nature, the new Government must support the ring-fencing of biodiversity funding under the next round of the Common Agricultural Policy. This should include a full suite of agroforestry options that are focused on native trees, ecosystem services, biodiversity and carbon lockup.

We urgently need a planned transition away from our socially and ecologically negative short life clearfell and replant conifer plantation forestry model to a continuous cover, close to nature, permanent woodland system that has multiple climate and biodiversity benefits.

We also need new legislation to make it a requirement for all forestry applications to undergo ecological assessment to ensure that there are no negative impacts on birds, pollinators and other wildlife and their habitats.

The next Government must call for a reform of Coillte and the Forestry Programme to ensure we deliver on sustainable forest management in response to the climate and biodiversity crisis. Native trees and broadleaf planting must be brought in line with the EU average and it is also vital that we develop and resource a national hedgerow conservation strategy.



#8 CONSTRUCTION SYSTEM CHANGE

There are many external environmental and societal costs associated with quarrying, including runoff into streams, damage to roads, dust, noise and vibration that are experienced by many communities.

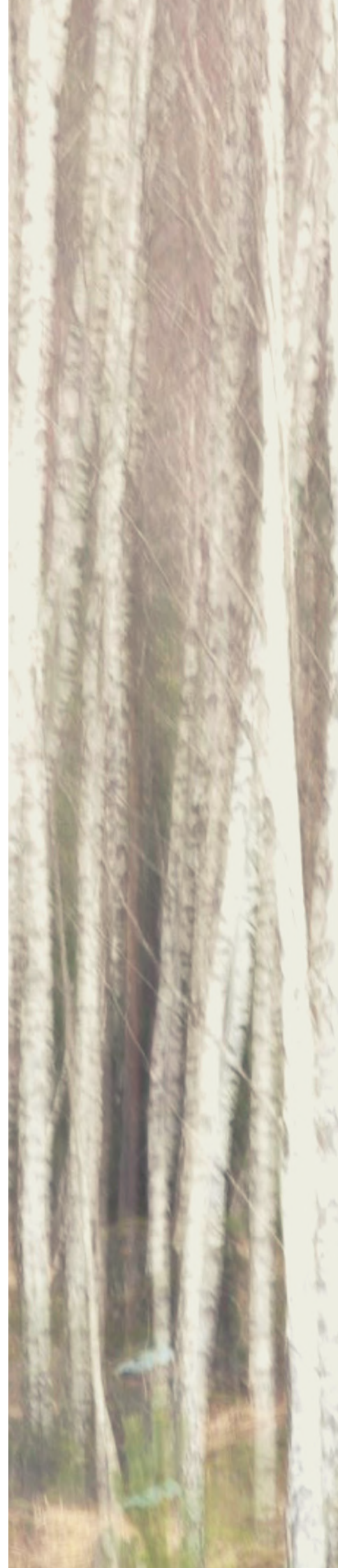
We need to see the next Government get serious on bringing in an aggregates levy of €2.50 on each tonne of sand, gravel, crushed stone and other aggregates extracted from the ground or lifted from the surface and used in construction.

Reuse of construction and demolition material must also form a cornerstone of the circular economy model and would alleviate pressure on our natural resources created by ongoing building development.

Amid the housing and homelessness crisis, a site value tax - a charge on the value of land - should also be examined by the next Government.

The current property tax on both land and the building discourages landowners from developing the land or improving the quality of the build through the likes of deep retrofitting.

A site value tax would encourage the efficient use of land as an investment in real estate such as building for high quality, high density in Dublin that does not lead to a higher tax bill.

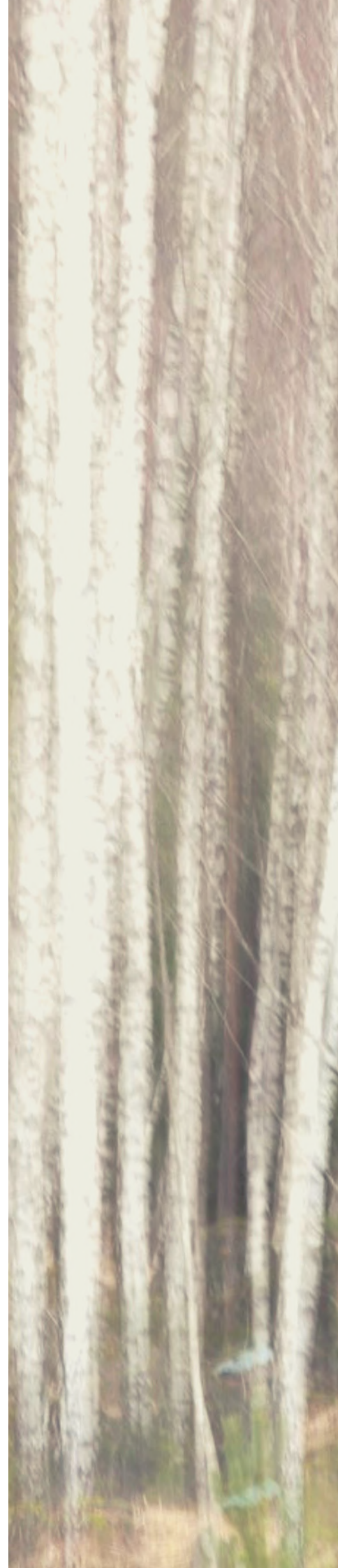


#9 ENSURE ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Just before the dissolution of the last Dail, the outgoing Government introduced the Heads of a new Bill that would have seriously altered the entire system of access to justice for a whole range of environmental decisions in Ireland.

Such legislation would have severely curtailed access to justice rights and made it much harder for ordinary people, local groups and national environmental NGOs to bring legal challenges to poor planning decision-making that would impact the environment.

The next Government must ensure that similar pieces of legislation are strongly opposed and that the vitally important principles of wide access to justice rights are fully respected in line with our European and international obligations.



#10 BREXIT-PROOF BIODIVERSITY

Brexit poses a major environmental threat to the island of Ireland unless we have a common set of standards for tackling the likes of invasive species, emissions standards, water quality, and hazardous waste.

The potential weakening of legislative protection in the North is perhaps the single greatest environmental risk posed by Brexit.

As such, the next Government must ensure that the environment is protected on the island of Ireland through the Good Friday Agreement as biodiversity doesn't do borders.

It must promote greater North-South and East-West Cooperation on the environment under the Agreement and establish a broader all-island mechanism to monitor and facilitate cross-border co-operation on environmental issues.

We also need a guarantee that the next Government will prioritise strong cross-border funding streams, and push to maintain a level playing field in environmental legislation, regulation, and enforcement.



CONTACT US FOR MORE DETAILS

www.environmentalpillar.ie

T: (01) 878 0116

E: office@ien.ie

