



**Environmental
Pillar**

Working for a sustainable future

Pathways to a Sustainable, Resilient and Equitable Ireland

A M A N I F E S T O





Introduction

2024 is on track to set new records for extreme global heat, with significant impacts on human health and well-being. The threats posed by climate change to Irish society, public health, and the economy are well-known and regularly emphasised in government reports. However, despite numerous warnings and the existence of various plans, strategies, and reports, the latest projections from the EPA indicate that Ireland will miss its 2030 emissions targets by 17 to 27 percent.

Meanwhile, Ireland's biodiversity remains in a critical state. The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) reports that 85% of habitats are in an unfavourable condition, and 15% of protected species are in decline. Additionally, 20% of Irish birds are in long-term decline, with 26% on the red list and 30% on the amber list. In Ireland's marine areas, only 9% of the ocean is protected. These alarming figures highlight the urgent need for stronger policies, effective implementation, and increased investment to reverse these trends and protect Ireland's natural heritage.

Improvements in water quality continue to be grindingly slow, with only 54% of surface waters found to be in good or high ecological status while the remaining 46% are in unsatisfactory ecological status according to the EPA.

Tackling the ecological crises of biodiversity loss, climate change and water quality requires a coherent, government-wide, and cross-sectoral approach, including substantial state funding. Nothing short of sustained and coordinated action from Government can meet the challenge. It is therefore critical that Government is organised in a way that places environmental action at the heart of its decisions. The Environmental Pillar believes that this can only be achieved through a reorganisation of departmental responsibilities and a reform of state bodies' mandates to ensure a robust Department of the Environment and a Department of Climate Action

The whole of government approach must also include the taxation system, which plays a key role in fostering a sustainable economy that benefits people, the environment, and businesses. The concepts of "taxing the bads" and "polluter pays" are vital principles and mechanisms for reducing environmental harm. Addressing fossil fuel subsidies across Government spending and taxation (€4.7bn in 2022 and €2.1bn in 2021) and promoting the circular economy will not only make the tax system more equitable and environmentally sustainable but also stimulate job creation within the circular economy. Furthermore, implementing a Site/Land Value Tax will help guide Ireland toward more sustainable development and address the issue of urban sprawl.

Finally, inequality, poverty, and marginalisation are not only societal injustices but also obstacles to effective environmental action. Lower-income households are often the least able to afford costly behavioural changes, yet they are the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, food prices, and energy costs. Therefore, it is crucial that policies work in harmony, protecting these households from the high cost-of-living while advancing our long-term vision of a sustainable, biodiversity-rich Ireland.

Resources should be focused on increasing social protection payments and setting future benchmarks along with retrofitting programs designed for lower-income households, to ensure that financial support reaches those most in need.

The Environment Pillar has put together a manifesto which is based on the key principles of polluter pays and just transition. It envisions a state and a public sector which lead on environmental sustainability and nature restoration and provide good models of practice. It places people and communities at the heart of change, with proposals that would make meaningful improvements to the quality of life in our villages and cities and would ensure that no person, regardless of their economic circumstance is left behind.

In particular, it envisions agri-food and fishing sectors that are environmentally and economically sustainable and work for the benefit of farmers, fishers and their communities as well as for nature. The vision at the core of this manifesto is one of an Ireland which lives within its ecological limits and where people, communities and nature thrive.

This Ireland is possible and we believe that the proposals in this document provide the practical pathways to get there.



Who We Are

Established in 2009 by government decision, we are comprised of 35 national independent environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and we work together to represent the views of the Irish environmental sector.

The work of our members covers a broad range of areas including habitat conservation, wildlife protection, environmental education, sustainability, waste and energy issues, as well as environmental campaigning and lobbying.

We envision a world where people and planet thrive alongside each other, and work in a number of areas to bring it about.

Members:

- An Taisce
- Bat Conservation Ireland
- BirdWatch Ireland
- CELT
- Eco Advocacy
- ECO UNESCO
- The Environmental Forum
- Feasta
- Forest Friends
- Friends of the Earth
- Global Action Plan Ireland
- Good Energies Alliance Ireland
- Grow It Yourself Ireland
- Hedgerows Ireland
- Green Foundation Ireland
- Green Economy Foundation
- Irish Cycling Campaign
- Irish Peatland Conservation Council
- Irish Seed Savers Association
- Irish Whale and Dolphin Group
- Irish Wildlife Trust
- Leave No Trace Ireland
- The Native Woodland Trust
- The Organic Centre
- The Rediscovery Centre Ireland
- Sonairte
- Streamscapes
- Sustainable Ireland Cooperative
- Sustainable Projects Ireland
- Talamh Beo
- Vincent Wildlife Trust
- VOICE
- Wildlife Rehabilitation Ireland
- Zero Waste Alliance Ireland

Putting Nature and Climate at the Heart of Government

Meeting the twin challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss requires a whole of government approach coupled with efficient and effective coordination across government departments and state bodies. The lack of a comprehensive department of the environment, which includes key functions such as water and the Marine, means that environmental protection and nature restoration are not given appropriate weight in government decision-making. Furthermore, current and future environmental and climate legal obligations will require more substantial and coordinated effort across all organisations of the state.



- Create a dedicated full-Cabinet Department for Environment, Nature, Heritage and Natural Resources which would include all natural and built heritage functions and environmental functions, including the NPWS, the EPA and water divisions. This would include the Marine Environment to undertake work in the areas of marine licensing, commercial fishing, offshore renewable energy, marine protected areas, environmental protection and monitoring, shipping, angling and marine tourism. Finally, the department would have responsibility for Bord na Mona and Coillte.
- Climate, transport and energy to be amalgamated into one department.
- Revise the legal mandates for key state agencies and public bodies, such as Gas Networks Ireland, the CRU, Coillte, Bord Na Móna, Teagasc and ESB, to require that they perform their functions in a manner consistent with legally binding carbon budgets and the land-use review. The outdated remits of Coillte, Bord Na Móna and the OPW must be reformed in order to unlock the potential of public land for nature, climate and community. State bodies represent the largest landowners in the countries. The Nature Restoration law will require a huge rethink in how we manage these public lands and the current mandates are not fit for this purpose.
- Clear direction given to all Government departments and public bodies on a vision for nature including requirement to adhere to environmental legislation
- Increase investment in state capacity and resources to deliver short-term and long-term climate action, nature protection and restoration (both marine and terrestrial) and water quality. Analysis across all sectors and levels point to the urgent need for a range of new staff to respond to existing commitments.
 - Increase staffing in the NPWS to ensure that it can meet not just current obligations and those arising from the Nature Restoration Law



Restoring and Protecting Nature

Ireland is currently facing a biodiversity crisis exacerbated by decades of underinvestment in environmental conservation. This is evident in the deteriorating condition of many of our habitats and species. According to the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), 85% of habitats are in an unfavourable condition and 15 % of protected species are classified as being in decline. 20% of Irish birds are in long term decline, 26% are red listed birds of conservation concern and 30% are amber listed birds of conservation concern. In Ireland's marine territory, only 9% of our ocean is protected. These stark statistics underline the urgent need for enhanced policy measures, implementation and increased investment to reverse these trends and safeguard Ireland's natural heritage.

- The Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss saw 99 Irish citizens sit over six weekends to debate and engage with expert and stakeholder opinion and produce a report with 159 recommendations. This was followed by an in-depth examination and subsequent report by the Oireachtas Committee on the Environment and Climate Action. The recommendations of the Citizens Assembly and the Oireachtas Committee should be implemented in full.

Better Governance for Nature

- Design and implement an ambitious National Restoration Plan which will set nature on the pathway to recovery.
 - Establish an expert working group, including environmental organisations, to design and monitor the implementation of the plan
- Ensure the proper funding of Ireland's National Nature Restoration Plan through:
 - The creation of a National Nature Restoration Fund, to finance current and capital funding for the National Nature Restoration Plan
 - Champion the establishment of an EU Nature Restoration Fund
 - Ringfencing funding for nature in the Infrastructure Climate and Nature Fund
 - Ensure the contribution of the private sector through a hypothecation of a minimum of 0.5% in Corporation Tax revenue, ringfenced for nature restoration.
 - Reviewing the effectiveness of biodiversity expenditure through CAP, EMFAF and the Forestry Programme to inform better future investment.

Supporting Sustainable Food & Farming

- Review the Acres Co-operation programme to ensure that future agri-environmental flagship schemes are long-term, adequately funded, locally-led and results-based and are aligned with biodiversity and climate change obligations. Address issues with the implementation of the current Acres Co-operation programme in particular the inadequacy of the IT system.
- Reform Food Policy ensuring:
 - All people on the island of Ireland have access to nutritious locally, nature friendly food produced by farmers earning a fair wage. This necessitates removing existing barriers for local food producers by providing institutional recognition and support (financial, structural and strategic) including a local food policy framework. Ensure the development of AKIS to facilitate Short Food Supply Chains with support and training.
 - Strengthen the position of farmers in the food supply, protect producers against below cost selling and competition from Free Trade Agreements and support EU Just Transition Fund for farmers.
 - Agri-food policy better aligns with our climate, nature restoration and other environmental commitments under the Climate Action Plan, the Nature Restoration law, and other EU and national regulations as required. This requires all future plans from Teagasc, Bord Bia and others to offer scenarios, strategies and support to reach these legally binding targets in all relevant documents including future MACC curves
- Stricter regulation of pesticide use by State-bodies, industry, commercial and individuals.



Marine and Fisheries

- Enact a long-overdue Marine Protected Area (MPA) legislation to safeguard our seas. Designate 30% of Irish waters as Marine Protected Areas and 10% as strictly protected.
- Conduct a review of aquaculture policy and licencing to ensure they align with climate, water and biodiversity policies and comply with the legal obligations and the EU Birds and Habitats Directives.
- Continue the work in developing Ireland's potential for Offshore Renewable Energy industry by implementing a truly plan-led and ecosystems-based approach to marine spatial planning';
 - The selection of DMAPs give due consideration to all marine and coastal stakeholders.
- Ensure full implementation of current and forthcoming government legal responsibilities relating to Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs), national MPAs, and the provision of additional responsibilities to government departments where necessary. Publish management and enforcement plans for each site, as it is designated.
- Harness our most powerful ally in the fight against climate change (nature) by investing in blue carbon opportunities and nature restoration. Increase long-term funding of nature-based solutions, including restoring salt marshes and mudflats.
- Adopt ecosystem-based fisheries management and fully implement the EU's Common Fisheries Policy including the implementation of the MSY and Landing Obligations.
- Publish an action plan for a just transition to low impact fisheries (in terms of bycatch and habitat disturbance). This action plan should be based on best scientific evidence and prioritise small scale, coastal fisheries, considering diversification of activities and income models, including through incentives to apply for ecological, economic and social criteria for the allocation of fishing quota.
- Fully implement the EU Common Fisheries Policy for the wider health and resilience of our marine environment and ecosystems.
- Introduce a ban on 18 metre trawlers in the six nautical mile zone and ban bottom trawling in Marine Protected Areas and phase out of destructive fishing practices in all water
- Engage effectively with coastal communities and stakeholders to successfully identify, manage, monitor the marine environment, including through the promotion of citizen science initiatives where community members can participate in data collection and monitoring activities.

Creating and Supporting Sustainable Communities

Tackling transport and residential GHG emissions is made more difficult by Ireland's settlement pattern, as is the provision of public services and utilities. Reduction of emissions in the transport sector will require a mix of both the take-up of electric vehicles and a model shift to active travel and public transport. While the take-up of electric vehicles will be an important part of the solution in the transport sector, private road transport is also responsible for other negative externalities including traffic congestion and use of public space.

Too many people are travelling great distances to work and/or stuck in traffic on a daily basis. This has real consequences for commuters' quality of life. In addition, traffic congestion has real costs to the economy.

Tackling Urban Sprawl

Ireland's current settlement patterns pose significant challenges in addressing the dual crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, as well as in delivering essential public services effectively. To mitigate these challenges, the next Government should:

- Introduce a Site/Land Value Tax (SVT)

This policy instrument has the potential to promote more efficient land use by discouraging the underutilization of valuable land and deterring detrimental practices such as land hoarding and urban neglect. In urban settings, SVT could be instrumental in incentivizing landowners to activate idle properties, thereby contributing to urban regeneration and more sustainable development patterns.

Sustainable Transport

The overarching aim of the new government's policy needs to focus on reducing car use. The Environmental Pillar supports the "Avoid", "Shift" and "Improve" approach which underpins the current Sustainable Mobility Policy.

The next Government should commit to the following:

- The spend on public transport versus new roads in the new Programme for Government needs to be of a ratio of at least 5:1. i.e. the vast bulk of the capital spend on transport needs to go on public transport. To cover BusConnects, Dart+, Metrolink, wider electrification and expansion of public transport, expansion of rural bus services etc.
 - At least 20% of the capital spend on transport to go on active travel (walking and cycling) so as to advance CycleConnects, National Cycle Network and other high-quality cycle networks.

- Review VRT levels for all sizes, weights and types of vehicles, to promote the use of greener and smaller vehicle models. Sports Utility Vehicles (SUVs) should be specifically targeted for increased VRT. Large, SUV-style EVs to be subject to the same weight-based road tax as ICE vehicles.
- Target EV subsidies to rural drivers who have fewer transport options.
- Move towards introducing a system of congestion and parking charges in the cities starting in Dublin city by 2027 alongside car parking levies on free workplace parking.
 - Congestion charging in Dublin city to be accompanied by actions to increase road space for public transport and active travel modes only and decrease road space for private cars and car parking
- Introduce financial penalties on local authorities that do not roll out active travel measures.
- Decouple the Bike to Work scheme from PAYE tax
- Strong state funded communications / campaigns around promoting public transport and active travel, and demarketing the car.
- Accelerate the rollout of light rail in Dublin, Cork, and Galway and active travel infrastructure in order to achieve emission reductions of 50% and a 20% reduction in car journeys by 2030

Schools

- Guarantee a free school bus place for anyone who wants one. Invest in a fleet of electric buses and mini-buses. Build safe routes to school for cycling and walking within a 3km radius of every school.
 - Prioritise funding for fast-build active travel schemes, School Streets and Safe Routes to School.
- Free more school streets from cars and use one-way systems to make arrival at school on bike and foot as safe as possible.
- Ban engine idling near schools.



Delivering Effective Climate Action

The dangers climate change presents to Irish society, public health, and the economy are well-documented and frequently highlighted in government reports. However, despite repeated warnings and the development of numerous plans and strategies, the latest EPA projections show that Ireland is set to fall short of its 2030 emissions targets by 17 to 27 percent. While the Climate Act

- Urgently introduce corrective measures under the 2021 Climate Act, i.e. new and additional actions, to reduce emissions in line with the binding limits on pollution to 2025 and 2030 agreed by the Dáil on a cross-party basis. The latest EPA figures project an overshoot of between 17 and 27 per cent.
- Support the European Commission proposal for a 90% reduction in EU emissions by 2040 and adopt 2035 and 2040 national carbon budgets in line with that.
- Ensure that planning decisions and planning policies are made in compliance with Climate Action Plans and within the legally binding constraints of the carbon budgets. Ensure planning authorities act in accordance with their obligations under section 15 of the climate act, commit to urgently clarifying the LULUCF limit in order to maintain the robustness and integrity of the climate law architecture
- Identify synergies within Ireland's National Nature Restoration Plan and the Land Use Review, in particular funding ambitious nature-based solutions to climate change such as the restoration of peatlands, wetlands, grasslands and native woodlands.



Fair and Just Climate Action Which Delivers for People and Communities

Addressing inequality, poverty, and marginalisation is not only a moral imperative but also a crucial factor in the success of environmental policies. Lower-income households, who are disproportionately affected by climate change, biodiversity loss, and rising energy costs, often lack the financial capacity to adopt necessary but costly behavioural changes. Thus, it is essential that government assistance to households consistently supports those who need it most and that lower income households are protected from high energy prices.

Supporting those on lower incomes through the transition

- Develop a system of benchmarking and indexing social protection payments to average wages.
- Examine the introduction of Universal Basic Income.

Delivering 'warmer homes for all' and reducing emissions

- Commit to retrofitting all social housing and the homes of those at-risk of energy poverty by 2030
- Introduce zero-interest loans for home renovations targeting low-income households, similar to models used in France and the Netherlands.
- Introduce minimum BERs in the private rental sector on a phased basis from 2025. This must be introduced alongside protection for tenants against rent hikes or eviction on the grounds of energy efficiency improvements.
- Expand the Warmer Homes Scheme to include rental properties receiving the Housing Assistance Payment on the condition of a 5+year lease being offered to the tenant.
- Introduce an Energy Poverty Act in line with legislation in Scotland which would define energy poverty, set down ministerial duties, introduce legally bound targets and set up an independent energy poverty advisory council.
- Establish a network of Community Energy Advice Services to provide face-to-face and tailored support with retrofit and heat pump grants, and to identify & target households at risk of energy poverty for energy efficiency measures. These advisors can identify households most in need and provide easily accessible advice on energy investment.



- Expand the legal mandates and capacity of the SEAI and local authorities to ensure their retrofit programmes reach those most in-need (building on Friends of the Earth research) so that it has the functions to respond to address energy poverty. Ensure the SEAI partners directly with anti-poverty and community groups to reach at-risk households.

Fossil-free homes

- Introduce a plan for scaling up of progressive retrofitting and district heating measures in line with a clear timeline for ending installation of fossil fuel boilers in existing houses
- Reject further expansion and connections to the gas distribution network and provide new housing developments with zero-carbon heating solutions, such as district heat, retrofitting, and heat pumps.
- Set a plan and timeline for householders looking to replace their heating such that there is access to zero carbon solutions while phasing out new fossil fuel heating systems in existing homes
- Develop local heating and cooling plans that incorporate a planned phase out of fossil fuel supply, including gas, and an acceleration of district heating deployment.

Clean, Renewable and Fossil-Free Energy

A clean, renewable and fossil-free energy system is vital to achieving our climate and energy security goals. We cannot achieve these goals if we lock-in our energy system and economy to fossil-fuel installations such as LNG terminals or infrastructure such as gas connections for data centres.

- Keep Ireland free of fracked gas and LNG imports by introducing a permanent ban in legislation and do not permit new infrastructure that prolongs our dependence on fossil fuels.
- Commission an independent risk assessment of future gas supply and demand in line with the climate law and carbon budgets, and of national security and public safety risks not just of a potential threat to gas interconnectors but also to any possible floating offshore LNG terminal.
- Reject a state-controlled floating LNG terminal as an option for a temporary emergency gas reserve. Also introduce legislation to enshrine key climate conditions, which rule out commercial LNG, before the Government makes any final decision on whether future strategic gas reserves are even needed based on the independent risk assessment. The climate conditions are detailed in 2023 Energy Security Review.
- Amend the Climate Act to ensure explicit fossil fuel phase-out plans and targets in accordance with carbon budgets.
- Mandate the CRU plan for gas phase out in accordance with carbon budgets, including setting a timeline for decommissioning of the entire residential gas distribution network while ensuring gas customers are protected both in terms of their bills and in terms of heating alternatives.

- Introduce a legal moratorium on data centres until an independent national review of current and projected data centre energy demand is undertaken, focusing on the security of our electricity supply. and compliance with the legally binding carbon budgets, with a view to establishing a robust legislative and regulatory framework.
- Introduce legislation to ensure Gas Networks Ireland do not provide any further connection of data centres to the gas network given the risks of locking-in long-term use of fossil gas.
- Introduce strict limits on electricity consumption used by existing data centres, not only new connections. In addition, require all existing data centres to invest in substantive renewables, storage and energy efficiency (including rooftop PV and batteries) all to the maximum extent possible on their own sites, in order to reduce their dependence on the national grid and fossil fuels, and to prevent undue reliance on external renewable development.
- Endorse the need for a global agreement to phase out fossil fuels (non-proliferation treaty)
- Introduce legislation to amend the code of practice for designated public officials in order to limit interactions with fossil fuel lobbyists to only where strictly necessary to enable designated public officials to effectively regulate the industry and accelerate the transition to a fossil-free economy.
- Introduce legislation to ban advertising for fossil fuel ads from companies or public bodies involved in fossil fuel production or distribution and ads about cars, boilers or flights that use fossil fuels.
- Develop an updated National Strategy for Renewable Energy Rollout to reflect:
 - Nature positive planning – i.e. the use of wind offshore and onshore in the right locations and with appropriate mitigation measures for nature protection.
 - Greater microgeneration supports
 - Solar panels on the roof of every school and on the roofs of 1 million homes by 2030.
 - Increase funding for community solar projects that allow low-income households to benefit from solar energy without needing to install individual systems.
 - Support community energy groups with access to grid connection so that communities can lead the renewable nature positive energy transition, and build resilient, diversified local economies.
 - Remove blockages to local community-owned renewable energy projects and revisit the question of shared-ownership opportunities for developer-led projects, which has proven successful in other countries at facilitating public participation in the energy transition



A Sustainable, Circular and Low Carbon Economy

The principle of “taxing the bads” is a crucial strategy for reducing environmental damage, and recent data from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) emphasize its urgency. In 2021, fossil fuel subsidies in Ireland reached a substantial €2.1 billion, marking a €0.8 billion increase from the previous year. This significant figure highlights the pressing need for a stronger shift toward sustainable taxation policies. Aviation alone accounted for €273 million in subsidies, with the effective carbon rate on kerosene at just €3 per tonne of CO₂, compared to €268 per tonne for petrol and €196 per tonne for road diesel. These subsidies not only harm the environment but are also inherently unfair.

Using the tax system to promote the circular economy and improve resource productivity offers a dual benefit: generating revenue and creating jobs. Primarily, it helps deter the excessive use of virgin resources like plastic, encouraging a more sustainable approach within industry. This, in turn, incentivises recycling of materials thus reducing waste and pollution while promoting greater resource efficiency.

An environmentally sustainable tax system

- Expedite the elimination of environmentally damaging subsidies in the taxation system, including but not limited to:
 - Aviation to be tackled through following measures:
 - (1) A ticket charge (climate charge), with revenue to be hypothecated for climate and nature restoration. Ticket charge to include domestic flights and should be a percentage of the ticket price rather than a flat charge.
 - (2) Introduce a charge on the landing and departing of private jets in Ireland
 - Remove the VAT exemption on fertilisers prior to the 2032 EU deadline
- VAT reform:
 - Relief and tax credits for refurbished and repaired items to improve the take up of repaired items.
 - VAT reform also needed on leasing and repair as per action plan for circular economy
 - Investigate case for VAT reduction to rate on recycling and compost bins to encourage better segregation.
- Introduce a tax on virgin plastic and introduce a levy on aggregates utilised within the construction industry.
- Increase in the landfill tax rate and introduce levy on incineration and exports of reusable and recyclable waste.

Circular Economy

Ambitious targets for new Circular Economy Action Plan to ensure that it is meeting the desired target of a society and economy using less resources, reusing resources and minimising waste. The targets should address issues such as the Right to Repair, Green Procurement Policy; Wellbeing and circular economy; Banned Item enforcement and who is responsible for enforcement.

- Scale up investment in re-use packaging initiatives and infrastructure
- Invest in Civic Amenity sites to support a transition from waste management to refurbishment and re-use as per Waste Management Plan for a Circular Economy
- Investment in skills and training in key sectors for re-use/repair.
- Establish insurance industry review to support repair and re-use initiatives, in concert with VAT reform
- Improve tax reliefs and credits for refurbished and repaired items to improve the take up of repaired items, as per action plan for circular economy.
- Increase enforcement of existing environmental regulations, including single-use plastic items and waste segregation. Banned item enforcement: ensure Local Authorities are sufficiently supported to carry out duties.
- Develop a Circular Economy pilot town city/ reuse facility to provide a proof-of-concept model.
- Examine the case for EPR contributions beyond the scope of SUPD; to include similar provisions for common litter items and wasted materials, as permitted by PPWR.
- Construction industry accounts for 48% of waste in Ireland. Set targets to increase recovery rates for re-use.
- Development of second-hand bikes in the Bike2Work scheme



A Wellbeing Economy

- Establish and appoint a Future Generations Commissioner or Ombudsman for Ireland.
- Establish a cross-party working group on the Wellbeing Economy which would take the needs of future generations and the constraints of planetary boundaries into account.
- Improve the National Wellbeing Framework so that it more accurately reflects environmental and societal needs. Introduce Framework indicators on biodiversity and the circular economy, and remove the indicators on absolute income and wealth (including government wealth), replacing them with indicators that focus instead on income and wealth inequality
- Ensure stronger incorporation of the Wellbeing Framework into budgetary decision-making, drawing on experiences from other jurisdictions including Wales, Scotland, Bhutan and New Zealand.



Protecting the All-Island Environment

The island of Ireland is a single biogeographic unit with shared landscapes, water sources, flora and fauna. We are in the midst of a climate and biodiversity crisis on the island and both jurisdictions face similar challenges in addressing these crises. Protecting this common environment is dependent on coherent policy-making, high standards and regulations and enforcement on both sides of the border. Increasing cross border cooperation and policy-making provides a real opportunity to improve the environment on an all-island basis. The withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union (Brexit) threatens this cooperation and shared standards and thus presents a significant risk to the all-island environmental integrity of the island of Ireland.

To address these risks, Government should:

- Develop a joint political or legal commitment on the environment in conjunction with the Stormont administration and the British Government. This should include a commitment not to introduce any significant regulatory divergence without good cause and without prior consultation on an all-island basis
- Better use should be made of the Good Friday Agreement to increase cross-border work on the environment including:
 - Ensure civil society organisations can engage directly with Good Friday Agreement structures such as the NSMC
 - Expanded roles for Treaty bodies which do not depend on a functioning government – in particular for the British Irish Council and the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference – to deliver a more resilient environmental governance framework;
 - Establish a Treaty oversight body for monitoring and promoting full implementation of the Agreement.
 - Ensure greater resources for environmental NGOs for cross-border work.
- Ensure continued and enhanced support for sustained, collaborative research on all-island/ cross-border environmental matters.
- Provision should be made for adequate, ring-fenced funding from the British and Irish Governments for both short and long-term all-island collaboration on environmental issues.
 - Ensure greater resources for environmental NGOs for cross-border work.

Strengthening Social Dialogue

Strengthening social dialogue would be of benefit in helping the political system navigate the difficult policy choices that the climate and biodiversity crisis are posing. The format of the annual National Economic Dialogue (NED), while useful in highlighting some concerns held by sectoral representatives, could not be considered a meaningful dialogue as it comprises just one day and does not provide the space for real discussion amongst the participants.

- Hold a series of dialogues over a number of days on key themes instead of a one-day long NED. This would facilitate real dialogue not only between Ministers and the participants but also between the sectoral representatives themselves, a key element that is missing in the current format.
- Hold a biannual meeting with each of the Pillars individually.



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