



**NORTHERN IRELAND
BIODIVERSITY GROUP**



**Comhshaoil, Oidhreacht agus Rialtas Áitiúil
Environment, Heritage and Local Government**

Biodiversity and Planning: Developing Connectivity for Sustainability

**Joint Conference of the Irish Biodiversity Forum and
Northern Ireland Biodiversity Group**

**11th November 2009
National Botanic Gardens Glasnevin, Dublin 9**

Summary Proceedings

Conference Programme

Biodiversity and Planning: Developing Connectivity for Sustainability

Chairman – Dr Ken Whelan

9.00 – 9.30	Registration	
9.30 – 9.40	Opening Address	John Gormley, Minister of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government
Session 1	Green Infrastructure	
9.40 - 10.10	Wales: A networked environmental nation?	Russell Elliott (Countryside Council for Wales)
10.10 - 10.35	Green infrastructure baseline in Ireland - opportunities within legislation, policy and practice	Mary Tubridy (Mary Tubridy and Associates) and William Hynes (Keith Simpson Associates)
10.35 – 11.00	Green infrastructure case studies and outline national map - investigations across scales and environments	Gearóid Ó Riain (Compass Informatics) and Richard Butler (Cunnane Stratton Reynolds)
11.00 – 11.15	Coffee break	
Session 2	Biodiversity and planning	
11.15 – 11.45	Planning and biodiversity in Ireland	Gerry Sheeran (President, Irish Planning Institute)
11.45 – 12.30	Panel Q&A and open discussion	Ken Bradley (DOENI) Brian Keaney (DOEHLG Spatial Planning Unit) Cliona O'Brien (Heritage Council)
12.30 – 1.30	Lunch	
Session 3	Workshops	
1.30 – 2.45	1. Coastal Zone Management in a changing world	Chair: Bob Brown (NIBG) Rapporteur: Eugene Nixon (Marine Institute) Provocateur: Andrew Cooper (UU)
	2. The WFD as a model approach for sustainable planning?	Chair: Jim Bowman (EPA) Rapporteur: Cathy Maguire (Comhar SDC) Provocateur: Sinead O'Brien (SWAN)
	3. Natura 2000 and spatial planning	Chair: Shirley Clerkin (Monaghan CoCo) Rapporteur: Niamh Kirwan (Comhar SDC) Provocateur: John Coll (NUI Maynooth)
2.45 – 3.00	Coffee break	
3.00 – 3.20	Report back from workshops	Rapporteurs
3.20 – 3.35	Open discussion	
3.35 – 4.00	Final thoughts and next steps	Bob Brown Ken Whelan

Conference Summary

Biodiversity is fundamental to the economy and society and should be at the core of strategic planning and decision making both in Government and at a sectoral level. There are major challenges ahead of us to protect and enhance biodiversity and ecosystem goods and services, not least in the context of climate change. The annual joint conference of the Irish Biodiversity Forum and Northern Ireland Biodiversity Group aimed to contribute to addressing these challenges through:

- Exploring an important/and or emerging issue.
- Informing our own thinking and feeding this into policy formulation.
- Guiding wider stakeholders, stimulating their thinking and getting their input.
- Producing an output to send to Government to influence policy and decision making.
- Raising awareness with the public through associated media and communications work.

The conference focused on planning and biodiversity as planning has a vital role to play in addressing the drivers of biodiversity degradation and loss. There is a need to find solutions and this conference aimed to contribute to that. It is clear that despite many detailed safeguards, planning has failed biodiversity to date and the importance of biodiversity for our wellbeing is still not properly valued in policy and decision making. We need new ways of doing things and the approaches such as Green Infrastructure that we explored at the conference offer potential solutions and ways of doing this. The conference was an important opportunity to explore new approaches in more detail, in particular how we can work together in an integrated and participative way.

Approaches such as green infrastructure are smart and strategic and offer potential ways of effectively integrating biodiversity into spatial planning and sectoral considerations. This is a real challenge for biodiversity policy and its implementation, and we need to find more effective ways of doing this to make progress in halting biodiversity loss. Green infrastructure enables the integration of biodiversity into a range of other policy areas including spatial planning, health, climate adaptation, tourism and recreation. The conference explored these opportunities and how they could be progressed in Ireland and this will make a positive contribution to shaping our future approach. We need to learn lessons from our experiences to date to inform how we do things in the future. The conference workshops on the WFD and its participative approach and progress to date on Natura 2000 aimed to make a valuable contribution to doing this. We hope that the outputs from this conference and the valuable experience of the participants can strengthen our inputs into policy and decision making.

The current policy context is fragmented and there are many barriers to progress but there are also opportunities such as the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill and the revision of the National Biodiversity Plan. The OECD environmental performance review report launched the day before the conference recommended that Ireland will need to strengthen its environmental management efforts and further integrate environmental concerns into economic decisions and reinforce international cooperation on environmental issues. This was an all-island conference which can contribute to making progress on these recommendations which included improved integration of biodiversity into sectoral policies and protection and enhancement of biodiversity outside protected areas through the creation of green corridors.

Another important factor is that solutions require an integrated and cross-sectoral approach as a focus on planning or nature conservation alone cannot deliver the actions required. The attendees at the conference came from across the range of sectors including Government, Local Government, nature conservation, tourism, agriculture, forestry, planning, landscape architects and ecologists. It will take all of us to work together to tackle the problems of biodiversity loss and climate change mitigation and adaptation and to succeed in embedding approaches such as Green Infrastructure in policy and practice.

Workshops

Each workshop addressed a number of suggested questions:

1. What are the main barriers to progress? Give three suggestions on how these can be overcome?
2. Is the current policy framework adequate? If not what are the limitations and how can these be overcome?
3. In summary what are the top 3 priority actions for next 3 years?
4. How can these be progressed on an all-island basis?

Workshop Reports

Coastal Zone Management in a Changing World

Andrew Cooper identified two of the main problematic issues in relation to coastal zone management, population growth, with Ireland having the second highest growth in Europe in the recent years, and sea level rise, which depending on how it is measured is currently averaging about 3.2 to 3.5 mm/year. He pointed out that the rate of sea level rise is increasing and some projections estimate a rise of up to 1m and that regardless of measures taken to reduce greenhouse gases emissions it will take 100 years to take effects on sea level rise. Coastal erosion is a natural process and controlling it by hard defences should only be used when absolutely necessary, for example the protection of urban areas or infrastructure such as roads. The cost benefit of using public funds to protect private property, such as one off housing or agricultural land, as opposed to paying compensation should be considered. What is needed is an integrated approach where planning and adaptive management rather than coastal protection is seen as the solution. Relative to other parts of Europe, Ireland's coastline is not heavily engineered.

In the discussion that followed the following main points were made:

- **Governance:** Improvement governance is essential – this includes new legislation, joined up policy and decision making, including the development of overarching policy / strategic framework with clear objectives, possibly on an all island basis. Improved governance is called for by the EC under their Integrated Maritime Policy (see Guidelines to Member States on an Integrated Approach to Maritime Policy). The Marine Strategy Framework Directive and using the British Irish Council and North South Ministerial Meetings should be the mechanism to progress the all Ireland approach.
- **Planning and Green Infrastructure:** It is not feasible to continue the current practices, change in the way we manage our coastal zones is urgently needed. Planning has an important role to play and increased awareness of the issue relating to the coastal zone is needed by the public, planners and decisions makers. Integration of terrestrial and marine spatial planning systems including the introduction of the Green (and Blue) Infrastructure concept would be beneficial. It was interesting to note in the plenary discussions that the foreshore and marine areas were blank. The review of the Planning and Development Act, which is likely to introduce the need for plans to be consistent with higher level guidance (regional planning guidelines) and strategies (NSS) is an opportunity to influence the process and introduce the Green Infrastructure concept.
- **Economics:** Too much emphasis is placed on sectoral economic interests such as property development. This is driven by a wish to live by the coast which is reflected in property prices. Cost benefit analysis should be used to inform decisions on coastal defence versus retreat and compensation.

The WFD as a model approach for spatial planning?

Jim Bowman briefly introduced the WFD and gave an overview of actions to date which unlike the other workshop topics have been progressed on an all-island basis. He posed the question 'the fundamental idea of the WFD is to manage the waters to support aquatic ecology and biodiversity – will it work?' He highlighted the importance of sustainable development and striking a balance between development, environment and quality of life and in the context of water, the WFD is the principal tool. Eamonn Moore gave an overview of the Sustainable Water Action Network (SWAN) a coalition of NGO's and their experience in participating in the WFD process to date. He highlighted the successes and failures and problems that remain to be resolved including getting participation right.

In the discussion that followed around the current policy framework, the main topics addressed were:

- Participation and governance – getting effective participation is challenging as many of those who participate are already interested and favourably disposed towards the objectives. We need different ways of engaging people rather than meetings to enable more participation. This will require improvements in communication and how information is presented to get inclusive representation. The experience of the advisory councils can provide lessons on how to improve governance.
- Coastal zone – work to date on the WFD has not sufficiently integrated coastal zone management and the coastal zone monitoring did not take place. This needs to be addressed in the next phase.
- Fragmentation – there is a wide range of organisations involved with different responsibilities and we need to ensure that this complexity is managed and that the different plans inform each other and local development plans.
- Implementation and integration – there is a lack of integration between the WFD and other important Directives such as the Floods Directive. This lack of integration needs to be addressed in both planning and implementation.
- Enforcement – there is a lack of enforcement although some progress is now being made.

The workshop also identified the top three actions for the next three years as:

- Integration and co-ordination of policies, plans and actions in particular through regional guidance and local development plans.
- The need for education on the value of water and what it costs.
- The hypothecation or ring fencing of water charges to fund implementation, participation processes and improvement schemes.

Natura 2000 and Spatial Planning

John Coll highlighted the unfavourable conservation status of the Natura 2000 network across Europe and in Ireland and range of barriers to progress. He discussed the linkages between biodiversity, ecosystem functions and resilience and how these can be evaluated. Areas where the current policy framework is inadequate were identified and he proposed carrying out a 'triage' of our natural resources and a range of ways to progress this on an all-island basis. The complexity and cross cutting nature of the challenges were highlighted.

In the discussion that followed the main points raised were:

- The interface between natural heritage and the economy is out of sync. The economy works in relatively short-term time scales, while the natural world works in longer-time scales. Quality of life and sustainability issues need to be taken into account in economic development. There needs to be wider stakeholder involvement, including politicians as well as the general public.

- The policy framework is inadequate. Three key issues that arose when evaluating the current policy framework was that there is very little enforcement, not enough communication and very little guidance.
- Environmental protection in the planning process needs to be strengthened and Appropriate Assessments need to be carried out in spatial planning. This will require a range of actions, including:
 1. Identifying those that will influence N2000 sites.
 2. Capacity building at Local Authority level including development of ecological expertise.
 3. Greater engagement with communities and more involvement in the various planning stages.
 4. Use of habitat maps in assessments.
 5. Penalties set at the right level so developers cannot afford to ignore the legislation. We are not valuing these things properly.
 6. Lack of funding in Local Authorities results in less assessments being carried out than people want to and feel are necessary.
- Habitat mapping at a county level is necessary as a baseline for developing GI. There needs to be a standardised approach to developing networks, buffers and corridors. Cork County Council is working with communities in conducting biodiversity audits in local areas.
- There is little standardisation amongst databases which makes it hard to get information and evidence. We need some overarching strategy so that there is compatibility between data sources. This may already happen through INSPIRE. This also needs to happen at a more local level. For example, people acquire sites and then discover there are issues. They need access to sound information in advance. There should be more effort made to use the internet as a means of access to data.
- Natura 2000 is seen as problematic and the benefits are not well communicated in media. Many habitats have been treated badly, especially woodlands. Restoration and management are very important. There should be better incentives and guidance for people to management Natura 2000 sites.
- Not enough been done on the marine side. Lessons should be learnt from terrestrial sites and cross border elements incorporated.
- Corridors and stepping stones are very important in improving biodiversity. Buffer zones are also effective, but there needs to be more evidence behind the selection of buffer zones.
- We need to target the decision makers.