



# GREEN FOUNDATION IRELAND

## Annual Report 2013

***Green Foundation Ireland aims, through education, to create public support for a sustainable society in Ireland.***

Green Foundation Ireland's second year of operation was a very busy one, packed with events.

During the year, Green Foundation Ireland was sorry to lose **Val Bresnihan** from the Board, but was very pleased to welcome **Thomas Legge** as a member of Board. Thomas is a Senior Associate at the Brussels-based European Climate Foundation.

### **FEBRUARY 2013: The Climate Gathering, The Burren**

The Climate Gathering is an ambitious initiative to create an inter-disciplinary network of political, business, scientific and cultural leaders who recognise that political and cultural fears are the greatest obstacle to the challenges of stabilising the climate and sustaining prosperity in the face of environmental limits.

The first of a series of annual gatherings in the west of Ireland, this initial gathering of the core network took place over four days in February 2013 in the Burren College of Art at Ballyvaughan, Co. Clare. The project is an initiative of Green Foundation Ireland and is supported by the Tony Ryan Trust.

Our use of the planet's resources is threatening our future prosperity and we are not responding quickly enough to this challenge. We need to make a leap that takes us beyond the current efforts to agree a global emissions deal, towards the practical business of creating a low-carbon economy. There are leaders in all walks of life in Europe and the US who are impatient to get on with this task. The Climate Gathering brought them together, and aims to develop an inter-disciplinary network of leaders who will take this task on into the future.

Advisers to The Climate Gathering included:

**Dr Colin Brown** (Director, [Ryan Institute for Environmental, Marine and Energy Research](#), NUI Galway);

**Peter Cassells** (Director, [Edward M Kennedy Institute for Conflict Intervention](#), NUI Maynooth);

**Prof Frank Convery** ([Earth Institute](#), UCD);

**Turlough O'Donnell** (Senior Counsel, former Chair of the [Bar Council of Ireland](#));

**Eamon Ryan** (former Minister for Energy in the Irish Government).

Development of the project has been supported by seed funding from the Tony Ryan Trust.

See The Climate Gathering website at [www.climategathering.org](http://www.climategathering.org)

### **MAY 2013: Heinrich Böll and Ireland**

To commemorate the completion of its first successful year in operation, Green Foundation Ireland hosted an anniversary seminar, *Heinrich Böll and Ireland*, on 2 May 2013 in the Mansion House, Dublin. The seminar explored Heinrich Böll's relationship with Ireland, and we were delighted that René Boll, son of Heinrich, joined us to celebrate our first anniversary. Members of the Heinrich Böll Foundation (the German Green Foundation) were also in attendance.

#### ***Heinrich Böll***

German novelist Heinrich Böll (1917-1985), winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, visited Achill regularly during the 1950s and 60s. His travelogue, *"Irish Journal"*, describes in loving detail his journey to Achill and his observations on island life. He satirised both church and state power and pomposities in his work, and was a trenchant critic of the liberal idea of the primacy of the private over the public sphere and that everything can be reduced to an economic relationship.

Tommy Simpson, Finance Director of GFI, introduced the artist **René Böll** who was present to give us his memories of Achill in the 1950s and **Dr. Gisela Holfter**, author of *"Heinrich Böll and Ireland"*, who contrasted 1950s Ireland with post-war Germany.

The seminar questioned whether Ireland has overtaken Germany in excess consumption, and considered what a greener lifestyle is. The work of the Heinrich Böll Foundation was outlined by **Ramona Simon** of the Heinrich Böll Foundation, Berlin.

### ***The Greeks and the Good Life***

Professor John Dillon, member of the GFI Board, introduced **Dr. Brendan O'Byrne**, Curator of the Plato Centre, TCD, who spoke on why consumerism cannot make us happy and how it requires indebtedness as a norm. He addressed what the classical Greeks would have considered a good and sustainable life, and the audience was invited to respond. He also discussed how we might find an ethical alternative to mass consumerism by considering the roots of western culture in Greek philosophy and how we can live in ways that are personally fulfilling and collectively sustainable.

### **AUGUST 2013: The Point Festival / Summer School**

Carnsore Point – location of the famous festivals of the late 1970s and early 1980s, which were instrumental in halting the plans of the then Government to build a nuclear power station at that site – is arguably the birthplace of the Irish environmental movement.

For the 35th anniversary of the first anti-nuclear demonstration in 1979, the Green European Foundation, with the support of Green Foundation Ireland, returned to Carnsore Point in Co. Wexford to host a stimulating weekend of fun, debate, music, film and outdoor activities. The Summer School took place over the weekend of 23-25 August 2013 and its theme for this year was "*Jobs, Democracy and Europe – The Failure of Politics?*".

The event began with the showing of a video of RTÉ's "*The Late Late Show*" of January 1979 about the original Carnsore Festival, and this was followed by a presentation by **Seán McDonagh** (author of book "*Fukushima – The Death Knell for Nuclear Energy?*"). Everyone was then entertained by comedy with **Abie Philbin Bowman**, who presented his new routine "*Terrorist Weather*" and treated the crowd to many new ideas on how to win the Climate Change debate. The evening ended with live music from **The Submersibles**.

The theme for Saturday was "*Why employment isn't working?*" and began with a panel discussion on employment and sustainability chaired by **Mar Garcia** (EGP Catalonia) and speakers included **Dirk Holemans** (Co-Ordinator of Oikos, the Belgian Green Foundation), **Jean Lambert** (UK Green MEP) and **Peter Scallan** (Director of Wexford Festival Opera, and Non-Executive Director of Celtic Linen and Rosslare Europort). This was followed by a workshop on Jobs in which **Bill Kelly** (Meitheal Mid-West), Mar Garcia and Dirk Holemans participated.

In the afternoon there was a Nature Walk around Lady's Island which was led by local naturalist, **Jim Hurley**, who has a special interest in promoting awareness of the need to protect and conserve the natural heritage resource values of the south Wexford coast. Those who remained behind attended a workshop titled "*Renewable Energy for Employment*", which was co-hosted by **Brian Hurley** and **Dan Boyle**. This was followed by a well-attended bilingual workshop (English and Irish) on "*Using Irish Music for Campaigning*", which was facilitated by **Seán Ó Donaile**. He was ably supported by American folk legend **Jim Page** and Irish traditional musician **Úna O'Boyle**.

The Festival Barbecue was held in the marquee with **The Ocelots** providing live music for the guests who had much to discuss after the first full day's activities. Jim Page then opened the evening's entertainment. He included a rendition of his famous anti-nuclear song "*Hiroshima Nagasaki Russian Roulette*". The **Cáca Milis Cabaret** followed with an eclectic mix of entertainment, including poetry, film, dance and much music. Artists included **Eleanor McEvoy**, **Leni Morrison**, **The Motives** and **The Ocelots**. An amazing night of entertainment was completed by **Corner Boy** who brought the house down.

A beautifully sunny morning saw Sunday's main session "*New Europe / Old Europe*" open in the marquee. As one of the expected panellists Vinay Gupta was unable to attend through ill health, Dirk Holemans kindly joined the panel of Mar Garcia, **Eamon Ryan** and **Jean Lambert**. Nuala Ahern chaired this session. The panel explored the current social and financial challenges facing Europe, with each speaking about how the situation was affecting their particular country.

This year's Summer School concluded with a guided walking tour, led by **Michael Bermingham**, of the nearby Carnsore Wind Farm. After the tour the delegates headed for home under a bright blue sky with much to ponder and a pep in their step.

### **OCTOBER 2013: Food – Good to Eat and Good for Ireland?**

This all-day seminar was held at the European Parliament Offices in Dublin and was hosted by Nessa Childers MEP.

In the current challenging economic conditions, food clearly has major potential to provide Ireland with new employment and business opportunities, while also providing produce that enhances the well-being of our citizens and our environment.

This was a cross-party event that provided a forum for a challenging and robust look at the future for food in Ireland. There was an exciting list of speakers from a political, NGO, food industry, media and agriculture background.

**Minister Tom Hayes TD** (Fine Gael and Minister responsible for Food Safety) opened the event and stated that sustainability is important to Ireland. Agri-business needs to have sustainability targets, hence the launch of 'Origin Green' – a sustainability programme for Ireland's food and drinks industry. Producing more food without negatively contributing to climate change is one of the most important policy considerations. In 2011 the agri-sector was responsible for 32% of emissions for Ireland; however Ireland's grass-based system is one of the most efficient beef production systems. Ireland is uniquely suitable for organic farming thanks to our climate and our green image. Demand for good, quality food is on the rise. Organic food production is viable and totally sustainable, and offers real opportunities for farmers.

### ***Session 1: Trusting the food we eat?***

*Chaired by **Ella McSweeney** (Broadcaster)*

**Suzanne Campbell** (Food and Farming Writer)

*Food safety*

Ireland's reputation for food is still good, Ireland secured new markets for beef post the horse meat scandal. The scandal was a case of food fraud – food fraud is not new and is always going to be with us. The report into horse meat did not show DEFRA and the UK FSA in a good light. The UK agencies failed to act.

Food safety and nutrition are intertwined. The family farm is important in traceability but farmers are burdened by external factors (e.g. regulation, subject to national reputation). Subsidies have an important role to play in supporting farmers to make farming viable; however targeted subsidies can preference certain crops, thus bringing homogeneity to food products and causing major health issues (e.g. US subsidy of corn production has led to the excessive use of corn derivatives and contributes to poor health, especially the use of High Fructose Corn Syrup in processed foods).

**Éamon Ó Cuív TD** (Fianna Fáil)

*Market impacts of maintaining high food standards*

The food sector is vulnerable to food scares and health issues. Food scares negatively affect markets; therefore, we must be extremely vigilant in dealing with threats and perceived threats. Image and reputation is what people buy and food based on image and reality must match.

Organic production is important and should be promoted. We also need a certification for non-intensive production – somewhere between industrial and organic production. We need to retain small and medium size farmers to retain structures and protect rural development. The motto should not be cheap food, the motto should be food good to eat, at a fair price and a fair return to the primary producer.

**Seamus Sheridan** (The Green Party)

*Food safety and culture*

Is our obsession with food safety detrimental to our food culture? Will we be left with processed, technically safe food? Food safety should not be an isolated issue and should be seen in the wider realm of the environment, food security, etc. For example, the antibiotic footprint of food production in water, soils, other animals, etc. is often ignored. Just because food is safe it doesn't mean that it is right. Large agri-food corporations are given massive governmental supports even though they commodify food and bring more processed food to the market.

**Professor Alan Reilly** (Chief Executive, Food Safety Authority of Ireland)

The FSAI was set up to protect the health and interests of Irish consumers and consumers of Irish foods. The FSAI is a food law enforcement agency, is science-based, provides advice to ministers, is independent of the agri-food sector, and is concerned with public trust of food.

We need to have regulation right across the food chain. One weak link can destroy the chain. Ultimately food safety is the responsibility of the industry. We have about 50,000 food premises in Ireland. These are monitored through risk-based food inspection. Premises each have a risk profile which contributes to the degree of inspection it is subjected to. Inspection can give you a degree of confidence in the food risk management system depending on what you find.

***Session 2: What will consumers want from food in 2020?***

*Chaired by Trevor Sargent (Writer and Grower)*

The sustainability of consolidating production to a few producers and supporting the people that put the other people out of business was questioned.

**Senator Kathryn Reilly** (Sinn Féin)

There is great potential for developing the indigenous food sector. Around 200 farmers in Ireland receive in excess of €100,000 in farm payments and more than 2,000 farmers receive over €50,000. We need to protect small farmers to

ensure food security and not just support large farmers. Localised food production can ensure food security.

**Eddie Downey** (Deputy President, Irish Farmers' Association)

Agriculture is now at the top of the political agenda. Agriculture drives the economy. We can continue to increase food exports. We already produce enough beef to feed 30 million Europeans each year.

Farmers keep farms in trust for future generations. Inspection processes should work alongside farmers. Agriculture in Ireland has reached its limits in emissions reduction. Emissions have been reduced by 10% over recent years but there is only about 3-4% further reductions possible. Criticism of the Irish model (of high meat and dairy production) could damage the model.

**Michael Kelly** (Grow it Yourself)

GIY has approximately 50,000 members and consists of around 800 individual food projects and groups. GIY built on the concept of 'Food Empathy' – a deeper understanding of food, where it comes from, how it is produced, and the time and effort required.

'Food empathy' opposed to 'food apathy' – where people don't know or care where food comes from.

GIY is open to everyone, from the person with one pot on the windowsill to the person growing 20 acres. It is about giving food growing a try, and learning and discovering about where food comes from and the cycle of food. GIY educates people about food seasonality. People can also grow a greater diversity and variety of food at home and grow produce that are not available in supermarkets.

**Gill Westbrook** (General Manager, Irish Organic Farmers and Growers Association)

Organic is often referred to as elitist but this is not the case. Sustainability is an overused term and has different interpretations.

To generate 1 tonne of artificial fertiliser uses 108 cubic metres of fresh water, 1 tonne of oil or gas, and emits 7 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>. Organic production uses 26% less energy.

Land based production is also responsible for rising sea temperatures. We need to look beyond our production methods and consider the entire food chain to include transport for exporting, etc.

### **Session 3: What people want from food in 2020?**

Chaired by **Nuala Ahern** (Chair, Green Foundation Ireland)

#### **Nessa Childers MEP**

##### *Food poverty*

People most at risk from food poverty are households with low income, households with more than three children, lone parents, households with disabled parents. People living in food poverty are often obese as they eat a lot of low-nutrition energy-dense food. We should raise taxes on sugary foods.

#### **Dylan McGrath** (MasterChef Ireland and Fade Street Social)

##### *Sourcing food*

Use suppliers you can trust. Ireland produces some of the best food in the world. By using Irish suppliers you reinvest back into the country. Customers are looking for nutritious healthy food. Maintaining high standards of food is important for tourism.

#### **Grace Binchy** (Bord Bia "Insight and innovation")

##### *Consumer perspective*

Factors that influence consumer trends:

- *Food and environment (economic)*: Simplicity; local emphasis; resourcefulness; convenience.
- *Food and technology*: Connections; transparency; resourcefulness; convenience.

New technologies make decisions for you about what you should eat, what to wear, etc.

#### **Pat Lalor** (Kilbeggan Organic Foods)

75% of Irish farmers are in the dairy or livestock sector. The average farm subsidy is €19,000. Average drystock farm income at end of year including subsidies is €16,000, thus farmers are losing money. Young people do not want to go into farming thereby contributing to the urbanisation of society. Food production can generate financial and job satisfaction. Current farm incomes are unsustainable for future generations. Farmers need to become more innovative. The supports and goodwill towards farmers are already there.

### **NOVEMBER 2013: Corporate taxation – ensuring a system fair for all**

This morning seminar was held at the European Parliament Offices in Dublin on 13 November 2013 and was hosted by Gay Mitchell MEP. The chair for the event was **John Bowman**.

The debate over tax loopholes and what level of taxes corporations really pay continues to heat up. While austerity demands cuts to services, is it acceptable that companies exploit tax laws to minimise their contribution? And what steps can be taken at national and European level to ensure a fair tax system, and how can political agreement be reached to take action?

**Nuala Ahern** (Chair of Green Foundation Ireland) opened the seminar by welcoming attendees. She noted that corporate taxation was a crucial debate throughout the EU and that the aim of the seminar was to point a direction towards a fair and workable solution in a non-confrontational manner.

### ***Creating a fair system – what can be done?***

**Sheila Killian** (Senior Lecturer in Accounting and Finance, Kemmy School of Business, University of Limerick) stated that by whatever metric you use the corporate share of taxation is falling in the OECD countries: headline rates of tax for companies are falling, as is corporate tax revenue as a percentage of GDP and revenue as a percentage of total tax taken. Another element of fairness or unfairness is the comparative advantage multinational corporations (MNCs) have over domestically-centred businesses in arranging their tax affairs through transfer pricing and selling between subsidiaries. MNCs can take advantage of scale and geographical spread to implement tax strategies that are not available to companies operating primarily in one country.

**Rodrigo Fernandez** (Researcher with the SOMO Institute in the Netherlands) referred to three related elements of the debate about the financial practices of MNCs:

- Competition in corporate tax rates and consequent base erosion.
- Loopholes and tax havens.
- "Shadow banking".

He suggested that shadow banking, a term coined in 2007, was a neglected element of the debate although it has been discussed at the US Federal Reserve, the G20 and others. It refers to methods by which financial institutions fund themselves outside of the regulated financial markets. In Europe the main countries associated with the practice are The Netherlands, Luxembourg and Ireland.

He commented that a lot of what we know about shadow banking practices comes from analysis following the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008 – it was only after its bankruptcy that its practices became public knowledge.

**Jim Stewart** (Associate Professor in Finance, Trinity College Dublin) addressed the question "is Ireland a tax haven?". Financial outlets such as Forbes and the Wall Street Journal routinely describe Ireland as such. Ireland certainly has many of the essential features of a tax haven and much debate has focussed on Ireland's low rate of corporate tax, but the issue is not the tax rate but the tax regime.

The official response is effectively one of denial, ignoring the fact that our corporate tax regime, as distinct from our corporate tax rate, is considered harmful by other countries. The rate itself is largely irrelevant, in that the real issue is transfer of profits to stateless entities or entities resident in no-tax jurisdictions. Ireland operates a tax-based industrial policy which is not sustainable and is effectively a two-tier corporate tax system: small firms and companies that are immobile are subject to a rule-based tax structure, while MNCs and "new economy" firms operate in a negotiated tax environment.

John Bowman then called on **Sorley McCaughey** of Christian Aid to make a response. He emphasised the impact of unfair tax policies on the global south, referring to a 2010 Christian Aid report estimating that US\$160 billion annually is lost to the poorest countries in the world through tax avoidance. He noted that this loss prolongs the reliance of such countries on international aid, raising the question of aid efficiency.

In the **questions and answers session** there was criticism of the "unhealthy consensus" on corporation tax in the Irish political system. The first two speakers pointed out that it was important for Foreign Direct Investment purposes that opposition parties as well as government parties supported the 12.5% rate, as this gave a high degree of certainty to potential investors.

### **DECEMBER 2013: Creating a People's Europe – Integration or Disintegration?**

This evening seminar was held in the Mansion House, Dublin on 6 December 2013 with the support of the Communicating Europe Initiative at the Department of the Taoiseach.

Recognising that the European Union faces its greatest challenges since its foundation, the seminar explored the causes of the current crisis and the necessary steps to create a new Europe to meet these challenges. If increased integration is necessary to solve the Eurozone crisis how can this be legitimised? Is there a danger that increased centralism, which may be necessary in some instances, may in fact alienate citizens even further from the EU?

There is a necessity for a social dimension to the discussions on Eurozone Integration. Further integration of the Eurozone is deemed necessary to its proper functioning as a currency area by many influential economic commentators, and Banking Union is already well advanced. However the economic debate fails to include a proper social dimension. The EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, László Andor, has urged that the discussions on Eurozone integration should include solving high unemployment.

See his Policy Brief "*Developing the social dimension of a deep and genuine Economic and Monetary Union*", dated 13 September 2013, [here](#).

The seminar addressed both of these issues with a discussion on what kind of social and ecological Europe is possible and desirable to urgently address these concerns. The seminar served to deepen public discourse and understanding of the current problems that beset the EU and achieved a public conversation and debate on the EU.

The speakers were **Emer Costello MEP** (Member of the European Parliament Committee on Social Affairs), **Dermot Scott** (Former Head of the European Parliament Office in London and a former official of the Institute of Public Administration) and **Alex Warleigh-Lack** (Professor of EU Politics at the School of Politics, Surrey University, UK).

They were asked to speak on the following questions:

*Is integration of the Eurozone proceeding without the inclusion of a proper social dimension?*

*Is the Eurosceptic debate increasing in intensity in the member states where unemployment is unacceptably high?*

The seminar hoped to address both of these issues and to debate what kind of social and ecological Europe is possible and desirable to meet such concerns.

### ***Irish Film Première***

The debate was preceded by the first screening in Ireland of "*Creating a People's Europe*". This film, produced by Bandit Films, is a project of the Green European Foundation for the Greens/EFA Group in the European Parliament. It was supported with funding from the Heinrich Böll Foundation and with the financial support of the European Parliament.

The film made a lively and interesting introduction to the proceedings, and the debate which followed the presentations of the speakers was passionate and very engaged with the topic.

To view the film "*Creating a People's Europe*" (20 minutes in length), please click [here](#).

After the formal seminar had concluded, discussions continued with a Christmas reception with mince pies and other seasonal fare.