



Green Foundation Ireland

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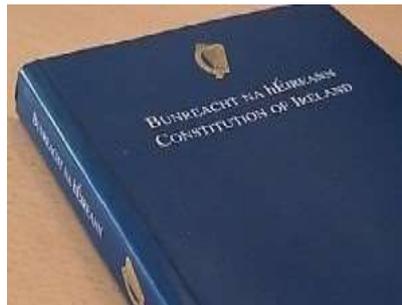
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Submission to the Citizens' Assembly – 30 July 2017

"How the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change"

Constitutional Protection of the Environment



We ask the Citizens' Assembly to recommend a referendum on the constitutional protection of our environment.

This would publicly show our commitment throughout the world to our environment, by giving our environment the strongest legal protection possible. In Ireland, 4 to 5 people die every day from air pollution, the status of our habitats is declining and we are not meeting our targets on climate change. Constitutional protection would give the public a right to a healthy environment, and ultimately would save lives.

For further information see our video of our seminar on this topic – <http://www.greenfoundationireland.ie/constitution-seminar-mar-2014-2/>

We also need Ireland to have a long-term legally binding commitment to meeting the Paris Agreement through a dedicated climate law as proposed by Friends of the Earth Ireland and many others (e.g. [the IIEA](#)). The existing Climate Action and Low-Carbon Development Act (2015) has no teeth. The Assembly is ideally placed to make an evaluation on the adequacy of the existing framework and the opportunity for additional legal safeguards to ensure that development decisions made over the next three decades are consistent with the objectives of the Paris Agreement.

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Agriculture

Ireland's agriculture sector must play its part and here Ireland has the opportunity to demonstrate how an agricultural economy can transition to a low-emitting food system in a socially just manner.

Resource Efficiency



Ireland has an opportunity to become a thought leader in resource efficiency. Like Scotland, with its highly acclaimed Zero Waste Scotland programme, Ireland is small and strong in community. The EPA led National Waste Prevention Programme is one of the first of its kind in Europe. However, resources dedicated to this area remain minimal, and a lack of true leadership from Government has prevented waste reduction and reuse from becoming more influential in our consumer society.

Ireland could become a leader in this area by making it mandatory to source a percentage reused/recycled goods through public procurement; developing a model that properly funds reuse per tonne goods reused to ensure it is prioritised ahead of recycling and waste-to-energy; and better support community reuse and recycling enterprises with a job scheme that reflects the needs of the sector.

To see our video of our Seminar on sustainable jobs and resource efficiency – <http://www.greenfoundationireland.ie/ecopro-seminar-november-2015-video/>

Renewable Energy



In order to reduce carbon emissions significantly, the world will need to move toward electricity systems dominated by renewables (e.g. sun, wind). Ireland and Northern Ireland have the highest percentage of variable renewables as part of a single synchronous system of any modern economy in the world, while meeting challenges like very high quality power demand from the tech industry.

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The lessons learned here will be extremely important for other larger power systems as they begin to attain the same levels of renewables. Ireland can go even further than this – the combination of variable renewables, demand side measures, interconnection to other markets and storage offers the potential for a fully renewable system. A relatively small power system and our particular industrial profile give Ireland the opportunity to explore the optimal mix and scale of generation and demand measures to achieve this.

However, adequate investment will be required in infrastructure, particularly in networks and smart metering, which is essential for the transition from consumer-based electricity usage to a prosumer (producer/consumer/storage) model. Networks will also need to be adapted to work in multiple directions (directing electricity flows both to and from consumers). Ireland must begin to optimise energy use across all fuel types and take advantage of our abundant natural resources, through aggressively electrification of heat and transport to address the fact that Ireland is not performing as well in decarbonising these areas.

The move to a smarter, more decentralised system should be accompanied by a national programme to articulate the long-term goals for the energy sector and to ensure that communities are placed at the centre of the renewable energy system. This should draw on the recommendations of the [National Economic and Social Council](#) and others. Furthermore, subsidies to fossil fuels should be phased out and a fair transition plan be developed for and with those who will be affected by the shift to renewable electricity, for instance those who are employed in peat extraction for electricity generation.

Education



This submission also calls for serious implementation of The National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) 2014-2020 which aims to ensure that education contributes to sustainable development by equipping learners with the relevant knowledge (the 'what'), the key dispositions and skills (the 'how') and the values (the 'why') that will motivate and empower them throughout their lives to become informed active citizens who take action for a more sustainable future. This objective emphasises the need for ESD to be an agent for positive change. ESD is therefore viewed as being proactive and transformational.

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The stated aims in the National Strategy for ESD will only begin to become dynamic and living aims when ESD is embedded within the curriculum across subjects at first and second level, so that our young students emerge from second level with the skills and knowledge to promote ESD within their lives and within the wider society. Sustainability can be considered to be a paradigm for thinking about a future in which environmental, societal, and economic considerations are balanced in the pursuit of development and improved quality of life.

To date more educated people tend to consume more of the earth's resources with consequent effects on more vulnerable groups. Re-orienting curriculums to address the need for more-sustainable production and consumption patterns and educating our students in ESD would also have the effect of students being aware of potential new ways of working and engaging in new careers related to ESD with consequent positive effects for all.

Ireland has already realised its ambition of becoming a knowledge based society driven by our membership of the EU – it is now time to engage our young people in becoming fluent in the language of ESD so that we can become leaders in being the change we wish to see happening in our precious world.

Transport



Ireland's population is projected to grow by up to 10 million people by 2050. It is essential that we plan for this growth in a way that simultaneously liberates people from the obligation to own a private car. This means long-term integrated planning of transport and housing in an integrated way. Public transport must be at the centre of all new housing development. The building stock should be designed to be carbon-neutral or carbon-negative.

We must be imaginative about increasing the density within our existing cities and about the means of delivering new housing, e.g. through co-operative and other not-for-profit models.

In all such long-term decisions, community buy-in is essential. The Citizens' Assembly can identify innovative suggestions on how to engage citizens in a more meaningful way in tackling the challenge of climate change.

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Ombudsman for Future Generations



We would like to see an Ombudsman for Future Generations – similar to the one in Wales – to have a long term vision and to make recommendations on plans and projects.

Thank You

We would like to take the opportunity to thank the Citizens' Assembly for their time in reading this and other submissions.

Green Foundation Ireland

30 July 2017