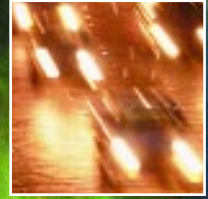
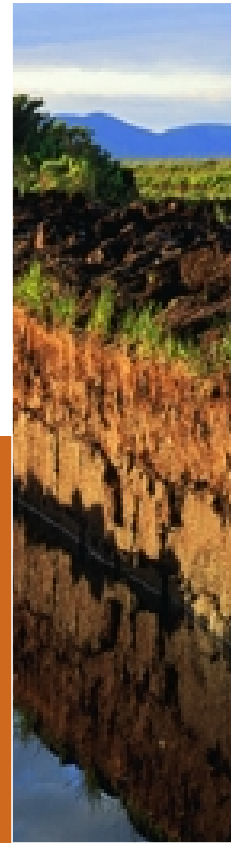
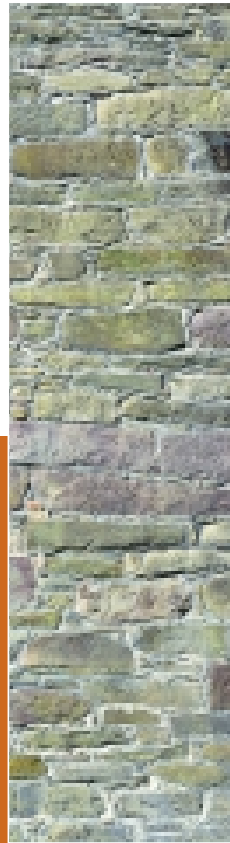
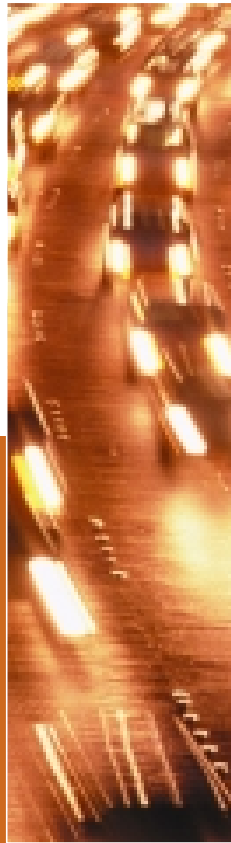
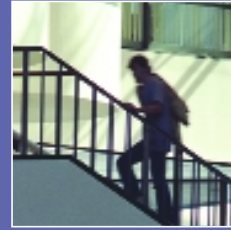


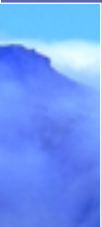


**COMHAR**  
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DEVELOPMENT  
PARTNERSHIP



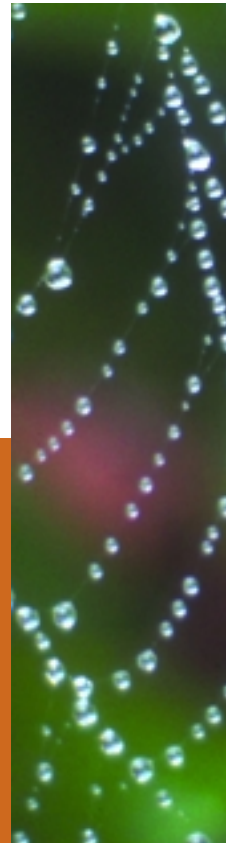
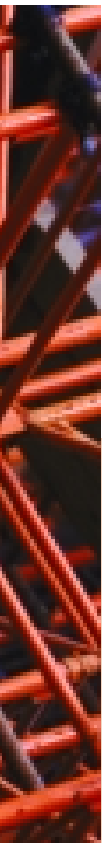
Annual Report 2001 Tuarascáil Bhliaintiúil





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## FOREWORD FROM CHAIRMAN, DR. JOHN BOWMAN



During its second year, *Comhar* believes that it has made a substantial contribution in advising policy-makers on issues of sustainable development. It has made recommendations on a diverse range of topics including:

- The preparatory process for the National Spatial Strategy;
- The draft Operational Programmes which will implement the National Development Plan, 2000-2006;
- Construction and demolition waste;
- Draft sustainable development indicators; and
- Revised draft guidelines on Local Agenda 21.

In addition to completing these particular work items, *Comhar* also embarked in December 2000 on defining and elaborating its own understanding of sustainable

development and considering how it might be made more widely known in Ireland. This decision followed a number of discussions in Plenary session around questions of definition and understanding of the concept, and how to make it more accessible to both policy-makers and the general public. This work continued into *Comhar's* third year, and we hope that it will make a significant contribution to the understanding and appreciation of sustainable development in Ireland.

Another area of work which commenced towards the end of the period under report, to be finalised early in our third year, related to climate change. Responding to a request from the Minister for the Environment and Local Government, *Comhar* addressed the important issue of communicating climate change, which had been highlighted in its earlier recommendations of December 1999 concerning the draft strategy. We were happy to return to this issue: the question of how best to communicate important messages is a recurring focus for *Comhar* in several areas of our work, and we are conscious of the need for clarity and accessibility of information.



Most of our work concerned national policy matters, as is appropriate for the National Sustainable Development Partnership. However, *Comhar* is mindful of the impact of international issues and developments on sustainability in Ireland. For this reason, we spent some time during the year considering issues for the EU's Sixth Environmental Action Programme, which was then in the preparatory, consultative stages. A special roundtable was held in May 2000, involving not only our own members but also representatives of our broader range of nominating bodies, to discuss this programme. This was a very useful exercise - including as it did the active participation of Mr. Alan Huyten of the European Commission - and we were able to take account of the views expressed in finalising our recommendations on the Programme, which were sent to the EU Commissioner for the Environment in October 2000.

Also in the international arena, *Comhar* was invited to participate in the National Councils for Sustainable Development Assessment of Progress on Agenda 21, which is being

co-ordinated by the Earth Council as part of the preparations for the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development. Following preparatory consideration and planning within Bureau during late 2000 and early 2001, this work is being undertaken mainly within *Comhar's* third year.

*Comhar* also continued to develop contacts with other organisations, including, during the period of this report, approaches to Dúchas, the Heritage Council and the National Economic and Social Council concerning relevant work issues. In addition to broadening the scope of our work, these contacts are important to ensure that we complement the activities of other organisations with mandates in similar or overlapping fields to our own.

I would like to acknowledge the support of the Minister for the Environment and Local Government and of his Department in assisting the work of *Comhar*; and the great courtesy and co-operation of the ENFO staff in St. Andrew Street where *Comhar's* secretariat is located. I would like to pay special thanks to the ENFO library staff who have been

unfailingly generous and courteous whenever called upon for expert advice.

I also wish to acknowledge the contribution of *Comhar's* secretariat staff at headquarters, Maureen Doyle, Marie Hughes and Ida Connolly for their support for the Chairman, Bureau, working groups and the wider membership. Finally, I wish to pay tribute to my fellow members of the *Comhar* partnership who have been so generous with their time and commitment to the work of *Comhar*.



**John Bowman**



## RÉAMHRÁ AN CHATHAOIRLIGH, AN DR. JOHN BOWMAN

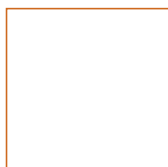
Creideann *Comhar* gur chuir sé go mór le comhairle a chur ar lucht déanta polasaithe maidir le ceisteanna forbartha inbhuanaithe i rith a dara bliain. Rinne sé moltaí ar raon leathan topaicí lena n-áirítear:

- An Próiseas ullmhúcháin don Straitéis Náisiúnta Spásúil;
- Na dréacht-Chláir Oibríochta, a chuirfidh an Plean Forbartha Náisiúnta, 2000-2006 i bhfeidhm;
- Dramhaíl tógála agus scartála;
- Dréacht-tháscairí forbartha inbhuanaithe; agus
- Dréacht-threoirlínte athbhreithnithe ar Chlár Oibre Áitiúil 21.

Chomh maith leis na míreanna oibre ar leith sin a thabhairt chun críche, thug *Comhar* i Mí na Nollag 2000 faoina thuiscint féin ar fhorbairt inbhuanaithe a shainmhíniú agus a mhionléiriú chomh maith lena mheas

mar a bhféadfaí eolas níos forleithne a bheith ar an bhforbairt sin in Éirinn. Tháinig an cinneadh seo tar éis roinnt pléite i Lánseisiún ar cheisteanna sainmhínte agus tuiscint a fháil ar an gcoincheap, agus mar is féidir é a dhéanamh níos inrochtaine do lucht déanta polasaithe agus don phobal i gcoitinne araon. Leanadh den obair sin i dtríú bliain *Chomhar*, agus tá súil againn go gcuirfidh sé go suntasach leis an tuiscint agus an léirtuiscint ar fhorbairt inbhuanaithe in Éirinn.

Bhain réimse eile oibre a thosaigh i dtreo dheireadh na tréimhse lena mbaineann an tuarascáil, obair atá le tabhairt chun críche inár dtríú bliain, le hathrú aeráide. Ag freagairt d'iaratas ón Aire Comhshaoil agus Rialtais Áitiúil, thug *Comhar* aghaidh ar an gceist thábhachtach maidir le heolas a scaipeadh ar athrú aeráide, rud a tugadh chun suntais ina mholtáil luaithe i Mí na Nollag 1999 i leith na dréacht-straitéise. Bhí áthas orainn fillleadh ar an gceist seo: is fócas féiltiúil do *Chomhar* i roinnt réimsí dár n-obair an cheist faoin mbealach is fearr le teachtaireachtaí tábhachtacha a chur trasna, agus tá a fhios againn go bhfuil an riachtanas ann do shoiléire agus inrochtaine eolais.



Bhain formhór ár gcuid oibre le hábhair polasaí náisiúnta, mar is cuí don Pháirtíocht Forbartha Inmharthana Náisiúnta. Tá *Comhar* ar an airdeall, áfach, faoin tionchar a bhíonn ag ceisteanna agus forbairtí idirnáisiúnta ar inbhuanaitheacht in Éirinn. Ar a shon sin, caitheamar roinnt ama i rith na bliana ag breithniú ceisteanna do Shéú Clár Gníomhaíochta Comhshaoil an Aontais Eorpaigh, a bhí an uair sin i staideanna ullmhúcháin, comhairleach. Tionóladh comhchomhairle speisialta i mBealtaine 2000, a raibh ár gcomhaltaí féin páirteach ann, ach chomh maith leis sin ionadaithe ó raon níos leithne comhlachtaí ainmniúcháin, leis an gclár seo a phlé. Is cleachtadh an-úsáideach a bhí ansin – lenar áiríodh rannpháirtíocht ghníomhach an Uasal Alan Huyten ó Choimisiún na hEorpa – agus bhí ar ár gcumas na tuairimí a léiríodh a chur san áireamh agus ár moltaí ar an gClár á thabhairt chun críche againn, a seoladh chuig Coimsinéir an Aontais Eorpaigh don Chomhshaoil i nDeireadh Fómhair 2000.

Sa réimse idirnáisiúnta chomh maith, tugadh cuireadh do *Chomhar* a bheith páirteach sna Comhairlí Náisiúnta

do Mheasúnú Forbartha Inbhuanaithe an Dul Chun Cinn ar Agenda 21, a chomhordaigh Comhairle an Domhain mar chuid dá ullmhúcháin do Chruinniú Mullaigh an Domhain ar Fhorbairt Inbhuanaithe 2002.

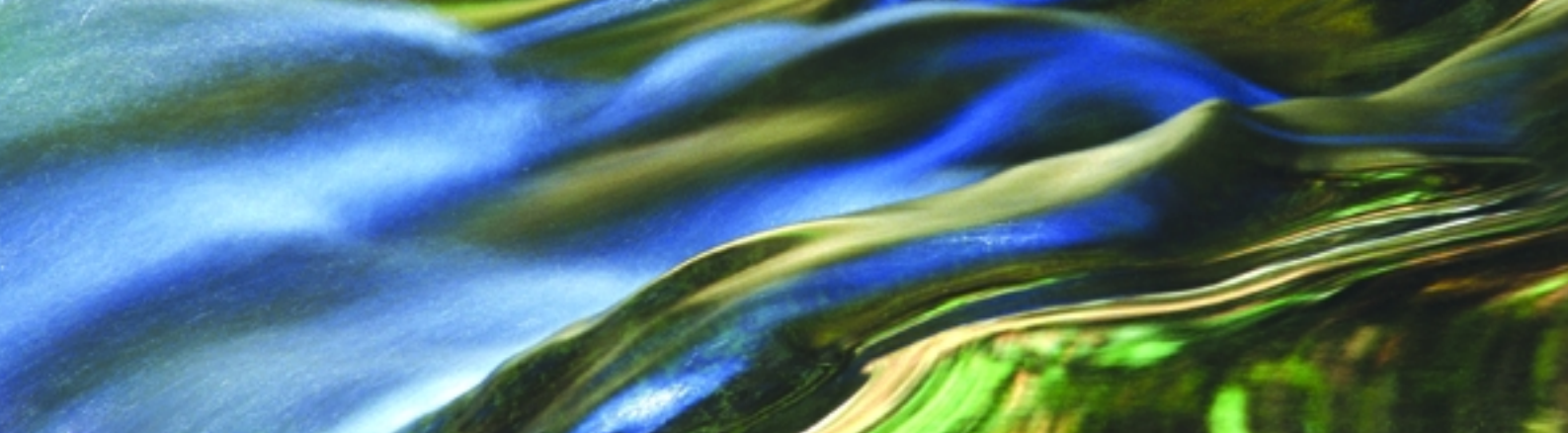
I ndiaidh bhreithniú agus phleanáil ullmhúcháin laistigh den Bhiúró i rith dheireadh 2000 agus thús 2001, tugadh faoin obair sin go príomha laistigh de thríú bliain *Chomhar*.

Lean *Comhar* de bheith ag forbairt teagmhálacha le heagraíochtaí eile, lena n-áirítear, i rith thréimhse na tuarascála seo, dul chun cainte le Dúchas, an Chomhairle Oidhreachta agus an Chomhairle Náisiúnta Geilleagair agus Sóisialta maidir le ceisteanna ábhartha oibre. Chomh maith le scóp ár n-oibre a leathnú, tá na teagmhálacha sin tábhachtach lena chinntiú go gcomhlánaímid gníomhaíochtaí eagraíochtaí eile le sainorduithe i réimsí atá comhchosúil nó ag forluí ar réimsí seo againn féin.

Ba mhaith liom aitheantas a thabhairt do thacaíocht an Aire Chomhshaoil agus Rialtais Áitiúil agus dá Roinn i gcabhrú le hobair *Chomhar*; agus do chúirtéis agus chomhoibriú mór fhoireann ENFO i Sráid San Aindrias

áit a bhfuil rúnaíocht *Chomhar* lonnaithe. Ba mhaith liom buíochas ar leith a ghlacadh le foireann leabharlaine ENFO a bhí flaithiúil agus cúirtéiseach gan teip aon uair ar iarramar comhairle saeolaí orthu.

Ba mhaith liom chomh maith buíochas a ghlacadh le hobair fhoireann rúnaíochta *Chomhar* ag an gceanncheathrú, is iad sin Maureen Doyle, Marie Hughes agus Ida Connolly as a dtacaíocht don Chathaoirleach, don Bhiúró, do ghrúpaí oibre agus don chomhaltacht fhorleathan. Ar deireadh, ba mhaith liom ómós a léiriú do mo chomhaltaí i gcomhpháirtíocht *Chomhar* a bhí chomh flaithiúil lena gcuid ama agus a dtiomantas i leith obair *Chomhar*.



# ANNUAL REPORT

## Introduction

*Comhar*, the National Sustainable Development Partnership was established in 1999 as the forum for national consultation and dialogue on all issues relating to sustainable development. It is also intended to assist in increasing participation and consultation on these matters. *Comhar's* full terms of reference are set out in Appendix 1.

*Comhar's* 25 members are drawn from five pillars or areas of society: the State sector, economic sectors, environmental NGOs, social/community NGOs and the professional/academic sector. The Chairman of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Environment and Local Government is an *ex officio* member of *Comhar*, which is chaired by Dr. John Bowman. The full list of members is given in Appendix 2.

The mission statement agreed by members in September 1999 states that *Comhar* "seeks to work in partnership to encourage sustainable development across Irish economy and society, and to advise Government on policies which support and promote sustainable development".

## Report on work

This annual report covers the period from March 2000 to February 2001, the second year of operation of *Comhar*. During this period, work progressed in a number of areas which are outlined in this report.

Four Plenary meetings were held in the course of the year, at which a range of issues were discussed and opinions and recommendations were finalised. Matters addressed by Plenary included proposals from the working groups; reports from *Comhar* representatives on the various Operational Programme Monitoring Committees; suggestions for new areas of work; and issues concerning *Comhar's* profile and its involvement with other organisations.

*Comhar's* Bureau continued to meet at intervals to assist the Chairman in the management of the Partnership. New representatives were nominated by two of the pillars in the autumn of 2000, with Sadhbh O'Neill taking over from Jeanne Meldon for pillar 3, and Máire Ní Chionna replacing Richard Moles for pillar 5.

The four working groups established in 1999 to address aspects of *Comhar's* three-year work programme (see Appendix 3) continued their work as summarised below.

### National Policy and Mechanisms Group

This group was established to address both policy consultation and advice, and also means and instruments to ensure better integration of environmental and sustainability considerations in economic sectors. It was envisaged that such instruments might be addressed in their own right, or in the context of particular policy proposals.

During the period under report, two main items of work were completed





by this working group. As the second year began, the group was considering transport issues arising from the National Development Plan and the draft Economic and Social Infrastructure Operational Programme, which was received for comment in early April 2000. An early draft paper from the group was submitted to Plenary that same month; following discussion, it was returned to the group for further work. This was carried out, and the matter was finalised in October 2000 with the agreement of Plenary.

Immediately following the conclusion of this work, the group examined a proposed set of headline indicators of sustainable development, on which *Comhar's* comments had been sought by the Department of the Environment and Local Government. A draft response was prepared by the group, and this was brought to Plenary in December 2000. As well as finalising and adopting the draft response, the Plenary also adopted a recommendation from the working group that *Comhar* should undertake further, medium-term work on the subject of indicators of sustainable

development. When the group met again in early 2001 to take this matter forward, however, it became aware that the work on progress indicators being undertaken by the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness was advancing rapidly. At the group's request, the Chairman wrote to his counterpart in the NESC, advising him of *Comhar's* work in this area and suggesting that there might be useful synergies in co-operation between the two bodies. A reply was awaited at the end of the period of this report.

In the meantime, the group began working on recommendations for communicating climate change, in response to a request received from the Minister for the Environment and Local Government. This work built on *Comhar's* previous recommendations for the draft Climate Change Strategy, which had also been initially prepared within the working group. At the end of the period covered by this report, the group was finalising a draft proposal in the matter for submission to the next Plenary session.

### **Spatial Planning Group**

This working group was established to examine a range of issues associated with spatial planning, such as sustainable settlements, planning and land use, agriculture and rural development, and coastal zone management. A medium-term focus of this work is to contribute to the development of the national spatial strategy, as proposed by Government.

During the year 2000 this working group was principally concerned with the forthcoming National Spatial Strategy (NSS), which is being formulated by the Spatial Planning Unit within the Department of the Environment and Local Government. The Strategy is required to address the need for balanced regional development and for development that is sustainable, and is expected to take two years to prepare.

The working group met through the year and additionally met with the Spatial Planning Unit on a number of occasions. In April 2000, it submitted to Plenary a draft response to the first consultation paper on the NSS, formulating the scope of the work



required. This was approved, and sent forward to the Department. Subsequently, over the course of the year, the group made a number of further comments on issues relating to the Strategy, generally in meetings with members of the Spatial Planning Unit (SPU). Towards the end of the year, at the suggestion of the group, the SPU was invited to make a presentation to *Comhar* Plenary on their work to date; this was done at the December 2000 Plenary. In early 2001, the group was preparing further input to Stage 3 of the NSS consultation process, to be completed early in the third year of operation.

### Waste Prevention and Management Group

In setting up this group, *Comhar* recognised the need for focus on the higher elements of the waste hierarchy, and in particular on options for waste prevention, minimisation, re-use and recycling. The development of case studies and best practice models, to illustrate principles or problems and help to promote more sustainable performance, was also acknowledged as an important issue for the group.

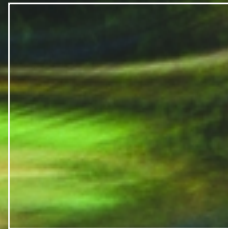
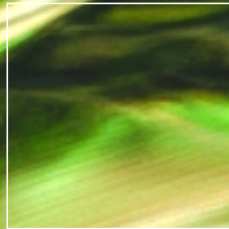
The working group began by scanning problem issues and expected actions in order to set its work priorities. As part of this consideration, copies of several regional waste management plans were obtained and discussed briefly. During the year, the group focused on two priority issues, namely, the proposed levy on plastic shopping bags, and controls on construction and demolition waste. In addition, other issues were dealt with in individual meetings.

In relation to the plastic bags levy, the waste group invited representatives of national supermarkets and an official of the Department of the Environment and Local Government to meet and discuss the issues and possible co-operation. The supermarket representatives explained their difficulties, especially the problem they saw if the levy was to also apply to the reusable bags which are now specially produced and sold in supermarkets. The working group agreed that this would defeat the purpose of levying one-way packaging and a formula for handling the problem was prepared. The group also suggested to the Department that

a cloth bag (carrying *Comhar* information and information on reuse and the government initiative) should be given free to every household in the country as part of the launch of the levy; the cost could later be recovered from the levy income.

In October 2000, at the group's request, Plenary agreed that the Chairman should write to the Minister of Finance, welcoming the proposed levy and urging that it should be introduced no later than 31st March 2001. It was also recommended that the levy should apply to plastic shopping bags only, with reusable, heavy plastic bags and cloth bags exempted to encourage their use; and that the environmental fund established from the proceeds should give preference to initiatives which encourage waste prevention, minimisation and reuse of products and packaging. The working group also wrote to the Minister for the Environment and Local Government, urging due consultation with all parties before commencement in order to overcome any potential difficulties, and suggesting the need





for a positive publicity campaign, to be prepared in a forum of all interested parties.

The second issue examined by the group was Construction and Demolition waste. Initially based on environment pillar concerns over the disposal of this waste, especially when used as wetland infill, the group examined the EPA Millennium report on this waste category and prepared extra data on their own initiative. They then met the EPA and the Department of the Environment and Local Government to discuss progress on creating better reuse/recycling opportunities, licensing of disposal and controlling unlicensed disposal. Based on these discussions, a paper was produced by the group for the October 2000 Plenary. A number of recommendations attached to this paper were adopted by the Plenary, and sent to the Minister for the Environment and Local Government, the Director-General of the EPA, and the Chairman of the Construction Industry Task Force on Recycling of C&D Waste.

### **Local Sustainability, Participation and Education Group**

This working group reflects the importance attached by *Comhar* to promoting local initiatives for sustainable development, and Local Agenda 21 in particular. It aims at providing guidance on pursuing sustainable development within reformed local government structures, Local Agenda 21 and other forms of community action for sustainability. Acknowledging the importance of broad public participation and involvement in these areas, it seeks to address means of securing more effective participation across communities and the general public. Education and information on sustainable development also come within the remit of this group.

In May 2000, at the invitation of the Foyle Basin Council, members of the group made a two-day visit to Northern Ireland. They met with the Northern Ireland Local Agenda 21 Advisory Group in Belfast to exchange information and briefly present their work. They then went on to Derry to

look at local projects, and also made contact with the Sustainable Northern Ireland Project (SNIP).

During the course of the year, the group considered a number of issues including sustainable communities and the new structures under the process of local government reform, in particular in relation to local participation in these structures. In November 2000, the group made a number of recommendations to the Minister for the Environment and Local Government concerning the Guidelines on Allocation of Funding to the Community and Voluntary Sector for Participation in the Local Social Partnership.

A major focus of the group's work in late 2000 was the revised draft guidelines on Local Agenda 21, prepared by the National Network of Local Agenda 21 officers, which were sent to *Comhar* by the Department of the Environment and Local Government for comment. The group drafted a response to these proposed guidelines, which was considered, and adopted, by the December Plenary.



## Work items concluded

During the period under view, *Comhar* agreed a number of recommendations and opinions, which were submitted to the relevant authorities as shown below.

### Initial comments on National Spatial Strategy Consultation Paper No. 1

Sent to the Department of the Environment and Local Government on 25 April 2000.

### Comments on draft Operational Programmes, 2000-2006

- 1 *Cross-cutting comments across OPs*
- 2 *Border, Midlands & Western Regional OP*
- 3 *Southern & Eastern Regional OP*
- 4 *Employment & Human Resources Development OP*

Sent to the Department of Finance; Department of the Environment and Local Government; Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment; Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development; Border, Midlands and Western Regional Assembly;

Southern & Eastern Regional Assembly, on 17 July 2000.

### Comments on the EU Sixth Environmental Action Programme

Sent to Commissioner Margot Wallstrom, DG-Environment, European Commission, and copied to the Ministers for Environment of each of the EU Member States, on 20 October 2000.

### Recommendations on Construction & Demolition Waste

Sent to the Minister for the Environment and Local Government, the Director-General of the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Chairman of the Industry Task Force on Recycling of C&D Waste, on 24 October 2000.

### Transport-related issues under the National Development Plan and the Economic and Social Infrastructure Operational Programme

Sent to the Minister for the Environment and Local Government, the Minister for Public Enterprise, the Border, Midlands & Western Regional

Assembly, the Southern & Eastern Regional Assembly, the Department of the Environment and Local Government, and the Department of Finance on 26 October 2000.

### Response to the Department of the Environment & Local Government's paper "Key Sustainable Development Indicators"

Sent to the Department of the Environment and Local Government on 20 December 2000.

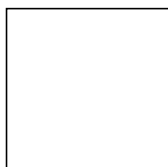
### Comments on the Revised Draft Guidelines for Local Agenda 21

Sent to the Department of the Environment and Local Government on 20 December 2000.

A summary of each of these recommendations is given below.

### Initial comments on National Spatial Strategy Consultation Paper No. 1

*Comhar* recommended that the Strategy should be based on, and underpinned by, clear principles, including:



- sustainable development.
- development, encompassing people and communities, rather than focusing on economic growth and competitiveness above all else.
- sustainable regional development driven by the needs of the regions, having regard to what is appropriate in each, rather than by a need to deal with over-spill from urban areas.
- ecological resources are a requirement for sustainable development into the future.

With regard to the key challenges identified in the consultation paper, *Comhar* proposed that a number of additional issues should be taken into account:

- The need to recognise issues relating to urban areas, including the role of communities, the need for integrated development, and the cultural, ecological, infrastructural, architectural resources of urban areas.

- Transport needs should be included, and community should be identified as the basis for the Strategy.
- Linkages should be made between people, skills and settlement strategy, with a focus on quality of life.
- Transport should be addressed from the perspective of development needs, not systems efficiency.
- Development which is appropriate for the regions themselves.

*Comhar* also recommended that environmental issues should be integrated into all areas, and that ecological networks should be the most important element, on which all else depends. An integrated environmental monitoring and reporting system for the country was needed, with all the different bodies involved in monitoring aspects of the environment.

*Comhar* recommended that implementation structures and mechanisms should be co-ordinated

and integrated with other policies and strategies. It also stressed the need for clarity on how, and by whom, the Spatial Strategy would finally be adopted.

*Comhar* concluded that the consultation process itself would be very important in creating “ownership” of the Strategy, and should be adequately resourced from an early stage in order to achieve ultimate acceptance of the Strategy. The Strategy should also be subject to a sustainability appraisal.

#### **Comments on draft Operational Programmes, 2000-2006**

Following on a commitment given by the Minister for Finance, drafts of the various Operational Programmes (OPs) were provided to *Comhar* between March and May 2000. In the relatively short time available, it was not possible to be as comprehensive in response as members of the Partnership would have wished. However, a number of important points, including strategic, cross-cutting issues, were identified.



In addition to providing specific comments on the two Regional Operational Programmes, and also on the Employment & Human Resources Development OP, *Comhar* laid particular emphasis on a number of crucial over-arching issues. These included:

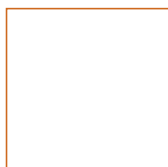
- Membership of OP Monitoring Committees (in particular the need for adequate representation of environmental interests (both NGOs and authorities). The fact that *Comhar* was to be included on all Monitoring Committees should not be regarded as substituting for environmental representation;
- The need to broaden the role and functions of the Monitoring Committees to allow for better evaluation of progress in meeting objectives and targets, as well as of the proper integration of policies within, and between, Programmes, and their integration with broader national policy;

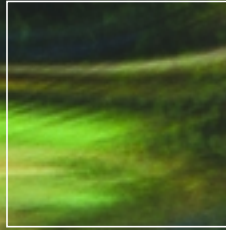
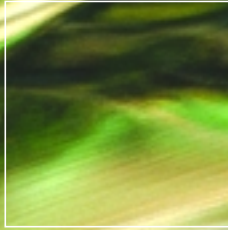
- The importance of setting out clear monitoring and evaluation criteria for the Monitoring Committees at the start of the process;
- The need for better eco-auditing of the programmes, in line with Government policy. Also, that such eco-auditing should take account not only of direct physical impacts, but also of more indirect consequences. *Comhar* noted that this latter point was a broader issue than could be addressed by any individual OP, but required attention in the arena of wider national policy, *inter alia*, through structural changes in the economy and society;
- The integration of the various policies proposed, particularly given the degree of overlap between the Programmes, and integration with areas of national policy such as the forthcoming National Greenhouse Gas Abatement Strategy and the National Spatial Strategy.

### Sustainable transport issues

*Comhar* addressed a broad range of transport related issues in the National Development Plan and the Economic and Social Infrastructure Operational Programme (ESIOP), recognising the impact of these initiatives for sustainable transport. It was concerned at the lack of integration of the NDP and OP proposals with other relevant policies, including the forthcoming National Spatial Strategy (and land-use planning in general) and the National Climate Change Strategy. It recommended that the preparation of the National Spatial Strategy should include delivering periodic findings which could be taken into account as the OP was implemented, with a corresponding onus on the Programme managers to adjust and amend project planning and implementation where necessary.

*Comhar* had concerns about the relative weighting given to various factors in carrying out strategic environmental assessment. It stressed the need for adequate weighting to be given to over-arching 'public good' issues, and also environmental issues,





and recommended that planning major transport infrastructure should always include strategic assessment of all factors, including transport demand, environmental pollution and CO<sub>2</sub> emission implications of road design and road transport programmes, as well as the economic considerations. As the Environmental Protection Agency was currently reviewing its guidelines on Environmental Impact Assessment, *Comhar* suggested that they consider setting out minimum requirements for consideration of alternative routes.

In regard to decisions on motorway/dual carriageway standards, *Comhar* recommended that the implications for environmental impacts and sustainability issues be seriously examined and re-assessed, including the needs of public transport and the greenhouse gas emissions from increased road traffic. Demand management (including mobility plans and land use/location strategies) could be an important factor in addressing increasing traffic volumes and their associated emissions and other impacts. Given the major, and growing, contribution of the transport

sector in increased greenhouse gas emissions, *Comhar* recommended that an appropriate research project be initiated at an early stage, to provide information on projected emissions and to model the likely impact of specific proposals.

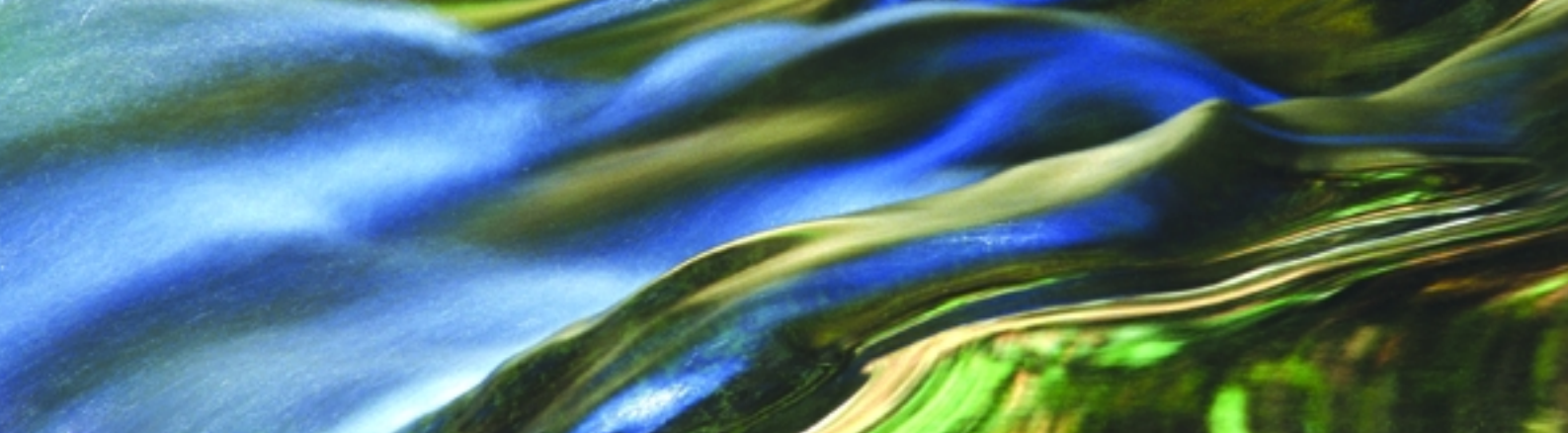
*Comhar* strongly recommended that all new roads projects, and also major improvements of existing roads, should assess the needs of cyclists and pedestrians and make provision for both cycle lanes and footpaths, where appropriate.

*Comhar* welcomed the increased investment in public transport proposed under the National Development Plan. However, it felt that additional funding should be made available for public transport, for the benefit of both the roads programme objectives and the National Climate Change Strategy. Public transport was an important component of sustainable settlement strategy, to serve mobility needs and provide an alternative to individual car transport. Investment in public transport under the OP should be expedited, and any additional money

which might become available through reallocation or savings should be used for public transport. *Comhar* noted the extent of the challenge to encourage people, through incentives, education and awareness measures, to change back to public transport, as well as the need to improve awareness of the impacts of private transport.

*Comhar* also recommended that more should be done in terms of improving road based public transport. It was concerned that the proposed motorway programme could have a potential negative effect on public transport, e.g. by hindering accessibility, affecting routing of services, reducing passenger access points, etc. Proactive measures were needed to improve public transport in this regard.

While *Comhar* welcomed the commitment to develop and build on local pilot projects for public transport services in rural areas, it considered the provision for this purpose was grossly inadequate. Public transport in rural areas needed to be significantly improved, both in respect of bus and



rail services and their integration with each other. At present, rural public transport cannot be depended upon, with the result that private transport becomes the most reliable mode for travelling; this leads to increased road traffic. Apart from the implications of widening commuter belts, public transport in rural areas is becoming increasingly important as more farmers travel to the economic centres for other work to supplement their farm income, and to facilitate tourism. Particular account should be taken of the needs of the mobility-impaired and the elderly who currently have no access to transport.

Policy development in the field of sustainable transport needs to be supported by an appropriate programme of research. The OP should make provision for financial support for appropriate research on sustainable transport, and should also include a budget for R&D innovation in areas such as technical vehicle improvements, alternative fuels, etc. Measures should be included to create a market for new technologies, such as electric cars. Other supportive measures could include tax reform and more favourable pricing for cleaner fuels.

Finally, *Comhar* stated its belief that there was a need for an overall debate on sustainable transport investment. In its submission on the draft National Greenhouse Gas Abatement Strategy (December 1999), it had recommended a fundamental revisiting of transportation goals, emphasising that a sustainable transport policy needs to take account of issues including greenhouse gas abatement, land use planning, and provision and design of road infrastructure. Longer term issues of affecting behaviour and influencing car dependency also need to be considered.

### Comments on the EU Sixth Environmental Action Programme

*Comhar* held a roundtable in Dublin on 24 May 2000 to discuss future directions for EU environment and sustainable development policy. The roundtable, which involved the members of *Comhar* as well as representatives of its full nominating panels, was designed to contribute to the consultation process leading towards the preparation of the EU's 6th Environment Action Programme. Mr. Alan Huyten of the European

Commission's Directorate-General for Environment attended the roundtable to present the Commission's thinking and participate in the discussion. The roundtable provided a useful opportunity to participate in informing future EU policy, which will have implications for Irish policy.

Amongst other comments agreed following consideration of the outcome of the roundtable, *Comhar* pointed out the need to give attention to the integration of the Programme with the forthcoming EU Sustainable Development Strategy. It recommended that the Programme's overarching objectives should focus on sustainable development and the quality of life, and address the need to decouple economic activity and environmental degradation. There should be a clear focus on environmental issues, including key areas such as water, waste, greenhouse gas emissions, and biodiversity.

The need for better integration across EU policies was highlighted, as was the importance of better communication of the Programme and its objectives to all sectors of the





economy and society. Recommended instruments for implementing the Programme included tax reform, and a greater integration of environmental priorities into the fiscal system and EU funding mechanisms; more emphasis on strategic environmental impact assessment (SEA); integration with research programmes; and giving effect to the provisions of the Aarhus Convention.

Greater participation by citizens and communities was seen as crucial. Education and awareness would be major factors in this, together with access to decision-making. The identification and encouragement of all stakeholders – including governments, commercial sectors, and individual consumers – was also seen as important.

### Recommendations on Construction & Demolition Waste

Comhar adopted the following recommendations:

- The EPA recommendations on better information and on recovery targets should be adopted;
- The Department of the Environment and Local Government should issue a circular letter to local authorities to provide guidance on this type of waste and the EPA/local authority role from licensing and permitting to monitoring and enforcement;
- An information leaflet should be produced on legislation covering this waste, where permission is to be sought and who controls same, for both the general public and the industry;
- A leaflet should be drafted on categories and types of building waste, options of reuse and recycling in the State and contact addresses. This should be aimed at both the home improvement DIY sector and smaller building firms;
- A seminar should be held by the EPA for the building trade and local authorities to clarify why licences/permits are needed, how best to streamline the system and pending EU law on construction waste;
- Training courses should be provided for specific target groups, including hauliers and digger/bulldozer drivers, to explain legislation and, in fieldtrips, to show operators at-risk habitats and key species.

### Response to the Department of the Environment & Local Government's paper "Key Sustainable Development Indicators"

Comhar's specific response to the Department's draft document on key headline indicators primarily addressed the immediate proposals for a headline set of indicators of sustainable development, and including comments on their presentation and communication, together with the need for further work. However, the Partnership also decided to undertake further work on indicators in the medium-term, taking account of other ongoing work so as to avoid duplication, with the intention of preparing a more detailed set of sustainable development indicators and the possibility of making recommendations for a better set of headline indicators arising from that work.



*Comhar* believed that the purpose of the proposed set of headline indicators was two-fold - to measure progress towards sustainable development, and to highlight issues and objectives so as to increase general understanding. As the proposed indicators document was to be aimed at the general public, *Comhar* recommended that its presentation should make clear to the intended audience what is involved. A graphic/pictorial form should be used, showing trends over time where possible, accompanied by a short and clear commentary to not only explain the indicator chosen, and the implications of the trend, but also indicate the linkages between various indicators and with policy objectives. A summary table should be included to clearly show these linkages.

*Comhar* recommended that steps be taken to fill important gaps in data for the longer-term development and refinement of suitable/necessary indicators. Where data was available, attention needed to be paid to the choice of what was included in

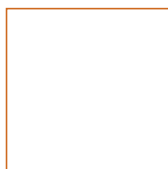
measuring the indicator, so that it illustrated progress on sustainable development. Available data also needed to be connected in order to provide indicators.

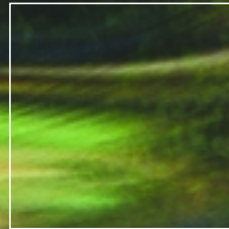
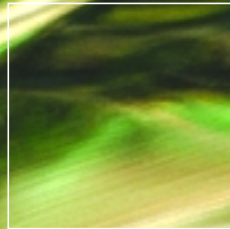
*Comhar* recognised the need for the development of longer term work in relation to indicators, in particular to give more details for policy makers. It noted that one opportunity which might be taken in this regard was the project on national progress indicators being undertaken by the National and Economic Social Council under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness. Other areas for further work related to disaggregation of indicators in respect of different groups within society, to highlight problems not shown by averaged or higher-scale indicators, and developing local versions of the national indicators, on an appropriate participative basis, to increase their relevance to the public. There should also be further development of green national accounting, following on from the Pilot Environmental Accounts published in 1999.

*Comhar* recommended that the initial indicators chosen should be reviewed after a period of three years, both for their continued relevance and to see whether they need to be refined, added to, or even replaced.

The indicators should not be divided into the three headings of economy, society and environment, as this did not give a proper picture of the complex inter-linkages which are a feature of sustainable development. However, there was a need for balance between these three areas.

*Comhar* recommended that the Department reformat the indicators into a table to help to illustrate the linkages between and across indicators and with policy objectives and specific targets, and to enhance their presentation and understanding. For the record, it provided the areas/amendments it had considered in regard to the Department's proposed set of headline indicators, and asked that they be taken into consideration in future work on further developing sustainable development indicators.





Finally, *Comhar* recommended that the Department should consider using radio and television as a means of communicating and disseminating the indicators. This might include an annual programme – perhaps including a debate – which would highlight the trends in the indicators, their implications, the extent to which progress was being made towards sustainable development, and the links with behavioural change.

### Comments on the Revised Draft Guidelines for Local Agenda 21

*Comhar* welcomed the opportunity to respond to these draft guidelines. Their publication was opportune, as the current process of local government reform aimed to achieve the type of community participation necessary for the Local Agenda 21 process. The draft guidelines were a welcome step forward towards Local Agenda 21, particularly as they recognised the importance of linking in to the new local government structures. They also highlighted the fact that Local Agenda 21 was much more than a purely environmental initiative, particularly in relation to addressing social exclusion and

the importance of community participation. The importance of making Local Agenda 21 part of the culture of local government was also highlighted, as was the need for resourcing the process of Local Agenda 21 within local government.

*Comhar* recommended that, to achieve the objectives of local sustainable development, Local Agenda 21 must become a corporate approach within each local authority rather than a list of projects and initiatives. It must be based on meaningful participation and partnership, applying to all aspects of local government such as housing/ accommodation and planning as well as environment.

While acknowledging the work done to date by Local Agenda 21 officers, *Comhar* felt that the process of Local Agenda 21 required more meaningful resourcing. This required not only commitment from the most senior levels but also at least one fulltime high-level member of staff responsible for driving the process, supported by a Local Agenda 21 Unit within each local authority, made up of members

from each section. In particular, it recommended that the office of the Director of Community and Enterprise, the Social Inclusion Unit (when such existed in all local authorities) and the social inclusion/anti-poverty cluster of the Community Fora should be represented on this unit.

*Comhar* also noted that resources needed to be made available to social partners outside of the local authority to enable them to participate fully, in particular those sectors of the community with least access to resources. It felt there was a lack of sufficient focus on certain aspects of Local Agenda 21, especially the building of proper participation and addressing social exclusion. In addition to suggesting textual changes to the draft guidelines, *Comhar* made a number of general points and recommendations:

- It welcomed the fact that some groups were being invited to comment on the draft guidelines, and also the acknowledgement of the role to date of the community and voluntary sector, various NGOs and others in implementing



Local Agenda 21 type initiatives; It was important that the role of these in drafting guidelines, especially at a local level, be acknowledged and facilitated;

- The guidelines should be made more specific, especially in areas where EU or national legislation had laid down obligations;
- *Comhar* acknowledged the important role of the Strategic Policy Committees in implementing Local Agenda 21 but felt that the process should be proactive in promoting participation and should involve other groups where appropriate (e.g. Community Platforms);
- The Community and Voluntary sector have a vital role in briefing both the Community and Enterprise Development officers and Local Agenda 21 officers on their views of sustainable development and of the guidelines, and these officers should actively seek inputs and advice from the community sector;
- The addressing of social exclusion and poverty is a major aspect of Local Agenda

21, but this was not adequately reflected/understood in the guidelines. Participation must be in all aspects of development that communities see as of concern to them, not those that the local authority decides are relevant;

- The recognition of the need for local authority staff to obtain training was most welcome; this should include training in participative methods of working, and how to build participation amongst socially excluded communities;
- Further analysis should be carried out on such issues as community participation in identifying, implementing and monitoring and evaluating projects as examples of good practice.

Finally, *Comhar* stressed that true participation involved the community engaging in joint analysis and decision-making and participating in all aspects of projects including identification, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. It also required the community having access to

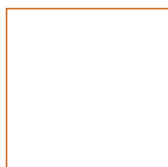
independent resources to allow it to develop its own agenda and policies, with particular attention to ensuring the equal participation of disadvantaged communities. *Comhar* recommended that local authorities, as part of the Local Agenda 21 process, develop and adopt a code of practice on supporting real and effective participation by the community sector.

#### Other work carried out

Arising from a proposal put to Plenary in April 2000, it was agreed that an ad hoc group of members of *Comhar* would meet with *Dúchas* to discuss a number of issues relating to habitat and species protection, in particular,

- the continued loss of important wetlands – e.g. to illegal infill, or as a result of legally exempted agricultural drainage schemes;
- the operation of an appeals process under which areas included in the Natura 2000 Habitat Directive list could be removed from the list; and
- damage to SPAs and other protected priority habitat areas.

This meeting was held in May 2000, and a report was made to the Plenary



in June 2000. Following on the information obtained at the meeting, it was decided by Plenary not to take any further action in the matter at that time.

### New work areas started

Over the course of the year, discussion continued within *Comhar* on issues relating to the definition and understanding of sustainable development in Ireland. Having been raised at a number of Plenaries, including in the context of discussing the draft Earth Charter, it was decided at the October 2000 Plenary that a special workshop for members would be held in early December to try to arrive at an agreed definition which *Comhar* might promote in Ireland. The outcome of this workshop was agreement that, rather than a single definition, *Comhar* should work instead on preparing a set of sustainable development principles which would be applicable to Ireland. The Secretariat was instructed to draw up an initial draft set of headings, for consideration at the first Plenary in 2001. This represented a major new area of work for *Comhar's* third year of operation, which will draw together experience and developments over the

term of office. It was also expected that this work would feed into a number of other areas to be examined during the third year.

Amongst these related areas was the start of preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, to be held in South Africa in autumn 2002. *Comhar* was invited by the Earth Council to participate in an Assessment of Progress on Agenda 21 to be undertaken by National Councils for Sustainable Development. Following agreement by *Comhar's* Bureau, work in this regard began in early 2001, and continued into the third year of *Comhar's* term.

### Appointments/nominations to other bodies

#### Operational Programme Monitoring Committees

During the year, *Comhar* was invited to nominate members for appointment to the Monitoring Committee of each of the Operational Programmes, as well as to the Environment Co-ordinating Committee. The table overleaf shows the representatives appointed to each committee.

### Nominations to Fisheries Boards

In March 2000, *Comhar* was advised that the Minister for the Marine and Natural Resources had prescribed it under the Fisheries Acts for the purposes of nominating candidates for appointment as members of a regional fisheries board. *Comhar* was invited to provide the names of two candidates for each of the seven regional boards. Although it was not possible within the very short time available to make nominations in respect of all of the fisheries boards, nominations were made to the Department of the Marine and Natural Resources in respect of three boards on 14 April 2000. One of *Comhar's* nominees was subsequently appointed by the Minister.

### Conferences attended by members

Members of *Comhar* attended a number of international conferences and seminars during the period under report; these were useful both for the information obtained and contacts made, including contact with similar bodies in other countries. The conferences at which *Comhar* was represented were:



COMMITTEE	COMHAR REPRESENTATIVE
National Development Plan/ Community Support Framework	<i>Jeanne Meldon</i>
Southern & Eastern Regional OP	<i>Philip Geoghegan</i>
Border, Midlands & Western Regional OP	<i>Seán Regan</i>
Economic & Social Infrastructure OP	<i>Sadhbh O'Neill</i>
Employment & Human Resources Development OP	<i>Josephine Henry</i>
Productive Sector OP	<i>Terence O'Donnell</i>
CAP Rural Development Plan	<i>Karin Dubsy</i>
Peace OP for Northern Ireland and the Border Region	<i>John Bowman</i>
Environment Co-ordinating Committee	<i>Jeanne Meldon</i>

Development Strategies" held in Stockholm on 23 February 2001.

In addition to these international contacts, members of *Comhar* attended a number of seminars and conferences in Ireland during the year, as follows:

- The Third Western European Roundtable of National Councils for Sustainable Development, held in Brussels from 6-7 April 2000, which was jointly organised by the Earth Council and the Stockholm Environmental Institute with support from the European Commission's DG-Environment;
- The 8th Annual Conference of the Network of European Environmental Advisory Councils (EEAC), held in Sesimbra,

Portugal from 2-3 June 2000. The topic of the conference was "The Coastal Zones Sustainable Development policies in Europe";

- The European Forum for Sustainable Development, held in Arc-et-Senans, France, from 30 June-1 July 2000, jointly organised by the European Environment Bureau and France Nature Environnement; and
- The EEAC conference, "Greening Sustainable

- The Tipperary Rural and Business Development Institute's conference "Local Agenda 21 - Developing a framework for successful participation" in March 2000 was attended by three members of the Local Sustainability working group;
- The Regional Studies Association conference "Building the Framework for Development: The National Spatial Strategy" in April 2000 was attended by three members of the Spatial Planning working group;
- Four members of the Waste Prevention and Management working group attended the Irish-Danish conference "Waste Management & Renewable Energy", in Dublin in October 2000. This conference was also chaired by Dr. John Bowman, in his capacity as Chairman of *Comhar*;





Mr Declan Burns, member of Comhar, presenting their special award to Sarah Fitzgerald, Sarah Rose Murphy and Maria Deasy



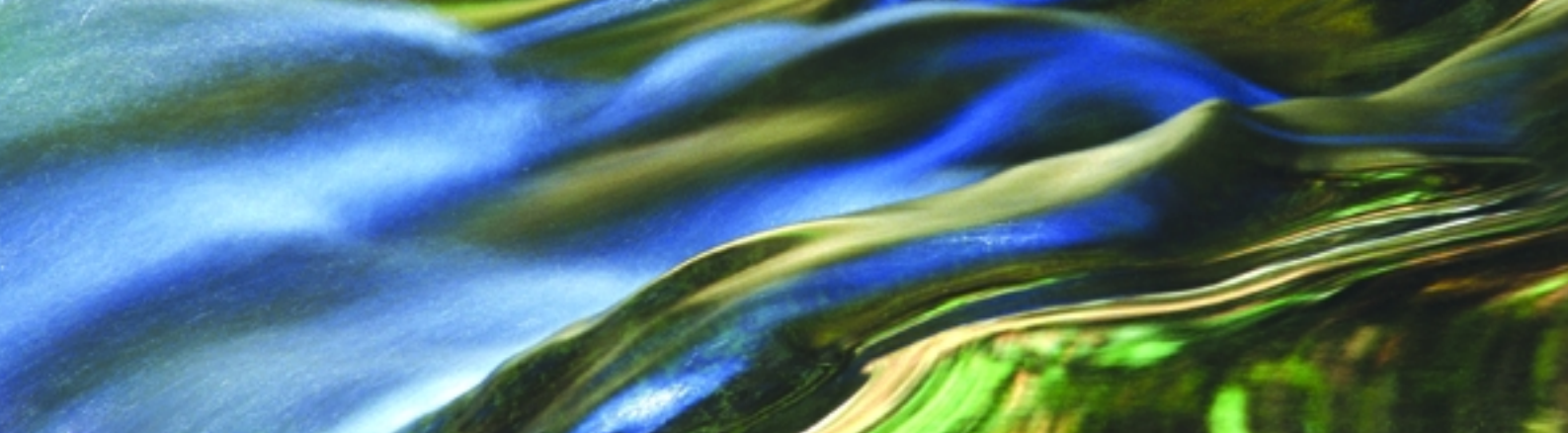
Mr Declan Burns, member of Comhar, presenting the special award to Sonia Buckley

- One member attended the Regional Assembly Conference, "The National Development Plan and Regionalisation in Ireland", in Waterford in October 2000;
- Four members attended a workshop on local indicators organised by the Natural Resources Development Centre of Trinity College Dublin in February 2001; this was part of the NRDC's input to the SEMPA project (Suburban Environmental Management: A Participatory Approach) sponsored by Fingal County Council.

### Young Scientists & Technology Exhibition

Comhar sponsors a number of special awards in the Young Scientists and Technology Exhibition each year, for projects which best demonstrate sustainable development. This sponsorship, which began in January 2000, is intended both to raise awareness of Comhar and its mandate, and also to encourage greater interest and involvement by young students in sustainable development issues. The award winners in the 2001 Exhibition were:

Sonia Buckley, Crescent College Comprehensive, Dooradoyle, Limerick, for her project "Solar Energy - A Useful Alternative" and Sarah Fitzgerald, Sarah Rose Murphy and Maria Deasy, Coláiste Choilm, Cork, for their project "Biodiversity in Hedgerows".



## APPENDIX 1

### Comhar's Terms of Reference

(1) The Terms of Reference of the National Sustainable Development Partnership are to advance the national agenda for sustainable development, to evaluate progress in this regard, to assist in devising suitable mechanisms and advising on their implementation, and to contribute to the formation of a national consensus in these regards.

The Partnership will:

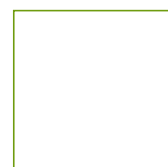
- (A) Have a specific focus on: Consideration of policy proposals and issues relating to the environment and sustainable development, and advice to Government on them;
- Researching and making recommendations, tailored to national conditions, on specific approaches to, or instruments for, environmental management and protection,

employment creation in the environmental sector, environmental performance in economic sectors;

- Reviewing the implementation in Ireland of Agenda 21 and the other Rio Agreements, and contributing to annual national reports to the UN Commission on Sustainable Development;
- Reviewing/responding to national data on environmental quality trends;
- Recommending mechanisms for greater integration of environmental and sustainable development considerations into the development and implementation of all Government policies;
- Promoting information exchange, dialogue and consultation on environmental policy and sustainable development among the social partners and non-governmental organisations;
- Advising on means of raising public awareness of

sustainable development and environmental issues, and encouraging positive behaviour at individual, community and sectoral levels.

- (B) Examine and make recommendations on other issues related to environment and sustainable development.
  - (C) Review and monitor the implementation of the Partnership's recommendations and if necessary make further recommendations; and
  - (D) Examine and report on relevant matters referred to it by the Minister for the Environment and Local Government or any other Minister.
- (2) The Partnership may consider sustainable development issues on its own initiative or at the request of a Minister of the Government.
- (3) The Partnership will work in three year cycles and will inform Government, through the Minister for the Environment and Local





Government, of its programme of work within three months of the beginning of each cycle.

- (4) In drawing up its work programme, the Partnership will take account of the role and functions of other bodies in areas related to sustainable development (environmental, social and economic) such as the NESC, the NESF, the EPA and the Heritage Council to ensure complementarity.
- (5) The Partnership may be invited/designated by the Minister for the Environment and Local Government to attend relevant international fora, including the UN Commission on Sustainable Development.
- (6) The Partnership may invite Ministers, Public Officials, Members of the Partnership, and outside experts to make presentations and to assist the Partnership in its work. It may also constitute appropriate subsidiary, consultative fora to assist in its work.
- (7) The Partnership will publish and submit all its reports (which

shall include annual reports on progress) to the Minister for the Environment and Local Government, who shall bring them to Government; to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Environment and Local Government; and to such Government Departments and bodies as may be appropriate.

- (8) The Partnership will be drawn from five broad pillars:
  - State/public sector;
  - economic sectors;
  - environmental NGOs;
  - social/community NGOs;
  - professional/academic sector.
- (9) Bodies designated by the Minister for the Environment and Local Government under these five pillars shall nominate candidates for the Partnership, and the Minister shall appoint no less than three of the nominees from each pillar to the Partnership.
- (10) The Partnership will have an independent Chairperson appointed by the Minister for the Environment and Local Government. The Chairperson's term of office shall be five years, and may be extended by the Minister.

- (11) The term of office of members will be three years during which term members may nominate alternates. Casual vacancies will be filled by the Minister for the Environment and Local Government from among the original nominees within the relevant pillar and members so appointed shall hold office until the expiry of the current term of office of all members. The size of the membership may be varied by the Minister for the Environment and Local Government on the approval of the Government.
- (12) The Chairperson of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Environment and Local Government shall be an ex-officio member of the Partnership.
- (13) The Partnership is under the aegis of the Department of the Environment and Local Government and is funded through a Grant from that Department. This Grant is part of the overall estimate for the Department of the Environment and Local Government.



## APPENDIX 2

### Membership of Comhar

**Chairman:** Dr. John Bowman

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**Ex-officio member:** Mr. Jackie Healy-Rae, Chairman,  
Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Environment  
and Local Government

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#### PILLAR 1

<b>Name</b>	<b>Representing</b>
Mr. Declan Burns	Environmental Protection Agency
Dr. Paddy Fitzmaurice	Central Fisheries Board
Mr. Joe Gavin	County & City Managers' Association
Mr. Joe O'Gorman	Irish Assembly of Regional Authorities
Ms. Geraldine Tallon	Department of the Environment & Local Government/Green Network of Government Departments

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#### PILLAR 2

<b>Name</b>	<b>Representing</b>
Mr. Des Cummins	Small Firms Association
Mr. Jim Devlin	Irish Farmers' Association
Dr. Mary Kelly	Irish Business & Employers' Confederation
Mr. Brendan Leahy	Irish Tourist Industry Confederation
Mr. Terence O'Donnell	Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers' Association
Mr. Fergus Whelan	Irish Congress of Trade Unions

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### PILLAR 3

Name	Representing
Ms. Karin Dubsky	Irish Coalition for Sustainability/NIEDO, Earthwatch, Coastwatch, Global Action Plan, Irish Wildlife Trust, VOICE, Birdwatch Ireland
Mr. Philip Geoghegan	An Taisce
Ms. Jeanne Meldon	Irish Uplands Forum
Ms. Gráinne O’Leary	ECO (The Irish Environmental Conservation Organisation for Youth)
Ms. Sadhbh O’Neill	Irish Coalition for Sustainability/NIEDO, Earthwatch, Coastwatch, Global Action Plan, Irish Wildlife Trust, VOICE, Birdwatch Ireland
Ms. Jennifer Wann	Irish Women’s Environmental Network

### PILLAR 4

Name	Representing
Dr. Anne Clune	National Women’s Council of Ireland
Ms. Josephine Henry	National Youth Council of Ireland
Ms. Liz O’Brien	PLANET (Partnerships for Local Action Network)
Mr. Seán Regan	Community Platform, CORI, National Association of Tenants’ Organisations, Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed, Community Workers’ Co-operative, ACRA
Ms. Bernie Walsh	Community Platform, CORI, National Association of Tenants’ Organisations, Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed, Community Workers’ Co-operative, ACRA

### PILLAR 5

Name	Representing
Mr. T. Kieran Kennedy	Royal Town Planning Institute
Dr. Richard Moles	Environmental Sciences Association of Ireland, Universities Research Group on the Environment
Ms. Máire Ní Chionna	Institution of Engineers of Ireland



## APPENDIX 3

### Work Programme, 1999-2002

#### Introduction

*Comhar*, the National Sustainable Development Partnership, was formally established on 26 February 1999. Its terms of reference are, in brief, to advance the national agenda for sustainable development, to evaluate progress in this regard, to assist in devising suitable mechanisms and advising on their implementation, and to contribute to the formation of a national consensus in these regards.

These terms of reference provide a very broad scope for *Comhar's* work programme. Within them, *Comhar* has an independent brief to design its own agenda. It may also be asked by the Minister for the Environment and Local Government, or by any other Minister, to examine and report on relevant matters.

In defining its work programme, *Comhar* considers that the following criteria are particularly relevant:

- adding value to existing work;
- assessing the policy relevance of issues, with a view to positioning itself at the developmental end of policy;
- avoiding duplication of work being carried out by other bodies; and
- using its unique nature and the strength of its broad representation to come to informed and balanced perspectives and recommendations.

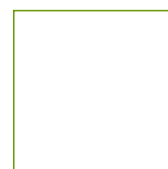
Under its terms of reference, *Comhar* will work in three-year cycles. This work programme accordingly outlines, in broad terms, the main areas in which *Comhar* will concentrate its contributions over the period from 1999 to 2002. While seeking to be reasonably comprehensive in this regard, *Comhar* recognises the need for more focused definition in respect of the broader topics. Members also

consider it important to retain a degree of flexibility in the work programme, to allow for adjustment, if necessary, in the light of experience or to take account of new issues arising over the three-year period.

In delivering on its work programme, *Comhar* will give careful consideration to the most appropriate vehicles to disseminate its message. In this regard, its work and products may take a number of forms, as appropriate to particular issues, including:

- advice to Ministers, to specific sectors, or to the general public;
- opinions on critical issues in relation to the environment and sustainable development;
- recommendations on policy development;
- research and preparation of reports; and
- sponsorships or other means to raise awareness.

*Comhar* will publish all its reports, opinions, and other products, using



a range of relevant means for their dissemination, including electronic media. It will also submit its reports to the Minister for the Environment and Local Government, for appropriate referral to Government, to the Oireachtas Committee on the Environment and Local Government, and to relevant Government Departments and other bodies.

### Major work areas

*Comhar* has identified four major work areas, comprising clusters of related issues as set out below, as requiring examination in its initial work programme. Working groups are now being established to begin the task of addressing these major areas. A first step for the groups will be to develop more detailed terms of reference in each area, to define and guide the work and establish more specific timetables and targets for each issue. The groups will also consider, inter alia, what sustainability means for the various issues, and the sectors or groups which they wish to address.

### National policy and mechanisms/instruments

*Comhar's* remit concerns not only policy consultation and advice, but also means and instruments which may be used to implement policy and in particular to ensure better integration of environmental and sustainability considerations in economic sectors. Initially, *Comhar* will offer advice on the sustainable development profile of the new National Development Plan. In relation to mechanisms and instruments to promote and pursue sustainability, options which may be examined by *Comhar* over the period of the work programme include:

- environmental management;
- eco-labelling;
- environmental taxation;
- voluntary agreements;
- regulation;
- sustainability proofing/eco-auditing of policies;
- green procurement;

- indicators; and
- effective communication strategies.

### Spatial planning

*Comhar* recognises that spatial planning is critically related to the pursuit of sustainable development, and has decided to establish a working group to examine a range of associated issues. These may include, for example, sustainable settlements, planning and land use, agriculture and rural development, and coastal zone management. The ESRI, in its report to Government on "National Investment Priorities for the Period 2000-2006" (March 1999) recommended the preparation of a long-term strategic physical planning framework for Ireland, incorporating a settlement strategy and an assessment of development needs in the future. The Government has decided in principle to develop a national spatial planning policy. It is anticipated that contributing to the development of this policy will be a medium-term focus for *Comhar*.



### Waste prevention and management

Comhar recognises that modernising waste performance is a key national policy objective. This is a very broad area, and research, recommendations or other inputs by Comhar will be informed by the waste hierarchy, prioritising prevention, minimisation, reuse and recycling and options for disposal. Comhar is aware that substantial work is underway by local authorities to complete the preparation and formal adoption of Waste Management Plans under the Waste Management Act, 1996. It has identified a need for focus on the higher elements of the hierarchy, and in particular on options for waste prevention, minimisation, reuse and recycling, but may also address options for waste disposal. There is a particular need for education and awareness raising in these regards. Comhar also considers that case studies and best practice models, which may illustrate principles or problems and help to promote more sustainable performance, should be developed.

### Local sustainability/public participation and education

Sustainable development considerations are relevant at all levels of government and society, and must also involve communities and individuals. Guidance on the pursuit of sustainable development within reformed Local Government structures, issues relating to Local Agenda 21 and other forms of community action for sustainability will be encompassed by this working group. Comhar recognises the importance of broad public participation and involvement in these regards, and will address means of securing more effective participation across communities and the general public. Identifying and disseminating models of good practice may be a focus of work in this regard. Education and information on sustainable development will also be addressed within the remit of this group.

### Ongoing work

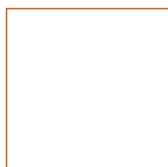
Comhar recognises that a number of ongoing and recurring issues arise from its terms of reference, including:

- monitoring overall progress under the National Sustainable Development Strategy, and progress towards sustainable development in general (having regard to the remit of other bodies working in this area, notably the Sub-Committee on Sustainable Development of the Oireachtas Committee on Environment and Local Government);
- reviewing the implementation of Agenda 21 and the other Rio agreements; and
- generally reviewing relevant policy proposals and developments as they arise.

Comhar will maintain an overview of these issues, and make appropriate provision to address these tasks on an ongoing basis, using a variety of suitable means.

### Awareness raising

To some extent, Comhar's mandate in relation to general awareness raising will be met in the course of delivering on its key objectives. In publishing



its conclusions, opinions, reports, and recommendations, for example, *Comhar* will:

- raise awareness of environment and sustainable development issues in general;
- reinforce the value of pursuing sustainable development policies and provide influential and representative guidance for economic sectors and the general public; and
- seek to build consensus around best practice models for better environmental and sustainable development performance.

*Comhar* will undertake specific awareness-raising actions from time to time as part of its work programme. In this regard, *Comhar* has decided in principle to provide some sponsorship in areas where this could highlight sustainable development concerns and draw attention to its agenda and implementation.

### Other issues

Alongside major work areas, individual members also have the option of

proposing/developing initiatives on particular areas of interest, which will then be submitted to the wider membership for consideration. Such initiatives could facilitate *Comhar* input to a range of issues, some of which may require short-term attention, or may subsequently be further developed within the work programme.

### Areas which the Minister asked *Comhar* to examine

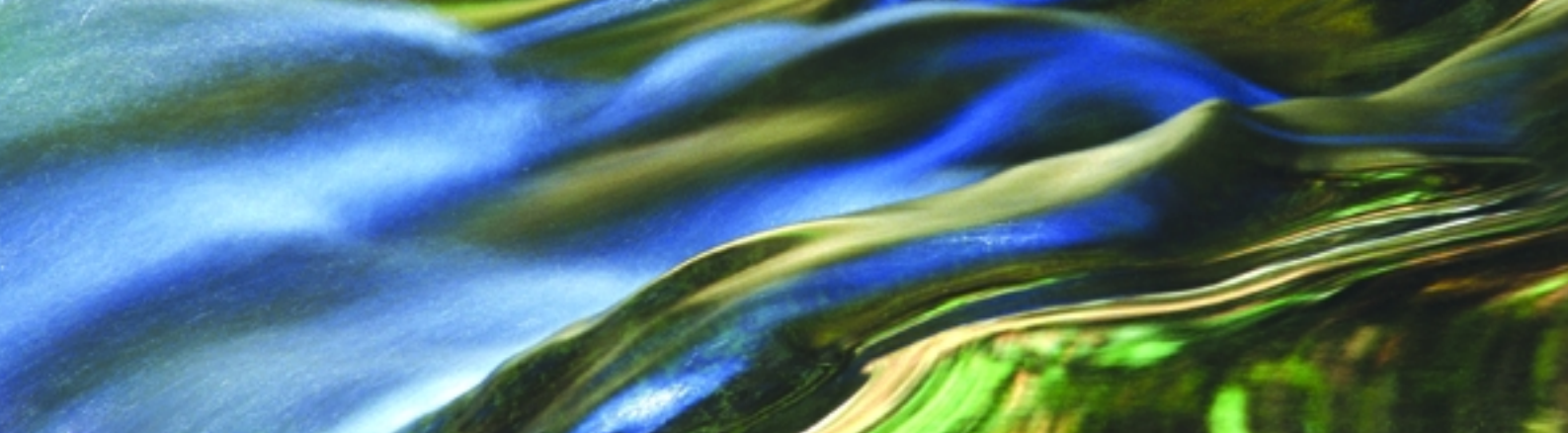
The Minister for the Environment and Local Government asked *Comhar* to consider three issues in preparing its work programme:

- how best to influence behaviour across the economy and society to support Ireland's international commitments on climate change, including limiting growth in greenhouse gas emissions;
- to inform Ireland's input to this year's Community-wide assessment of EU environment and sustainable development policy; and

- to identify and develop good practice models and instruments which will promote environmentally sustainable behaviour.

### Climate change

Climate change abatement policies will have a continuing relevance across *Comhar's* work programme, impacting on and influencing a broad range of sectoral and cross-sectoral issues. Climate change will therefore be taken into account across the work programme and by all the working groups already referred to. A National Greenhouse Gas Abatement Strategy is currently being prepared, with a view to meeting Ireland's commitments under the Kyoto Protocol to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. *Comhar* will now give consideration to appropriate advice and recommendations on economic and social behaviour in support of progressive action to limit and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.



### Review of EU policy on the environment and sustainable development

*Comhar* notes the importance of the current review of EU policy on the environment and sustainable development, which is due to be completed by the end of 1999 and to lead to a new policy programme for the period 2000-2005. It notes that the European Commission is preparing a communication for Council, containing a global assessment of performance under the Fifth Environment Action Programme, by summer 1999. *Comhar* will encourage public and stakeholder consultation on the new communication during autumn 1999, as well as making its own contribution to the debate.

### Good practice models and instruments to influence behaviour

Work in these regards will be substantially addressed by the working groups already referred to. In relation to models of good practice, *Comhar* recognises the value of identifying and disseminating such examples

to encourage practical action for sustainability. Given that good practice models may be found across a range of issues and sectors, it is intended to pursue this throughout the work programme, including the areas of local sustainability, waste prevention and management, and sustainable planning/land use issues.

### Contribution to international policy and review

*Comhar's* input to the current review of EU policy on the environment and sustainable development has already been referred to above.

### Contribution to national reports to the UN Commission on Sustainable Development

The Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) is tasked by the UN with furthering and monitoring the global implementation of Agenda 21. As part of its work, specific topics are designated for review at each of its annual meetings. The over-arching issues for the period to 2002 are poverty and sustainable consumption and production. Sectoral and cross-sectoral themes to be examined in

2000 are integrated planning and management of land resources; financial resources/trade and investment/economic growth; and agriculture. In 2001, the themes will be atmosphere; energy; transport; and information for decision-making and participation.

National reports are prepared annually, on the basis of questionnaires issued by the CSD, and are submitted in late autumn for the following year's meeting. The Department of the Environment and Local Government will provide draft reports to *Comhar* in good time, seeking its opinions/recommendations on the content.

### OECD environmental performance review of Ireland

The Environment Directorate of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) implements a programme of environmental performance reviews, whereby member countries submit themselves for peer review of their environmental policies and performance. A commitment was





given in the National Sustainable Development Strategy (1997) that Ireland would seek review under this programme.

The review will be carried out during 1999, with a preliminary visit during the summer, and the main review in the autumn. *Comhar* welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this major review, and to work with and advise the OECD as appropriate.

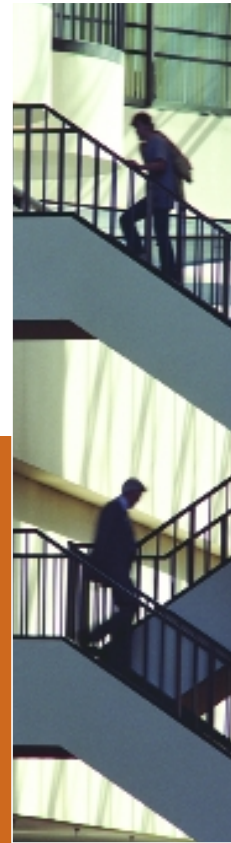
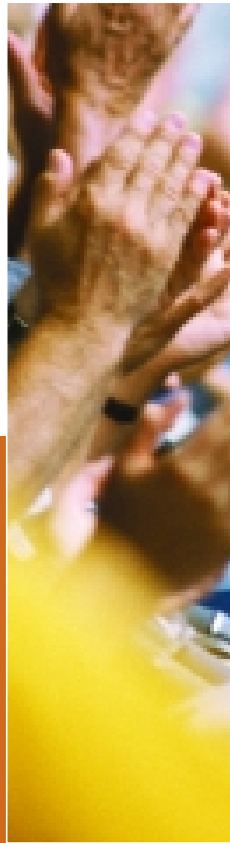
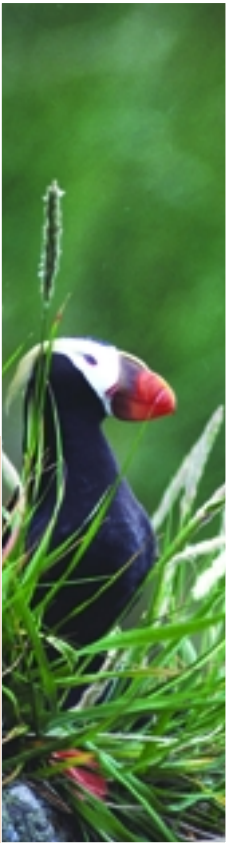
## Review

This three-year work programme will be reviewed at the end of 1999, which is an introductory year. *Comhar* has established a Bureau, whose tasks include monitoring and guiding the overall work programme between Plenary sessions.

## Annual report

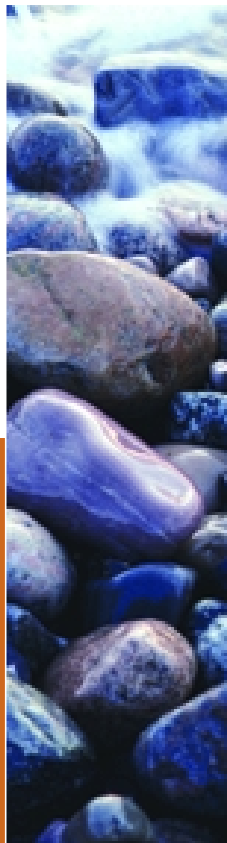
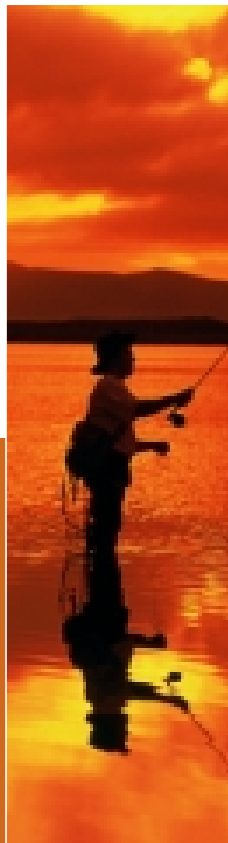
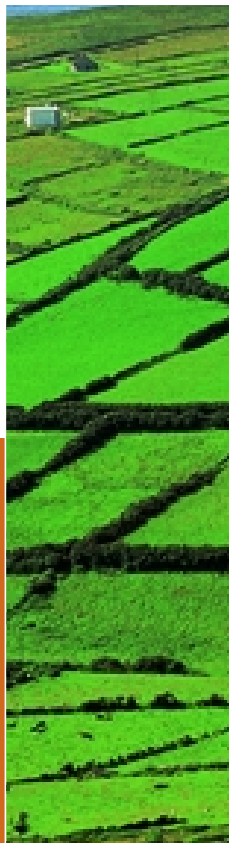
*Comhar* is required to report annually on its progress and activities. Its work will therefore include the preparation and publication of an annual report, which will, inter alia, include an update on the work programme.

25th May 1999





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**FORBARTHA**  
INMHARTHANA  
NÁISIÚNTA



17 St. Andrew Street,  
Dublin 2, Ireland.

Telephone: 01 888 3990

Email: [comhar@environ.irlgov.ie](mailto:comhar@environ.irlgov.ie)



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