

# **Collaboration on Climate and Biodiversity: Shared Island as a Catalyst for Renewed Ambition & Action**

## COUNCIL REPORT

No.156 October 2021



An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Eacnamaíoch agus Shóisialta  
National Economic & Social Council

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No.156 October 2021

This report from the Council is part of a wider body of work undertaken on a Shared Island for the Department of the Taoiseach.

An Oifig Náisiúnta um Fhorbairt Eacnamaíoch agus Shóisialta  
National Economic & Social Development Office NESDO

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# Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	v
<b>Executive Summary</b>	vi
<b>Chapter 1</b>	
<b>Climate and Biodiversity: A Shared Challenge</b>	1
1.1    Introduction	2
1.2    Rationale for All-Island Cooperation	3
1.3    Core Argument in this Report	3
1.4    Overview of the Consultation Process Underpinning the Report	4
1.5    Report Structure	5
<b>Chapter 2</b>	
<b>Climate, Biodiversity &amp; Integration: Towards a Shared Ambition</b>	6
2.1    Introduction	7
2.2    Ambition on Climate Action	7
2.3    Ambition on Biodiversity	9
2.4    Ambition for an Integrated and Holistic Approach	10
2.5    Ambition on the Circular and Bio-Economy	12
2.6    Conclusions	13
<b>Chapter 3</b>	
<b>Networks, Projects and Engagement Shared Experiences</b>	14
3.1    Introduction	15
3.2    Formal and Informal Collaborations	15
3.3    Collaborating on Water Quality	19
3.4    Research Networks	20
3.5    Societal Engagement, Participation and Communication	23
3.6    Conclusion	24
<b>Chapter 4</b>	
<b>Six Areas of Shared Opportunity</b>	25
4.1    Introduction	26
4.2    Circular and Bioeconomy	26
4.3    Environmental Regulation and Standards	27
4.4    Marine Resources	28
4.5    Renewable Energy	30
4.6    Sustainable Agriculture	31
4.7    Valuing Nature	32
4.8    Conclusions	33

## **Chapter 5**

<b>Strengthening Climate and Biodiversity Collaboration: Council Proposals for Shared Action</b>	<b>34</b>
5.1 Introduction	35
5.2 Build on the Consultation Process	35
5.3 Develop and Deepen the Shared Ambition: Expression of Common Purpose	36
5.4 Enhance Shared Experiences: Networks and Strategic Working Groups	37
5.5 Advance Shared Opportunities: Priority Areas	38
5.6 Conclusion	40

## **List of Figures**

Figure: 1: Source of Submissions	5
Figure 2: Local Authorities who are Partners to the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan	16
Figure A.1: Prioritised Areas for Further Consideration	45

## **List of Tables**

Table A.1: Summary of Suggested Actions Arising from the Consultation	46
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## **List of Boxes**

Box 1: The Belfast Climate Commission	8
Box 2: Example; The All-Ireland Pollinator Plan.	16
Box 3: Examples of Collaboration	18
Box 4: Ireland-Scotland Joint Bilateral Review	19
Box 5: Learning from Water Quality Cooperation	20
Box 6: Research Network Examples	22
Box 7: Valuing Nature Examples	33

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This involvement of all these individuals and organisations has contributed to a fuller and more detailed understanding of the substantive environmental challenges facing this island. It has also brought into view the elements and processes needed to bring about a shared approach to common problems, and the levels of action required to deliver solutions.

The Council is particularly grateful to voluntary organisations, individuals and students for their time and effort in taking part, and in particular acknowledges the multiple submissions made by DCU postgraduate students, encouraged by Dr Diarmuid Torney. The Council would also like to acknowledge the contributions provided by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), and Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), Shirley Clerkin, Heritage Officer in Monaghan County Council and the North West Regional Development Group. Thanks also to the Irish Environmental Network and Northern Ireland Environment Link, Professor Michael Morris and colleagues from the AMBER research centre, Professor John Barry, QUB and members of the All Island Climate and Biodiversity Research Network.

The Council is also grateful to Caitriona Mullen for expertly organising the Green Transformation in the North West focus group, which informed this work.

Finally, the Council would like to thank the Shared Island Unit at the Department of the Taoiseach for their support with this work.

# Executive Summary

## **Climate change and biodiversity loss are integrated, urgent challenges we share on this island**

There is a determination, urgency and clarity on the climate and biodiversity emergencies facing the world and an increasing understanding of their interconnectedness. Climate change and biodiversity loss are global issues that are indifferent to geographical boundaries: they require cooperation among countries to address them effectively. The land, waters, air and nature supported by this island are shared and cannot be protected fully without cooperation and coordination.

Forming part of a wider body of work on a Shared Island for the Department of the Taoiseach, this report by the National Economic and Social Council examines the particular challenges and opportunities of climate change and biodiversity loss across the island.

This is a timely initiative, and it is the first time these important issues have been considered from a shared island perspective by the Council.

## **Consultation highlights an appetite for collaboration on climate and biodiversity**

In this report, the Council examines the question: to what extent does scope exist to strengthen cooperation and collaboration across the island, and specifically the potential for tangible actions on climate and biodiversity?

The starting point was an extensive consultation and research process. This included 64 submissions and 38 interviews, with people from a range of organisations and different areas of expertise, across the island. It also involved an overview of the policy and legislative context in Ireland and Northern Ireland, as well as in the UK and EU.

This report summarises the challenges faced by both jurisdictions on the island and outlines experiences and networks that are working, on an all-island basis, on climate and biodiversity issues. The consultation provided an extensive list of opportunities, suggestions and recommendations that sets a rich agenda for future collaborative work.

## **There is very significant scope to strengthen cooperation and collaboration**

The Council has identified a strong, shared ambition and vision to act on an all-island basis. There is a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities; and of the need to accept that strengthening cooperation takes time and requires public engagement and participation.

There is also a deep, shared experience that provides a solid foundation to deliver on this ambition. The Council recognises the importance of the Good Friday Agreement institutions and organisations, already working on an all-island basis. There are, in the view of the Council, many opportunities that can energise and increase collaboration in a range of areas.

## **A shared and inspiring vision and statement of common purpose is needed**

To take these opportunities forward, the Council would welcome the development of a shared and inspiring vision for integrated climate and biodiversity action across the island, through a joint statement of common purpose.

Such a statement could be enhanced using creative approaches to encourage communities across the island to develop stories of the sustainable, environmentally protected futures we could all enjoy. In particular, the Council believes that it is important to explore how to provide young people with avenues to contribute and engage on climate and biodiversity on an all-island basis.

A joint statement could outline the shared climate and biodiversity challenges and ambition, and include a commitment to work collaboratively across sectors and communities. Topics such as mitigation, adaptation and restoration, including both land and sea could be addressed. The preparation and reflection on such a statement of common purpose could help inform and progress the Irish Government's commitment, in the Programme for Government, to develop an all-island strategy on climate and biodiversity.

There may well be a role for the institutions and bodies established under the Good Friday Agreement – including the North South Ministerial Council – in this vision-setting process and articulation of common goals in relation to tackling climate breakdown and the biodiversity crisis.

#### **There is a need to support and foster ties between formal and informal structures**

Further attention should be given to developing and supporting collaborative ways of working on environmental challenges. The Council values the current work of partnerships and networks in sharing good practice, and working to align efforts to mitigate against climate change, and protect nature.

The Council recommends the creation of a distinct funding stream for mapping and exploring the work of existing environmental networks across all sectors in Ireland and Northern Ireland. It also recommends a structured engagement between the Environment Sector of the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) and civil society groups on a periodic basis.

Mission-oriented research to address specific all-island climate and biodiversity challenges could capture public imagination and provide evidence-based solutions. The Council supports the All-Island Climate and Biodiversity Research Network, and the introduction of new funding opportunities, such as the North-South Research Programme. The Council also sees value in the development of a series of all-island conferences on key themes, to include in the first instance: circular economy and bioeconomy; renewable energy; marine conservation and adaptation; and water quality and management.

#### **Strategic working groups should be established in five areas to explore opportunities for mutual benefit**

Strategic working groups could provide a focus and setting for collaborative, forward-looking discussion and formulation of advice on shared opportunities in key areas. These would include representatives from academia, relevant government departments, business and NGOs. A number of strategic working groups are suggested:

##### **i) Sustainable Agriculture: Expanding Shared Areas of Interest**

A group could explore a common vision for nature-based and climate-friendly farming, listening to and visioning with farmers in both jurisdictions. This could include a focus on particular measures such as Farming for Nature, peatland restoration and drainage.

##### **ii) All-Island Opportunities from a Circular Economy and Bio-economy**

Given economies of scale and to gain competitive advantage, an all-island approach should be explored. Specific areas include all-island producer responsibility initiatives; an all-island waste strategy; and opportunities in the bioeconomy.

##### **iii) Collaborations on Renewable Energy**

The future of renewable energy development on land and at sea is a significant area of opportunity for north-south cooperation and collaboration.

This working group could explore areas such as solar, anaerobic digestion (AD), off-shore wind, wave and tidal, building cooperation, sharing expertise and seeking solutions. There is also scope to re-visit an all-island approach to research, investment and governance.

iv) ***Valuing Networks for Nature***

There is scope to build on the achievements of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan and develop further discussion on nature recovery networks and the role of a wildlife web.

The focus of a strategic working group could include consideration of the potential for hedgerow corridors, and a ‘necklace of peatlands’.

v) ***Marine and Coastal Climate Adaptation and Impact***

This Group would look at strengthening cooperation, sharing knowledge and practice in relation to the marine and coastal impacts of, and adaptation to, climate change.

The focus of the working group could include: flood water management, coastal erosion and the impacts of a rise in sea-levels.

The Council recommends that consideration be given, as part of the Government’s Shared Island initiative, and in appropriate consultation with the Northern Ireland Executive, to how these strategic working groups could most productively be established and operate.

**An ambition to do more can be achieved, by working in partnership on common climate, biodiversity and sustainable development goals**

The report illustrates the opportunities that exist to develop a sustainable island. It highlights the networks that can help ensure the island thrives and prospers in a post-pandemic and post-Brexit context, while also addressing environmental challenges and meeting our nationally- and internationally-agreed commitments.

## Chapter 1

### **Climate and Biodiversity: A Shared Challenge**

*'Given our shared geography and climate, both Ireland and Northern Ireland face similar challenges in relation to environmental protection and, in particular, climate mitigation, adaptation and protection of biodiversity'.<sup>1</sup>*

## 1.1 Introduction

The realities of climate change and biodiversity loss are increasingly evident. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report has set out in stark terms how climate change is widespread, rapid and intensifying (IPCC, 2021). The Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Service (IPBES) reports that nature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history — and the rate of species extinctions is accelerating, with grave impacts on people around the world now likely (UN IPBES, 2019).

For the island of Ireland, north and south, coastal erosion, sea level rise and flooding will be some of the most noticeable and disrupting factors in terms of everyday life, as well as the potential for storm surges. Recent evidence points to the rising sea levels in Ireland, along with increased ocean temperatures and acidity (Cámaro García & Dwyer, 2021). Large storms such as Storms Ophelia (2017) and Lorenzo (2019) highlight the fragility of Ireland's coastline and its vulnerability to significant erosion, flooding and damage (CCAC, 2021).<sup>2</sup>

Both Ireland and Northern Ireland have national and international commitments to the Paris Agreement, Agenda 2030 and the targets set in the UN Convention on Biological Diversity for 2030 and beyond.<sup>3</sup> The transition to net zero and the Nationally Determined Contributions of the Paris Agreement are expected to be pushed further, for all countries, at the COP 26, to be held in Scotland in late 2021. The UK, as the convenor of COP 26, and along with the EU, is likely to be a significant actor in helping to progress efforts on climate mitigation around the world, and COP will provide opportunities for collaboration. Another significant framework is the UN's 2030 Agenda, based on achieving the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which can also represent a basis for a shared focus for sustainable development on the island of Ireland.<sup>4</sup> The UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is significant for both countries and a key meeting began in October (COP15) which will set out a new global biodiversity framework.<sup>5</sup>

The intention to bring down emissions and protect nature is evident in both countries. It is likely to be further intensified through both Irish and EU efforts, and those of Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK.

The success or failure to address the challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss falls to both international and national action by governments, public authorities, business and civil society. Reflecting – through partnership, sharing of good practice, and collaboration – on common problems has the potential to increase and deepen progress.

The island of Ireland should be a place where this type of creative collective action can occur. This report considers the degree to which there is common ground – in the form of shared ambitions; experiences and networks; and opportunities – that could form the basis for a more collaborative approach to climate and biodiversity action across the island.

This report is a significant development in the National Economic and Social Council's substantive consideration of climate change and broader sustainable development.<sup>6</sup> It is the first time these important issues have been considered from a shared island perspective, bringing both Ireland and Northern Ireland's experience, policies and perspectives jointly into light.

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<sup>1</sup> Submission from the EPA.

<sup>2</sup> While there is a National Adaptation Strategy (DCCAE, 2018), Ireland does not yet have a coherent coastal adaptation policy, with responsibility for protecting our coastline spread across departments, local government and agencies. Northern Ireland's second Climate Change Adaptation Programme (NICCAP2) covers the period 2019-2024 (DAERA, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> See Convention on Biological Diversity, <https://www.cbd.int/meetings/COP-15>, accessed 09.2.21.

<sup>4</sup> The UN SDGs provide a 'shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future' (UN, 2015). The SDGs are unique in that they provide a platform for considering public policy within the context of multiple pillars – the environment, economy, and society – together, underpinned by a partnership approach to policy implementation (Doyle, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> See Convention on Biological Diversity, <https://www.cbd.int/meetings/COP-15>, accessed 09.2.21.

<sup>6</sup> In 2011, at a request from Government, the NESI Secretariat began work on climate change and in the decade since, the challenges and opportunities of shifting to a low carbon society have been central to the work of the Council.

## 1.2 Rationale for All-Island Cooperation

Now, more than ever, there is a determination, urgency and clarity around the climate and biodiversity emergencies facing the world, and an increasing understanding of their interconnectedness. It is, therefore, timely that the Council would provide an insight into how these common environmental challenges and opportunities can be progressed across the island.

The rationale for considering environmental issues from a geographical perspective and collaboratively is convincing. Climate change and biodiversity loss are global challenges and require cooperation among countries to address them effectively. For a small island, a defining characteristic of the collective climate and biodiversity crisis is its indifference to geographical boundaries. The land, waters, air and nature that this island supports are shared, and cannot be protected fully without cooperation and coordination.

The Irish Programme for Government, *Our Shared Future* (June 2020), notes the potential to explore an all-island approach to environmental issues such as climate breakdown and the biodiversity crisis (Government of Ireland, 2020). Co-operation between Ireland and Northern Ireland on these issues is already evident, however, the potential for future environmental divergence remains a concern. Ireland and Northern Ireland may focus on different approaches to address these challenges. Ireland's membership of the EU will continue to influence environmental policy and regulation.

The environmental regulatory and policy context in Northern Ireland is complex and still unfolding (Gravey & Whitten, 2021). The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), which is an executive agency within the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), remains responsible for environmental regulation post-Brexit. More developments will follow once the UK Environment Bill 2019-20 (still under Parliamentary scrutiny) is brought into law. This extends to Northern Ireland (NI) in respect of principles, governance and a range of other sectors. Under the EU-UK Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland, a number of key environmental product/technical standards – introduced when the UK was part of the EU – continue to apply (Cave & Allen, 2020). The current development of strategies, and the prospect of a new oversight body in 2022, should bring an energised focus to climate and biodiversity policy in Northern Ireland.

## 1.3 Core Argument in this Report

Ultimately, each jurisdiction will need to bring about its own environmental results. However, the core argument in this report is that the challenge of protecting our natural assets and reducing polluting emissions lends itself to integrated and collaborative solutions.

*First*, the report demonstrates that there is a strong, shared ambition and vision to act on an all-island basis. The context is one of urgency and concern that, without environmental progress, the island faces the risk of further biodiversity loss and additional impacts of global warming. While not specific to the environment, civil society and business groups have been vocal across both jurisdictions on the need for a new and comprehensive all-island approach (e.g. Ibec-CBI Northern Ireland Joint Business Council, 2019).

*Second*, the report shows that there is a deep, shared experience which offers a solid foundation to deliver on this ambition. It illustrates that cooperation between Ireland and Northern Ireland to address these environmental challenges has already been operating at many different levels.

Environmental protection is underpinned by the formal structures, implementation bodies and areas of cooperation already in place. The Good Friday Agreement identifies the area of environment, and specifically environmental protection, pollution, water quality and waste management, as a potential area for North South cooperation and implementation. Cooperation in this area is taken forward through the North South Ministerial Council, with a current work programme which focuses on environmental research and reporting, environmental protection and sustainable development, water and wastewater management, waste management in a cross-border context, and EU funding for

environmental initiatives.<sup>7</sup> North South Implementation bodies such as Waterways Ireland and the Loughs Agency have delivered all-island approaches to protection and pollution in their areas of responsibility (MHC, 201). The work of the British-Irish Council (BIC) on the Environment including climate adaptation is another formalised forum for further collaboration on an East-West basis. In addition, multiple connections, networks and collaborations have been developed between local authorities, NGOs, businesses, civil society and in the research communities North and South.

Third, the report identifies opportunities that can energise and increase collaboration in a range of areas including circular and bioeconomy, aligning regulations and standards, marine resources, renewable energy, sustainable farming and valuing nature.

Finally, the report highlights specific ways that cooperation and collaboration can be strengthened and improved, which in turn can support tangible actions and solutions for mutual benefit across the island.

## 1.4 Overview of the Consultation Process Underpinning the Report

A NESC Secretariat consultation paper, *Climate and Biodiversity: Challenges and Opportunities*, published in February 2021, outlined key policies and developments, in some detail, in both jurisdictions (Moore, 2021). It noted the severity and urgency of the problems across Ireland and Northern Ireland. It detailed areas of potential development including biodiversity, climate, renewable energy, rural resilience and farming and resilient cities.

The paper formed the basis for an extensive consultation process. This involved 64 submissions, and 38 in-depth interviews with people from a range of organisations and different areas of expertise.

The submissions originated from across the island. However, most – 70 per cent (45) – were made from people or organisations based in Ireland. A further 19 per cent (12) were from all-island organisations, and 8 per cent (5) from Northern Irish organisations. The relatively higher number of submissions from the south may be a reflection of NESCs more established networks in Ireland, and the short time available to develop similar networks in Northern Ireland.

Figure 1 shows that over a quarter of submissions (28%) were made by individuals and 28 per cent by government/EU funded organisations including government departments. Nearly a fifth came from representative organisations and 17 per cent from NGOs. Smaller numbers came from private companies and academics.

Supplementary meetings were held with 38 experts/researchers, NGOs, government departments and national organisations. Over a quarter (29%) of interviewees represented Northern Irish organisations (11 out of 38). Also, as part of the wider NESCs Shared Island project, a series of focus groups on the North West region were held in September 2021, including one on Green Transformation, with 18 participants.<sup>8</sup>

The NESCs consultation revealed the science, research, public authority and civil society expertise and knowledge that is involved in a range of diverse areas on the island, including managing peatlands, healthy rivers and loughs and marine life, renewable energy, rural resilience and sustainable farming.

Notable in the process was the participation of individuals and students, civil society groups and academics, north and south. These provided a voice to a range of actors who might not have engaged directly with NESCs work on sustainability to date.

The consultation paper was presented at the Shared Island Dialogue on Environment and Climate, convened by the Department of the Taoiseach on 5 February 2021. This event featured participation by Ireland's Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications, Eamon Ryan TD, and over 100 civil society groups, business and agriculture representatives, academic and research experts, local authorities, and environmental and sustainable development agencies.

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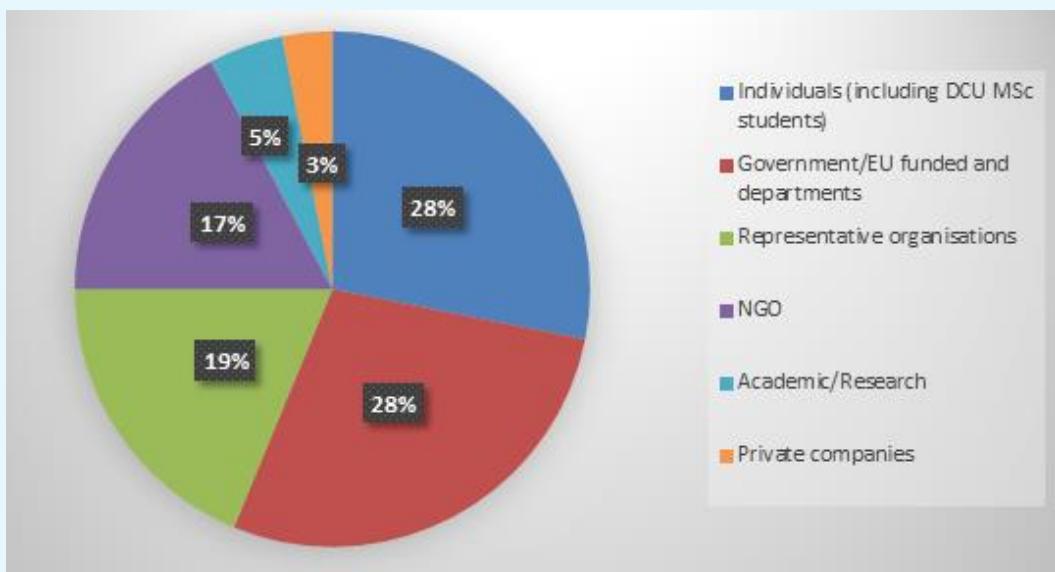
<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org/areas-of-co-operation/environment>, accessed 26.10.21.

<sup>8</sup> These were facilitated by Caitriona Mullen on behalf of NESCs.

This report was prepared drawing substantively on the submissions and interviews, combined with policy research and analysis across both jurisdictions. Council members, including representatives from the environmental, community and voluntary, business, unions and farming pillars, government departments and independents, deliberated on the consultation material and draft report,

Appendix 1 provides a list of the submissions and the interviews. While not an exhaustive list, Appendix 2 provides an overview of the suggestions made and noted in this report. A summary of the submissions will be published alongside this report.

**Figure: 1: Source of Submissions**



## 1.5 Report Structure

The rest of the report is structured as follows.

- Chapter 2 describes the sense of shared ambition that emerged in the consultation and research, with a strong emphasis on climate, biodiversity and the need for an integrated approach, and the role of the EU Green Deal and circular and bio-economy.

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- Chapter 3 examines the shared experiences that became evident during the consultation, and highlights formal and informal networks, collaboration on water quality, research networks and societal engagement.

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- Chapter 4 focuses on six areas of shared opportunities for economic, environmental and social mutual benefit that emerged in the consultation.

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- Chapter 5 outlines the Council view on how co-operation on climate and biodiversity can be strengthened, and the economic and environmental opportunities and synergies which could be achieved by working on all-island basis.

## Chapter 2

### **Climate, Biodiversity & Integration: Towards a Shared Ambition**

*There is a need to explore a ‘joined up and co-ordinated position on the possibilities, priorities and practicalities of a shared island climate action and biodiversity programme including the needs of business investment and the Protocol.’<sup>9</sup>*

## 2.1 Introduction

There has been a global awareness and policy shift towards a heightened ambition to deliver meaningful climate and biodiversity action, with increased clarity over recent severe weather events. The severity and impacts of global warming are laid out in the first instalment of the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report (2021).

This shift is coupled with the focus on living with Covid-19, recovery and the need to ‘build back better’ or ‘build forward’. The broader framing and direction of the European Green Deal is important in this regard in shaping Ireland’s policy journey. Northern Ireland too faces a new chapter of environmental policymaking, following Brexit, and the UK is preparing for COP 26 towards the end of 2021. Another significant event before then, COP 15, focused on biodiversity, is being held in China.

The NESC consultation paper outlined where momentum has been building across the island. It noted advances in renewable energy development, the circular economy and bioeconomy, nature-based solutions on land and sea, and an increasing focus on adaptation and integrated approaches.

This chapter sets out the four key themes that emerged most strongly in the consultation. These are:

- ambition on climate action;

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- ambition on biodiversity;

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- ambition for an integrated and holistic approach; and

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- ambition on circular and bio-economy.

The remainder of this chapter discusses each theme.

## 2.2 Ambition on Climate Action

*‘There are several clear areas of common interest and where cooperation and coordination would likely prove mutually beneficial for both jurisdictions, as the low carbon transition unfolds across the island.’<sup>10</sup>*

A key theme to emerge in the consultation was the relevance and timeliness of approaching climate change and action from an all-island perspective, notably in relation to sharing heightened legislative ambition, common policies, practices and expertise.

The Council recognises this timeliness, particularly in advance of the UN COP 26 and COP 15 meetings on climate and biodiversity, respectively. The Council shares the sense of urgency and timeliness for increased climate ambition and action.

In Ireland, the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 commits Ireland to a 51 per cent reduction in carbon emissions by 2030 compared to 2018 levels. Sectoral budgets will be set out periodically to underpin a significant shift in overall ambition. The forthcoming Climate Action Plan 2021 will set out specific initial actions to deliver an average 7 per cent per annum reduction in overall greenhouse gas emissions from 2021 to 2030 (DECC, 2021a). In Northern Ireland, climate policy is currently underpinned by the UK Climate Change Act 2008 (2050

<sup>9</sup> JBC (Ibec-CBI) Submission

<sup>10</sup> ICTU Submission

Target Amendment) Order 2019 and in line with the requirements of the Paris Agreement. However, a legislative process is underway to introduce a Northern Ireland climate act for the first time.

Both jurisdictions on the island have declared climate emergencies; share similar greenhouse gas profiles; and have international commitments to meet. Many areas for specific action were identified in the submissions, including: the value of a common stance on fossil fuel subsidy fade-out; sustainable agriculture; and the climate and biodiversity vulnerabilities to food systems and diet.

Particular challenges identified in the submissions included: decarbonising transport and the logistics sector, given the trade that flows between the two jurisdictions; and reducing agricultural emissions. A paper by the NESCC Secretariat, prepared as part of the NESCC Shared Island project, outlines the increased interconnections of business on the island (Cahill, 2021). Business networks are collaborating to progress climate action, e.g. Chambers Ireland and Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry recently co-hosted an all-island climate change event in Belfast, which was attended by the Taoiseach, Northern Ireland's First Minister and Deputy First Minister (Chambers Ireland, 2021).

The Council believes that approaching climate policy, climate mitigation and adaptation from an all-island perspective would bring benefits in terms of aligning strategies; and sharing data, expertise and experiences.

The agricultural sector was frequently mentioned as being appropriate and necessary to examine from a climate perspective, given the many similarities in the two jurisdictions. Others called for a common vision for nature-based or wildlife-friendly farming, and a recognition that working with farmers, and listening and visioning with them, is the way forward for the approach to climate as well as biodiversity. Nature-based solutions are required to mitigate, and adapt to, climate change. It was argued that such solutions must underpin land management and land-use policy, including our approach to dealing with agricultural emissions. This is an issue that is especially challenging on the island of Ireland in comparison with other countries, due to agriculture's significant contribution to the economy. Drainage on wetlands/peatlands was identified as a key area of work for both jurisdictions, given the trans-boundary implications of these types of works on carbon storage levels and inventory reporting. Another suggestion was in relation to positive air quality for climate mitigation, which also would help to protect and restore biodiversity.

Resonating with the Council's previous work, consultees highlighted the need to develop a common just transition framework across the island. Suggestions were made to include a focus on social impacts, and social and regional proofing, involving employee representatives, skills and training, and global leadership.

Finally, the role of the Belfast Climate Commission was noted in the consultation. This is an innovative means of coordinating climate action, which could provide a basis for deeper cross-border and inter-city collaboration on climate change.

#### **Box 1: The Belfast Climate Commission**

The Belfast Climate Commission was established in December 2019, supported by the Place-based Climate Action Network (PCAN). This is a 5 year project funded by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council. It brings together researchers, policy-makers and the private sector through five platforms: three city-based climate commissions (in Leeds, Belfast and Edinburgh) and two theme-based platforms on finance and business.

The Belfast Climate Commission is co-chaired by Belfast City Council and Queen's University, and has been established to translate climate policy into action 'on the ground' to bring about transformative change. Involving members from the public, private and third sectors in Belfast. Commission Members collaborate within three working groups: Business and Finance; Community Climate Action; and Just Transition (Belfast Climate Commission, 2021).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> See Belfast Climate Commission <https://www.belfastclimate.org.uk/about-belfast-climate-commission>, accessed 23.09.21

## 2.3 Ambition on Biodiversity

*'The biodiversity crisis is particularly relevant to the shared island dialogue because other species cannot recognise this imaginary line we've drawn between north and south and move freely across borders.'*<sup>12</sup>

A second significant theme was that protecting biodiversity has not received the same amount of attention or resources as the climate challenge, despite its value and significance.

In terms of policy and ambition, Ireland's National Biodiversity Action Plan (2017-2021) provides a framework to track and assess progress towards Ireland's Vision for Biodiversity over a five-year timeframe from 2017 to 2021 (DCHG, 2017). It sets out seven objectives including to mainstream biodiversity into the decision-making process across all sectors. It argues that an all-Ireland approach is necessary to safeguard biodiversity on this island and sets a target for enhanced cooperation with Northern Ireland on common issues. The Biodiversity Working Group, which oversees the implementation of the Plan, includes a representative from Northern Ireland.

The policy in Northern Ireland: Valuing Nature—A Biodiversity Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020, sets out 'to make progress towards halting overall biodiversity loss, establish an ecosystem approach and help business and society in general have a greater understanding of the benefits that nature can bring to everyday life in Northern Ireland' (DAERA, 2015: 6). However, both jurisdictions have faced difficulties to date in reversing biodiversity loss and achieving international targets to date.<sup>13</sup>

A convincing argument was made by many consultees that fragmentation and a lack of coordination of biodiversity policy across jurisdictions has not helped progress action. The rationale for strengthening ambition and coordination in the submissions was underpinned by the frequently-made pragmatic observation that nature knows no boundaries, and that the island is one biogeographical unit. This was seen as underpinning the need to work together. There was also a focus on the need to address water and marine concerns, as they are an integral part of biodiversity.

Common challenges are faced by both jurisdictions in relation to shared river basins and water sources. These water resources are in part jointly managed by two cross-border bodies – Waterways Ireland and the Loughs Agency – and within the EU Water Framework Directives. By comparison, the infrastructure for the supply of treated water, and for waste water, does not have similar joined-up management, north and south. It was also noted that there is also no shared policy on groundwater. In addition, concerns were raised about the risk of divergence in future approaches to treated and waste water, and to ground water.

Connections to nature and place were deeply felt by many across the island, and this was noted as being key to environmental engagement. A vision for enhanced public participation to bring 'the spirit of Aarhus' front and centre was also outlined. This refers to the Aarhus Convention, an international agreement providing for access to information about the environment, access to justice on environmental matters, and the promotion of public participation (EC, 2003).

Others, with specialist insights on biodiversity, pointed to the importance of focusing on restoration and remediation of ecosystem functions by exploring existing solutions, rather than focusing on biodiversity loss. It was suggested that a shared island approach could contribute to the UN Decade of Restoration, which began in June 2021. This could involve a minimum commitment of 30 per cent of land and sea being protected and effectively managed for biodiversity by 2030, in line with EU Biodiversity Strategy. Ireland has 13 per cent of land designated as Special Areas of Conservation (NPWS, 2021). Specific suggestions of high-level actions include establishing webs or networks to build linkages or corridors of natural vegetation, between existing conservation areas.

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<sup>12</sup> Submission from Individual 'AO'.

<sup>13</sup> A State of Nature report by the UK Natural History Museum, in collaboration with the RSPB, reported that Northern Ireland and Ireland were close in their ranking for biodiversity loss out of 240 countries surveyed listed as 12th and 13th worse performing, respectively. This speaks to the commonality of the biodiversity crisis across the island. (Natural History Museum, 2020; RSPB, 2020); The NESI Secretariat Consultation Paper (Moore, 2021) provides more detailed policy and practice context for biodiversity and climate across both jurisdictions.

The Council believes that the protection of nature has been insufficient to date across the island and requires urgent attention. NESC research has previously explored natural capital, and ecosystem accounting research and practice. This is an area that has received increased emphasis internationally in recent years (Bresnihan, 2017; Bullock, 2017). Biodiversity loss is now recognised as a tangible financial risk in the Dasgupta Report of early 2021 (HM Treasury, 2021). The UN Convention on Biological Diversity is preparing a new Global Framework, in advance of COP 15. One of the draft goals is to ensure that ‘Nature’s contributions to people have been valued, maintained or enhanced through conservation and sustainable use supporting the global development agenda for the benefit of all’ (UN Convention on Biological Diversity, 2021).

Nonetheless, a specific focus in the submissions was on the value of nature and how this is not fully recognised within policy.

## 2.4 Ambition for an Integrated and Holistic Approach

*‘All themes listed in the consultation should be given equal weighting as they are inextricably linked. By only addressing one issue, it will exacerbate the other issues. The biodiversity crisis & climate crisis are both of equal importance & weighting’.<sup>14</sup>*

A third and arguably the strongest theme in the consultation was the need to progress climate and biodiversity in an integrated way, to examine the synergies, interactions and overlaps between them.

There can be little doubt now that nature, economy and society cannot be separated, as the systems are interdependent. For example, consultees pointed to the importance of valuing nature to protect biodiversity, but also ways in which local wealth-building can be a significant tool in supporting rural economies. It was strongly argued by many that ambition and action in one area will impact on the others.

Many submissions criticised policy strategies that take a narrow remit – e.g. where an energy strategy does not really take environmental, social or economic considerations into account.

There is ‘gestalt value’ in looking across these areas, rather than just within them, as has traditionally been the case. This is an increasingly recognized perspective, as outlined in the joint publication from the international bodies for biodiversity – the IPBES – and climate – the IPCC (Pörtner, 2021).

However, in practice, such an integrated approach is not in evidence. For example, around 3 per cent of global climate funds, from public and private sources, are allocated to biodiversity and ecosystems, despite the potential cost-effectiveness of natural solutions relative to other interventions (Griscom, 2017). One notable exception is Ireland’s draft Biodiversity Sectoral Climate Change Adaptation Plan which seeks to identify adaptation options that will help to protect biodiversity and ecosystem services from the impacts of changing climate (NPWS, 2019c).

A very positive development, in the view of the Council, would be the development of a shared and inspiring vision for integrated climate and biodiversity action across the island, including its inland and surrounding waters. There is potential for a coherent, co-ordinated and ambitious expression of common purpose to align climate targets and regulatory approaches. Such a statement and approach could outline a way forward, built on cooperation and mutual interest. Chapter 5 proposes the development of such a statement.

While integrating climate and biodiversity approaches was emphasised, it was also noted that this should be within a sustainable development framework. Working to achieve the UN SDGs could help to ensure a holistic response across all areas and across the island, given that they constitute a common framework which is accepted in both jurisdictions. It was also noted that there could be added value in a constructive and collaborative approach to progress for each goal, which would point to differences and to commonality.

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<sup>14</sup> Submission from Derry City and Strabane District Council

The consultation and research pointed to many potential benefits from a more holistic, integrated, ambitious and co-ordinated approach. Submissions pointed to the mutual co-benefits (for north and south, and for climate and biodiversity) from such an approach.

Specific reference was made to the potential for increasing carbon storage in marine and coastal areas ('blue carbon'); ground water and air quality improvements; and land-based biodiversity solutions. The interlinkages between nature, wellbeing and resilience; and nature and climate action were emphasised in many submissions. A point made a number of times was that biodiversity should be at the core of all climate policies in Ireland and Northern Ireland. This is a view that the Council shares.

Alongside these environmental benefits, the consultation also highlighted wider societal benefits including: cultural and heritage conservation; enhancements to social capital; job creation, and increased tourism.

Reflecting on the pandemic, submissions noted multiple co-benefits, including in relation to climate and health, which could come from the island of Ireland becoming an exemplar of cross-border cooperation on biodiversity and climate action. It was argued that this could become the basis for a new socio-ecological contract.

Particularly noted was the importance of building societal engagement, and improving communications and public engagement, so that biodiversity and climate change were made 'local', and 'reflective' of pressing issues affecting the island. The value of civil society networks – such as the GAA, unions, churches and others – to mobilise action, and of businesses to mobilise finance, was outlined. In this context, the potential role of citizens' assemblies in both jurisdictions was mentioned. There is a need to develop approaches to deal with tensions and competing green objectives, for example in relation to the use of green space in cities. Others suggested the creation of an urban green space inventory to examine the importance of household access to, and use, of urban green spaces. This could draw on the tools used elsewhere, such as the English People and Nature Survey (Natural England, 2021).

Implementation of policy to deliver on ambition was also identified as critical, with a focus on setting SMART targets and evaluating and monitoring progress across government departments – in both Northern Ireland and Ireland, but also more closely between jurisdictions. Key areas would include examining and working on green skills, training, and jobs shortages, on a shared island basis.

Considering sustainability in its broadest sense – including in the economy and in cross-cutting policy initiatives such as the European Green Deal – is a key part of the context for shared island cooperation. Submissions emphasised the development of sustainable recovery plans as providing key opportunities for significant delivery and real alignment. Examples given included the focus on cross-border grid linkage, and the Single Electricity Market on the island.

The Council recognises the work of business and trade union groups such as Chambers Ireland, the IBEC-CBI NI Joint Business Council, and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, to build collaboration and all-island engagement on environment and sustainability issues, as Ireland and Northern Ireland move out of the pandemic.

Ireland's National Development Plan 2021-2030 recognises that island is a single ecological entity, integrated in crucial environmental, economic and social domains. It sets an enhanced level of ambition for collaborative cross-border public investment, to build a more connected, prosperous and sustainable island, for all communities and traditions that share the island (Government of Ireland, 2021c). It aligns with the Council's view that co-ordinated approaches form a significant part of addressing the challenges of climate breakdown and the biodiversity crisis and protecting the common environmental resources of the island, as well as for effective policy and public investment.

## 2.5 Ambition on the Circular and Bio-Economy

The Council has long been convinced of the significance and value of a circular economy for economic and environmental development in Ireland (NESC, 2017). A 2018 EU Commission report, on the impacts of circular economy policies on the labour market, estimated that a circular transition could deliver an additional 700,000 EU jobs across all skill levels by 2030 (Government of Ireland, 2021a). In addition, the circular economy has the power to shrink global GHG emissions by 39 per cent, if the current extent of efficient resource consumption is doubled by 2032 (CGRI, 2021).

In Ireland, the social reuse and repair sector already employs over 700 people, supports 2,200 trainees or work integration positions, and works with over 7,200 volunteers. Social enterprises are ideally positioned to deliver such jobs, because of the level of manual labour and the diversity of skills types and levels involved. Some recent examples are the expansion of a ‘tap map network’ of free tap water refill stations by Refill Ireland and Refill Northern Ireland, and the expansion of the digital marketplace ‘Thriftify’ from Ireland into NI and the rest of the UK.<sup>15</sup> In 2015, a report estimated that Northern Ireland could gain £474 million of annual economic opportunities from moving to a circular economy, and more than 13,000 jobs could be created (ReNew, 2015).

In Ireland, recent focus has been placed on developing an Irish Circular Economy Strategy and Circular Economy Bill, to implement many of the actions in the Government’s Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy (DECC, 2021b). This will be supported by the roll-out, of the EU’s Second Circular Economy Action Plan, a key building block of the European Green Deal (EC, 2020a). The OECD is undertaking an analysis of the economics and governance of the circular economy in Ireland, as part of its Circular Economy in Cities and Regions division (OECD, 2021). This OECD work suggests that, while Ireland is at a turning point in relation to the circular economy, structural and governance gaps remain. These include a lack of a legislative and regulatory framework, limited capacities at national level, and the financial risks and inadequate scale for private investment (Romano, 2021).

The UK Government and Northern Ireland Executive have set out how the EU 2020 Circular Economy Package will be transposed, and the Waste (Circular Economy) (Amendment) Regulations NI was introduced in December 2020 (NIRN, 2020). The Strategic Investment Board in Northern Ireland has been commissioned by the Department of the Economy to develop a strategic policy options framework for the Circular Economy (CE) in Northern Ireland, in preparation for the development of a Circular Economy Strategy for Northern Ireland (SIB, 2020).

The opportunities, in relation to the circular economy, have been noted by the North South Ministerial Council (October 2020). Building on this recognition, NESC believes a vision and sense of common purpose is possible in practical terms in relation to circular economy and bioeconomy. Contributors outlined that there is ample scope for sharing of resources and expertise.

A cohesive all-island approach would bring maximum benefit from resources, infrastructure and materials, as well as reuse and waste management. It could be an important driver of a fair and just economic transition. The bioeconomy is also a key part of the innovation system for agri-food, which is of strategic importance. Growing the bioeconomy is identified across a range of government strategies in both jurisdictions, as playing a key role in rural economic diversification.

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<sup>15</sup> See <https://www.thriftify.ie/>, accessed 23.09.21

## 2.6 Conclusions

A strong ambition for a shared and integrated approach to climate and biodiversity emergencies, as declared by both jurisdictions, came out clearly from submissions. The Council considers that the development of a holistic, integrated and shared understanding and approach to address climate change and biodiversity loss is timely and important.

The challenges of delivering ambitious action should not be underestimated, with a need to focus on effective implementation. Multiple environmental challenges exist, and action on one may have unintended consequences on another. There is always added complexity in seeking to work and co-ordinate across jurisdictions.

In the context of governments responding to Covid-19 and working to ‘building back better’, opportunities exist for further integration and prioritisation of climate and biodiversity measures. However, there is much to do in this regard. Of the \$15 trillion being mobilised globally to recover from Covid-19, reportedly only 3 per cent is benefitting nature (Brotherton P. et al., 2021).

For the island of Ireland, a targeted approach focused on responding to specific environmental challenges could make real progress. Specifically, collaborative action to further biodiversity conservation, restoration and value is recognised as crucial to effectively address loss and future risks. Shared climate challenges, and ways of sharing solutions, in agriculture, the marine, coasts and fresh water warrant closer cooperation and can bring added value.

The next section explores networks and projects which are creating flexible, innovative and experimental arrangements focused on many of these shared challenges and opportunities.

## Chapter 3

### **Networks, Projects and Engagement** Shared Experiences

### 3.1 Introduction

The formal structures established through the Good Friday Agreement, coupled with informal networks and collaborations on environmental issues, demonstrate the multiple connections that already exist between Ireland and Northern Ireland on different levels.

The consultation revealed that the island has a wealth of networks and collaborations, developed to solve problems, explore new ideas, share information or work collaboratively over shared land or resources. This rich variety demonstrates the value and vibrancy of collaborative solutions to address environmental challenges.

It is the case, that alongside formal and EU-related cooperation, wider north-south cooperation and engagement on environmental protection on the island has been evident, particularly in relation to biodiversity, including the protection of habitats and species as well as invasive alien species control and management (EC, 2019). However, a common view in the consultation was that the full potential for cross-border environmental cooperation had not yet been fulfilled, and that despite some cooperation, progress has been slow across the island to deliver on biodiversity conservation targets.

The Council believes that a shared island approach should start from the structures and institutions already in place, and map out pathways for further development.

This chapter maps out the shared experiences and networks that exist. It is structured as follows:

- formal and informal collaborations;

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- collaborating on water quality

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- research networks; and,

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- societal engagement, participation & communication.

### 3.2 Formal and Informal Collaborations

*There is enormous potential for enhancing green infrastructure and biodiversity through collaborative projects across state agencies, local authorities and with local communities.<sup>16</sup>*

Close collaboration has been achieved to date, and cross-border co-operation exists in many environmental areas. The value of all-island collaboration in managing the environment has been recognised through the establishment and work of the Environment Sector of the North South Ministerial Council. This meets regularly to collaborate on environmental protection, pollution, and water-quality management in a cross-border context. Also mentioned was the British-Irish Council's Environment Work Sector.

A frequently cited example of an innovative framework for coordination was the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan (Box 2). Its contribution to date and ways to strengthen its impact were noted. It was suggested that the plan could be underpinned by statute and legislation, coupled with stronger national legislation in terms of biodiversity.

<sup>16</sup> Submission from Inland Fisheries Ireland

### **Box 2: Example; The All-Ireland Pollinator Plan.**

The All-Ireland Pollinator Plan for 2021-2025 is a 5 year road map first developed by a 16-member voluntary steering group. It now receives support from a range of statutory organisations including the National Parks and Wildlife Service; the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine; the Heritage Council, and An Bord Bia.

Its implementation is being co-ordinated by the National Biodiversity Data Centre. The all-island framework is supported by governmental and non-governmental partner organisations who share responsibility for delivering the plan's 186 actions.

Local authorities, north and south, have signed up as partners under the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan Partnership Framework.<sup>17</sup> It provides an example and potential model for developing bottom-up, expert-led but multi-actor initiatives.

Figure 2 shows the map of local authorities who are partners to the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan.

### **Figure 2: Local Authorities who are Partners to the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan**

To date, the following councils have become partners to the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan:



Source: (All Ireland National Pollinator, 2021).

<sup>17</sup> See <https://pollinators.ie/councils/council-partners/>, accessed 23.09.21

Some of the other collaborations and areas where good cooperation has developed include:

- local authorities have been working collaboratively with a strategic regional focus, such as the North West Regional Development Group (See Box 3);

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- Joint Business Council (established 1974);

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- implementation of the EU Habitats and Birds Directives;

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- the Single Electricity Market (SEM);

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- the Irish Environmental Network's collaboration with the Northern Ireland Environment Link; Natural Capital Ireland (see Box 3);

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- the *Framework for Cooperation: Spatial Strategies of Northern Ireland & the Republic of Ireland*, developed in 2013 by the Department for Regional Development in collaboration with the Department for Environment, Communications and Local Government (DRD & DECLG);

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- the All-Island Local Authority Forum and Co-operation Ireland (See Box 3); and,

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- community resources networks established by CRNI and NIRN (See Box 3).

There is also a benefit in considering east-west alignments as well as north-south. For example, consultees pointed out that many linkages already exist ecologically between the north coast of the island of Ireland and Scotland, as these are quite unique in terms of geographic proximity, biogeographic connectivity and cultural history. Scotland has expertise in wind energy and, in particular, in Marine Renewable Energy and Natural Capital. It was suggested in the submissions that this is arguably more advanced than any other region of the UK. (See Box 4 on the Ireland-Scotland Joint Bilateral Review)

### **Box 3: Examples of Collaboration**

#### **Natural Capital Ireland**

This is a group of over 900 organisations and individuals from academic, public, private and NGO sectors, interested in the development and application of the natural capital agenda in Ireland, on both sides of the border.

As of 2021, there are two NI representatives on the Steering Committee – from NI Environment Link and the Ulster Wildlife Trust. NCI is actively working with these partners to develop cross-border projects, for example under EU LIFE and PEACE PLUS. This type of cooperation can be replicated by other organisations with an interest in climate and biodiversity on the island of Ireland.<sup>18</sup>

#### **Co-operation Ireland**

Co-operation Ireland supports co-operation for mutual benefit between Northern Ireland and Ireland, and works to facilitate strategic leadership for the building of good relations and collaboration.

#### **The All-Island Local Authority (LA) Forum**

The All-Island Local Authority Forum and wider Programme supports the exchange of learning and practical experience around shared objectives, with over 340 people from across the island attending events and seminars during the year.<sup>19</sup> The town/town recovery and regeneration sub-group in the LA Forum is exploring the possibility of all LAs across the island agreeing to reflect the UN's Sustainable Development Goals in their new development plans.<sup>20</sup>

#### **Community Resources Network Ireland (CRNI) and Northern Ireland Resources Network (NIRN)**

CRNI and NIRN work in close collaboration to support reuse and repair across the island. Together they represent 50 community-based reuse, repair and recycling members. Networking events have been held which have led to the sharing of knowledge and practices, linking organisations such as the Belfast Repair Cafe, Belfast Tool Library (tool lending) and Derry & Strabane Council (the first Zero Waste area, with a Zero Waste Strategy and a Circular Economy strategy), as well as the Rediscovery Centre (National Centre for a Circular Economy, paint reuse scheme), Roscommon Women's Network (CycleUp project) and An Mheitheal Rothar (bicycle refurbishment).<sup>21</sup>

#### **North West Regional Development Group**

The North West Regional Development Group was formed in 2016 as a strategic partnership between Derry City and Strabane Council, and Donegal County Council – the first of its kind on the island. Current initiatives include: the development of a North West Climate Action Plan as a strategic framework for climate action on a cross-sectoral and regional basis; a North West Green Transformation Joint Working Group, that has produced a Green Recovery Statement of Intent; progress towards a North West Regional Energy Strategy; and a co-ordinated focus on biodiversity through the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan.

<sup>18</sup> Submission from Natural Capital Ireland.

<sup>19</sup> See , <https://cooperationireland.org/about-us/>, accessed 23.09.21

<sup>20</sup> Submission from All-Island LA Forum.

<sup>21</sup> Submission from CRNI & NIRN

#### **Box 4: Ireland-Scotland Joint Bilateral Review**

A review of Ireland-Scotland examined the potential for future growth in the Irish-Scottish relationship. It included recommendations that Ireland and Scotland cooperate on the research and development of offshore renewable energy technologies, to enable these to become commercially deployable – particularly in the areas of floating wind and wave energy. In addition, Ireland will engage with the Scottish Government on their approach to the wellbeing economy and just transition in Climate Change policy (Government of Ireland, 2021b).

### 3.3 Collaborating on Water Quality

*'Much needed improvement in water quality requires a cross border, co-operative approach....and effective and even enforcement of those regulatory and policy frameworks. There is a tradition of cross border coordination in Ireland on water management issues'.<sup>22</sup>*

Collaboration and partnerships have been productive in the area of water. For example, Irish Fisheries Ireland participate in many cross-border groups, such as those working to deliver the Water Framework Directive. The North South rivers and lakes technical sub-committee, chaired by EPA and NIEA, works well with other NI water and environment agencies. Within the marine environment, the Loughs Agency's remit applies to the two shared water bodies of Lough Foyle and Carlingford Lough.

However, many loughs and coastal areas across the whole island of Ireland act ecologically as a single resource, particularly for migratory birds. Wider cross-border management approaches are needed for these areas and for our wider marine environment.

The Council recognises the value and learning potential of existing collaboration on the Water Framework Directive. It is important to learn from the bodies who are working together and cooperating to implement that regime. The consideration of the island of Ireland as a single river basin district was proposed. Both Ireland and Northern Ireland have finalised their respective 'Significant Water Management Issues' (SWMI) assessments and are currently preparing the third- cycle River Basin Management Plans. There are opportunities to continue to share information and knowledge to address common challenges in relation to water quality. Box 5 provides some examples.

Governance issues were raised in relation to biodiversity protection, and the limits to the Loughs Agency's role on biodiversity conservation and protection, particularly regarding the management of invasive alien species such as the Japanese Oyster. It was noted that there was a difference in how Ireland and Northern Ireland were managing the oysters' spread. Opportunities for learning and sharing practices should be examined.

Building on the existing successful biodiversity collaboration, formal and informal networks should be further strengthened between bodies and institutions across the island (for example CCAC, EPA, SEAI, Teagasc, NPWS and respective counterparts in Northern Ireland).

Submissions noted that support could be increased to build contacts, cooperation and linkages between NGOs and communities. It was noted that environmental NGOs, voluntary and community groups play a very significant role across the island, working alongside expert ecologists and environmentalists as well as local authorities. This is key to progressing biodiversity action including rewilding, habitat restoration and species conservation.

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<sup>22</sup> Submission from RSPB NI.

To effectively embed biodiversity issues into practices at local, regional and national level, it was argued there was a need for more ecologists and biodiversity experts to be employed. In local authorities, heritage officers could deliver more progress implementing local biodiversity and heritage plans, and making nature-based solutions visible with increased biodiversity expertise.

It was also argued that resourcing and supporting networks across the island with the necessary expertise to share evidence and practice, would enrich the work of local authorities and public bodies as they increase efforts to conserve and restore biodiversity.

#### **Box 5: Learning from Water Quality Cooperation**

CatchmentCARE (Community Actions for Resilient Eco-systems) is an EU-funded (Interreg) project. It aims to improve freshwater quality in cross-border river basins, across three cross-border catchments, through the development of three water quality improvement projects in the Finn, Blackwater and Arney catchments; along with the installation of 50 groundwater monitoring stations across the region. These will give a better understanding of groundwater in the cross-border catchments, and the interaction between groundwater & surface water bodies.

Two local authorities – Donegal County Council (Lead Partner) and Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council – are working with academics from Ulster University, as well as the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute, and specialists from the British Geological Survey, the Loughs Agency, Geological Survey Ireland and Inland Fisheries Ireland. Collectively these participants bring a rich and diverse skill-set to the delivery of the CatchmentCARE Project<sup>23</sup>.

### **3.4 Research Networks**

*'Environmental research has a strong all-island dimension and provides significant opportunities for cooperation and developing solutions to common environmental challenges'.<sup>24</sup>*

The consultation identified a lack of all-island evidence which could be used for comparative analysis on climate and biodiversity. There are gaps in knowledge and understanding in many areas, such as the impacts of climate change on our oceans and coastlines; agriculture and climate mitigation; and water quality. Additional data and shared approaches are needed across the island, including using citizen science, spatial mapping and GIS. Shared access to existing data sets and a common approach to environmental assessments would be important. One area that was noted was the potential for seamless all-island maps of habitats and various ecosystem extent accounts. Consultees highlighted the need for research collaboration, but also, for mapping out synergies in expertise and focus. One suggestion was to fund PhD students to audit innovative experiments/initiatives going on across sectors.

Consultees pointed to recent efforts to develop all-island research networks that are in need of funding supports. Environmental research is increasingly building a strong all-island dimension, and provides significant opportunities for cooperation and developing solutions to common environmental challenges.

<sup>23</sup> See <https://www.catchmentcare.eu/>, accessed 08/10/21.

<sup>24</sup> Submission from the EPA.

Many positive recent developments include:

- The Interreg Atlantic Area Programme has recently supported five marine projects, with all-island grant-aid of €3.6m (estimated grant-aid of €1.1m to NI Partners).
- Marine-related research, supported by the NI-IE-Scot Programme with all-island grant-aid of €51.4m, has included a focus on improving the water quality status of Carlingford Lough and Lough Foyle;
- Eight Horizon 2020 projects were awarded to international consortia which included partners from both Northern Ireland and Ireland;
- The EPA's environmental research programme, as it takes an all-island perspective and engages with representatives from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA). In the last 14 years, EPA has funded €5.5m worth of projects led by Queen's University and the University of Ulster;
- The EPA-funded Transboundary Adaptation Learning Exchange (TalX) research project is focused on climate adaptation. This project involves collaboration between Ireland's Climate Information Platform, Climate Ireland and the Climate Northern Ireland network and will work across five case study jurisdictions (Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England).
- An all-island research, development and innovation (RDI) ecosystem has long been promoted in marine research policy in Ireland (e.g. Sea Change strategy, 2007-2013);
- The Marine Research Funders Forum (MRFF), established by the Marine Institute, is an all-island network that involves 25 organisations, including government departments, funding agencies and other RDI stakeholders.
- The EU funded Mistral project, led by Queen's University Belfast, is an innovative research and training network to which NESCI is a non-academic partner. It looks at the complexity of social acceptance issues facing the deployment of renewable energy infrastructure.
- The Marine Institute is working with Enterprise Ireland and other agencies to further develop the blue economy through the Marine Ireland Industry Network. The network is open to members from throughout the island of Ireland.
- The North South Research Programme will invest €40 million over 5 years (See Box 6) (HEA, 2021).
- QUB and UCD are undertaking a collaborative research project that will map past and present cross-border environmental cooperation (UKRI, 2021).
- Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) are planning to develop, with partners in the North and South, an all-island Research and Innovation System. SFI are developing a range of mechanisms to support all-island research including challenge-based funding focused on solutions, and potentially supporting multiple all-island Research Centres (SFI, 2020).
- The All-Island Biodiversity and Climate Research Network (see Box 6); and
- 5 Agencies SHARE Activity (see Box 6).

### **Box 6: Research Network Examples**

#### **The All-Island Climate and Biodiversity Research Network (AICBRN)**

This is an initiative that brings together researchers, from a wide range of disciplines across the island of Ireland, who are undertaking research in climate and biodiversity topics.

Its aim is to develop a large-scale research and innovation initiative to improve ‘public good’ policy and management decisions; underpin business and enterprise strategies; and strengthen societal capacity to address the climate and biodiversity emergencies (AICBRN, 2020). The network is developing a prioritised set of actions to progress its work, helped by a townhall meeting held in July 2021.<sup>25</sup>

#### **5 Agencies ShARE Activity**

EPA collaborates with NIEA in relation to the 5 Agencies ShARE activity, which is a collaborative forum for identifying and progressing shared knowledge needs between the environment agencies of Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales, England and Ireland. Its focus is typically on policy implementation and regulatory challenges with the outputs being directly actionable.<sup>26</sup>

#### **The North South Research Programme**

The North South Research Programme is a collaborative scheme as part of the Irish Government’s Shared Island initiative, with an investment of €40 million over 5 years, funded through the Shared Island Fund (HEA, 2021).

The Programme will support the deepening of links between higher education institutions, researchers and research communities. It is being delivered by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) on behalf of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research Innovation and Science. Given the relative lack of all-island evidence and comparative analysis on climate and biodiversity, the need for such research collaboration is considerable.

It was suggested that there would be value in building an all-island research community, and developing a consistent approach to research supports across both jurisdictions, as well as exploring funding for shared island research challenges (e.g. such as in the areas of climate, biodiversity and our changing ocean and coastlines). The importance of sharing both the urgency and resolve to address these common problems was outlined, but also the recognition that solutions may be undermined by divergent approaches or a lack of coordination. One suggestion was for the development of a ‘one stop shop’ secretariat or body for local authorities, researchers and practitioners. This could map sources of existing data and act as a guide for cross-border and all-island research and practice.

The Council supports the positive developments in all-island and collaborative research projects, such as the work of the All-island Climate and Biodiversity Research Network; and new funding opportunities, such as the Irish Government’s €40m North South Research Programme, which is supported by the Shared Island Fund.

There is wide-ranging research capacity, and networks are in place in the areas of food, biodiversity, agriculture and the marine. However, it is important that policy supports bring together leading research centres across the whole island of Ireland to tackle the climate and biodiversity emergency. There is value in developing shared island targets, supported by long-term funding. However, some pointed to the difficulty of developing biodiversity and climate targets and policy in the context of short-term political cycles.

<sup>25</sup> Townhall Meeting, see <https://www.eventbrite.ie/e/all-island-climate-and-biodiversity-research-network-town-hall-meeting-tickets-157803686073>, accessed 23.09.21.

<sup>26</sup> See <https://www.sepa.org.uk/about-us/how-we-work/our-research/five-agencies-share-programme/>, accessed 23.09.21.

The focus of research could be both large-scale across the island, but also on the development of granular local data. The potential for an all-island approach to citizen science was noted. The development of integrated research programmes could maximise and align the strengths of researchers in different jurisdictions.

### 3.5 Societal Engagement, Participation and Communication

*'Nature and our atmosphere protect and enhance the island of Ireland, but to maintain and improve these assets requires societal engagement, innovative thinking and collaboration'.<sup>27</sup>*

There are opportunities in articulating and exploring the good practice, cross-border learnings, and future potential for societal engagement that exist in many areas. This could involve affected communities and vulnerable groups so they can provide input on shared island research and proposals.

Other suggestions focus on the need to share engagement practices that emphasise social and societal benefits. Communities need to be supported to be the agents for change, as part of the low carbon transition and to ensure buy-in. Engagement could be enhanced in relation to specific areas such as renewable energy. For participation to be meaningful, genuine value must be placed on local knowledge. Integrating local knowledge into decision-making through participative approaches complements scientific expertise, and there is a growing evidence base that such approaches foster better outcomes. Interesting models exist for broad societal engagement at a local level, such as the Dingle Peninsula 2030, a multi-partner initiative on the Dingle Peninsula, Co. Kerry, which involves the Dingle Creativity and Innovation Hub, ESB Networks, North, East and West Kerry Development (NEWKD), and MaREI (MaREI, 2018).

The shared experience of having good interpersonal networks is a common strength across both jurisdictions. Contributors suggested that there would be value in strengthening participative structures, public engagement and dialogue for civil society, across the island and particularly, cross-border. One suggestion was to use all-island sports teams, such as rugby and hockey, to promote wider participation in tackling climate and biodiversity issues.

Exploring how north-south common environmental goals and objectives, and ultimately frameworks, can be developed with the full participation of civil society and environmental NGOs would be an important area to develop further. Exploration of the ways in which the public, and civic society, can engage with the post-Brexit environmental regulatory framework in Northern Ireland and its constituent governance structures, and the supports needed for such engagement, would be valuable. Good practice on public engagement could be shared between the different policy systems – for example, a lot could be learned from Northern Ireland's work on engagement for its marine and environmental strategies.

Engagement is also needed at local level around specific challenges, such as local authorities across the island reflecting on the UN SDGs in their development plans; or on the management of wetlands, where communities on both side of the border could be supported to work on approaches.

The importance of effective communication around climate and biodiversity action was stressed. Emphasis was placed on positive messaging on actions and solutions; showing how facts contribute to addressing the problem; targeting groups; monitoring progress; and generating feelings to encourage changes in behaviour, rather than just focusing on the provision of information.

The vital role of education to stimulate appropriate behaviour change is a distinct area, but can also be seen as a cross-cutting requirement. It was suggested that an all-island education programme on climate change would be worth developing. Allied to this was a proposal to develop an education strategy on environmental protection and biodiversity aimed at farmers, the younger generation, and citizens in general.

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<sup>27</sup> Submission from SFI.

## 3.6 Conclusion

The Council is impressed by the multiple structures, institutions, research projects, networks and organisations working on an all-island basis or on areas, sectors, and particular environmental issues that includes partners, in the North and South.

Networks are working across the island in areas such as pollinators, energy, and environmental research; and collaborations are evident between local authorities, environmental NGOs, social enterprises and business. There is much to be learned from this experience of sharing good practice. It also is evident that strengthening these relationships and structures would enhance the ability of both jurisdictions to address these common problems. There is significant scope to build on and enhance shared experience and knowledge (including among institutions).

Among the benefits would be articulating and exploring what good practice is across sectors; developing cross-border learnings; and identifying future potential for societal engagement. It was pointed out that sharing good practice should not be limited to small scale pilot projects or ‘add-ons’, but to support ambitious new thinking.

It was also noted that there is a need to support increased contacts, cooperation and linkages between NGOs and communities, north-south, as well as east-west and at European level. Emphasis was placed on the need to highlight current strengths more clearly; work on practical solutions to common problems; and identify where clear benefits would arise from both jurisdictions working together and developing richer cooperation.

The potential to learn across networks, in relation to farming and the rural economy, was noted. In addition, it was argued that it was important to avoid setting up new institutions and structures, and to work with what is there already.

In relation to learning, consultees pointed to the value of clustering as a means to draw out expertise across the island, and to provide a forum for exchange of expertise – particularly in relation to research, but also for SMEs. Examples for further development include the Smart Farming Programme in Ireland, while an international example at city level is the C40 Cities network.

The Council recognises the potential of highlighting these relationships to underscore that cooperation exists, and that it is feasible and productive in addressing environmental challenges. By making these projects and collaborations more visible and joining them up, there could be valuable learning and further opportunities for more strategic cooperation.

Despite views coming from different sectors – including business, unions, local authorities, public servants, community groups and researchers – the issues identified are aligned and complementary. While there may be a diversity of views expressed in both jurisdictions about climate and sustainable development policies and practices, the consultation reflected broader shared island considerations, and emphasised the broader possibilities, as well as identifying the risks of divergence and impeding environmental progress.

The Council believes that building on what has already been achieved – in terms of structures, collaborations and active networks to deal with environmental protection and management - would be more fruitful than establishing new structures (e.g. in waste management, invasive alien species, river basin management and bird conservation). A key consideration, discussed in Chapter 5, is to explore the ways in which these informal networks can and should intersect with the more formal structures.

Chapter 4 focuses on the significant opportunities for environmental progress that could be developed by a shared island approach.

## Chapter 4

### **Six Areas of Shared Opportunity**

## 4.1 Introduction

The consultation and research brought a large range of opportunities for economic, social and environmental gain to the fore. It showed that significant potential exists for strengthening a shared approach to addressing biodiversity loss and climate change, and investing in the green transition.

This chapter summarises six key areas:

- circular and bioeconomy;
- coordinating regulations and standards;
- marine resources;
- renewable energy;
- sustainable agriculture; and
- valuing nature.

## 4.2 Circular and Bioeconomy

*'A circular approach must be at the heart of any policy in a modern, technologically driven society to help deliver a sustainable planet'.<sup>28</sup>*

A strong theme in the consultation, which the Council endorses, is that a shared island approach to the circular and bio-economy would be significant in terms of optimising resource efficiency and economies of scale, and creating jobs across the island.

Market opportunities are available through the efficient use of resources and the global move to the circular economy. Optimising the available resources for reuse, recycling and recovery, and associated markets, would bring particular advantages from a shared island perspective. It was noted that the Irish manufacturing sector accounts for 32 per cent of GDP, significantly higher than the European average, and therefore would benefit more from increasing circularity. Northern Ireland's now unique access to the EU Single Market was noted as a comparative strength.

A number of specific examples were outlined. These include:

- a strategic all-island waste strategy, that adapts and progresses waste management; helps align fees and enforcement; improves processing waste treatment infrastructure, including for hazardous waste; supports business and local authorities to work more closely; and promotes good practice through the Regional Waste Management Offices;
- a shared island approach to reuse and repair infrastructure storage, which would provide a buffer to localised capacity shortages;
- environmental management of end of life tyres (ELT), where an all-island Extended Producer Responsibility Initiative, is used to provide traceability across the island;
- collaboration on green and social public procurement building on developments in both jurisdictions, including Northern Ireland social scoring on public procurement (Department of Finance (NI), 2021); and Ireland's recently introduced Green Public Procurement: Guidance for the Public Sector;

<sup>28</sup> Submission from AMBER/AICEP.

- building skills and training for a circular economy; and

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- promotions and awareness campaigns.

A cohesive, all-island approach would mean greater standardisation and could provide a basis for a roadmap for future development. It could also support the case for accessing EU and UK-level funding.

A focus on bioeconomy complements circular economy, but it is also distinctive. A key focus in bioeconomy is agriculture, forestry and marine, and other natural resources; as well as new technologies to produce sustainable food, feed and other high value bio-based products. These are areas which the research and submissions viewed as opportunities, and they are reflected in the discussion below on sectoral opportunities.

### 4.3 Environmental Regulation and Standards

*'Common environmental standards play a crucial role in providing a level playing field and preventing unfair regulatory competition across key sectors in relation to cross-border trade, indirectly securing more robust protection of the environment'.<sup>29</sup>*

The submissions noted that both jurisdictions have work to do to improve current environmental standards. However, an all-island commitment to high environmental standards was seen as a significant opportunity. It was noted that post-Brexit there could be future divergence, which could create difficulties for effective biodiversity restoration and climate mitigation. The loss of shared EU governance structures, monitoring and enforcement, and potential loss of funding streams was also noted. The incentive to collaborate and work to raise and align standards is therefore sizable.

A number of areas where aligning standards would add value to current practices were highlighted. These include:

- peatland restoration, modelled on the best practice, for example, MoorFutures in Germany which examined restoration of peatlands for voluntary compensation of CO2 emissions; or the UK Peatland Code, a voluntary certification standard (Forest Europe, 2011; IUCN, 2021);

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- regulation and policy, including sharing lessons on planning and judicial review. This could include a focus on polluting sectors, such as intensive agricultural developments;

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- a common approach to fossil fuel subsidy;

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- aligning or coordinating the mandates and operations of public bodies to deliver on targets – e.g. climate mitigation and energy efficiency;

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- signals to private sector investments for public good, such as climate resilient and sustainable infrastructure;<sup>30</sup>

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- the public health and environmental benefits of the fracking ban implemented in Ireland, which would be undermined if a policy is not implemented in Northern Ireland; and

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- increased action and legal responses being developed that recognise common international commitments such as the Paris Agreement.

Suggestions were also made on governance processes and practices to improve collaboration. These included calls to map policy, practice convergence, and flag divergence on a routine basis, so that differences and opportunities could be more readily recognised.

<sup>29</sup> Submission from Chambers Ireland.

<sup>30</sup> A point also made by the British Irish Chamber of Commerce (2020) in their Expert Seminar Report How Infrastructural Investment Can Fuel the Recovery.

Finally, it was suggested that work should focus on overall governance. Ideas in this context included developing an overall agreement between Ireland and Northern Ireland, and establishing an all-island environmental regulatory framework.

## 4.4 Marine Resources

*'There is considerable potential in all-island collaboration on biodiversity loss, particularly regarding our shared coastal areas, marine protection and low levels of regulation of undersea activity'.<sup>31</sup>*

The importance of the ocean economy, and the opportunities associated with what is called 'the blue economy', were a strong theme in the consultation.

The EU Biodiversity Strategy aims to put Europe's biodiversity on a path to recovery by 2030, and contains specific actions and commitments for marine conservation. It includes commitments to legally protect a minimum of 30 per cent of the EU's land and sea area. Ireland's Programme for Government (2020) includes a commitment to protecting 30 per cent of its maritime area by 2030, and the Government launched a public consultation in this regard earlier this year (EC, 2020b; Government of Ireland, 2020; DHLGH, 2021b). In June 2021, G7 members agreed to protect at least 30 per cent of the world's ocean by 2030, as well as domestically (DEFRA, 2021). For Northern Ireland, this target has been endorsed by DAERA but not yet set out in policy (NIEL, 2020a). A report from the Marine Protected Area Advisory Group (2020) indicates that the current network of protected areas encompasses only 2.13 per cent of Ireland's total maritime area.

An important recent development is the designation of a high seas Marine Protected Area (MPA) for seabirds, agreed through Ospar, which is the mechanism by which 15 governments, including Ireland, the EU and the UK cooperate to protect the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic (Ospar, 2021).

The consultation and research identified a number of specific concerns across the island. These include:

- vulnerability of marine habitats due to human activity impacts, including the increasing amount of marine litter, the decline in marine biodiversity, and the consequences of climate change, which include increasing sea temperature, sea level rise and ocean acidification (NIEL, 2020b);
- low levels of regulation of undersea activity;
- freshwater and marine environment and species are not prioritised in the same level of detail as terrestrial ecosystems, in terms of conservation action;
- coordination and adequate protection for conservation areas;
- the need for greater awareness of the challenges surrounding the achievement of good water quality in marine, fresh- and groundwater; and
- greater consideration of flooding and coastal erosion risks.

Ireland's marine environment, and the sustainable use of its resources, are legally underpinned by a number of European Directives and associated national legislation. The National Marine Planning Framework sets out how to manage Ireland's maritime activities to ensure the sustainable use of marine resources up to 2040 (Government of Ireland, 2021). Work on conservation areas has been undertaken in Ireland recently, by the Expert Group on Marine Protected Areas (DHLGH, 2021a; Marine Protected Area Advisory Group, 2020). Northern Ireland is considering a Draft Marine Plan (DAERA, 2018; Ritchie & McElduff, 2020).

<sup>31</sup> Submission from Fórsa.

Within this broader legal and strategic context, the consultation helped to identify opportunities for all-island collaboration, on climate and biodiversity challenges, in relation to shared coastal areas and marine protection. Given that the British Irish Council Environment Work Sector has discussed climate adaptation in recent years, a marine and coastal focus could help to continue cooperation, and the sharing of information, experience and best practice.

Specific issues raised in the consultation include:

- Coastal planning approaches must be underpinned by the development of shoreline management plans. These should promote the blue carbon role of natural habitats, and their biodiversity benefits, as well as the role such habitats play in reducing flood risk and coastal erosion;<sup>32</sup>

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- Opportunities should be created for sharing knowledge on climate risk assessments. These could include forthcoming work by Irish Lights, which will provide an all-island coastal assessment of assets, and the impact of storm damage;

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- An all-island coastal erosion and flooding risk and mitigation plan should be produced, by a body similar to or aligned with, Ireland's National Coastal Change Management Strategy Steering Group. This group, chaired by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, and the Office for Public Works (OPW), was established in 2020 to consider the development of an integrated, whole of Government coastal change strategy.

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- Met Éireann is developing and will be implementing a Flood Forecast Centre (FFC) which will be the operational element of the National Flood Forecast and Warning Service (NFFWS), that will provide a flood forecast model for Ireland at both national and catchment levels. Continued and strengthened all-island collaboration and data sharing is critical for success, and this includes ongoing engagement between Met Éireann and Northern Ireland's Department for Infrastructure Rivers and the NI Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute.

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- An all-island review of at-risk assets and infrastructure should be carried out. This would help to strengthen social resilience by engaging people with flooding solutions.

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- There should be greater understanding and protection for marine systems that provide mitigation benefits. These include the role of kelp forests – which are common (but also threatened) in Irish coastal waters – in delivering carbon drawdown and protection from storm surges.

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- Existing cross border inter-agency consultation, coordination and collaboration should be developed and deepened, including stakeholder consultation in relation to the challenges in water quality and conservation.

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- Further research and monitoring is needed on the sequestration of blue carbon and on the balancing of marine and wind energy generation and conservation.

In general terms, it was noted that there has been an increased interest and focus by the public on marine life, and the coasts and beaches around the island. However, it was argued that there is a need to continue working to build greater societal empathy for the marine environment and its protection.

<sup>32</sup> Submission from Ulster Wildlife.

## 4.5 Renewable Energy

The consultation pointed to the scope for future renewable energy developments to bring advantages to the island. Both Ireland and Northern Ireland are committed to developing a sustainable electricity system, underpinned by the Single Electricity Market and driven by Paris Agreement obligations. Ireland is committed to reaching 70 per cent of electricity generated from renewable sources by 2030, and has developed an auction-based Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) to help deliver on this. The UK's Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) has a legally binding target towards net zero emissions in all sectors of the economy. Northern Ireland and the Department for the Economy (DfE) are currently working with stakeholders to develop the next Strategic Energy Framework for Northern Ireland.<sup>33</sup>

Renewable energy and its development across the island has an active network in various spheres. The Irish Wind Energy Association, IWEA, for example held a conference last year exploring Our Shared Energy Future.<sup>34</sup>

The consultation highlighted that, for the efficient integration of renewable energy, there is a need for further alignment of policies, incentives and market structures across the island. This would help ensure a safe, secure, sustainable and affordable electricity supply. The learning from the All-island Single Electricity Market could be applied to other renewable energy solutions going forward.

Delivering the target of 70 per cent renewable energy electricity by 2030 would require exceptionally high-level performance by the all-island power system. The critical nature of north-south cooperation in meeting EU-level renewable energy targets was emphasised. A view was expressed in the consultation that Ireland will not be able to meet its renewable energy targets for 2030 without the entire island addressing it collectively.

There is potential to align the two markets on long-term island energy policy objectives, within the parameters of the respective EU and UK frameworks. This potential applies to collaboration north-south as well as east-west – for example, with Scotland.

A number of specific opportunities were highlighted. These include:

- developing an integrated approach to connection of offshore resources;
- establishing all-island research programmes and networks on renewable energy;
- commencing cross-border collaboration on R&D, in areas such as in Carbon Capture Storage and hydrogen;
- developing a coherent overarching energy policy, and building societal engagement;
- a more integrated approach to energy infrastructure, renewables, societal engagement, and planning and grid development. These would build further connections between developer-led and community energy projects on the island; and,
- achieving a just transition on energy poverty, home heating and transport.

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<sup>33</sup> See forthcoming <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/northern-ireland-energy-strategy-2050>, accessed 26.10.21.

<sup>34</sup> See <https://iwea-all-island-conference.com/iwea-all-island-conference/pages/agenda>, accessed 23.09.21.

## 4.6 Sustainable Agriculture

*"Safeguarding the environment and maintaining a sustainable and competitive agriculture sector is very important to farmers. Farmers care about the environment."<sup>35</sup>*

The Council recognises that responding to agricultural emissions on the island of Ireland is a shared and complex challenge. The submissions pointed to the commonalities, rather than differences, in farming – some of which are unique to the island of Ireland, due to its having fertile soil in a temperate climate.

Agriculture produces the largest share of emissions, north and south – 35.3 per cent in Ireland and 27 per cent in Northern Ireland (2019 and 2018 respectively). As such, the challenge of finding ways to reduce emissions and the impact of agriculture on a range of wider environmental issues – such as water quality and biodiversity – is shared across the island. It has been noted that there is obvious scope for increased cooperation and joint research programmes (Arnold, 2020).

The Food Vision 2030 Strategy is a new 10 year strategy for the Irish agri-food sector. It builds on Ag Climatise, the roadmap for delivering the emissions reductions targets for agriculture, in the Government's Climate Action Plan 2019. The forthcoming Climate Action Plan 2021 will outline how this sector can increase mitigation levels. The new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) will bring further policy measures, with an increased focus on climate and biodiversity. Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) for the period 2023-2027 is open for consultation (DAFM, 2021). Northern Ireland has established an Independent Strategic Review of the NI Agri-Food Sector (ISRAF), including a consultation process during 2021 (DAERA, 2021b).

Against this policy backdrop the consultation identified a number of specific areas where opportunities to collaborate might exist. These include:

- A common approach to the financial supports in which farmers should be incentivised and financially supported to adopt climate mitigating practice;

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- Payments to farmers as land managers and as protectors of nature could be explored more widely, through CAP measures and beyond, including payment for the provision of ecosystem services. Showcase examples include the Burren Life and Kerry Life projects (NPWS, 2019a, 2019b);

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- An all-island rollout of Farming for Nature may help address the post-Brexit challenge of differences in agriculture, impacts on biodiversity and marketing of agricultural products; and

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- Local rural mobility issues, including rail solutions, should be explored; as should changing car dependency; economic opportunities through climate adaptation; and local food sharing strategies.

In more general terms, the consultation noted the importance of forestry in terms of its climate mitigation potential, but also the ‘totality’ of its economic as well as environmental contribution.

A number of contributors also raised the role of small-scale, diverse and sustainable agriculture in protecting and sustaining biodiversity, but noted that transition of this type needs to be supported.

The consultation also highlighted that engagement with people around climate change, and in rural communities should not be separated from broader community development and wellbeing initiatives. There was a strong focus in the submissions, on the need to explore how to transition to more sustainable types of agriculture, and the importance of acknowledging that rural life is more than farming. There were risks in relation to the future of rural communities, which may be impacted by climate change and biodiversity loss.

<sup>35</sup> Submission from the IFA.

The consultation also raised the idea of visioning work with farmers to identify possibilities. Cross-border listening exercises could inform policy and practice. Reflecting on one of the areas highlighted in the consultation paper, there was a focus on new economic models and community wealth building in rural areas. Collaboration and meaningful participation with communities was considered important, as well as involving farmers. The co-creation and co-ownership of climate action by communities was key as was co-design with stakeholders to avoid setting up new structures and institutions.

Finally, the principle of a just transition was mentioned in relation to farming. An example was given of the work of the Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN) on its River Catchments Catalyst Project. This recognises the importance of a just transition for farmers – in this case the adoption of different agricultural practices that improve and protect water quality. An essential component consists of a livelihood analysis of the farming community, which involves consideration of farming income streams and their relationship to the wider rural economy.

## 4.7 Valuing Nature

*'By integrating Natural Capital into our decision making, we can make more informed decisions that better reflect the values of nature when taking investment decisions to help rebuild the economies in both the North and the South.'*<sup>36</sup>

Nature-based solutions, natural capital, and accounting for nature are increasingly part of policy debates, in part because of visible losses experienced due to climate impacts such as flooding, droughts and threats to pollination (Bell, 2020). Heightened focus is now on how to deepen and extend nature-based solutions and conservation action, including efforts to protect native species, rewet peatlands, restore native forests, and re-wild. Much work has been done to develop the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan and All-Island Climate and Biodiversity Research Network, drawing together expertise with a focus on biodiversity challenges.

There was a strong focus in the consultation on restoring ecosystem function and natural capital accounting (to support policy and research development). It was suggested that the UN's System of Environmental Economic Accounting (SEEA) could be used to do this. If natural capital could be aligned across both jurisdictions, this would help to ensure that commonalities could be exploited, and trans-boundary monitoring of changes could be carried out. A view expressed was that this could bring some enduring economic and social benefits in the long term and could help build the competitiveness and uniqueness of an island 'brand'.

The consultation identified a number of specific ways that there could be greater cooperation between governments on the island, which would help factor natural capital accounting into mainstream economic/investment decisions and policymaking.

First, contributors argued that, despite broad policy and public backing, research and policy on natural capital in Ireland lags behind the UK. Northern Ireland has benefitted from the structures established at a UK level to progress natural capital. This suggests there is an opportunity for Ireland to learn lessons from the work in Northern Ireland.

Second, there are a small number of case studies that could help inform future work in this area. These include the close co-operation of Derry City and Strabane District Council (DCSDC), and Donegal County Council, in the climate and biodiversity areas through the North West Regional Development Group. The Irish Natural Capital Accounting for Sustainable Environments (INCASE) Project, funded by the EPA, has been developing accounts for different sites (see Box 7 for details on all three initiatives). These examples point to a capacity and appetite for further developments across the island.

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<sup>36</sup> Submission from RSPB NI.

### **Box 7: Valuing Nature Examples**

#### **Derry City and Strabane District Council's Natural Capital Accounts**

Derry City & Strabane District Council have produced a Natural Capital Account that is being used to help manage the District at a landscape scale. Their natural capital assessment showed that greenspaces in Derry and Strabane are significant economic assets, provide good value for money and are easily accessible to most urban residents. Every £1 spent on investment and maintenance of greenspaces generates £21 of benefits in 2020, an increase from 2019.(DCSDC, 2021)

#### **Donegal County Council**

Donegal County Council has, for the first time, provided a dedicated ring-fenced budget of €100,000 in 2021 to be spent solely on biodiversity measures – between its own operations and community-driven initiatives, which will be matched by other funds.

#### **Example: INCASE Project**

Irish Natural Capital Accounting for Sustainable Environments (INCASE) is an EPA-funded research project (2019-2023). It is the first Irish project to develop natural capital accounts for different sites in Ireland.<sup>37</sup>

## **4.8 Conclusions**

This chapter reported opportunities to increase cooperation and collaborative responses identified in the consultation. In outlining these, the Council is mindful that ratcheting up climate and biodiversity action, and delivering results in a few short years, will be extremely challenging for all sectors across both jurisdictions on the island.

There may also be difficulties when policies do not align or there is poor communication. The social, economic and political realities of transitioning away from fossil fuels will require leadership, public engagement and a collaborative approach.

The importance of the Good Friday Agreement institutions – organisations already working and building links – cannot be overstated, and it is hoped that their value and potential to add more to environmental areas will be utilised fully. In a post-pandemic recovery, maximising these economic and environmental opportunities and synergies could provide the island with competitive and sustainable development advantages.

Finally, the opportunities identified in this report align with the Government of Ireland's National Development Plan, and its commitment to work towards a more sustainable island. In particular, it focuses on the all-island infrastructure for energy transformation; all-island action to tackle climate change, protect biodiversity and expand the circular economy; and conserving the common water, coastal and marine resources of the island (Government of Ireland, 2021c).

<sup>37</sup> See INCASE Project <https://www.incaseproject.com/about>, accessed 23.09.21

## Chapter 5

### **Strengthening Climate and Biodiversity Collaboration: Council Proposals for Shared Action**

## 5.1 Introduction

The question the Council set out at the start of this work, and the consultation process, was to what extent scope existed to strengthen cooperation and collaboration across the island; and whether this, in turn, could support tangible actions on climate and biodiversity?

The research and consultation strongly suggests that there is very significant scope to do so. It has identified a large range of actions that can be taken forward, some of which are already underway.

In this closing chapter, the Council sets out four areas with potential to strengthen environmental cooperation and collaboration, which arise from the shared island consultation on climate and biodiversity challenges and opportunities. These are:

- Build on the Consultation Process;

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- Develop and Deepen the Shared Ambition: Expression of Common Purpose;

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- Enhance Shared Experiences: Networks and Strategic Working Groups; and

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- Advance Shared Opportunities: Priority Areas.

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- The remainder of this chapter outlines actions and recommendations in each of these areas. It closes by noting work that NESC can take forward.

## 5.2 Build on the Consultation Process

The consultation process has demonstrated the value of engagement and dialogue. This has taken a number of forms and has highlighted a number of key issues.

First, it has helped establish a shared understanding that, while the urgency for climate and biodiversity action is clear, there is awareness that strengthening cooperation takes time and requires public engagement and participation. The timeliness of deepening action was widely noted, given the considerable legislative and policy development across the island, and the increasing international focus.

Second, it has helped shed light on common problems and efforts to develop solutions. All-island research collaborations have been building momentum – such as through the All-Island Climate and Biodiversity Research Network – but also through the development of the forthcoming PEACE PLUS programme, which has a strong focus on supporting a sustainable future on the island, and the new North-South Research Programme.

Third, it has shown the deep capacity that exists within NGOs, local authorities, businesses, public agencies and the public, north and south, to work together to support nature, and to manage the risks from invasive alien species, illegal waste, coastal erosion, biodiversity loss and extreme weather events.

It has shown that expertise is evident in many spheres, with ecologists, scientists and researchers, among others, sharing ideas, such as, on rewetting bogs and peatland restoration, afforestation, community energy, pollinators, and marine carbon sequestration.

The Council note that this expertise, if combined with effective means of broader public engagement, could be used to deepen dialogue on the current context and future. The Council believes that creative approaches could encourage communities across the island to develop stories of the sustainable futures we could all enjoy. All-island story-telling projects of future low carbon and thriving nature and society should be supported. It is worth exploring how to provide young people with avenues to contribute and engage on climate and biodiversity on an all-island basis.

Fourth, it also helped portray a deeper understanding of the environmental contribution of the institutions and structures established under the Good Friday Agreement. These indispensable forums provide a structured framework for consultation, coordination and action to address environmental challenges on the island.

## 5.3 Develop and Deepen the Shared Ambition: Expression of Common Purpose

The Council believes there is a need to progress climate and biodiversity in an urgent, ambitious, integrated and holistic way. It would welcome the development of a shared and inspiring vision for integrated climate and biodiversity action across the island. Working towards a common set of challenges across a small single biosphere, can only be strengthened by a shared island perspective. These policy challenges can be approached creatively and collaboratively, such as by bringing nature-based solutions to climate action and marine conservation to renewable energy development.

The Council believes that while there is growing shared ambition for climate and biodiversity action, both north and south, it could be more explicit and used more strategically to galvanise action, build public support and awareness, and deliver results.

The Council considers the strong focus on stating a vision and a common purpose, as a potential way forward. Through partnership, both jurisdictions can work towards integrated climate and biodiversity action, by way of an expression of common purpose between Northern Ireland and Ireland, but also east to other UK neighbours.

The development of a joint statement on the shared climate and biodiversity challenges would be a positive development, setting out a commitment to work collaboratively across sectors and communities on mitigation, adaptation and restoration – including territorial, water, coastal and marine.

In this year of COP 26 and COP 15, there may be an opportunity to better communicate current actions and developments, both north and south. The opportunities for co-operation between Scotland and Ireland have recently been explored, through the Irish-Scotland Joint Bilateral Review. A focused joint review on environmental areas for further collaboration between Ireland and Northern Ireland would be invaluable. Other stakeholders have already taken a collaborative position on addressing environmental issues. For example, business is supportive of the development of a joined-up and co-ordinated position on the possibilities, priorities and practicalities of a shared island climate action and biodiversity programme.<sup>38</sup>

The Council welcomes the enhanced level of ambition for collaborative cross-border public investment, and the need for co-ordinated approaches to climate and biodiversity action, in the Government of Ireland's National Development Plan (NDP) (Government of Ireland, 2021c). The preparation of, and reflection on, such a statement of common purpose could help to inform and progress the Irish Government's commitment in the Programme for Government to seek to develop an all-island strategy on climate and biodiversity.

There may well be a role for institutions and bodies established under the Good Friday Agreement, including the North South Ministerial Council, in this vision-setting process, and in the articulation of common goals in relation to tackling climate breakdown and the biodiversity crisis.

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<sup>38</sup> Submissions from JBC (Ibec-CBI); Chambers Ireland

## 5.4 Enhance Shared Experiences: Networks and Strategic Working Groups

The Council finds that there are many shared experiences in responding to environmental challenges, but these can be hidden, duplicated, or lacking in impact due to invisibility. Strong examples of working in partnership exist, such as the approach to river basin management, which is based on years of working collaboratively in response to the EU Water Framework Directive.

The Council recommends that further attention be given to developing and supporting collaborative ways of working, which draw on good existing practices. This can be done in three key ways:

First, established mechanisms can be utilised to build collaboration for common challenges and opportunities, such as the many all-island organisations and collaborations noted here. Critical supports to collaboration are the Environment sub-group of the British-Irish Council (BIC); and other institutions established under the Good Friday Agreement. Other types of mechanism exist such as the all-island strategic rail review run jointly by the Minister for Transport and the Northern Ireland Minister for Infrastructure.

Second, the Council recognises the particular importance of focusing on climate and biodiversity challenges, with expert research and development, from a shared island perspective. It supports a deepening and strengthening of inter-disciplinary, cross-jurisdictional, inter-sectoral research collaborations, which maximise the wealth of expertise across the island.

Common challenges in climate and biodiversity such as potential barriers and areas of regulatory divergence; evidence and data for informed all-island research; and comparative research, are all areas worth exploring further. Mission-oriented research to address specific all-island climate and biodiversity challenges could capture public imagination, provide evidence-based solutions, and inform and help evaluate strategies.

The Council considers that there is value in the further development of a series of all-island conferences, initially on the themes of: circular economy and bioeconomy; renewable energy; marine conservation and adaptation; and water quality and management. Other conferences could explore climate and agricultural emissions; nature recovery networks; and approaches to public climate engagement.

Third, the Council values the current involvement of partnerships and networks in sharing good practice, and working to align efforts to mitigate against climate change and protect nature. These informal and formal networks are worth supporting and further developing, such as those focusing on wind energy, resource use, and pollinators. They can share practices and develop solutions to support climate and biodiversity progress of mutual interest,

These networks include NGOs, local authorities, researchers, business organisations, unions, and civil society groups. There is value in exploring how these informal and formal networks might link in and further develop. Resourcing and creating more direct avenues for communication and cooperation would be beneficial. There is a need for further scoping and mapping exercises to identify and potentially link actors in these networks.

Members of the Council, including Chambers Ireland, Ibec, the trade unions, and environmental, social and community pillars all have active north-south engagement through their networks and the scope of their organisations. Making their work more visible, and developing increased links with Northern Ireland communities and businesses, could help enrich and increase the value of these networks.

The Council believes that possibilities exist to build and foster ties between the formal and informal structures. The Council proposes two avenues to progress this.

First, the creation of a distinct funding stream for mapping and exploring existing environmental networks across all sectors, north and south.

Second, widening engagement would strengthen these structures where feasible. The Council would support efforts to establish a structured engagement between the Environment Sector of the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) and civil society groups on a periodic basis. This could include representatives from environmental NGOs, business, unions, farmers and other key sectors that have developed cross-border networks and collaborations.

The value of public engagement and the wider societal transition is an important consideration for policy makers across the island. Ireland has established a number of structures for public engagement such as citizens' assemblies, Public Participation Networks and the National Climate Dialogue, but it is recognised that more can be done, with Programme for Government commitments to develop new models of engagement.<sup>39</sup> The potential for connections with all-island sports teams, such as rugby and hockey, to promote wider participation in tackling climate and biodiversity issues should be considered. Northern Ireland also has a heightened focus on engagement on environmental issues, through a web app, the Environmental Engagement Index (EEI), which aims to increase the level of engagement in pro-environmental behaviours by the general public across Northern Ireland (DAERA, 2021a). The Council recognises the potential to share innovative practices such as this between the two jurisdictions and build capacity on public engagement.

## 5.5 Advance Shared Opportunities: Priority Areas

There are considerable shared opportunities, and multiple ways in which all-island collaboration could be at sufficient scale to attract green transition investments in both jurisdictions. The following recommendations aim to ensure that this can happen.

First, particularly for priority areas, existing collaborations and networks should be enhanced, made more visible and linked, and scaled up where appropriate. One such area is comparative and all-island research to address shared environmental challenges. The Council supports the All-island Climate and Biodiversity Research Network, and new funding opportunities such as the North South Research Programme. For example, one specific area that will be critical is all-island collaboration and data sharing on flood forecasting and warning services.

Second, there barriers to cooperation that will need to be carefully monitored and tackled if the benefits are to be fully gained. These include regulatory divergence or policy differences that can undermine, rather than mutually support efforts to transition away from fossil fuels and restore nature.

Third, it is important to seek to align or co-ordinate regulations that can drive the transition in both jurisdictions in complementary (but potentially distinctive) ways, e.g. through fossil fuel subsidy fade out; carbon pricing; green skill development; and training and job creation.

Finally, the Council recommends the establishment of a number of strategic working groups to explore opportunities for future collaboration. Operating for a fixed period, such as 6 months, they would include representatives from academia, relevant departments, business and NGOs. Each Working Group could be hosted by a university, and stakeholders would optimally include representatives of both jurisdictions. A short report would be produced to identify a number of key areas of mutual interest and potential for further exchanges.

A number of strategic working groups with a broad focus are suggested here, but this number could be reduced in consultation with key stakeholders. The Council recommends that consideration be given – as part of the Government's Shared Island initiative, and in appropriate consultation with the Northern Ireland Executive – to how these Strategic Working Groups could most productively be established and operate.

The Council recognises that there are a number of ways in which such groups could be convened, while still meeting the objective of providing a setting for forward-looking discussion and formulation of advice. However, the overarching purpose is that they would explore the opportunities and modes for progressing value-added cooperative approaches to the pressing and shared environmental challenges that face both jurisdictions on the island.

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<sup>39</sup> For further information on these and other forms of public engagement, see <https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/b59ee9-community-network-groups/>, accessed 09.02.21.

The five suggested strategic working groups are:

**Sustainable Agriculture: Expanding Shared Areas of Interest:** The agricultural sector was frequently mentioned as being appropriate and necessary to examine from a climate perspective, given the many similarities in the two jurisdictions. There were calls for a common vision for nature-based or wildlife friendly farming, and a recognition that working with farmers, listening to and visioning with them, is the way forward for both climate and biodiversity. Wider issues of mobility and rural resilience would also need to be considered.

It was argued that such solutions must underpin land management and land use policy, including our approach to dealing with agricultural emissions – an issue that is especially challenging on the island of Ireland by comparison with other countries. Existing initiatives such as Farming for Nature could be explored further. Peatland restoration was identified as a key area of work, north and south, given the trans-boundary implications for carbon storage levels and inventory reporting.

**All-Island Opportunities from a Circular Economy and Bio-economy:** An all-island approach should be explored to support the shift to a circular economy in Ireland, Northern Ireland, and the rest of the UK, given the potential economies of scale and the resulting opportunity to gain competitive advantage. As both jurisdictions are developing circular economy strategies, it is a good time to examine ways of maximising benefits for both countries.

Specific initiatives could include all-island producer responsibility initiatives, e.g. for tyres; an all-island waste strategy; an all-island approach to the circular economy; and a shared island approach to reuse and repair. Existing networks and platforms, such as TCD's AMBER centre, CRNI/NIRN and Circuléire, could inform the work of this group.

**Collaborations on Renewable Energy:** The Council considers future renewable energy development as a significant area of opportunity for north-south cooperation. This is reflected in the consultation material, which emphasised technical and pragmatic reasons such as off-shore wind development and the Single Electricity Market, but also the societal and governance challenges of planning, community engagement and support for a transition of this scale.

There is scope for multiple networks for different kinds of renewable energy, such as solar, AD, offshore wind, wave and tidal. There is also scope for building cooperation, and sharing expertise and seeking solutions in the areas of research, investment and governance. For example, Ireland would benefit from policy and incentives to boost production of renewable energy from AD, and bring it to levels comparable to those in Northern Ireland. Another example, given the lack of public refuelling infrastructure for CNG or hydrogen in Northern Ireland, is the opportunity to share knowledge between the two jurisdictions to examine the role and development of this technology across the island.

**Valuing Networks for Nature:** The Council sees considerable potential to build on the progress of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan, and to further discussion on issues such as nature recovery networks and a ‘wildlife web’, developing linkages or corridors of natural vegetation between existing conservation areas. Consultees pointed to the potential of a focused approach to hedgerow corridors, and a ‘necklace of peatlands’ along the border. These would knit the landscape together through common biodiversity objectives, restoration actions and community buy-in, working collaboratively to deliver large and visible benefits. The potential increase in natural carbon storage (peatlands/wetlands) is a valuable nature-based solution. Mapping of urban green spaces could also be a focus, as could marine nature-based solutions, including the sequestration and mapping of blue carbon sources (e.g. the role of kelp forests).

The working group could also examine the importance of addressing biodiversity alongside climate change, and the potential of natural capital and valuing nature as useful policy tools. There are governance and policy challenges in both jurisdictions on how to effectively embed biodiversity and this is an area that would benefit from cooperation and sharing of good practice.

Another suggested biodiversity area, that could potentially be explored, is the management of invasive alien species where there are efforts to further develop all-island approaches under PEACE PLUS, in the border counties and Northern Ireland.

**Marine and Coastal Climate Adaptation and Impact:** The Council considers there is value in strengthening cooperation, and expanding knowledge and shared practices, in relation to the marine and coastal impacts of climate change; and in relation to all-island approaches to adaptation. The focus of the working group could include specific challenges such as: flood water management, coastal erosion and the impacts of a rise in sea-levels.

A number of potential opportunities are underway that could be developed to progress this and which could inform the work of a strategic working group. The Council welcomes recent collaborations between the EPA, Met Éireann and the Marine Institute, and suggests that such alliances could be developed to include Climate NI, Irish Lights, and other relevant bodies and departments. The possibility of carrying out an all-island review of risks, assets and infrastructure could also be explored.

Opportunities also exist in relation to the significant gap in information on changing ocean and climate. An All-Island Marine Knowledge and Innovation programme of research could be developed and resourced, in conjunction with the Marine Institute that could explore this, as well as the development of all-island climate services; safe and sustainable food from the ocean; healthy marine environment and ecosystems; and building a sustainable blue economy.

## 5.6 Conclusion

This report has shown that there is an ambition to collaborate across the island to deal with climate and biodiversity in an integrated, positive and imaginative manner. Many suggested actions have been identified through the consultation process. Many of these have been outlined in this report. (See Table A1 in the Appendix for a summary).

The challenge is enormous and urgent, and the cost of inaction is frightening. Recent IPCC and IPBES reports, combined with more frequent and severe extreme weather events around the world, and closer to home, make this a time for all shoulders to the wheel.

The report illustrates the potential opportunities for strengthening existing networks, and building new ones, in order to underpin the mutual efforts to contribute to a thriving and prosperous island. The report shows that this ambition can be better achieved through collaboration and working in partnership on common climate, biodiversity and sustainable development goals. Doing so can underpin and strengthen each jurisdiction's response to meeting international commitments and objectives, and bring the potential for collaborative opportunities of mutual benefit.

This report has identified a series of actions and recommendations. For its part, the Council will seek to ensure that its work programme, specifically its work on sustainable development and climate action, will include a strong shared island perspective. Areas where this will be explored include: agriculture and climate action; natural capital; and place-based research on just transition.

In addition, the Council will continue to work on developing a comprehensive report on the Shared Island and will explore opportunities for further work in this regard.

## Appendix 1: Submissions and Interviewees



## Submissions

All -Island Local Authority Forum	Hans Dubois
AMBER (Advanced Materials and BioEngineering Research)/AICEP (The All-Island Circular Economy Proposal Team), TCD	Hans Visser, Biodiversity Officer, Fingal County Council
Amy O'Brien	Heritage Council
An Taisce	IFA
Angela Lloyd	Indaver
Central Statistics Office (CSO)	Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI)
Chambers Ireland	Ireland (GNI)
Climate Action Regional Offices (CAROs) (Kildare County Council)	Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN)
Coalition 2030	Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)
Colin Doyle	Irish Lights
Community Resources Network Ireland (CRNI)/Northern Ireland Resources Network (NIRN)	JBC (Ibec/CBI)
Community Wetlands Forum	Jennifer Archer
Coomhola Salmon Trust Ltd	Joanne O'Connor
Dept of Agriculture, Food and the Marine	Keep NI Beautiful (KNIB)
Derry City & Strabane District Council	Lia Clarke
Dr Mary Dobbs, Maynooth	Local Authority Heritage Officer Network (LAHON)
Dr. Chris McGonigle, University of Ulster	Loughs Agency
Dylan Murphy	Maeve Thornberry
EirGrid	Marine Institute
Environmental Pillar, and Northern Ireland Environment link (NIEL)	Marzia Doro
EPA, Dr Eimear Cotter	Natural Capital Ireland (NCI)
Eric Conroy, Council member of An Taisce	North West Regional Development Group (NWRDG)
Fórsa Trade Union	Patrick Barrett, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM)
Gas Networks	Prof. Mark Johnson, School of Natural Sciences and Ryan Institute, NUI Galway
	Prof. Pat Brereton DCU

Repak ELT	Social Justice Ireland
Road Haulage Association	Southern Region Waste Management Office (SRWMO)
Róisín Greaney	TASC
RSPB Northern Ireland	Tillage Industry Ireland
Sadhbh O'Flynn	UCD Energy Institute
Science Foundation Ireland (SFI)	Ulster Wildlife
Senator Alice-Mary Higgins	Waterways Ireland
SHARECITY	
Sinéad Loughran	

### Interviewees

AICBRN Research Group: Dr Tasman Crowe, UCD; Prof. Peter Thorne, Maynooth; Prof. Murray Hitzman, UCD.

Aileen Lawson, Ulster Farmers Union

AMBER & AICEP Research Group: Prof. Michael Morris, TCD (AMBER); Deirdre Caden, TCD; (AMBER) Martin Doherty, Belfast; Lorraine Byrne, TCD (AMBER); David McCormack, CIRCULÉIRE; Rachel Kavanagh (AMBER); Dr. Peter Martin, QUB.

Aoife Ni Lochlann IEN and Sean Kelly NIEL

Brigid Murphy, mixed farmer Co.Sligo

Cathy Burns, Derry City & Strabane District Council

DAERA: Owen Lyttle, Colin Breen, Helen Anderson

DAFM: Patrick Barrett; Corina Roe; Jack Nolan; Edwina Love

Dr Amanda Slevin, PCAN Network, QUB

Dr Finbarr Brereton, UCD and Dr Viviane Gravey, QUB

Dr. Aine Macken Walsh, Teagasc

Dr. Helen McHenry, WDC

Dr. Jade Berman, Climate NI

Dr. Mary Dobbs, Maynooth University

Dr. Una Fitzpatrick, National Biodiversity Centre

Karen Ciesielski and Aoife Ni Lochlann IEN

Karin Dubsky, Coastwatch Ireland

Kerry Curran, Intertrade Ireland

Malachy Campbell, NIEL

Michael D'Arcy, JBC

Prof. Brian O'Gallachoir, UCC

Prof. Diarmuid Torney, DCU

Prof. John Barry, QUB

Sean McCabe, TASC

Shirley Clerkin, Heritage Office, Monaghan County Council.

## Appendix 2: Consultation – Key Themes & Overview of Suggestions



The Consultation Paper outlined possible opportunities for further co-operation. These focused broadly on five substantive areas: climate policy; building resilience in cities; valuing nature; renewable energy; and rural and farming communities.

The complexity of the challenges faced by the island and its two jurisdictions was expertly conveyed by those who participated. They helped to flesh out these areas with concrete details and examples.

As part of the consultation, respondents were invited to answer these questions:

- i Should one of the five areas identified be prioritised for more detailed consideration in a Shared Island context? If so, which one and why?

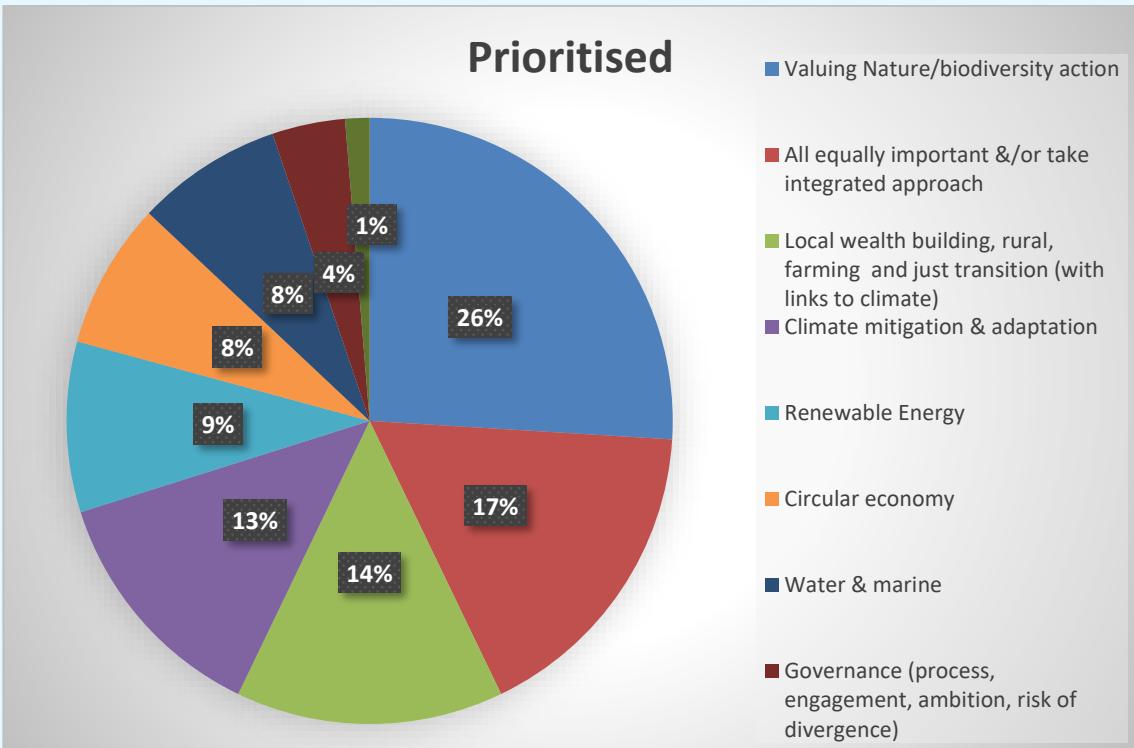
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- ii Is there another area, not listed in the five areas identified, that should be considered for further exploration on a Shared Island basis? If so, what is it and why?

A thematic analysis was carried out on the material received, particularly to identify: existing common practices, networks and areas of cooperation; potential areas for further research, development or exploration; and lessons on meeting the climate and biodiversity challenges going forward.

Figure A.1 presents a ‘tally of preferences’ from the submissions and interviews. It shows that the five areas resonated well with those consulted. Many of them were strongly supported as areas to be further developed from a shared island perspective.

**Figure A.1: Prioritised Areas for Further Consideration**



Valuing nature and biodiversity was the most frequently cited area that was worth further consideration from an all-island perspective (cited by 26 per cent of respondents). The importance of taking an integrated and holistic approach to the challenges together, rather than focus on one or two alone, was also widely noted. Climate policy and practice, along with rural resilience and sustainable agriculture, were also strong themes.

Resilient cities was not prioritised in the consultation, although it was considered important particularly with regard to strengthening networks between Belfast, Dublin and other cities on the island. NESCs Roundtable on Resilient Cities and supporting research (Creamer et al., 2021) demonstrated the value of sharing innovative practices from Belfast and Bristol, and its relevance for cities on the island (Creamer et al., 2021).

Some suggestions were made for areas that were not as fully developed in the Consultation Paper. These included more focus on existing structures; existing collaborations and practices that could be strengthened, such as on waste management, work on invasive alien species and water quality, but also the inclusion of the substantive areas of the marine, and the circular economy.

Contributions included a focus on the need for taking a long-term view to develop cooperation and trust. This will require engagement with multiple actors and communities on a sustained basis. While it was possible to agree on what needs to be done for climate and biodiversity, it was harder to know how to do it.

The consultation provided a rich array of ideas and concrete actions, which could be the focus for further collaborative work on climate and biodiversity. Table A.1 provides a summary.

These were analysed and examined in detail by the Secretariat to identify areas of action which the Council believes should be prioritised. Chapter 5 of this report discusses the Council's proposals for shared all-island action on climate and biodiversity.

**Table A.1: Summary of Suggested Actions Arising from the Consultation**

1. Develop targets and processes to evaluate and monitor progress on an all-island basis across government departments, in key areas including green skills, training and jobs shortages. Explore opportunities for an all-island approach to green skills, training and jobs.
2. Examine the potential role of a Climate Commission in supporting climate action on the island of Ireland, drawing on the work of the fast Climate Commission.
3. Co-operate on building a shared focus on achieving the SDGs by 2030, including with local authorities.
4. Establish webs (wildlife web) or nature recovery networks to build linkages or corridors of natural vegetation between existing conservation areas.
5. Create an urban green space inventory to examine the importance of household access to, and use of, urban green spaces. This could draw on the tools used elsewhere, such as in the English People and Nature Survey.
6. Underpin the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan by statute and legislation, coupled with stronger national legislation in terms of biodiversity.
7. Bring together leading research centres across the whole island of Ireland to tackle the climate and biodiversity emergency. Develop shared island targets with long-term funding. Support development of all-island research and exchange, through the All-island Climate and Biodiversity Research Network.

8. Use all-island sports teams, such as rugby and hockey, to promote wider participation in tackling climate and biodiversity issues.
9. Examine lessons from Northern Irish engagement on its marine and environment strategies.
10. Developing an education strategy on environmental protection and biodiversity for farmers, the younger generation, and remaining citizens, is fundamental for the societal transition.
11. Develop an all-island education programme on climate change.
12. Develop a single strategic all-island waste strategy, that adapts and progresses waste management; helps align fees and enforcement; improves processing waste treatment infrastructure, including for hazardous waste; supports business and local authorities to work more closely; and, promotes good practice through the Regional Waste Management Offices.
13. Create an environmental management structure for end of life tyres (ELT), whereby an all-island Extended Producer Responsibility Initiative is used to provide traceability across the island.
14. Develop green and social public procurement (developments are occurring in both jurisdictions, e.g. Northern Ireland has introduced social scoring on public procurement; Ireland has recently introduced Green Public Procurement: Guidance for the Public Sector).
15. Engage with and develop a cohesive all-island approach to a circular and bioeconomy including reuse and repair; enhance building skills and training for a circular economy; and develop a shared island approach to reuse and repair infrastructure storage, which would provide a buffer to localised capacity shortages.
16. Explore approaches to peatland restoration, modelled on the best-practice, for example, MoorFutures in Germany or the UK Peatland Code.
17. Share experience and strengthen cooperation on the targeted management of cross-border habitat areas.
18. Share ‘lessons learned’ in the planning process and judicial review between north and south. Develop regulation and policy, and sharing lessons, on planning and judicial review in relation to polluting sectors, such as intensive agricultural developments.
19. Develop a common approach to fossil fuel subsidy.
20. Align mandates and operations of public bodies to deliver on targets – e.g. climate mitigation and energy efficiency.
21. Strengthen civil society participative structures across the island around climate, energy and biodiversity issues.
22. Develop clear signals to promote private sector investments for public good, such as climate resilient and sustainable infrastructure.

23. Develop an all-island commitment to high environmental standards.
24. Identify the benefits of the fracking ban implemented in Ireland, such as for public health and the environment.
25. Engage and discuss feasibility of developing an all-island citizen science initiative.
26. Audit and map collaborative experiments/initiatives through a programme of supported PhDs.
27. Map policy and practice convergence and flag divergence on a routine basis, so that differences and opportunities could be more readily recognised.
28. Develop an overall agreement between Ireland and Northern Ireland on establishing an all-island environmental regulatory framework.
29. Coastal planning approaches must be underpinned by developing shoreline management plans that promote the blue carbon role of natural habitats and their biodiversity benefits, as well as the role such habitats play in reducing flood risk and coastal erosion.
30. Explore the possibility of developing a joint north-south approach to the management of the infrastructure for the supply of treated water and for waste water.
31. Develop a joint policy on groundwater.
32. Deepen existing inter-agency consultation that exists around water quality and conservation; nature conservation and restoration; and natural capital.
33. Produce an all-island coastal erosion and flooding risk and mitigation plan, by a body similar to Ireland's National Coastal Change Management Strategy Steering Group.
34. Deepen understanding of the role of marine systems which provide mitigation benefits, for example the role played by kelp forests – which are common (but also threatened) in Irish coastal waters – in delivering carbon drawdown and protection from storm surges.
35. Develop and deepen existing cross-border inter-agency consultation, coordination and collaboration, along with stakeholder consultation in relation to the challenges facing water quality and conservation. Create opportunities to share information and knowledge on the development of River Basin Management Plans; home heating and transport solutions; and sustainable agriculture.
36. Carry out further research and monitoring on the sequestration of blue carbon, and on the balancing of marine and wind energy generation.
37. Examine how the learning from the All-island Single Electricity Market could be applied to other renewable energy solutions going forward.
38. Developing an integrated approach to connection of offshore resources.
39. Establish all-island research programmes and networks on renewable energy.
40. Commence cross-border collaboration in R&D in areas such as Carbon Capture Storage and hydrogen was needed.

41. Developing a coherent overarching energy policy, and building societal engagement, are key activities on a shared island.
42. Create a more integrated approach to energy infrastructure, renewables, societal engagement, and planning and grid development, which would build further connections between developer-led and community energy projects on the island.
43. Develop a common just transition framework across the island, to include a focus on social impacts, and social and regional proofing, and involve employee representatives, skills and training.
44. Support an all-island approach to achieving a just transition on energy poverty, home heating, and transport.
45. Develop a common approach to the financial supports by means of which farmers should be incentivised and financially supported to adopt climate mitigating practices.
46. Further ways of paying farmers as land managers and protectors of nature could be explored more widely, through CAP measures and beyond; including payment for the provision of ecosystem services. Showcase examples include the Burren Life and Kerry Life projects.
47. Supporting an all-island rollout of Farming for Nature may help address the post-Brexit challenge of differences in agriculture, impacts on biodiversity, and marketing of agricultural products.
48. Explore local rural mobility issues including rail solutions; changing car dependency; economic opportunities through climate adaptation; and local food-sharing strategies.

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No.	Title	Year	No.	Title	Year
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No.	Title	Year	No.	Title	Year
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