

EPA Strategic Plan 2016-2020

Consultation Issues

What you said and how we've responded



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Our Environment Our Wellbeing

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Introduction

The EPA Strategic Plan 2016-2020 is our fifth formal strategic plan since the EPA was established. It sets out what we intend to achieve over the next five years in delivering our mandate to protect and improve the environment as a valuable asset for the people of Ireland and to protect our people and the environment from the harmful effects of radiation and pollution.

As part of the development process of our new Strategic Plan 2016-2020, we conducted a public consultation process on the draft plan during October-November 2015. We received 52 submissions from members of the public, other Public Sector Bodies and representative organisations including Environmental Non-Governmental Organisations. Submissions were received by email, letter and by a dedicated on-line questionnaire. The majority of submissions supported the broad objectives of the plan and the strategic priorities that will need to be addressed over the next five years. They have helped us refine and strengthen the strategic plan and the EPA is very appreciative of the time and attention given by everyone that made a submission.

Specific issues were also raised during the consultation process, some of which can be addressed by the EPA and others that fall outside the remit of the EPA or where the EPA has a limited role. The following is a summary of the major issues that were raised by the submissions and an explanation as to how the EPA can respond to them.

Advocacy and Partnering

- ***There were a number of submissions welcoming the opportunity to work with the EPA in advocating for a clean, productive and well protected environment and also for the EPA to continue to focus on making the public more aware and engaged on issues and to promote the work of the EPA.***

As set out in our strategic plan our continuing over-riding priority will be to keep the environment centre-stage and support a sustainable society and economy. Now, more than ever, it is vital that the environment is placed at the heart of everyday decisions.

We will continue to advocate strongly for protecting and managing Ireland's environment, recognising that it is a shared responsibility involving all those living and working in Ireland. We are conscious that the EPA is just one of many players who must act together for a clean healthy and well protected environment and that we need to continue to build relationships and engage with others in this important work. We are committed to playing our part and will

be expanding our influencing, advocacy and partnering roles so that, working together we can target opportunities to integrate environmental priorities and sustainability into sectoral, economic and social policies. Over the course of our strategic plan we will work hard to increase awareness of environmental issues and support the active involvement of the public in environmental protection.

In order to protect the environment, we recognise there needs to be greater engagement by house holders, communities and businesses in resource efficient behaviours. We will further enhance our *BeGreen* suite of initiatives including Green Homes, Green Business, Green Hospitality, Stop Food Waste and Smart Farming, to assist citizens and the business community to identify opportunities to contribute to environmental sustainability while also saving money.

We will continue to develop new means of communicating environmental information to a wider audience with a particular focus on improving access to local and community level information. This will be achieved through expanded use of social media, on-going development of our website and map-based information systems, dissemination of local and regional environmental information from our key national reports, sponsorship of television programmes, development of guidance and educational material.

Format

- *The overall format was seen as clear, concise and helpful and the objectives were clearly set out. Suggestions were made around strengthening the links between the objectives and the outcomes.*

These suggestions were taken on board in the revision of the final strategic plan. We have identified five high level strategic goals that will provide a clear focus for our work over the next five years. These include being a *Trusted Environmental Regulator; Leader in Environmental Evidence and Knowledge; Effective Advocate and Partner; Responding to Key Environmental Challenges and Organisationally Excellent*. Through these we are committed to strengthening and enhancing our core functions, including regulation, enforcement and assessment. For each of these high level goals we have identified a set of objectives that we will pursue to achieve the associated outcomes. We fully recognise that these are ambitious goals and targets and will require broader cross-sectoral and societal input.

Health and Well-being

- *A number of submissions welcomed the inclusion of health and well-being in the strategy and saw it as a positive step. They would like the EPA to continue to strengthen its role in this area and further collaborate and engage with other health agencies and relevant stakeholders.*

We fully recognise the intrinsic link between a good quality environment and the health and well-being of our people. A thriving, clean and well-protected environment provides the very basis for a good quality of life and helps us all to live safe, healthy lives.

It is in this context that we have identified the overarching theme for this Strategic Plan as ‘*Our Environment- Our Wellbeing*’. We intend to place greater emphasis on collaboration with Government Departments, agencies and communities to promote the link between a good quality, well protected environment and the health and well-being of our people.

The EPA Health Advisory Committee will continue to play an important role in providing advice to the EPA about addressing the interface between the environment and human health and on how best to integrate human health considerations with environmental and radiological protection activities.

Air Quality/Pollution

- ***In the draft strategy published for consultation there was very little reference to air quality or air pollution. There was a call for a Clean Air Act to be established and to increase the role of the EPA, Met Éireann and HSE particularly regarding expanding air monitoring activities and on providing information on air and related health aspects.***

The issue of air quality is now recognised as a key environmental challenge in the final Strategic Plan, with a particular objective to strengthen the air quality frameworks in Ireland to further protect people and the environment. We will place a significant focus on air quality over the next five years and will continue to advocate for the adoption of stricter World Health Organisation guidelines as the legal standards for air quality in Ireland. We also intend to publish a national air quality monitoring plan for Ireland, to expand the current air quality network across the State, and provide better information on air quality at a more localised level. Separately, we will roll out a programme of citizen science activities in conjunction with national and international partners amongst which will include projects on air quality.

Water Framework Directive

- ***‘Coordinated implementation of the Water Framework Directive is of course welcomed but the exact outcome is unclear’***

The EPA welcomes its new leadership role in implementing the Water Framework Directive and is committed to providing a sound and comprehensive evidence base to underpin implementation of the Directive and the attainment of its objectives. In so doing the EPA will be working and collaborating with the many other organisations involved in implementation so that a more holistic catchment perspective is taken to the assessments of pressures and the development of appropriate and specific measures to both improve and protect the quality of our waters. The EPA will also be working to ensure that timely and relevant information on the water environment, on pressures on water and actions that are being taken to address known issues is publically available to catchment communities, public service organisations and other stakeholders so that they can work together and with the EPA to achieve a better water environment for all.

Biodiversity

- *Would like to see the EPA promote greater awareness to the threats to biodiversity*

While the EPA is not the leading competent body in Ireland regarding biodiversity a significant amount of work that we do has a direct impact on promoting awareness and protecting biodiversity. Examples of some of this work include:

- We have developed and are implementing an EPA Biodiversity Action Plan as part of the overall National Biodiversity Action Plan.
- The advent of the Water Framework Directive has resulted in a greatly increased ecological component in the monitoring of the aquatic environment, and our activities in that regard will significantly increase the state of knowledge of aquatic biodiversity in Ireland.
- As part of our research programmes, significant projects continue to be funded to increase knowledge of biodiversity change and its causes. During 2015 a number of projects were funded that will further our understanding of peatlands (climate relevant, ecosystem services & mapping) and support the management of invasive species.
- We will continue to include an assessment of the status of Ireland's biodiversity as part of our State of the Environment reports and facilitate reporting of nature and biodiversity information by the NPWS to the European Environment Agency.
- In implementing our functions relating to the licensing and regulation of various significant activities, we will continue to ensure that biodiversity is protected.
- We will continue to implement our responsibilities under the Environmental Liability Directive in relation to the damage or risk of damage to protected species and habitats and the identification of appropriate remediation.

Research

- *There were number of submissions supporting the importance of continuing to resource environmental research.*

We have identified being a leader in environmental evidence and knowledge as one our key strategic goals. We fully recognise the importance of having a research programme that addresses knowledge gaps and helps identify solutions to emerging and complex environmental problems. Effective management of the environment is increasingly science-driven. Through our research programme (2014-2020), we are generating the evidence, knowledge and expertise needed to protect and manage Ireland's environment. Our Research Programme consists of three key pillars: Climate, Water and Sustainability and a series of research calls under these pillars are held on an annual basis. We are also working hard to help Irish researchers take full advantage of other European funding opportunities.

Accessible Information

- *There were number of submissions emphasising the importance of providing environmental information in a timely and accessible format.*

Clear, accurate and timely information is a vital component in raising awareness about the environment among the public and key policy and decision makers. We have a strong track record in making environmental information and data available to the public and other stakeholders and we are committed to continuing to improve the quality, quantity and timeliness of data and information provided. Over the next four years, we want to improve, in particular, information about the quality of peoples local environments so that people and communities have greater access to up to date information about the environmental quality of where they live, work and play. We also want to make it easier for people to get this information through their smart phones and other electronic devices and will work with other organisations that also hold environmental information so that the EPA can provide a one-stop-shop to the public when they need to know something about the quality of their local environment. We are also committed to making as much of our data as we can available as ‘open data’ to facilitate widespread re-use of this data, starting with air quality, bathing water and radon data.

Risk based enforcement and financial provisions

- *There were a number of submissions asking that the EPA take a lead role in enforcement, ease the financial burden of compliance and end duplication of implementation of environmental regulations*

A key objective in our strategic plan is to continue the on-going development of a proportionate and effective regulatory approach. In developing this risk based, responsive regulatory approach we fully recognise the need to engage with all our stakeholders. We are committed to minimising the administrative burden on those we regulate while maintaining standards and levels of compliance. We fully recognise the difficult economic times in which we operate and the costs associated with effective regulation. However, ensuring there is adequate financial provision in place to manage environmental liabilities arising from the closure of potentially polluting activities will remain a priority for the EPA. We aim to achieve reduced environmental risks at EPA regulated facilities through tailored interventions and ensuring that appropriate financial provisions are in place. We will continue to work with local authorities and other regulators through the Network for Ireland's Environmental Compliance and Enforcement (NIECE) and the three newly established Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authorities (WERLA) to tackle national waste priority issues.

List of Submissions

- Scottish Environmental Protection Agency
- European Environment Agency
- Environment Agency (UK)
- Natural Resources Wales
- Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
- EIRGRID
- Irish Waste Management Association
- Health and Safety Authority
- Irish Water
- Gas Networks Ireland
- National Biodiversity Data Centre
- Birdwatch Ireland
- IBEC
- Irish Wind Energy Association
- Irish Rural Link
- Irish Farmers Association
- The Woodland League
- Nigel de Haas
- Helen Doyle
- Professor John Sodeau, UCC
- Professor Lokesh Joshi, NUIG
- Maeve Thornberry
- Health Service Executive
- SWAN Ireland
- Brendan Price
- Bob Wilson
- Science Foundation Ireland
- Helen Riordan
- Richard O' Hanlon
- Ruairi O'Carroll
- Teagasc
- Jerry Kiersey
- Renata
- Abdul Kaleem
- Eric Conroy
- Owen Martin
- Pat Brereton, DCU
- James Walls, Fingal Co. Co.
- Diarmuid O'Donovan, NUI, Galway
- Community Reuse Network Ireland
- Department of Finance
- Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM)
- Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (DJEI)
- Food Safety of Ireland (FSAI)
- The Office of Public Works (OPW)
- Road Safety Authority (RSA)
- Commission for Energy Regulation (CER)
- Anonymous (numerous)