

Making Ireland's Development Sustainable
- Review, Assessment and Future Action

Key points made in the Report:

- the sustainable development agenda is complex and broad, involving economic, social and environmental policies and the linkages between them. Because of Ireland's rapid change through the 1990s – change which was largely associated with the nature and extent of economic growth - and the implications of this for the natural resource base, the Report focuses primarily on the environment-economy link as a priority issue now for sustainable development policy in Ireland. It also includes appropriate reflection of social issues,
- in terms of review (sections 3 and 4 of the Report), significant progress has been made since 1992 with protection of the environment, including in the framework of the 1997 Strategy,
- there have been a number of major policy developments; institutions for environmental protection and sustainable development have been strengthened; the concept of environmental integration is now more fully accepted as a feature of legislation, Government policy and national development programmes; there is greater appreciation of the importance of shared responsibility for the environment on the part of all sectors of society; public access to information in relation to the environment has been extended; and, in terms of environmental outcomes, the long-standing trend of deterioration in river water quality has been halted,
- particular milestones include: the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1993, the integrated pollution control licensing system operated by EPA since 1994, the Waste Management Act 1996, the adoption of *Sustainable Development: A Strategy for Ireland* in 1997, the creation of Comhar – the National Sustainable Development Partnership, in 1999, and publication of the *National Climate Change Strategy* in 2000,
- progress has been made in decoupling energy and materials intensity from economic growth, and in reducing emissions from industry. There have also been improvements in key areas such as river water quality, local air quality, and waste recycling,
- in terms of assessment (section 5 of the Report), *Sustainable Development: A Strategy for Ireland* (1997) recognised that taking sustainable development forward would be a long-term process, stressing that its main impact would be seen within a long-term overall time horizon. This acknowledged the nature of

sustainable development as an evolving process requiring ongoing assessment and refinement,

- while much action has been taken under the Strategy in its initial 5 years, significant effort will continue to be necessary across the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development to ensure that Irish policy and action are moving in the direction of sustainability. This reflects also the global experience since UNCED, which has generally shown that implementation of sustainable development is slower than had been anticipated, with gains in some areas often offset by lack of progress in others,
- it is necessary for Ireland to do better in the coming decade if all our international commitments are to be met, and national environmental quality improved and protected. Underlying problems in the relationship between the economy and the environment in Ireland have not yet been fully addressed so there are substantial challenges on the road to meeting significant domestic and international commitments,
- the 1997 Strategy's aim of achieving more sustainable production and consumption has been challenged in a consumer society, fuelled by the economic boom of recent years. While there has been progress towards greater eco-efficiency, there is still a considerable way to go in terms of sustainable production. The increase in consumption, whether in terms of transport or energy or individual consumer goods, is associated with adverse impacts such as waste generation, congestion and urban sprawl,
- Ireland is now challenged by the nature, location and pace of economic growth; changing population and settlement patterns; underdeveloped environmental infrastructure; and unevenly applied environmental controls, which are impacting on environmental quality both nationally and locally,
- the main issues are: eutrophication of inland waters; increases in the amounts of waste; the urban environment; the impacts of settlement patterns; the need to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases; and depletion of natural resources and threats to biodiversity,
- on the international agenda (section 6 of the report), international co-operation for the environment is an integral part of Irish foreign policy. Ireland, through its membership of the European Union, UN and OECD, ratification of the various relevant instruments, and programme of official development assistance (ODA), has been an active participant in most of the global initiatives on environmental protection and sustainable development over the last 10 years,

- in terms of future perspectives, section 7 of the Report sets out policy priorities in relation to sustainable development for the new decade. In doing this, the Report recognises that there will be a need for continuing review and adaptation of policies and actions in respect of these issues and in other areas of sustainable development policy concern and action,
- section 7 is not intended to be a detailed action plan; rather, the aim is to set out broad policy orientations, the detail of which is or will be set out in other contexts,
- this section details principles developed by Comhar to be followed in working towards sustainable development; the Government's broad policy objectives for sustainable development; the role of eco-efficiency, quality of life and social policy considerations in this context; policy priorities for Ireland over the new decade (in individual policy areas and on a cross-cutting basis), and institutional approaches to sustainable development. Finally, the section outlines Ireland's role in working for sustainable development at the international level.
- Some of the main points are:
 - a broad emphasis on eco-efficiency as a means of achieving both environmental and economic objectives,
 - the need to engage the interest and attention of individuals in this agenda,
 - implementation of the *National Climate Change Strategy (2000)*,
 - implementation of the *National Biodiversity and National Heritage Plans (2002)*,
 - implementation of the revised *National Anti-Poverty Strategy*,
 - pressing ahead with the catchment-based approach to water quality, including through investment in waste water infrastructure and additional regulations where necessary,
 - development of a national strategy to meet the requirements of the Gothenburg Protocol and the related EU Directive concerning transboundary air emissions,

- implementing the policy approaches to waste management set out in Government policy statements,
 - implementation of a National Spatial Strategy, addressing among other things issues relating to settlement patterns.
- In terms of horizontal approaches, the Report highlights the importance of:
 - working with the market using economic and fiscal measures and producer responsibility initiatives,
 - good quality regulation in the interests of the environment,
 - implementation of the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive from 2004,
 - promotion of Local Agenda 21, including through the County and City Development Board process,
 - research and indicators.
 - Finally, the Report highlights that Ireland has adopted measures to honour the UNCED commitments on finance for developing countries, by giving a commitment to increase its aid allocation to reach the UN target of 0.7% of GNP by 2007.

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