



Environmental Pillar
OF SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP

Ireland

**Submission to the
UN Conference on Sustainable Development 2012**

Rio+20

**Taking Action
for a**

Sustainable Future



From the Environmental Pillar of Social Partnership - Ireland

Oct 2011



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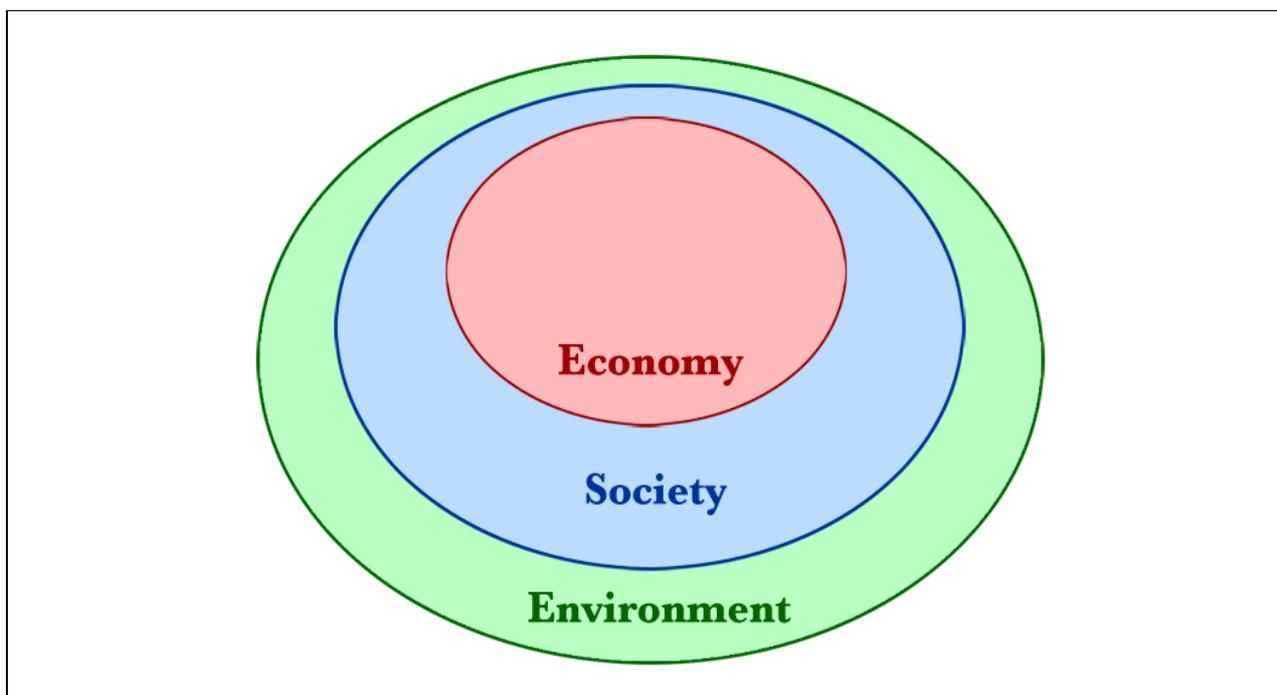
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Environmental Pillar members: An Taisce. Bat Conservation Ireland, BirdWatch Ireland. CELT - Centre for Ecological Living and Training. Coast Watch. Coomhola Salmon Trust. Crann. ECO UNESCO. Feasta. Forest Friends. Friends of the Earth. Global Action Plan, Gluaiseacht. Grian. Hedge Laying Association of Ireland. Irish Doctors Environment Association. Irish Natural Forestry Foundation. Irish Peatland Conservation Council. Irish Seal Sanctuary. Irish Seed Saver Association. Irish Whale and Dolphin Group. Irish Wildlife Trust. The Organic Centre. Sonairte. Sustainable Ireland Cooperative. VOICE. Zero Waste Alliance Ireland

1. Introduction

The Environmental Pillar of Social Partnership in Ireland welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Rio +20 Conference on Sustainable Development. The Environmental Pillar is one of the 5 National Social Partners established by the Irish Government to enable civil society interaction with government. The Environmental Pillar is an advocacy coalition made up of 27 national Irish environmental NGOs.

The major outcomes of the Rio Conference in 1992 “The Earth Summit” included the Rio Declaration, Agenda 21, and the Sustainable Forest Principles. For the first time at international level, it was agreed that economic development must incorporate principles like environmental sustainability, public participation, human rights and poverty reduction. The outcomes of the Earth Summit made it clear that protection of the environment was essential for the well-being of societies and the economic systems that they create. The fundamental concept of sustainable development has evolved since and is best described by means of the “Russian doll model”. This model shows human society evolving from and entirely reliant on the environment from whence it came. It also shows the economic systems that were created by humanity as a subset of human society and one that can be and has been changed to suit the needs of the time.



Human Society emerged from, and is entirely reliant for its survival on, the natural environment. Economic systems are created to serve society and can be changed by society. Human society on its present course, with a rapidly growing population, and with an economic system based on an ever increasing use and abuse of natural resources, is destined to destroy the natural systems on which it relies.

In recent developments, a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth has been drafted and the Ecuadorean Constitution (2008) and Bolivia's Law of the Rights Of Mother Earth (2011) both now recognise the Rights of Nature.

*"in an interdependent living community it is not possible to recognize the rights of only human beings without causing an imbalance within Mother Earth."*¹

Some progress has been made since 1992 including through the elaboration of regional, national and local sustainable development strategies, the adoption of a binding agreement on Climate Change, the progression of the Convention on Biological Diversity² and associated international, national and local biodiversity Action Plans, and the ratification of the Aarhus Convention on environmental democracy by 44 states in the UNECE region. In developing countries, the Rio Declaration allowed for the incorporation of Human Development considerations and greatly influenced the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) agenda. However wealth is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a small percentage of the population, undermining the sense of solidarity necessary for concerted efforts to resolve the global crises of poverty, environmental degradation and economic chaos.

Overall, though, 20 years on, tangible change has been negligible as evidenced by the collection of global crises today: crises in democracy, global economics and finance, climate change, accelerating biodiversity loss and food security. While much has been achieved through the MDGs, sadly over 1 billion people continue to live in absolute poverty worldwide while the international framework which is expected to help them is fragmented and incoherent. Agenda 21 has largely been paid only lip service, and has failed to integrate the key challenges of sustainable development in to various sectors. The Convention on Biological Diversity has driven some progress and raised profile of the global biodiversity crisis however biodiversity loss continues at an unprecedented rate. The Sustainable Forest Principles are still not being implemented or progressed.

Even though the agenda for the Rio +20 conference is somewhat restrictive and lacking in vision, the 20th anniversary still represents a major opportunity for states to re-commit to and prioritise the fulfilment of the principles which underpin the Rio Declaration and to agree and implement a programme which moves humanity forward in that direction.

However, political will to fulfil commitments has waned since 1992 and the institutional framework for making real progress on sustainable development is inadequate.

¹ ¹ Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth, 2010

<http://www.therightsofnature.org/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/FINAL-UNIVERSAL-DECLARATION-OF-THE-RIGHTS-OF-MOTHER-EARTH-APRIL-22-2010.pdf>

² The Convention was opened for signature on 5 June 1992 at the Rio "Earth Summit". It remained open for signature until 4 June 1993, by which time it had received 168 signatures.

For this to change, the involvement of major groups and stakeholders will be critical in the preparatory process and in the conference itself, as civil society will play a central role in gathering support and momentum for dealing with the global challenges discussed there. Civil society will also bring knowledge, expertise and resources as well as advocacy skills that will promote the environmental and developmental priorities and obligations, helping to ensure the following outcomes as the absolute minimum required to tackle the many crises facing humanity and nature:

- 1.1 an explicit expression of the need for a seismic shift in the prevailing economic model to one based on the understanding of the limits to growth, together with an outline mechanism for moving towards a new model;
- 1.2 a reiteration of commitment to implement the principles of sustainable development contained in the Rio Declaration of 1992, together with timelines for action;
- 1.3 a clear statement that sustainable development will underpin the narrative for a “post Millennium Development Goals” framework;
- 1.4 a declaration of the rights of nature.

2. Responses to specific questions

2.1. What have been the main successes/failures in progressing sustainable development since the Earth Summit in 1992; what are the key remaining gaps and how do you think Ireland should best address these issues?

2.1.1. Cross-cutting Issues

If humanity is to survive and flourish then the kind of radical thinking that marked the Earth Summit needs to be turned into action. Twenty years on, the public and the public authorities at all levels of governance still need to be informed and educated about the real issues that face them. The “bread and circuses” that make up much of what is provided by both the public and privately owned media, together with their continual reference to members of the public as “consumers”, drives society further towards the brink of social and environmental collapse. The continual and inexplicable emphasis on basing all decisions on the pursuit of continual GDP growth underlies this myopic drive towards the destruction of our life support systems. The measurement of our success as a society needs a new yardstick based on well-being and environmental integrity. We need to measure qualitative not quantitative growth.

The main failure then has been the lack of integration of the principles of the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 in to all sectors and policy drivers (e.g. finance, construction and development, energy, transport planning, agriculture and forestry).

By contrast and taking Principle 10 of the Declaration as a positive example of where action has occurred, the UNECE countries together with the Environmental NGOs developed the Aarhus Convention in 1998. This regional convention has had and is continuing to have significant impacts on EU governance as well as on that of the 44 Parties. However Ireland, some 13 years later, remains the only EU country yet to ratify it. Despite this latter fact, in 2008, Ireland decided to be the lead country in the establishment of the Aarhus Convention Taskforce on Public Participation a body that has the potential to lead the way in developing all aspects of civil society engagement with decision-making, at a time in history when it is absolutely essential to develop new ways of having conversations.

The implementation of agreements and commitments on Sustainable Development emanating from the Earth Summit has been disappointing. Compliance and enforcement

procedures are at best inadequate and in most cases non-existent. RIO+20 presents an opportunity to revisit agreements and commitments made in 1992 and to consider how we will deliver on these, both collectively and individually. Furthermore governments will be expected to make firm commitments on how to tackle emerging issues.³

Ireland could lead the way by for example in promoting compliance and enforcement procedures/mechanisms, and new approaches to tackling emerging issues. Ireland must show the political will to fulfil commitments made in 1992.

The establishment of Comhar as the National Sustainability Council with its 5 stakeholder pillars was one of the shining lights in the general gloom during the property bubble “boom”. Sadly the Council is to be disbanded in December 2011. Some of the functions and resources of Comhar are to be transferred to the National Economic and Social Council (NESC). Whilst it is a major step forward that the issue of sustainability is now to be discussed and researched in NESC which is an advisory body directly to the Government, it is currently unclear how much of the valuable work initiated by stakeholders within Comhar will continue, including the Biodiversity Forum, and the Ramsar committee.

The Biodiversity Forum exists to monitor the implementation of the National Biodiversity Plan. The new Plan has recently been signed by cabinet and is due to be published very soon. The National Biodiversity Plan outlines Ireland’s actions to fulfil CBD commitments that arose from the Rio Earth Summit to halt the loss of biodiversity, as well as actions to be taken by various state agencies to address the biodiversity commitments and some of the major ECJ rulings against Ireland on compliance with the Birds and Habitats Directives.

It is enormously important to continue to facilitate stakeholder participation in the delivery of the new National Biodiversity Plan and in the monitoring of the implementation of the plan. The Forum has been run as a working group of Comhar and as such will now need to be housed and appropriately resourced elsewhere if Ireland is to ensure successful delivery of the NBP actions.

If, as proposed, Comhar is being subsumed in to NESC, then the Biodiversity Forum should also be run as a working group of NESC. This would be likely to facilitate improved participation of the social partners in the implementation of the National

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- Food security;
- Sustainable agriculture
- Climate security
- Access to energy, clean energy
- Water security and access
- Ocean – blue economy
- Green urban economies/eco-cities
- Sustainable consumption and production

Biodiversity Plan. Similarly, the Ramsar Committee should also be considered in the new arrangements.

ENFO (the Environmental Information Office), once an international example of best practice in information dissemination, was effectively axed in all but name in 2009. ENFO was a well known and utilised source of environmental information. If we are to see growing public awareness of the likely impacts of climate change, biodiversity loss and degradation of essential services provided by the environment ('ecosystem services'), then a well-resourced environmental awareness strategy is needed to replace ENFO. The roll out of additional ENFO points is a welcome development although these will need to be more active and more dynamic in their approach to disseminating environmental information and education than is currently the case.

Environmental NGOs have been very successful in providing environmental education, in a manner that facilitates real public engagement at minimal cost. This should point towards greater resourcing and inclusion of these groups in the making and implementation of an environmental awareness strategy. Involving the public in decision-making requires as a prerequisite both active and passive availability of information. Involving the public is essential to the effectiveness of the hard decisions that will have to be made over the years ahead.

2.1.2 General Areas of Concern

Some general areas that have not received the attention they badly need include:

2.1.2.1 Implementation of European environmental law has been extremely poor in Ireland, with 6 ECJ cases currently open against Ireland for failures to implement wider ranging environmental safeguards including EIA and biodiversity protection. This is a strong indicator of Irelands lack of strategic and resourced approach to strengthening sustainable management of our natural environment and is one of the key issues that needs to be addressed by Ireland to achieve the SD objectives.

2.1.2.2 GDP is a totally inadequate measure of progress or development. Unfortunately there is very little political will or commitment to change this, nor a sense of urgency to achieve goals set in 1992. There is still no widely accepted environmental index or measure.

2.1.2.3 We rarely see equity mentioned as a necessary ingredient for achieving sustainable development.

2.1.2.4 There needs to be greater investment into public involvement in sustainable development. The institutional framework to catalyze this is very important at local, national and international levels.

- 2.1.2.5 Education, information and participation generally relies more on the informal sector than the formal sector we need to work to change this.
- 2.1.2.6 Business and Industry are central to our lives and there are great opportunities as well as great obligations. Since RIO 1992 there has been much erosion of state influence and regulation.
- 2.1.2.7 The social partners must be actively involved in greening the work environment.
- 2.1.2.8 A policy framework to make technology available to Less Developed Countries is needed. This would for example contribute to a sense of equity.

2.1.3 Energy and Climate

Since 1992, Ireland has made limited progress in the area of clean energy and actually gone backwards in terms of climate change. Current projections indicate that Ireland will only meet its Kyoto obligations as “a direct result of the current economic recession” and is likely to miss annual obligations under the EU’s 2020 target after 2015.⁴

Advances in the share of renewables in Ireland’s energy mix are welcome but are clearly not sufficient in terms of delivering overall greenhouse gas emissions reductions. Energy efficiency measures are also progressing but need to be accelerated if Ireland is to meet its international emissions reduction targets.

Energy policy must integrate climate change concerns if greenhouse gas reduction targets are to be met. Energy policy should also address the challenge of energy security. In 1990 Ireland imported 68% of its energy and this has increased to 89% in 2008, peaking at 91% in 2006. Moreover, Ireland is heavily dependent on the importation of oil and gas which leaves it very vulnerable to increases in the prices of these commodities on the international markets.⁵

The work of the Sustainable Energy Authority Ireland in promoting the move away from fossil fuels and reducing energy inefficiencies has been a positive if limited force. Work on an energy “pay as you save scheme” should lead to a pilot soon.

2.1.4. Local Agenda 21

The establishment of the County and City Development Boards as the engines of Local Agenda 21 would have been a positive step, but the limited terms of reference given to them left them largely without an environmental remit. Efforts made by the Environmental Pillar to introduce Sustainability into the actions of these bodies are generally being greeted by the members of the Boards with interest and by some with enthusiasm. However, unlike the movement to add social inclusion to the work of the

⁴ http://www.epa.ie/news/pr/2011/name_30811.en.html

⁵ http://www.seai.ie/Publications/Statistics_Publications/EPSSU_Publications/Energy_in_Ireland_2009.pdf

CDBs, there is no significant support from Government for the move to incorporate sustainability into their Terms of Reference.

Sustainable Development: A Strategy for Ireland, published in April 1997, provided for local authorities to complete Local Agenda 21 Plans for their areas. Each county council and county borough was to have a designated Local Agenda 21 Officer, and these were to be networked at regional and national levels. Sadly this strategy achieved very little, and needs to be reviewed and replaced with a new strategy at the earliest possible time. There are good examples of local authorities taking local initiatives, such as Dublin City Council, Roscommon County Council etc.

The role of county and city based Community Forums needs to be enhanced in order for the wider community to engage with the governance structures more effectively at the local level.

2.1.5. New Directions for Ireland

Instead of trying to get from the earth as much as we can, as fast as we can, paying as little as we can to get it, we must start trying to nurture it, like we would a bountiful garden. Ireland with a relatively small, well-educated population should avoid invasive/destructive technologies/industries.

GM food crops and Hydrological Fracturing “fracking” (for oil/gas) are examples of technologies that give short term monetary gains to a few, and cause long-term problems/crises for humanity, biodiversity and planet. The Earth is the living system that sustains our species. All living systems have their limits; and the complex biosphere that supports us is gradually being pushed towards a number of very serious tipping points.

2.2. What contribution can the current focus on the green economy contribute to advancing sustainable development, particularly from an Irish perspective?

2.2.1. Green Economy

A 'green economy', by itself, does not incorporate many of the other core principles of sustainable development. A "sustainable" development model must not just respect environmental boundaries, but also promote social justice, reduce poverty and inequality, encourage inclusive and participatory decision-making and be based on clear principles and mechanisms for accountability. Furthermore, the definition of a green economy proposed by the UNEP and supported by the European Commission does not represent a significant departure from the current economic model which is driven by the over-consumption of scarce natural resources. While the promotion of the 'green economy' may well move states towards sustainable development, its reliance solely on efficiency (as per Europe 2020 Strategy) fails to address the fundamental change required to move to sustainability.

A green economy can be seen as one which is low carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive. Our existing economic model and our current focus on it will not deliver a green economy.⁶

Many hi-tech aspects of the "business as usual" Green Economy include the use of "rare earths", the reserves of which are in countries with large indigenous hi-tech industries such as China, or in conflict zones such as the Congo. Other reserves are in countries where the EU is attempting to undermine the development of local industries through forcing the removal of export duties on raw materials. There are many ethical and sustainability issues here. Ireland must collaborate with the other states in tackling the many accelerating global crises. The participants at the Rio+20 Conference must work to establish mechanisms to protect the less developed countries and the global biosphere from the kind of resource grabbing that is the latest expression of colonisation, exploitation and empire building.

In a green economy market prices must adequately reflect environmental costs, and fiscal policy must shift taxation from work to resource consumption.

2.2.1.1. A 'green' economic system must promote social equity, gender equity and inter-generational equity.

⁶ UNEP's definition of a Green Economy is one which will result in improved human well-being and social equity while significantly reducing environmental and ecological risks.

A truly sustainable 'green economy' functions within the limits of the planet, and ensures a fair distribution of resources among all countries and social groups - as well as between men and women. We need an economy that provides incentives for zero-waste, low-carbon economies that enhance and restore the natural environment, while also providing new 'green' livelihoods, employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for women as well as men. The 10 Year Framework Programme (**10-YFP**) on Sustainable Consumption and Production (**SCP**)⁷ implementation should be an important part of the basis of for the development of Green Economy policies.

2.2.2. Climate and Energy The green economy should represent the internalisation of climate change and clean energy issues into each national economy, in addition to other environmental concerns. The focus on the benefits of moving towards a low carbon, energy efficient economy and the accompanying business opportunities is important but should not detract from the fundamental objectives of avoiding catastrophic climate change, decarbonising the energy sector and addressing the risks of energy security.

2.2.3. Agriculture The agricultural sector in many parts of the world needs thorough review from the perspective of the green economy and maintaining food security for all, preserving the natural capital of the land and its biodiversity resources, and promoting resource efficiency. There is a particular need to manage and conserve water resources better. New targets are needed in these areas. Effective measures for better, more transparent functioning of agricultural markets should be introduced. The volatility of and unacceptable increase in food prices must be combated. The use of renewable resources in energy production must not happen at the expense of global food supply. Security of food supply should be ensured by maintaining stocks at regional level. We should also aim to make more use of residual biomass from agriculture and food production. The protection of soils as a fundamental resource should take centre stage in the debate on food production.

2.2.4. Marine Environment The marine environment is characterised by pollution, overfishing and overexploitation of other marine resources. Conference participants should mandate the competent UN bodies to initiate a new international process to strengthen and coordinate existing mechanisms for protecting the marine environment and to protect fish stocks, marine

⁷ http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/dsd_aofw_scpp/scpp_ss0310.shtml

biodiversity and other marine resources more effectively than under existing arrangements. The introduction of Marine protected areas over 20% of the world's oceans should be a high priority. This would create an estimated 1 million jobs worldwide and contribute to preserving fish stocks and establishing a sustainable fishing industry and marine food resource.

2.2.5. Natural Resource management and Biodiversity protection are key issues of environmental sustainability, underpinning agricultural productivity, tourism, climate change adaptation. Ecosystem services are enormously valuable and currently undervalued in Ireland despite making a huge contribution to flood alleviation, climate regulation, soil fertility, water quality and fisheries, to name but a few.

2.3. Can the green economy contribute towards Ireland's efforts in assisting developing countries and what priorities should we be addressing in this regard?

2.3.1. As a wealthy country, Ireland should take the lead in developing a genuinely green economy. The benefits for developing countries are multiple but include:

2.3.1.1. Avoidance of the negative impacts of climate change

2.3.1.2. Avoidance of destructive and exploitative extraction of natural energy resources

2.3.1.3. Technology transfers that allow developing countries to "leapfrog" to a low-carbon economic model

2.3.1.4. Demonstration of a successful, low-carbon developed country

2.3.1.5. In order to achieve a truly green economy, we need better regulation of international financial actors and financial flows.

2.3.2. Specific instruments to achieve a greening of the economy:

2.3.2.1. **New indicators for well-being.** It is in the interest of youth and future generations, that bold steps will be taken towards a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication. In order to achieve the transition to green economies, the actual political implementation of concepts such as new indicators for measuring development and the **internalisation of external costs** must be ensured and backed up by effective governance systems.

2.3.2.2. **Planetary boundaries** must be assessed and made the basis of decision-making on the using of best available scientific knowledge, whilst always taking into account the **precautionary principle**.

2.3.2.3. The introduction of a global **Financial Transaction Tax**, to contribute to financing protection of our global commons and of sustainable development and investments in green and inclusive economies. E.g. a "Robin Hood Tax" or a "Tobin Tax"

2.3.2.4. Eco-efficiency instruments are important, but there is also an urgent need for '**sufficiency**' instruments (social innovation, caps on resource use

etc.), especially in the Northern countries to tackle the over-consumption of - and excessive pressure on - natural resources.

2.3.2.5. If a green economy is to be a tool for achieving sustainable development and poverty eradication we need to highlight the importance of improving national environmental governance. Achieving sustainable development will require making policy decisions that involve balancing competing interests and reaching good compromises. If decision making processes are secret, non-participatory and unaccountable, a few selected and powerful interests will influence policy and developmental decisions. Principle 10 and good national environmental governance which recognizes coordination, efficiency, transparency, engagement and accountability becomes a foundational and enabling requirement for the success of a green economy and sustainable development.

2.3.3. Independent Technology Assessment The need for a Multi-stakeholder technology assessment for existing and emerging technologies mechanism that guarantees prior informed consent and rights of communities impacted by the financial flows, timely information, effective participation, and redress mechanisms. At Rio+20, Ireland should commit to such an agreement for assessment and monitoring of new technologies before their widespread use – e.g. geo-engineering.

2.3.4. Nuclear & uranium lifecycle control

Based on the UNEP foresight report, governments must start developing legally binding mechanisms to address the cost of decommissioning and clean-up of nuclear power-plants, nuclear waste and uranium mines. Currently, most countries have no funds to pay for decommissioning of closed nuclear power-plants or containment and clean-up of uranium mining tailings, causing long-term, inter-generational and partly cross-border pollution and security risks for water, food, and eco-systems. To this end there is a need to develop a global strategy to address the risks that nuclear energy and the whole uranium cycle, such as mining and waste disposal, pose to global environment and human lives and health, and decide on an effective and rapid global government response. In particular:

2.3.4.1. the establishment of a **UN rapporteur on uranium and nuclear risks**.

2.3.4.2. the establishment of **a global financial mechanism** to redress and clean-up of damage and pollution of nuclear and uranium lifecycles;

- 2.3.4.3. the establishment of an **independent institutional framework** to document, monitor and assess the environmental damages and risks of nuclear and uranium activities and increased lifecycle control. Such an institution must assure effective public participation, transparency and access to information.

2.4. *What impacts can the EU 2020 strategy, and in particular, the Resource Efficiency Flagship Initiative, have on advancing sustainable development in Ireland and what priorities should Ireland establish in implementing the Initiative?*

2.4.1. Energy

Energy is a key input into any economy. As such, efforts to improve efficiency in energy consumption should be a priority for the Irish government. Implementation of the EU Resource Efficiency Flagship Initiative in Ireland should focus on increased investment in R&D in clean energy technologies.

Priorities should include:

- 2.4.1.1. A serious effort to integrate all sectors of the economy/govt. depts. behind this initiative and develop a coordinated strategy and action plan in through a fully transparent, consultative and adequately funded process.
 - 2.4.1.2. A serious effort to move quickly and ensure adequate funding is in place.
 - 2.4.1.3. Society must be encouraged and empowered to participate actively at all stages of this initiative from design stage to evaluation and monitoring
- 2.4.2.** The Irish government should set strong energy efficiency targets and create regulatory certainty to ensure the necessary investment.
- 2.4.3.** A strong and effective climate law will ensure a whole of government approach to climate change mitigation that moves away from a silo mentality within departments. The three main planks of climate legislation are targets, carbon budgets and an expert committee on climate change. Legislation should contain and be supported by Climate Change Strategies.

2.5. *How should we pursue improvement of governance under the four headings below? Which areas should be prioritised? Is strengthening UNEP necessary? Do you think that changes are also needed in the way sustainable development is managed at the UN level?*

- 2.5.1.1. The UNEP needs to be strengthened and allocated sufficient resources in order to fulfil its remit.
- 2.5.1.2. A serious effort to put in place procedures for compliance and enforcement of environmental law is urgently required. Compliance was not mentioned in the Helsinki outcome document.
- 2.5.1.3. The proposal for an International Court for the Environment should be considered.

2.5.2. *Sustainable Development Governance which needs to be reinforced and mainstreamed within the UN system.*

- 2.5.2.1. Strong International Environmental Governance is needed. This can be achieved by:
 - 2.5.2.1.1. **Upgrading UNEP** with new responsibilities and resources, proposals include:
 - 2.5.2.1.1.1. Upgrade from a programme to a specialized agency
 - 2.5.2.1.1.2. Strong programme on Sustainable Consumption and Production under UNEP
 - 2.5.2.1.1.3. Further strengthen the Trade and the Environment activities of UNEP
 - 2.5.2.1.1.4. Further strengthen civil society participation in UNEP, by applying the Aarhus Convention Guidelines on 'public participation in international environmental policy processes'
 - 2.5.2.1.1.5. Upgrade the mandate of Panel of Natural Resources (under UNEP), to govern better the use of natural resources and the fair distribution of those.

2.5.3. *International Environmental Governance is weak, largely due to institutional fragmentation, and needs to be strengthened. Over the past decade attempts to improve environmental governance have been made – most recently as part of high-level consultative group under the aegis of UNEP; however, progress has been difficult.*

- 2.5.3.1. Establish a **trusteeship** for the transitional governance of the **global commons** until they are adequately governed by legally binding rules. This should have a clear mandate to negotiate effective structures at national and international levels for the governance of global commons.
- 2.5.3.2. **A Strong Technology Assessment Body.** The need for inter-disciplinary approach, the application of precautionary principle and the rights of the impacted communities must be at the heart of the work of the assessments.
- 2.5.3.3. Rio+20 presents a unique opportunity to develop institutional arrangements necessary to the effective implementation of the **precautionary principle**.
- 2.5.3.4. Decision-making based on best available science urgently requires systematic research on planetary ecological boundaries, which must be used for the assessment at the international level of the impact of emerging practices and technologies.
- 2.5.3.5. Decision-making needs to be framed by the system perspective of sustainable development impacts. Furthermore, the development of an insurance scheme for social and environmental risks would enable to the pricing of such risks.
- 2.5.3.6. **Establish an ombudsperson for future generations at the UN level**, e.g. as part of a strengthened mandate for UNEP or in combination/rotation with other UN bodies
- 2.5.3.7. Establish an ombudsperson for future generations **at national levels** with the mandate to work independently from the heart of government monitoring and ensuring that long-term goals and the rights of future generations are guaranteed in all policy decisions and their implementation.

2.5.3.8. A serious effort to put in place procedures for compliance and enforcement of environmental law is urgently required. Compliance was not mentioned in the Helsinki outcome document! The proposal for an International Court for the Environment should be considered.

2.5.3.9. **Citizen Enforcement:** In many countries, law enforcement officers are spread thin, with little ability to prioritize among serious environmental issues. For that reason, a number of progressive governments have created citizen suit provisions allowing for citizen enforcement of laws.

2.5.4. *International Economic and Social Governance* is addressed by a number of institutions, international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, regional development banks, and other bodies such as the World Trade Organisation.

2.5.4.1. In order that a truly green economy is established based on the fundamental principles of sustainability then these bodies will at the very least need to be radically reformed and given new terms of reference. Whilst such important bodies are operating on the GDP growth model with a few green tinges, it will be very difficult for open economies such as Ireland's to break the downward spiral. Ireland should therefore work to create this change.

2.5.5. *Non-State Actors (the "Major Groups")* have an important role which include indigenous people, women, youth , workers, farmers, local government, the scientific community, business and industry. Their role and impact has been limited in scope and there is a need to strengthen it. There is a need as well to strengthen the role of business which is already active in committing to greening their operations, with many companies are embracing sustainable development in their operations and corporate governance.

2.5.5.1. A successful transition to a sustainable economy depends on it being accepted and supported by civil society. The involvement of civil society will be critical in the preparatory process for Rio+20, in the conference

itself and in the follow up to the conference. CSOs bring knowledge, expertise, credibility and advocacy skills to the table. In this regard, Parties and Signatories to the Aarhus Convention are required to enable the involvement of the public in international fora. Ireland should take a lead on this by including its civil society representatives in the national delegation.

2.6. What are the expectations for the outcome of Rio+20, and what are the concrete proposals in this regard, including views on a possible structure of the Outcome document?

2.6.1. The focus on the Green Economy as a major part of the conference would be a hopeful one if it includes any radical thinking. However if the business as usual input of the EU is a sample of the level of ambition for the conference then the Environmental Pillar would have very low expectations.

2.6.2. The political document adopted at Rio+20 to be (a) visionary (b) build on the Rio Declaration, Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of implementation, (c) identify the gaps in achieving the goals set by these decisions and (d) spell out concrete steps that will be taken by governments in the next decade to fill these gaps.

2.6.3. To focus on particular targets Ireland should for example support the move for three new framework conventions

2.6.3.1. Regional conventions for the implementation of Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration

2.6.3.2. Corporate Social Responsibility based on the ISO 26000 outcome

2.6.3.3. Develop the Precautionary Principle into a framework convention to include issues on emerging technologies, bio-engineering and nano-technology.

2.6.3.4. Maintaining or achieving adequate food security, energy security, and resource security for all current and future generations in a world of increasing population and limited natural resources is one of the biggest new challenges facing the world in the century ahead. Ultimately, qualitative economic growth is needed that helps to eliminate poverty and social injustice whilst preserving natural resources for future generations. Establishing institutional structures for meeting this challenge should be a central issue for the 2012 summit.

2.7 *What are the comments, if any, on existing proposals: e.g., a green economy roadmap, framework for action, sustainable development goals, a revitalized global partnership for sustainable development, or others?*

2.7.1 In order for any of these proposals to succeed there is a need for a major shift in the awareness and understanding of the issues that need to be resolved. Time is not on our side. The oncoming climate chaos and the likelihood of the 6th great extinction barely register on the political horizon.

2.8 *What are the views on implementation and on how to close the implementation gap, which relevant actors are envisaged as being involved (Governments, specific Major Groups, UN system, IFIs, etc.);*

2.8.1 Environmental law, at International, regional and national level(s) is not working .We need law that is affordable, intelligible, accessible, predictable, and clear to all - Law that is legally certain.

2.9 What specific cooperation mechanisms, partnership arrangements or other implementation tools are envisaged and what is the relevant time frame for the proposed decisions to be reached and actions to be implemented?

2.9.1 **An international court for the environment,**

2.9.2 **Ombudsman for the future generations at a national and international level**

2.9.3 **Governance** The rights of access to information, public participation, and access to justice are essential to sustainable development. The 1992 Rio Declaration provided for these rights in Principle 10 and Agenda 21 helped the move towards establishing these rights in many countries. Renewed commitment is needed to establish these rights in every country. The use of regional conventions following the example of the Aarhus Convention in the UNECE region should be prioritised to enable this. The Rio 2012 Summit provides an opportunity for governments to transform Principle 10 from aspirational goals into actionable rights. Governments and civil society should use the opportunity to commit together in adopting, implementing, and exercising these rights in support of sustainable development. The 2012 Summit's focus on the theme of improving institutional frameworks should galvanize nations to improve their national environmental governance, develop international instruments giving legal force to Principle 10, and implement these principles into international bodies' decision-making processes. The lead on this latter point should be taken by the parties and signatories to the Aarhus Convention⁸.

2.9.4 **Robust International Framework.** The main aim of the conference should be to establish a robust institutional framework within the UN system for implementing the conference decisions, a framework which would have on-going responsibility for promoting sustainable development throughout the world and for driving an action programme to green the global economy over the coming years. The emerging concept of a new top-level **Sustainable Development Council**, involving all the countries of the world, that would report directly to the General Assembly and integrate and

⁸ Aarhus Convention 1998, Article 3.7. *Each Party shall promote the application of the principles of this Convention in international environmental decision-making processes and within the framework of international organizations in matters relating to the environment.*

strengthen the work currently done separately in the UN ECOSOC and CSD should be supported by Ireland.

2.9.5 Measuring progress towards a greener economy: Parameters need to be established that give a clear indication of the progress that is being made towards greater sustainability. Methods should be developed for measuring economic progress in terms of improvements in human welfare and quality of life, with reference to the fight against poverty, the creation of decent working conditions and preservation of the natural environment. In particular, methods must be agreed for measuring the use of various kinds of natural capital in the soil, water and different ecosystems that results from economic activity.

This also raises the question of the current disconnect between consumption and the environment which has led to the struggle to find a “value” for the environment. This lack of valuation and subsequent bypassing of the market has translated into increased environmental vulnerability with a marked degradation of ecosystems and the loss of biodiversity. Thus, it is necessary to allocate consideration to this by using previous models and studies, such as The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity study (TEEB)⁹, to develop a means by which the value of the environment can be measured using tried and tested methodologies, so as to decrease the current environmental degradation that is occurring due to its lack of market value. A healthy biodiversity is crucial to the economic success of Ireland with the National Biodiversity Data Centre stating that Biodiversity accounts for €2.6 billion of Ireland’s economy annually from the goods and services it provides.¹⁰ Therefore in our current economic context it is imperative that we document, understand and take advantage of our rich biodiversity, and for this to occur a new method of managing natural capital must be initiated. The same arguments apply globally.

2.9.6 A timetable for establishing a system to measure progress towards a green economy should be agreed at the summit

⁹ <http://www.teebweb.org/>

¹⁰ FitzPatrick, Ú., Regan, E. and Lysaght, L. (editors)(2010) Ireland’s Biodiversity in 2010: State of Knowledge. National Biodiversity Data Centre, Waterford.

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