OUR SUSTAINABLE FUTURE
A FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FOR IRELAND

SUMMARY
Disclaimer: Where issues of interpretation arise with regard to the content of this summary of Our Sustainable Future (OSF), it should be noted that the main OSF takes precedence over this document.
INTRODUCTION

This document summarises Ireland’s Framework for Sustainable Development Our Sustainable Future. Its timeframe is to 2020 to tie in with other national and international frameworks, but a longer-term horizon to 2050 is also taken where appropriate, to provide a framework for guiding and reporting on long-term broad development trends such as on climate change.

Sustainable development is “development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”1 It is aimed at promoting wellbeing of citizens now and in the future. It requires creating a sustainable and resource efficient economy founded on a fair and just society, respecting the three core pillars of sustainability: the environmental, the economic, and the social.

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (the Earth Summit) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 adopted a declaration calling for action throughout the world towards achieving a more sustainable pattern of development for the 21st century and beyond. Despite significant progress, the problems discussed then still endure. Unsustainable trends in relation to climate change and energy use, land use, threats to public health, poverty and social exclusion, and biodiversity loss still persist, while new challenges have emerged.

Subsequent summits included the Millennium Summit in September 2000, where world leaders adopted the UN Millennium Declaration, setting out targets for 2015 that have become known as the Millennium Development Goals. The UN General Assembly has committed to the organisation of a further UN Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012 to mark the 20th anniversary of the Earth Summit.

The Treaty of Lisbon states that one of the European Union’s objectives is to work for the sustainable development of Europe based, in particular, on a high level of protection and improvement of the quality of the environment. The Europe 2020 Strategy, adopted by the EU in 2010, set targets for the decade in the following areas: employment; research & development and innovation; climate change and energy; education; and poverty and social exclusion.

At national level Sustainable Development: a Strategy for Ireland (1997) led to significant progress in the development and implementation of policies and action across most sectors. The strategy was reviewed in 2002. Significant challenges remain, however, across a number of policy areas. In particular, we need to position ourselves to meet a range of challenging targets, including on energy, climate and biodiversity, at a time when people’s main concern is economic recovery and enhancing employment opportunities.

Overall, the economic situation in Ireland is dramatically different to the earlier part of the last decade. The country faces huge challenges that are all the more acute when set against the backdrop of a global economic downturn. While the situation has helped to ease some environmental pressures (e.g. traffic congestion, greenhouse gas emissions and waste management), there is greater pressure on public resources. There is a need to achieve positive economic, environmental and social outputs while at the same time ensuring equality and an appropriate balance between the three core pillars of sustainability. Recognising its job creation potential in Ireland, the Action Plan for Jobs 2012 contains an action to publish and implement a new plan for the development of the green economy.2

2 The ‘Green Economy’ is a term which is used to categorise a range of economic activities which contribute to lower greenhouse gas emissions, better resource usage and respect for the environment.
Ireland has a well deserved reputation as a country with a high quality environment. Ireland’s environmental performance is reviewed periodically by the OECD, most recently in 2010 when significant progress was recognised over the previous decade, and opportunities seen in the current situation for reform where policies are both economically costly and environmentally damaging.

Our Sustainable Future sets out the challenges and how we might address them in making sure that the quality of life and general wellbeing can be improved and sustained in the decades to come. It aims at improving synergies and identifying and tackling policy gaps, policy conflicts and trade-offs as part of a coherent, joined-up approach to policy making on sustainable development. Such an approach, transcending administrative and geographical boundaries, is central to its overall objectives. Building on work by the United Nations (UN), the European Commission and Comhar Sustainable Development Council (SDC), the following set of principles for sustainable development have been developed for Our Sustainable Future.

Our Sustainable Future - Principles for Sustainable Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Principles</th>
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<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>Promote an innovative, competitive and low-carbon economy with the aim of achieving smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.</td>
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<td>Satisfaction of human needs by the efficient use of resources</td>
<td>Prices should reflect the real costs to society of production and consumption activities and polluters should pay for the damage they cause to human health and the environment.</td>
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<td>Equity between generations</td>
<td>The needs of current generations should be addressed without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.</td>
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<td>Resources should be used within the capacity for regeneration.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender equity</td>
<td>Women have a vital role in environmental management and development and their full participation is therefore essential to advance sustainable development.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Respect for ecological integrity and biodiversity</td>
<td>The abundance of wildlife and extent of habitats should be maintained, improved and restored where necessary, through sustainable management.</td>
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<td>Social equity</td>
<td>Social inclusion should be promoted to ensure an improved quality of life for all.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Respect for cultural heritage /diversity</td>
<td>The quality of landscapes, the heritage of the man-made environment and historic and cultural resources should be maintained and improved.</td>
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3 Social Inclusion: ‘The process which ensures that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social and cultured life and to enjoy a standard of living and well being that is considered normal in the society in which they live.’ (Source: Joint Report by the Comission and the Council on Social Inclusion, Office for Official Publications of the EU)
Sustained efforts to encourage business representative organisations / enterprise development agencies to continue to engage businesses on the need to integrate sustainable development considerations are crucial. The role of Strategic Environmental Assessment in promoting transparent plan and programme making and mainstreaming environmental considerations is also important.

The overall aim of Our Sustainable Future is to provide for the integration of sustainable development into key areas of policy, to put in place effective implementation mechanisms and deliver concrete measures to progress sustainable development. The objectives of the Framework are to:

- Identify and prioritise policy areas and mechanisms where a sustainable development approach will add value and enable progress towards the strategy aims.
- Highlight and promote existing sustainable practices that, with the correct support, can underpin sustainable development more generally.
- Strengthen policy integration, coherence and co-ordination and bring a long term perspective to decision making.
- Set out governance mechanisms which ensure effective participation within government and across all stakeholders.
- Set out clear measures, responsibilities and timelines in an implementation plan.
- Set out how progress is to be measured and reported on through the use of indicators.
- Incorporate adequate and effective monitoring, learning and improvement into the Framework process.

*Our Sustainable Future* broadly follows the thematic approach of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy.

The key challenges are categorised as follows:

- Sustainability of public finances and economic resilience.
- Sustainable consumption and production.
- Conservation and management of natural resources.
- Climate change and clean energy.
- Sustainable agriculture.
- Sustainable transport.
- Social inclusion, sustainable communities and spatial planning.
- Public health.
- Education, communication and behaviour change.
• Innovation, research and development.
• Skills and training.
• Global poverty and sustainable development.

These key challenges are summarised in this document and are set out in detail, along with a discussion of commitments and targets and remaining gaps, in the main Framework document. The latter also sets out in detail 70 measures, which the Government will implement and which form the core of Our Sustainable Future.

While the vision may seem ambitious, even daunting, it is achievable. It is essential that we do achieve it, recognising that economic, environmental and social progress go hand in hand. Everyone must recognise their own responsibility and act accordingly. ‘Business as usual’ is not an option. Getting there will take leadership from central Government, local government and the State sector generally and across Irish society. Ultimately, the challenge is down to us, our success or failure will be a function of the degree to which we value our natural environment and are prepared to protect it.
Sustainability of Public Finances and Economic Resilience

Ireland is adjusting to a difficult recession complicated by banking and fiscal crises which necessitated us having to avail of a programme of EU/IMF support. The Programme for Government 2011 and the EU/IMF Programme of Financial Support for Ireland provide the blueprint for a return to fiscal stability and sustainable economic growth. Unsustainable public finances undermine the framework for economic prosperity and so the restoration of sound public finances has to be the cornerstone of economic planning.

Achieving economic growth that is environmentally sustainable is another major challenge. Conventional economic metrics do not take into account the social and environmental aspects of sustainability. Therefore, complementary indicators are also needed that are more inclusive of other dimensions of progress.

The Europe 2020 Strategy reaffirms collective determination to ensure fiscal sustainability, including by accelerating plans for fiscal consolidation. It supports a shift towards a resource-efficient and low-carbon economy and the European Commission has committed to using a range of financing and economic instruments to achieve this objective.

Stocks of human, physical, natural and social capital need to be conserved and enhanced as they are the assets on which current and future development relies. In considering the sustainability of the public finances these assets should be considered in an integrated way, if they are to provide a basis for sustainable recovery.

Note: The main report - Our Sustainable Future - should be consulted for full details of the individual measures proposed.

Measures Summary

1. Integrate Environmental and Social Indicators into Measures of Economic Progress
   - develop in consultation with stakeholders measures of wellbeing to supplement economic growth as a metric for prosperity.

2. Develop a Framework for Environmental Tax Reform
   - a gradual shift of the tax base away from taxing what we want more of, such as investment and labour, towards taxing what we want less of, such as pollution. The Carbon Tax already in place is an example of the effective use of environmental taxes for revenue-raising purposes.
   - Scope for action on taxation over the short to medium term is limited by budgetary constraints; a longer term aim is to have a tax system which is sustainable from the standpoint of raising revenue and supporting national development; and taking into account issues of equity and competitiveness.
Our Sustainable Future

Sustainable Consumption and Production

To sustain the Earth’s population at the levels of consumption of the Irish population would take more than three planets’ worth of resources\(^5\). Ireland’s Ecological Footprint has continued to grow and in the latest assessment we had the tenth highest per person Footprint in the world\(^6\).

At European level, sustainable consumption and production is promoted in the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy, which includes flagship initiatives on resource efficiency and industrial policy. It aims at boosting EU competitiveness, generating new business opportunities, driving innovation and creating green and sustainable employment. The policy framework is further elaborated in the Commission’s Sustainable Consumption and Production and Sustainable Industrial Policy Action Plan (2008). There is also a range of legislation focused on improving products\(^7\) and policies aimed at smarter consumption, notably through greener public procurement.

At national level a number of Government policies and programmes are in place to support good practice as well as specific initiatives by other key stakeholders. Some Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) initiatives in Ireland to date include the following:

- the National Waste Prevention Programme (NWPP) run by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA);
- Green Tenders, An Action Plan on Green Public Procurement;
- the Market Development Programme for Waste Resources known as rX3;
- supports for Green Business strategies available from the relevant agencies.

In addition, the Programme for Government 2011 commits to developing a national waste policy that will adhere to the EU waste hierarchy.

There is a need for Ireland to move beyond cleaner production and waste prevention policy. We need to ensure the effective implementation in Ireland of initiatives at EU level under the Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe that effectively supports the transition that is required in energy, industrial, agricultural and transport systems and in consumer behaviour.

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3. User Charges
- together with the introduction of domestic water charges as outlined in Measure 20, consider the scope and need for wider user charging, where appropriate.

4. Shifting the Fiscal Focus towards the Green Economy
- in line with the recommendations of the OECD\(^4\), priority will be afforded to the development and implementation of appropriate fiscal measures, including, over the longer term, the rationalisation and phasing out of environmentally or economically harmful subsidies.

5. National Reform Programmes under Europe 2020
- these will take account of the measures in Our Sustainable Future with the synergies important in other policy making areas, including those relating to local government.

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Conservation and Management of Natural Resources

Biodiversity, ecosystems and natural resources are our natural capital. Biodiversity plays a significant role in underpinning vital economic sectors. For example, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, 40% of the world’s economy is based directly and indirectly on the use of biological resources. In Ireland, as elsewhere, economic sectors such as agriculture, forestry, tourism, marine fisheries and aquaculture are reliant on the effective conservation and management of natural resources. The services provided by ecosystems include food and water, control of climate and disease, nutrient cycling and crop pollination and recreational benefits. The value of Irish biodiversity and ecosystem services was estimated at over €2.6 billion per year (2008) and this is a conservative value as some important services were not included.

Ireland, along with the other EU Member States and the EU itself, is a party to the Convention on Biological Diversity. A key event was the publication in November 2011 of Actions for Biodiversity 2011-2016; Ireland’s National Biodiversity Plan and it will be reviewed, and amended, if required, in 2013. The implementation of its wide-ranging actions will work towards the protection of biodiversity and ecosystem services. A draft National Landscape Strategy is currently in preparation to ensure compliance with the European Landscape Convention. A key gap remains the absence of a national ecosystem assessment and the mapping of Ireland’s natural resources. A Green Infrastructure approach can contribute to improved integration of biodiversity into sectoral policies and the creation of green corridors to enhance overall biodiversity.

Under the Water Framework Directive, River Basin Management Plans for each of the seven river basin districts in the State have now been adopted. The plans set out the current status, the objectives to be achieved by 2015, and the programme of measures to be implemented.

Measures Summary

6. Completion of Policy on Waste Management
   - new policy to be finished in mid-2012, adhering to the waste hierarchy and moving Ireland away from an overdependence on landfill to a range of alternative treatments.

7. Resource Efficiency
   - work to ensure the effective implementation of this initiative in Ireland in line with the development of the EU Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe under Europe 2020

8. Green Tenders, An Action Plan on Green Public Procurement
   - fully implement this action plan, supporting the development of the green economy in Ireland.

9. Resource Efficiency Programmes for Business
   - the relevant agencies [e.g. IDA, EI, SEAI, and EPA] should continue to work to offer an integrated suite of these programmes.

The Government intends to take a national approach to water in order to improve the quality of service, increase the cost efficiency and conserve our national resource. Irish Water, a State company, will take over water investment and maintenance programmes and will be regulated by the EPA and by the Commission for Energy Regulation. A programme of water metering will also commence, which will be followed by the introduction of water charges based on usage above a free allowance.

There is a need for an integrated marine and coastal management process to take account of measures such as the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the main purpose of which is to protect and preserve the marine environment, prevent its deterioration and where practicable, restore marine ecosystems where they have been adversely affected. This would also take cognisance of the Common Fisheries Policy, a key component of which is the conservation, management and sustainable exploitation of marine biological resources.

### Measures Summary

   - to co-ordinate actions towards meeting national, EU and global 2020 biodiversity targets; integrate biodiversity concerns with climate change, economic and spatial planning policy.

11. **Development of a National Terrestrial and Marine Habitat Map**  
    - to be developed by 2016 and underpin decisions on policies and action to protect biodiversity and a stepping stone to future, long-term measures.

12. **Development of an Integrated Approach to Green Infrastructure**  
    - to improve the quality of our natural environment and support biodiversity at the national, regional and local level.

13. **Effectively Communicating the Economic Rationale for Conservation of Natural Resources**  
    - to strengthen the mainstreaming of biodiversity considerations across policy areas.
Climate Change and Clean Energy

Climate change is one of the great challenges facing mankind. The European Council has concluded that greenhouse gas emissions from developed countries as a whole must be reduced by 80-95% by 2050, compared to 1990 levels in order to reduce the risk of dangerous and potentially catastrophic climate change materialising. Ireland actively supports EU ambition and leadership on climate policy. In addition there is the challenge of peak oil, providing a secure and clean energy supply and being more efficient in our energy use.

The transition to a low-carbon economy in line with EU and international policy development will require a range of responses across sectors. Under the 2009 EU Climate and Energy package, Ireland faces a significant mitigation challenge, particularly in relation to those areas of the economy not covered by the EU-Emissions Trading Scheme. In summary, in these areas, Ireland is required to progress down an annual emissions reduction trajectory from 2013, reaching a point in 2020 where emissions are equivalent to 20% below their level in 2005. In parallel with the mitigation agenda, work on adapting to the unavoidable impacts of climate change is also underway.

Measures Summary

22. National Climate Policy
- following the 2011 National Climate Policy Review, the policy development process will be taken forward through a three-pronged process: an independent analysis to be carried out by the Secretariat of the National, Economic and Social Council (NESC), broad consultation, including input from the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Environment, Transport, Culture and the Gaeltacht; and sectoral mitigation progress through the Cabinet Committee on Climate Change and the Green Economy.

23. National Climate Change Adaptation Framework and National Adaptive Capacity Assessment
- a National Climate Change Adaptation Framework to be developed, aimed at mobilising adaptation measures across different sectors and levels of governance to reduce Ireland’s vulnerability to the impacts of climate change.

24. Ensure that Critical Infrastructure is Climate Resilient
- efforts to ensure this should be made in the context of sectoral adaptation measures.

25. Climate Legislation
- to be taken forward in accordance with the Roadmap published by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government.

26. Emissions Trading
- Ireland to continue to play an active role in the EU Emissions Trading regime.

27. Develop a Communication and Research Plan
- outlining the scale of the change that must take place, costs of inaction and the benefits and opportunities of transition (see linked measures 7, 32 and 48).

28. Review of Irish Energy Policy
- considering fully the outcome of the peer review by the International Energy Agency in 2011.

- maintain the commitment on a cross-Departmental and agency basis.

30. Bioenergy Strategy
- being developed in a process led by the Department of Communications Energy and Natural Resources.
Sustainable Agriculture

Substantial progress has been made in Ireland to integrate environmental considerations into agricultural and forestry policies and activities and we have an efficient and increasingly sophisticated agricultural industry. However, despite progress in a number of areas including combating water pollution and biodiversity loss, negative environmental impacts still form a significant challenge. Food Harvest 2020, an industry vision for the Irish agri-food sector, states that Ireland must build on the strengths of its ‘green’ image and maintain its commitment to sound agricultural practices.

Historically, Ireland has high per capita emissions of greenhouse gases. A significant factor contributing to this is the extent to which agriculture plays a prominent role in the economy. There are 12.7 million head of livestock in Ireland, with the majority of food produced exported to other Member States. Thus, the food demands and requirements from countries with lower agricultural capacity are a significant driver and contributing influence to the overall levels of agricultural emissions in Ireland. In relation to emission levels, the recently published European Commission Joint Research Centre Evaluation of the livestock sector’s contribution to EU greenhouse gas emissions clearly shows that based on a life cycle analysis approach, Ireland is among the most emission efficient food producers.

Notwithstanding this, a detailed analysis of the potential for, and costs of, emissions reductions in the agriculture sector indicates that the sector can reduce emissions cost effectively by about 4% compared to business as usual.

Efforts need to be focused on further improving sustainability and reducing reliance on fossil fuel energy sources. This will bring opportunities for the agri-sector if combined with labelling schemes and indicators, such as carbon and water footprints and efforts to reduce embodied GHG emissions in Irish produce.

The further development of Ireland’s national forests has the potential to contribute to achieving economic objectives in a sustainable manner, while also contributing to environmental protection and enhancement, climate change mitigation through carbon sequestration, and the provision of public goods and services.

Measures Summary

31. Continued Support for Sustainable Agricultural and Forestry Development in Ireland
- actively pursue the implementation of environmental policies as they relate to those envisaged under Food Harvest 2020 by: promoting sustainable pasture-based farming and soil management; contributing to sustainable energy requirements; contributing to the protection of biodiversity and ensuring environmentally sustainable production practices for seafood and aquaculture;
- a focus on and support for farmers to remain in farming and to increase productivity;
- maintaining the maximum number of active farmers engaged in food production;
- continue to invest in the afforestation programme to support sustainable development;
- implement recommendations arising from the national forest policy review;
- identify measures to reduce food waste, including associated consumer awareness.
32. Research and Knowledge Transfer
- identify research measures for a focused approach in agriculture nationally that ensures:
  • high quality environmental research relating to climate change and water quality is undertaken;
  • a greater emphasis on public/private partnerships in carrying out required research;
  • research bodies in food production will have a role in developing agri-food business opportunities and focusing measures to reduce GHG emissions from agriculture;
  • outputs of research are successfully adopted at farm level.

Sustainable Transport

Transport, which is a key element of a sustainable development strategy, should be closely aligned to land use planning and the need to create more sustainable communities. Sustainable transport is central to national efforts to combat climate change, air emissions (for example, NOx from road transport) and other negative environmental and social impacts.

The European Commission has adopted a roadmap\textsuperscript{10} to build a competitive transport system that will increase mobility, remove major barriers in key areas and fuel growth and employment. At the same time, the proposals will dramatically reduce Europe’s dependence on imported oil and cut carbon emissions in transport by 60% by 2050.

A key characteristic that distinguishes energy use in transport is the almost total dependence on oil as a fuel, and import dependency, over 99% in both cases. The transport sector is the third largest contributor to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in Ireland, at 19.1% of the national total. The years 2008 to 2010 saw reductions in transport emissions, mainly due to the economic downturn, with freight activity in particular being much reduced over the period. Notwithstanding changed economic circumstances and the success of certain measures in reducing emissions from and energy consumption of the vehicle fleet, transport and travel trends remain unsustainable.

At a European level, the Renewable Energy Directive (2009/28/EC) mandates each Member State to ensure 10% of transport energy by 2020 comes from renewable sources. The EU Climate and Energy Package also resulted in binding targets being set.

The national policy approach on sustainable travel is set out in ‘Smarter Travel - a Sustainable Transport Future’, the National Cycle Policy Framework and the Road Safety Strategy. Action is being taken on delivering ambitious goals for 2020, which include: improving the planning system to discourage dispersed development and long commuting; reducing car travel by encouraging alternatives; and achieving real reductions on current levels of emissions. Additional Government targets in relation to sustainable transport include those for electric vehicles to constitute 10% of the Irish transport fleet by 2020 and a biofuel obligation, which will incrementally increase on a sustainable basis to 2020, to meet the renewable energy target of 10% in 2020.

\textsuperscript{10} Roadmap to a Single European Transport Area - Towards a competitive and resource efficient transport system, COM(2011) 144 final of 28.3.2011
Measures Summary

33. Ensure Continued Implementation of Smarter Travel and the National Cycle Policy Framework
- maintain the Government’s commitment to and support the continued implementation of sustainable travel measures, to assist in achieving the following goals:
  • Reducing distance travelled by private car and encouraging smarter travel;
  • Ensuring that alternatives to the car are more widely available mainly through investment in cycling and walking;
  • Improvements to public transport (e.g. integrated ticketing) as well as some targeted infrastructural improvements;
  • Improving the fuel efficiency of motorised transport.

34. Examine Feasibility of Retrofitting Gross Polluter Vehicles with NOx Abatement Technology
- in addition to the measures proposed under Smarter Travel, assessing the feasibility and effectiveness of introducing such a scheme, e.g., for heavy goods vehicles and buses.

Social Inclusion, Sustainable Communities and Spatial Planning

An overarching goal of sustainable development is to improve quality of life and to develop sustainable communities. This is a complex challenge involving spatial planning and the quality in the built environment alongside measures to improve social inclusion.

The 2002 National Spatial Strategy (NSS) centred on the need to focus future development in nine Gateway city/large towns and nine medium sized Hub towns. But many of the larger Gateway cities have experienced population growth lower than the national average, while strong growth took place within commuting distance of the Gateways. The National Spatial Strategy Update and Outlook re-affirms the Government’s commitment to implementing the NSS and sets new priorities and objectives taking on board experience since 2002. A new housing policy statement recognises the recent unsustainable growth in the housing market.

Sustainable communities are about social issues such as improving social inclusion and reducing poverty, and supporting communities that are vulnerable, disadvantaged or under threat. Local participation is essential; However, difficulties can arise including the multiplicity of structures. The national poverty target (recently reviewed) is to eliminate consistent poverty by 2020.

Measures Summary

35. Developing Sustainable Communities
- to include the implementation of the following:
  • the National Spatial Strategy and the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010;
  • Core Strategies in local planning;
  • national and regional development monitoring systems;
• the agreed recommendations of the Local Government/Local Development Alignment Steering Group;
• the Report of the Advisory Group on Unfinished Housing Developments;
• the periodic publication of planning guidelines on relevant topics;
• the development of an integrated approach to green infrastructure as outlined in Measure 12;
• the Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines;
• the Government Policy on Architecture;
• the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010–2030; and
• support of the Greening Irish Communities Network.

36. Social Inclusion: Key National Strategies

37. Social Inclusion: Housing
- invest in the renewal, maintenance and management of social housing estates; a benchmark audit of the social housing stock will be undertaken to determine environmental sustainability and enable monitoring of quality;
- introduce measures to improve housing for vulnerable groups; support systematic procedures for the management and maintenance of Traveller specific accommodation by local authorities; continue the Senior Alert Scheme, with additional measures on energy, etc. for vulnerable older people; and implementation of the Housing Strategy for People with a Disability.

38. Social Inclusion: Children and Young People
- publish in 2012 a five-year Children and Young Peoples Policy Framework.

39. Social Inclusion: Support for Local and Community Engagement
- continue to support such engagement in tackling poverty and social exclusion.

40. Social Inclusion: Migrant Integration
- continue to develop comprehensive, coherent and transparent policies.

Public Health

Public health protection is an essential goal for society in delivering wellbeing and quality of life. Ireland has made significant progress in regard to the health of the population, but some key challenges remain.

Mortality from circulatory system diseases fell by almost 40% between 2000 and 2009. Survival rates from cancer continue to improve and the gains are leading to a welcome reduction in the gap between survival rates in Ireland and other developed countries. The number of people over the age of 65 is projected to increase from over 500,000 now to over 1,300,000 in the next 30 years.

Ireland’s ageing population, together with adverse trends in risk factors means that the level of chronic health conditions will certainly increase. Many of the risk factors can be prevented. The main public health challenges, including lifestyle factors contributing to health, are smoking, alcohol, obesity, insufficient
physical activity, some environmental factors (although Ireland generally has good air and water quality), and the emergence of new conditions. Maintaining a healthy environment is inextricably linked to the health of our population.

People who are less well off or who belong to socially excluded groups tend to fare badly in terms of social determinants of health. Traveller life expectancy remains at levels last experienced by the general population 60 years ago. Cross sectoral co-operation is necessary to improve the health of the population and to reduce health inequalities. There must be a focus on prevention.

Measures Summary

41. Review of Policy Framework for a Sustainable Public Health System
- to be completed with the aim of developing a policy framework for public health for the period 2012 to 2020; also develop a new Health and Wellbeing Framework.

42. Implement Preventative Interventions
- implement an evidence-based programme of ill-health preventive interventions that are effective across the social gradient, including meeting all commitments in terms of water, soil, hazardous chemicals and air quality, as well as measures outlined in this Framework;
- develop a strategy to ensure that exposure to radon gas is addressed;
- actions by the Department of Health to include:
  (i) prepare the Report of the National Substance Misuse Strategy, including alcohol;
  (ii) complete a policy to reduce tobacco consumption across the population;
  (iii) publish revised healthy eating guidelines;
  (iv) review a requirement for lifestyle surveys and develop proposals for the adult and childhood population;
  (v) the Special Action Group on Obesity to continue introducing measures to tackle the issues involved.

43. Improve Availability of Information on Health Inequalities
- the Department of Health will develop further indicators relating to lifestyle including alcohol, tobacco, diet and physical activity.

44. Health Information Bill
- the Department of Health to prepare legislation for the Health Information Bill, to provide better governance of personal health information.

45. Disease Modelling
- building on the work of the National Cancer Registry, national registers of other diseases to be created; continue to revise the list of notifiable diseases.
Education, Communication and Behaviour Change

Education for sustainable development is crucial in strengthening the capacity of individuals, communities, businesses and governments to make judgments and decisions in its favour. It needs to be embedded at every level of the education system. A draft National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development published for consultation in 2007 awaits adoption.

Public communication is vital in making sustainable development better understood and appreciated. Public authorities need to actively engage with citizens and stakeholders in the development and implementation of policy. However, raising awareness does not always lead to changes in behaviour and more sustainable outcomes. This is a challenge for policy makers.

A number of different Departments and agencies, including local authorities, are already involved in promoting key messages on sustainable development. However, sustainable development cannot be addressed by public authorities alone. Non-governmental organisations and civil society groups have a crucial role in advocating for a more sustainable society.

The Aarhus Convention11 is designed, inter alia, to give ordinary citizens the right to have a say in decision making that affects the environment. The principles of the Convention are already incorporated into Irish law and Ireland intends to ratify it as soon as possible.

Measures Summary

46. Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development
- this will be published in 2012, with four key objectives: (i) embed Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) at every level of the system; (ii) promote public awareness of ESD; (iii) promote capacity building in support of ESD; (iv) promote high standards of environmental management in education institutions;
- specific actions to include: integrating ESD into all areas of the curriculum; media and awareness campaigns; research, collaborative working and industry links, promoting low energy sustainable buildings; engaging with providers and community interests;
- the University of Limerick with other stakeholders, will continue to provide logistical support for, and participate, in the work of the Regional Centre for Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development in identifying research needs and best practice on ESD.

47. Communicating Progress on Sustainable Development
- ongoing reporting on progress towards sustainable development to take place, including progress on implementation of Our Sustainable Future (see Measure 65).

48. Encouraging Behavioural Change
- suitable policies and strategies, as appropriate, will be considered to address this issue.

49. Aarhus Convention
- Ireland to ratify the Aarhus Convention and incorporate the spirit of the Convention in the development and implementation of sustainable development policy.

Innovation, Research and Development

Sustainable development policy depends on knowledge from different fields of research and disciplines and, crucially, linking different disciplines. The application of knowledge includes providing the evidence base upon which to build policy and providing insights about complex problems to policymakers. Thus, the research agenda can facilitate the meeting of other policy objectives across the sustainable development challenges identified in this Framework.

The EPA’s Science, Technology, Research and Innovation for the Environment (STRIVE) programme is an example of an integrated research funding programme that also delivers important public goods. The programme has placed particular emphasis on new and improved technologies for the management of resources and to reduce the environmental impact of human activities as well as essential policy-supporting and ‘public good’ research.

The green economy can provide opportunities for job creation in start-up and scale-up companies, with increased public demand for ‘green’ goods and services in both domestic and international markets. It is an area in which Ireland has a number of strengths, including a ‘green’ image and could become strategically important for the country.

Ireland’s National Reform Programme under the Europe 2020 Strategy affirms Ireland’s headline target to improve conditions for research and development, with the aim of raising combined public and private investment levels to 2.5% of GNP (approximately equivalent of 2% of GDP). The Programme for Government 2011 outlines a significant set of innovation and commercialisation strategies and goals.

Measures Summary

50. Deliver the Right Investment Framework
- includes maintaining designated environmental, policy-supporting research funding (e.g. the EPA’s STRIVE programme and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine’s Research Stimulus Fund) which identifies solutions to tackle key environmental challenges and promote job creation and investment in the green economy.

51. Bridge the Gap in Linking R&D to Sustainable Commercialisation and Policy Development
- includes measures to bridge the gap in terms of linking R&D and emerging technologies to commercialisation; research to support policy development; and essential ‘public good’ research.

52. Focused Research on Sustainable Development
- an R&D strategy for sustainable development will be developed by the EPA; where possible, it will be important to enhance the knowledge transfer dimension of such research programmes so that research drives changes in practice.

53. Postgraduate Training
- encourage the further development of programmes in higher education institutions that focus directly on sustainable development or are at least informed by it; continued cooperation among relevant bodies on further interdisciplinary research and training in sustainable development.
Skills and Training

One key enabler in the move to a low-carbon and resource-efficient economy is mobilising the skills and training required to take advantage of future employment opportunities in this area. Skills and training are crucial in underpinning other key policy areas. Unless Ireland has the right skills and training structures and programmes in place, we run the risk of missing out on significant environmental and economic opportunities. Skills and training programmes are not just a matter for central Government – there are a wide range of other parties, such as industry, higher and further education institutions, local government as well as civil society organisations, that all have important roles to play.

The Europe 2020 Strategy has put forward an agenda for new skills and jobs as one of its seven key flagship initiatives. It aims to modernise labour markets by facilitating labour mobility and the development of new skills with a view to increasing labour participation and productivity rates and better matching of labour supply and demand.

Nationally, the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs published a report in 2010 examining the future skills needs of enterprise within the green economy and made a number of recommendations to ensure that the workforce needs of those enterprises engaged in the green economy are being met. The Programme for Government 2011 also commits to undertaking a number of specific strategies for job creation including the potential for green jobs and ensuring the labour market skills are in place to support this sector.

The Government Policy on Architecture 2009-2015 commits to a number of actions relating to the development of skills in areas including sustainable energy construction and architectural conservation, maintenance and repair from continuing professional development for professionals to the training of skilled craftspersons.

Measures Summary

55. Ensure Education and Training Provision is Aligned with the Skills Requirements of the Green Economy
- education and training providers will seek to respond to the findings of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs in relation to the skills requirements associated with the green economy. In this context, opportunities for structured graduate placements and internships for third level students will also be considered.

56. Industry Training Networks for Sustainability
- these will be supported, where appropriate, in order to deliver the required courses and skill sets needed for a resource-efficient and low-carbon economy.

12 This has been recognised in a report by Comhar SDC examining the skills and training needs for a Green New Deal and also the Government’s High-Level Action Group on Green Enterprise.
OUR SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Global Poverty and Sustainable Development

Ireland must continue to lead in its international development efforts and remain committed to reducing poverty through sustainable development.\(^\text{13}\) In addition to its intrinsic importance, aid is also increasingly recognised as a long-term investment in a more stable world.

The first hit and worst affected by climate change are the world’s poorest, who are least able to cope. This is especially true for people in developing countries where natural resource dependency is high. These countries have contributed least to climate change\(^\text{14}\). Climate justice must be at the centre of the international response to global poverty and hunger in order to underpin a path to an inclusive, equitable, low-carbon, climate resilient future for vulnerable countries.

The Government’s Hunger Task Force identified three priority areas where Ireland can best contribute, namely: sustainably increasing smallholder agricultural productivity in Africa with a particular focus on women farmers; targeting undernutrition, particularly in infants, children and mothers; and promoting governance and leadership action on tackling global hunger.

Ireland supports the development of trade in accordance with the WTO rules based system, to underpin economic and social development in developing countries, in particular in Least Developed Countries.

Measures Summary

59. Official Development Assistance
- Government re-affirms its commitment to the 0.7% of GNP target for Overseas Development Aid, the Millennium Development Goals and outcomes of 2002 World Summit.

60. Address Hunger and Food and Nutrition Insecurity in the World’s Poorest and Most Vulnerable Households
- continue to combat global hunger and food and nutrition insecurity, and to enhance programmes as follows: hunger reduction; sustainably boosting agricultural productivity; interventions that combat the irreversible effects of chronic undernutrition in early childhood; national nutrition plans in developing countries; capacity building within local Agriculture Ministries; in-country agricultural research and knowledge and technology transfer; demanding leadership through resilience in Ireland’s food production systems; research in the area of global food security.

\(^{13}\) White Paper on Irish Aid, Government of Ireland
61. Financing Climate Change Actions in Developing Countries
- help more vulnerable countries in accordance with the Cancun Agreements 2010; support a comprehensive post-2012 global climate change agreement.

62. Trade
- seek to ensure that the EU position in relation to trade is supportive of a rules based trading system which, inter alia, recognises the need for special and differential treatment of Least Developed Countries and some developing countries.

63. Mainstreaming Environment and Sustainable Development
- Irish Aid Programme will continue to integrate the principles of sustainable development to promote developmental fairness in light of changing environmental conditions.

64. United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development
- participate at EU level to ensure a successful outcome to the Conference to be held in Rio de Janeiro in 2012.
### Implementation

*Our Sustainable Future* has been developed as a whole-of-Government undertaking. Its implementation will similarly require an active and central Government policy driven approach. Its integration into policies and programmes and the implementation of its measures, including the further development of the green economy, require a coherent and consistent approach across all relevant Government Departments and sectors. Annex 1 sets out a sectoral plan for the delivery of measures in *Our Sustainable Future*. This plan identifies for each measure, a lead Department, other Departments and bodies with responsibilities, and a timeline for delivery. Political oversight of implementation of *Our Sustainable Future* will be delivered through the Cabinet Committee on Climate Change and the Green Economy and, where necessary, at Government. Contributions will also be needed by others to achieve the aims of the Framework. Only with the support of wider society and involvement of all stakeholders can this Framework deliver progress on sustainable development. Noting that Northern Ireland has published its sustainable development strategy, we will also work with relevant bodies there to identify areas of common interest and opportunities for joint implementation of both strategies, where appropriate.

Within local and regional authorities and other relevant public bodies operating locally, there is still a need for improved awareness, training and capacity building on sustainable development, as well as in all sectors of society and educational systems.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) involves assessment of the likely significant environmental effects of plans and programmes prior to their adoption. Ireland also has a system of Regulatory Impact Analysis (RIA) which involves a detailed assessment of the impacts of regulation and involves consultation with stakeholders and citizens. As RIA is not a comprehensive Sustainability Assessment (SA), there is therefore potential to develop an SA model that can be integrated with the RIA system.

The County/City Development Boards will continue to include sustainable development as a focus of their planning and it will be further emphasised as a cross cutting issue in their next planning round.

### Measures Summary

#### 65. Implementation, Monitoring and Reporting of Our Sustainable Future
- political oversight through the Cabinet Committee on Climate Change and the Green Economy and, where necessary, at Government; coordination and implementation of sectoral measures will be the responsibility of the relevant lead Government Department, in consultation with stakeholders; this process should be affirmed by Government Departments in their Statements of Strategy; the High Level Inter-Departmental Group for Sustainable Development will coordinate and drive delivery of the Framework.
Longer-term Perspective and Measuring Progress

The timeframes to 2020 are important in achieving a stepped approach to desired longer term objectives. A 2050 perspective will provide a practical framework for guiding and reporting both on long-term broad development trends and promoting forward-looking reflections on sustainability. Notwithstanding forecasting challenges, the evidence is now overwhelming that “business as usual” is not an option on a global level. The Stern Report\(^{15}\) demonstrates that the economic costs of effective and timely international action on climate change would be far outweighed by the costs of inaction – potentially up to 20% of global GDP.

One of the basic principles set down in Our Sustainable Future is the promotion of an innovative, competitive and low carbon economy with the aim of achieving smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Our Sustainable Future will provide a platform for the advancement of the green economy and resource efficiency agendas in the period ahead.

Ireland’s longer term perspective needs to take account of the linkages between the crucial themes of natural resources, energy and transport. Investments and policy choices made or not made in the next four to five years will still have impacts in 2050. From a policy perspective we must not lose room to manoeuvre to cope with the unexpected and avoid getting locked into solutions that are costly and inefficient in the long term. Under the Review of National Climate Policy it is proposed to develop a Low Carbon Plan to 2050 for Ireland. Current biodiversity plans and strategies are focused on 2020 targets; subsequent policies and decisions will be made in due course aimed at achieving the 2050 vision.

At an international level the most recent development in the area of sustainable development indicators (SDI) is the publication of a report of the Joint UNECE/OECD/Eurostat Working Group on Statistics for Sustainable Development\(^ {16}\). This has informed the development of indicators for Ireland.

The National Statistics Board recommended\(^ {17}\) that the CSO develop a new annual environmental indicators report. This report, Environmental Indicators Ireland 2012 was published in March 2012\(^ {18}\). An already developed conceptual framework can be used to develop a comprehensive SDI set to inform policy and decision making at a national level and to communicate progress on sustainable development to policy makers and other stakeholders.

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66. Training Programmes for Local and Regional Authority Staff and Elected Representatives and Other Relevant Public Bodies
- sustainable development should be integrated into the training programmes for local and regional authorities and other relevant public bodies, including in relation to financing and procurement.

67. Sustainability Assessment
- the synergies between sustainability assessment and RIA will be examined.

68. Stakeholder Engagement for Sustainable Development
- the Government will continue to support stakeholder dialogue and engagement for sustainable development, including through the County/City Development Boards; the National Economic and Social Council will also develop its work in a way that integrates sustainable development issues into its research and analysis of significant national challenges.

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\(^{15}\) Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change [HM Treasury, 2006]


\(^{17}\) Strategy for Statistics 2009 – 2014

Measures Summary

69. Sustainable Development Indicator Set
- adopt and develop a sustainable development indicator set aimed at national policy making and the general public.

70. Further Development of the Indicators
- research to be undertaken to further develop and improve the SDI sets.
### Implementation Plan

#### Short-term (within 5 years)  medium-term (six to 10 years)  longer-term (beyond 10 years)

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<tr>
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<td>DPER, CSO</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>National Reform Programmes under Europe 2020</td>
<td>DT</td>
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#### Sustainable consumption and production (SCP)

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<td>8</td>
<td>Green Tenders, An Action Plan on Green Public Procurement</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Resource Efficiency Programmes for Business</td>
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</table>

#### Conservation and management of natural resources

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<td>Implementation of Actions for Biodiversity 2011 – 2016: Irelands National Biodiversity Plan</td>
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<td>DCENR, DAFM, DECLG, EPA, Marine Institute, IFI, Heritage Council, ÚnaG, LAs</td>
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<td>Effectively Communicating the Economic Rationale for Conservation of Natural Resources</td>
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<td>LAs, CDBs, Local Development Companies</td>
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<td>51</td>
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<td>62</td>
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<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>Mainstreaming Environment and Sustainable Development</td>
<td>DFAT, Irish Aid</td>
<td>DECLG</td>
<td>Short term</td>
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<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development</td>
<td>DECLG</td>
<td>Irish Aid</td>
<td>Short term</td>
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<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>Implementation, Monitoring and Reporting of Our Sustainable Future</td>
<td>All Departments and agencies</td>
<td></td>
<td>Short term</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

\(^{19}\) Expert Group on Future Skills Needs
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Lead Department</th>
<th>Other Bodies</th>
<th>Timetable</th>
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<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>Training Programmes for Local and Regional Authority Staff, Elected Representatives and other Relevant Public Bodies</td>
<td>DECLG</td>
<td>CCMA, LAMA, GCCC, AMAI</td>
<td>Short term</td>
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<td>67</td>
<td>Sustainability Assessment</td>
<td>DECLG</td>
<td>DF, DPER</td>
<td>Short term</td>
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<td>68</td>
<td>Stakeholder Engagement for Sustainable Development</td>
<td>DECLG</td>
<td>NESC</td>
<td>Short term</td>
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**Measuring progress on sustainability**

<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Indicator Set</td>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>DECLG, DPER, DAHG, EPA, SEAI, ESRI, NESC, Forfás, LAs, LGMSB</td>
<td>Short term</td>
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<td>70</td>
<td>Further Development of the Indicators</td>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>DECLG, DPER</td>
<td>Medium term</td>
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