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Engage communities and the private sector

5.1 Communicate the multiple benefits of biodiversity

5.2 Boost community engagement & grassroots involvement

5.3 Redouble efforts to engage the financial and business sectors



5.1 Communicate the multiple benefits of biodiversity

The Interim Review of the National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) did not mention the Government's declaration of a climate and biodiversity emergency over the lifetime of the plan. Climate issues overall remain a higher priority and continue to receive more parliamentary and policy attention than biodiversity.

But nature and biodiversity can play a central role in achieving national and sub-national net-zero carbon targets. Acting to protect, recover and renew biodiversity can deliver co-benefits such as climate mitigation and adaptation, and enhanced human health and wellbeing. And the protection, monitoring and restoration of biodiversity has benefits that go beyond the heritage values traditionally associated with conservation. The benefits of biodiversity, and the risks posed by its loss, are borne across the economy and society.

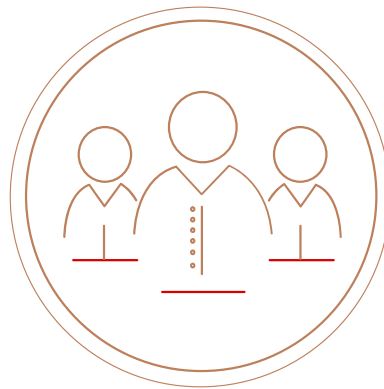
To better capture these multiple values, Natural Capital Accounting should be mainstreamed across government. This will enable accountability for the quantity, quality, location and provision of services from natural capital assets.

Furthermore, third-level education on biodiversity should cut across disciplines from planners to business to economics to engineering and agriculture. Insights from all these disciplines will contribute to the knowledge base on biodiversity.

Nevertheless, biodiversity is valuable in its own right and for its own sake. The Government must effectively communicate these values with stakeholders. The most recent EuroBarometer report on Attitudes of Europeans towards Biodiversity shows a strengthening of understanding and support for biodiversity amongst the Irish public.

There is more awareness but insufficient urgency and understanding. Future messaging must place less emphasis on individual action and more on system change, for example the required transformation in the tourism, agricultural and forestry sectors.

To achieve this, the Forum recommends the creation of a dedicated Communications Strategy for biodiversity, similar to what the Government has produced to manage the Covid-19 pandemic, to create a common call to action nationally. This Strategy should consider the hosting of annual or biennial biodiversity conferences to raise awareness of the issues and keep momentum behind actions. Environmental NGOs should be involved and appropriately funded.



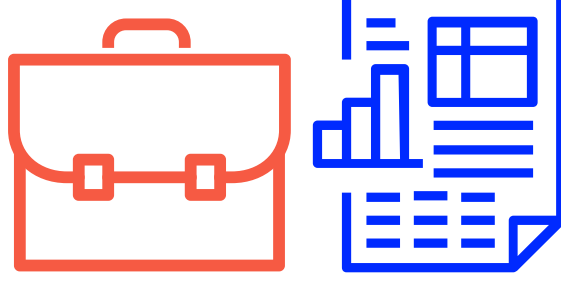
5.2 Boost community engagement & grassroots involvement

Ireland has shown leadership on community involvement in biodiversity and citizen science. The citizen science projects of the National Biodiversity Data Centre ([NBDC](#)) and the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan ([AIPP](#)) have been major successes. For example, in 2020, the AIPP reached all 3,200 primary schools in Ireland; 162 local communities have become pollinator-friendly and 55% of all Councils are partners of and engage with the Plan; and 278 businesses support the Plan. The annual [Irish Wetland Bird Survey and Countryside Bird Survey](#), funded by National Parks & Wildlife Service ([NPWS](#)) and coordinated by BirdWatch Ireland is currently undertaken by 750 volunteers nationwide. They are two of the largest citizen science projects nationally.

Some interdisciplinary research projects have also demonstrated strong community engagement, such as: [Coastal Communities Adapting Together](#), the [Cultural Value of Coastlines](#) and [Ecostructure](#). Furthermore, the [Farming for Nature](#) initiative received international recognition in the 2020 [ACT for Biodiversity Challenge](#).

To build on these successes, the Government should consider creating sector-specific versions of the next NBAP. For example, the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan created several different versions of the Plan for different stakeholders to make it clear how they could get involved and what actions were expected of them. In addition, a Citizens Assembly on Biodiversity should be used to deliberate on the state of biodiversity in Ireland and the options available for achieving meaningful impact to halt and reverse biodiversity loss and restore ecosystems, habitats and wildlife.

The Forum also recommends that the Government invest in community-led, bottom up approaches to implement biodiversity programmes. The [Community Wetlands Forum](#) (CWF), established under the umbrella of [Irish Rural Link](#) and partially supported by NPWS, is an excellent example of this, made up of community representatives who have established wetland or bogland conservation sites in their area. Currently there are over 21 active sites, with a high potential for growth. The bottom-up approach taken by the CWF starkly contrasts with the community opposition to various environmental directives implemented in recent years. Groups such as CWF receive some support but require far more resources to deliver community leadership capacity, research, development and more.



5.3 Redouble efforts to engage the financial and business sectors

The private sector has a vital role to play in reducing impacts on biodiversity and helping to fund biodiversity action. But at present, the corporate and financial sectors generally fail to appreciate how they depend on biodiversity, and where action is taken, it is often designed to enhance the company's reputation rather than truly reduce impact on biodiversity. Irish companies and financial institutions must manage their biodiversity impacts at home and abroad, considering the full value chain, imports and exports.

There has never been a better opportunity to engage with the private sector on the issue of biodiversity loss. As we emerge from the pandemic, there is a greater understanding of the role of ecosystem services in the wider economy, and unprecedented legislative and regulatory backing for private sector action on biodiversity. The Government must seize the opportunity of the [EU Green Deal](#), the revised Common Agricultural Policy ([CAP](#)), the revision of the Non-Financial Reporting Directive ([NFRD](#)) and the demand for stronger Environmental Social and Governance ([ESG](#)) metrics to develop incentives for the private sector to deliver positive outcomes for biodiversity. For example, the European Central Bank has stated that it aims to conduct climate and environmental risk stress tests on European banks before the end of 2022. Ireland can use this as an opportunity to encourage the pillar banks to act on biodiversity, which could act as a catalyst for action in the wider private sector.

Furthermore, the Department of Finance should work to explore tax incentives for companies and financial institutions to fund nature-based investments such as conservation afforestation, marine restoration etc. Although this would mean foregone revenue for the State in the short term, the measure would generate economic activity such as delivering rural employment, boosting tourism and restoring valuable biodiversity. Direct and indirect taxation of the incremental economic activity could ensure the measure is revenue-positive or at least expenditure-negative for the Exchequer.

Those implementing the next NBAP must ensure there is strong engagement with the Department of Business, [Enterprise Ireland](#), the [IDA](#) and the chambers of commerce and trade associations. To facilitate this, the next NBAP can consider the creation of biodiversity awards and national quality marks for business. Better labelling of products in line with EU eco-labelling regulations would also allow consumers to understand the impact of their purchases on biodiversity, both in Ireland and internationally. Irish companies, financial institutions and policymakers must actively participate in international private sector initiatives, such as the [EU Business @ Biodiversity Platform](#), the [Business for Nature Coalition](#) and the [UN Global Compact](#). In 2020, NPWS took an initial step towards this by funding a project to research Irish business' impact and action on biodiversity. The project provided recommendations for the establishment of a Business & Biodiversity Platform in 2021.