

Our Energy Future Workshop 3rd of May 2023

Meeting Note

Our Energy Future: How to improve national and local responses to biodiversity protection and environmental assessment while meeting renewables targets.

On the 3rd of May 2023, Friends of the Earth facilitated an in-person workshop, organised as part of the *Our Energy Future* project, a partnership with the Renewables Grid Initiative and EirGrid*.

The workshop included an afternoon session with NGO and industry stakeholders. The session built on Friends of the Earth's preceding workshop on the same topic in October 2022 (see [here](#)). Issues discussed in the meeting included impediments to environmental protection and renewables/grid rollout. As part of this session participants were invited to consider areas of common ground between stakeholders in terms of both challenges and necessary responses.

This note provides a summary of issues raised in this discussions among civil society and industry participants. This note does not seek to detail all points made and rather attempts to provide a high-level summary of some of the main matters and recommendations addressed in the workshop. Information is not presented in any order of priority.

Impediments to environmental protection and renewables/grid rollout

- Lack of state capacity particularly ecologists
- Lack of NGO resources – certain NGOs overwhelmed with requests from developers
- Lack of independent transparent data undermines trust
- Lack of clarity on the position of MPAs.
- Lack of trust in certain state actors to deliver on planning and enforcement obligations/commitments.
- Weak monitoring/enforcement
- Lack of public participation/community engagement in certain projects/developments

Suggested changes to overcome obstacles

- Increase the capacity of An Bord Pleanála and local authorities.
- Investment in National Biodiversity Data Centre
- Source experts, e.g. ecologists, from outside of Ireland
- Centralised database, standardization of data collection, as well as improved accessibility
- Investment in education/skills development
- Prioritisation and guidance re stakeholder engagement. See for example EirGrid's [Stakeholder Engagement Plan](#).
- State funding for community engagement officers to improve awareness
- Provide best practice examples and guidance re progressive steps/projects
- Further support for collaborative efforts such as the Our Energy Future project in order to build trust. Example of [Oceans Statement](#) on offshore wind and nature protection.
- Recognition of the imperatives of climate and biodiversity crises – need for stakeholders to move from a “yes if” to a “both...and” in relation to renewables/grid rollout and environmental protection measures.
- Stakeholder engagement re grid development north and south.

Prioritisation and next steps

- Prepare a joint statement in the context of Budget 2024 (Oct)
- Establish stakeholder working group on access to/standardisation of data
- Plan a multi-stakeholder dialogue on key elements/principles for environmentally-sound solutions to renewables/grid rollout (an 'island'/away-day approach with stakeholders). Suggestion of Q4 2023.

Major External Factors

- Budget 2024 (Oct)
- Local + EU elections (June 2024)
- Climate action plan consultation
- MPA bill
- Planning bill
- European Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive
- National Planning Framework
- National biodiversity plan
- Local county development plans

Registered participants included:

- An Taisce
- Aqualicense
- Birdwatch Ireland
- Coastal Concern Alliance
- Coastwatch
- EirGrid
- ESB
- Fair Seas Ireland
- Friends of the Earth
- Good Energies Alliance Ireland
- Green Foundation Ireland
- Irish Environmental Network / Environmental Pillar
- Irish Solar Energy Association
- Irish Whale and Dolphin Group
- Irish Wildlife Trust
- Oceans 5
- Renewables Grid Initiative
- Simply Blue Group
- Stop Climate Chaos
- Wind Energy Ireland

*This workshop has been organised as part of Our Energy Future - a 3-year collaborative project of EirGrid, Friends of the Earth and the Renewables Grid Initiative to engage communities and groups around the country on Ireland's energy transition. The project is supported by the Mercator Foundation (Stiftung Mercator).