Working Party on Environmental Performance

ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE REVIEW OF IRELAND

MID-TERM PROGRESS REPORT

Paris, OECD, 26-28 March 2014

This document has been prepared by the Irish Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government. It describes some of the main policy developments since the last EPR of Ireland which was published in 2010, as well as the actions taken by the Irish government to implement the EPR’s recommendations.

For more information, please contact Mr. Brendan Gillespie, Head, EPI Division Environment Directorate, Brendan.Gillespie@oecd.org

Complete document available on OLIS in its original format

This document and any map included herein are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ............................................................................................................................. 3
Waste Management........................................................................................................................................ 3
Climate change and greenhouse gas emissions............................................................................................ 3
Water............................................................................................................................................................ 4
Local Government Reform .......................................................................................................................... 4
Planning and Development Reform ............................................................................................................. 4
Sustainable Development............................................................................................................................. 4
Public Participation...................................................................................................................................... 4
Environmental Legislation and Compliance................................................................................................ 5
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The OECD Environmental Performance Review of Ireland in 2009, made thirty-eight recommendations intended to contribute to further environmental progress in Ireland. This mid-term review provides a timely opportunity to take stock of the progress made and the challenges which remain.

2. Significant progress has been made across a range of environmental policy areas. Actions have included the reform of the waste sector, reform of the water sector and planned introduction of domestic water charge, introduction of a carbon tax, and substantial reform of the local government system.

3. Notwithstanding the recent economic difficulties faced by Ireland, environmental matters continue to be very much on the agenda. Although protection of the environment may face many challenges during an economic recession, it has been recognised by both government and industry that these challenges are interlinked and can also bring opportunities. The concept of a ‘green economy’ and ‘green growth’ has helped identify areas where the development of ‘clean’ and ‘green’ technology, innovation and products can yield dividends.

Waste Management

4. There are significant on-going changes in relation to the waste management regime. A new waste management policy was published in June 2012. The number of waste management planning regions has been reduced from 10 to 3 in order to facilitate more effective and efficient waste management planning. A review of enforcement structures has also been carried out and new consolidated enforcement structures are under consideration.

5. A wide ranging review of existing producer responsibility initiatives (PRIs) was initiated in 2012 to assess the nature and level of challenges facing current agreements in relation to the management of the various waste streams. The findings and recommendations of the review are forming the basis for further developments in this area.

Climate change and greenhouse gas emissions

6. A Carbon Tax was introduced in 2010 on CO₂ emissions from the non-traded sectors of the economy, with the aim of integrating climate change into the annual fiscal budgetary process and changing behaviour to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. The rationale of the Carbon Tax is to change the relative price of fuels based on CO₂ emissions in order to change consumption patterns, encourage efficiency and lead to an improvement in environment quality.

7. The Carbon Tax is an example of the effective use of environmental taxes for revenue-raising purposes. The scope for action on taxation over the short to medium term is limited by the budgetary constraints currently facing Ireland; however the implementation of the Carbon Tax has helped avoid some increases in other areas of taxation and is nevertheless a comprehensive tax reform. Ireland’s National Sustainable Development Strategy sets out a longer term aim of having a tax system which is sustainable – both from the standpoint of raising revenue and supporting national development.

8. The National Climate Change Adaptation Framework was published by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government in December 2012. It is guided by the EU policy framework on climate change and provides an overarching policy framework to ensure adaptation measures are taken across different sectors and levels of government to manage and reduce Ireland's vulnerability to the negative impacts of climate change.
Water

9. A fundamental reform of the water services sector has seen the introduction of a new public utility ‘Irish Water’ which has assumed responsibility for the provision of water services from the beginning of this year, which will lead to increased efficiencies and infrastructure in this area. A programme of installation of domestic water meters is underway and domestic water charging will commence at the end of the year. The Commission for Energy Regulation has been given responsibility for the independent economic regulation of the water sector as well as responsibility for representing the interests of customers.

Local Government Reform

10. The Local Government Reform Act 2014 provides for one of the most radical changes to the local government system in Ireland. This will involve the merging of certain city/county councils in order to reduce the number of these and will also introduce a comprehensive system of local governance at sub-county level, with municipal districts in place of town councils. These changes will foster meaningful decision making at a devolved level as well as introducing efficiencies and cost savings.

Planning and Development Reform

11. A comprehensive review of planning legislation and national-regional-local co-ordination culminated in the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010, which introduced a number of new measures including a core strategy system to better ground local planning around agreed national and regional estimates of future development requirements.

12. The introduction of a requirement to include a core strategy in development plans is intended to secure a strategic / phased approach to zoning which will facilitate infrastructure provision – showing the location, quantum and phasing of proposed development (with links to housing strategies, retail policies, transport plans, new schools provision etc.) and demonstrating policy consistency within each region.

Sustainable Development

13. Ireland’s revised National Sustainable Development Strategy - ‘Our Sustainable Future: a Framework for Sustainable Development in Ireland’ - was launched in June 2012. It sets out the roadmap for a holistic policy framework with sustainable development at its heart. The document identifies 70 cross cutting measures to be put into effect. Some of the measures already implemented include, inter alia, the development of a national policy on waste management, the establishment of ‘Irish Water’, a €65 million programme of investment to promote sustainable travel, publication of a Government policy statement on growth and employment in the green economy, and publication of an action plan on green public procurement.

Public Participation

14. The Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters was ratified in June 2012 and all of its provisions fully implemented into national law. The introduction of the Environment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2011 addressed the issue of costs in certain proceedings, which were previously a barrier to ratification.
Environmental Legislation and Compliance

15. The Environmental Protection Agency, in conjunction with the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, is progressing a range of initiatives which will help to simplify and clarify the requirements of environmental regulations and which will help to promote better compliance.

16. A dedicated environmental compliance unit within the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, has been established which has seen a significant reduction in the number of outstanding EU infringement proceedings in relation to environmental issues.

17. Overall, Ireland is meeting the challenges and harnessing the opportunities presented by its economic landscape. While every goal has not yet been met, this mid-term review demonstrates a substantial measure of progress and details initiatives in their early stages which allow us to look forward with optimism towards our next Environmental Performance Review.