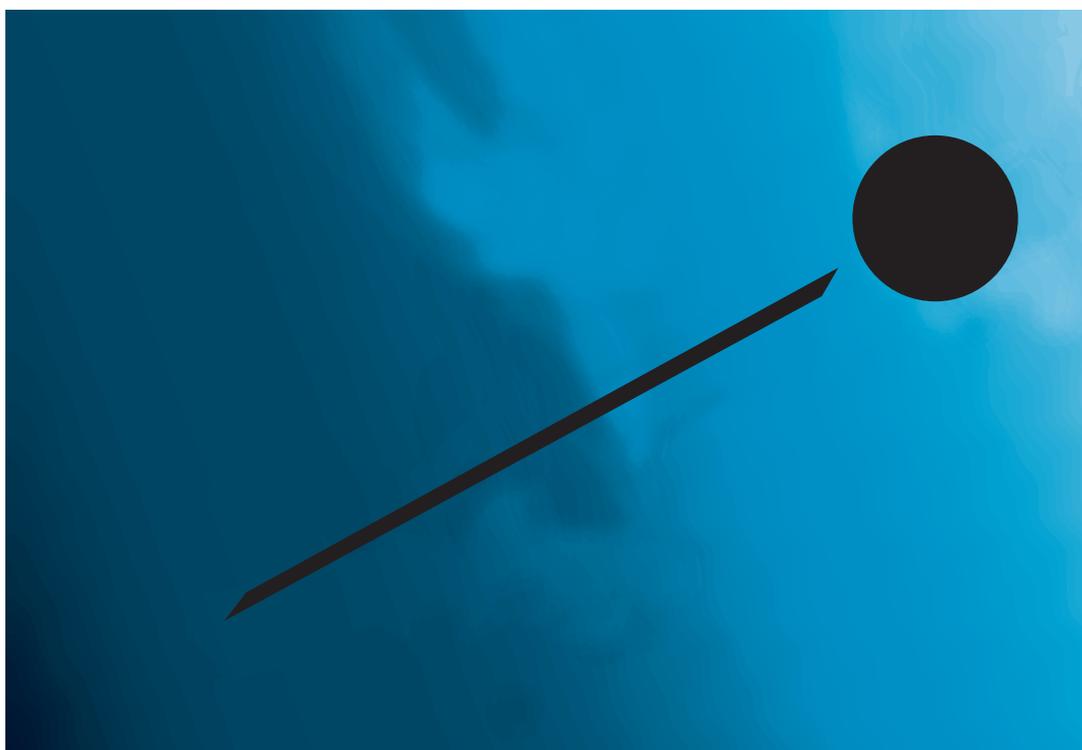


**OECD Environmental
Performance Reviews**

IRELAND

**CONCLUSIONS
AND RECOMMENDATIONS**



**OECD Environmental
Performance
Reviews**

IRELAND

Conclusions and Recommendations



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The Conclusions and Recommendations

of the OECD *Environmental Performance Review of Ireland* are published on the occasion of a press conference in Dublin by Irish authorities, with OECD participation, on 4 November 2009.

The full report *OECD Environmental Performance Reviews: Ireland* will be published at a later date.

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PREFACE

In the context of the worst economic downturn in recent history, Ireland is facing a number of important environmental challenges. The current crisis offers an opportunity to shift paradigm and move to a new framework that would restore sustainable economic growth, prevent environmental deterioration and enhance quality of life. These are the goals of the recently launched OECD Green Growth Strategy. Country Reviews of Environmental Performance are an essential part of informing this debate.

The Environmental Performance Review will also help Ireland to move forward in responding to this challenge in the interest of its citizens and its next generations, and to make a contribution to the global effort to fight environmental deterioration and support greener economic growth. It includes 38 policy recommendations in many environmental fields, including, water, air, biodiversity and international co-operation.

Ireland has made substantial progress since the last Review in 2000. Environmental policies have been improved, and I welcome recent measures adopted to achieve an innovation-based, green, low-carbon economy. Environmental institutions have been strengthened and significant investments were made in environmentally-related infrastructure. As a result, Ireland generally has good air and water quality. Energy intensity, or energy use per unit of GDP, is the lowest among OECD countries.

Rapid and resolute action is necessary as significant challenges remain. The Environmental Performance Review recommends three essential steps:

- Ireland should strengthen its efforts to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions in transport, agriculture and in the commercial and residential sectors, in particular, in view of the current negotiations of a climate change agreement at COP15 in Denmark. Indeed, in 2007 greenhouse gas emissions were +25% above the 1990 level, exceeding the Kyoto target of keeping them under +12.6 % by 2008-2012.
- Ireland should provide better incentives for efficient use of water resources by charging households for the consumption of water.
- We recommend that Ireland ratifies the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters.

The Environmental Performance Review is the result of rich and co-operative dialogue between Ireland and the other members and observers of the Working Party on Environmental Performance. We are confident that this collaborative effort will be useful to advance the policy debate in Ireland on how to tackle the important environmental challenges that are common to us all.

Angel Gurría
Secretary-General
OECD

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS*

This report examines Ireland's progress since the previous OECD Environmental Performance Review in 2000, and the extent to which the country has *met its domestic objectives and honoured its international commitments*. The report also reviews Ireland's progress in the context of the OECD Environmental Strategy for the First Decade of the 21st Century.** Some 38 recommendations are made that should contribute to further environmental progress in Ireland.

In 2000-07, Ireland *sustained the high rate of economic growth* that began in the mid-1990s; GDP growth averaged nearly 6% annually, well above the OECD and euro area rates. Once among the least developed Western economies, with high levels of economic emigration, in 2008 Ireland enjoyed the third highest per capita GDP in Europe. However, *Ireland's economy sharply slowed in late 2008*, due to the collapse of the construction sector, reduced private consumption and weak exports linked to the international economic downturn. The scope for fiscal stimulus is very limited in Ireland, which is one of the few OECD countries (with Hungary and Iceland) that have *tightened fiscal policy* in early 2009.

The crisis represents a challenge for maintaining environmental commitments. It also presents opportunities to reassess and reform those policies that are both economically costly and environmentally damaging. *Environmental policy priorities* include reducing greenhouse gas emissions in a comprehensive and cost-effective way, further enhancing water infrastructure and waste management, and strengthening nature protection.

To meet these *challenges*, Ireland will need to: i) strengthen its environmental management efforts; ii) further integrate environmental concerns into economic decisions; and iii) reinforce international co-operation on environmental issues.

* Conclusions and Recommendations reviewed and approved by the OECD Working Party on Environmental Performance at its meeting on 6 October 2009.

** The objectives of the OECD Environmental Strategy are covered in the following sections of these Conclusions and Recommendations: maintaining the integrity of ecosystems (Section 1), decoupling of environmental pressures from economic growth (Sections 2.1 and 2.2) and global environmental interdependence (Section 3).

1. Environmental Management

Strengthening the implementation of environmental policies

Ireland's environmental planning framework expanded significantly during the review period. Well-defined, ambitious objectives were established and efforts made to provide the means to achieve them. *Ireland's regulatory framework* was upgraded and brought into closer conformity with EU requirements. The 2003 *Protection of the Environment Act* strengthened regulation of activities most harmful to the environment and extended the scope of licensing to meet EU requirements for integrated pollution prevention and control (IPPC). *Other areas of legal reform* included biodiversity and wildlife protection, strategic environmental assessment (SEA), and air, waste and water management. The main *government agencies dealing with the environment* – the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) – enlarged their portfolios and staffing. The Environmental Enforcement Network, established in 2003, provides a mechanism for concentrating resources and promoting co-ordination and coherence across administrative divisions. *Economic instruments* have been introduced, especially in the waste sector. The revenue they generate supports infrastructure development and compliance promotion campaigns through the Environment Fund. *Voluntary approaches* by business and industry, especially regarding air and waste, have led to increased recycling, reduced air pollution and the promotion of eco-innovation and energy efficiency.

However, Ireland continues to face some implementation problems, in particular regarding surface and groundwater quality, waste management, and nature and biodiversity protection. The *lack of enforcement capacity in smaller municipalities* has been an important impediment. In spite of recent accelerated efforts, more needs to be done to *harmonise the environmental regulatory framework with EU legislation*. The environmental legal system lacks coherence. The European Court of Justice (ECJ) has delivered judgements against Ireland for not transposing EU regulations into national law and for otherwise failing to meet EU requirements. In 2006, the number of procedures brought by the European Commission against Ireland for infringing EU environmental directives was among the highest in the EU. Particular problems have involved the application of environmental impact assessments (EIAs) for projects in sensitive areas. The use of *economic instruments* has not been extended in the water sector, which relies on state budget transfers for investment and operations. Further opportunities for market-based approaches exist in air, biodiversity and waste management. More could be done to promote *environmental management in enterprises*, especially small and medium-sized companies. *Public expenditure for environmental protection* has increased significantly, but still represents a relatively small share of GDP. While a large part of Ireland's public environmental expenditure takes place at local level, local authorities have limited fiscal autonomy. The *economic crisis* and large budget deficit impose serious constraints on government action and put at risk Ireland's ability to meet its environmental commitments.

Recommendations

- maintain the *commitment to meet the objectives* in the main environmental policies and programmes, in spite of the difficult economic context, by increasing cost-effectiveness of environmental policies and providing adequate funding for environmental infrastructure;
- maintain recent efforts towards harmonisation of Irish *environmental legislation* with EU directives and promote implementation, particularly regarding environmental impact assessment;
- consider how best to consolidate environmental regulations into a coherent framework with the aim of simplifying and clarifying requirements and promoting better compliance;
- in the context of the ongoing review of local governance, examine the *environmental responsibilities of different administrative levels* to identify opportunities for better co-ordination, economies of scale and improved policy development and implementation, e.g. as regards provision of water services and establishment of waste management infrastructure;
- review the Irish National Roadmap for the Implementation of the EU Environmental Technologies Action Plan, building on current initiatives, with a view to strengthening *incentives for eco-innovation*.

Air

Following major reductions since 2000 in emissions of SO_2 (-61%) and *non-methane VOCs* (-17%), Ireland is on track to meet the relevant 2010 EU targets. The National Emission Ceilings (NEC) Directive target for *ammonia* emissions was achieved in 2001. Emissions of particulate matter (PM) have been substantially reduced in urban areas, and emissions of *CO and toxic contaminants* have decreased. *In all major sectors generating air pollutants, reductions have been made* as a result of i) a substantial shift from heavy fuel oil to natural gas in electricity generation and industry, ii) reductions in the sulphur content of fuel oil and gas oil, iii) decreased use of coal and peat in the residential sector and iv) application of catalytic controls and other technology in cars. *Voluntary agreements* between central authorities and the private sector significantly reduced the sulphur content in coal and petroleum coke for heating. *Urban air quality* complies with all standards for SO_2 , NO_x , lead, PM_{10} , CO, ozone and benzene. EU requirements for levels of cadmium, lead, arsenic, nickel and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) in ambient air have been met. *Air quality monitoring* has improved, including recent requirements for small particulates, heavy metals (arsenic, cadmium, mercury, nickel) and PAHs. *Pressure on air quality from transport* has been reduced, especially in Dublin, through investment in light rail (tram and train networks), tunnels and bypasses. *Vehicle standards* have gone into effect: the share of inspected vehicles violating emission standards remains low and the availability of cleaner fuels has increased. A *long-term Transport 21 strategy and an ambitious Sustainable Travel and Transport Action Plan* have been adopted to promote sustainable mobility and access.

However, the decrease in *NO_x emissions* is very slow and Ireland, along with many other EU Member States, will face considerable difficulty in meeting the *NO_x* emission target of the NEC Directive. The installation of flue gas desulphurisation at the Moneypoint coal-fired electricity station, which is expected to bring national emissions of *SO₂* below the 42 000 tonne 2010 ceiling, has yet to be completed. Ireland has not yet ratified the Stockholm Convention on persistent organic pollutants (POPs) or the Aarhus Convention protocols on POPs and heavy metals. To facilitate ratification, revised emission inventories of POPs and heavy metals have been finalised and reported in 2009. Some policy recommendations of the *2000 public transport strategy for Dublin* have not been implemented, most notably improvement of the bus service, integrated ticketing and facilities for cycling and walking. Property and land taxation, combined with land use planning procedures that are not integrated with investment in public transport infrastructure, have led to considerable *urban sprawl* and growing reliance on cars in urban and, increasingly, rural areas. Most *freight* is now carried by road, which increases air pollution pressures.

Recommendations

- implement additional measures to *reduce NO_x emissions* in order to achieve current and forthcoming NEC Directive requirements; consider how these requirements could be achieved most cost-effectively among the relevant sectors;
- complete *retrofitting of the coal-fired Moneypoint power plant* to reduce *SO₂* emissions; carry out *further investment in combined heat and power installations* in the industrial, commercial and service sectors; and ensure compliance of large combustion plants with requirements of the National Emissions Reduction Plan;
- ratify the *Stockholm Convention on POPs and the Aarhus Convention protocols on POPs and heavy metals*;
- implement the *2009 Sustainable Travel and Transport Action Plan*, particularly measures to improve public transport in urban areas; assess how road pricing/congestion charges could contribute to achievement of the plan's objectives; and reinforce programmes to support public transport options in rural areas;
- *develop measures to better link land use and transport planning* with a view to controlling urban sprawl.

Water

Ireland generally enjoys *good biological quality in its rivers*, lakes and in-shore and marine waters. A small improvement in the biological quality of rivers and lakes has been observed in recent years. Substantial *investments in drinking water and wastewater treatment infrastructure* were made since the 2000 OECD review. As a result, the compliance rate with the EU Urban Waste Water Directive rose from 25% to 92%. Treatment plants removing nutrients now serve most eutrophication-sensitive areas, as the directive requires. More than 99% of drinking water supplied

by public utilities meets health standards. Ireland has also improved the institutional arrangements for water management: a *new water services law* and more than a dozen new regulations (most transposing EU directives) have been adopted. The role of the Environmental Protection Agency in making sure local government carries out its water-related functions has been strengthened, including through good monitoring systems and a national auditing system producing comprehensive, publicly accessible summary reports. Ireland has met all deadlines to date for *implementing the Water Framework Directive*. A new approach to minimising flood risk is being put in place.

Nevertheless, the rate of progress so far is unlikely to prove sufficient to meet the Water Framework Directive goals for 2015. *Nitrogen levels in rivers and groundwater* are still on the rise in many areas. There has also been a rise in the trophic status of rivers. The clean-up of point sources of nutrients has been compromised by tardy implementation of the Nitrates Directive, which improved only after a judgement by the ECJ in 2004. Bacterial contamination is an issue for groundwater used as drinking water supply. Despite the high compliance rate with drinking water health standards, problems persist with *bacterial contamination in many group water schemes* serving small settlements. The city of Galway experienced outbreaks of cryptosporidium in 2002 and 2007, and old lead pipes cause unacceptably high lead levels in more than a few towns. Ireland still has an uncommonly high leakage rate from its urban supply systems despite recent improvements. Moreover, the country will not be in full compliance with the Urban Waste Water Directive until 2011, six years late. Many sewage treatment stations have a poor record regarding statutory effluent limits, and there is no inspection regime for septic tanks. A fundamental and politically sensitive issue in Irish water policy is *pricing household consumption of water*; the absence of household water charges impedes the development of an economically, environmentally and socially efficient water services sector.

Recommendations

- further consolidate *water-related legislation* into a coherent framework;
- consider establishing *dedicated river basin agencies* to implement the Water Framework Directive;
- introduce *water pricing for households*, in a way that takes account of environmental, economic and social considerations;
- strengthen measures to achieve “good” *quality status, at least, for Irish waters* by 2015, paying special attention to eutrophication; improve protection of drinking water sources;
- further integrate water quality and flood risk management considerations into *spatial planning and development management processes*.

Waste

The 1998 and 2002 *national waste policy statements* and the 2001 amendments to the Waste Management Law established ambitious targets and introduced measures for improved waste management. *A number of targets were met in advance of their due dates*, including the 2010-11 targets for recovery of paper, cardboard, wood and packaging waste, and the 2013 targets for recovery of construction and demolition waste and municipal waste. *Large-scale illegal waste dumping* has been eliminated through a mix of measures, such as widening kerbside collection of household waste, setting up a specialised EPA enforcement office and introducing complaint procedures and sanctions. *Agreements between industry and the government* on end-of-life products and improvements to the infrastructure for collecting recyclable waste from households have helped increase recycling rates for glass, wood, chemicals, electrical and electronic equipment, tyres, batteries and plastic. Rationalisation of waste planning and management, including the establishment of *ten waste management regions* (down from 34 previously), and the introduction of *economic instruments* (volume-based waste collection charges, and landfill and plastic bag levies) have helped reduce landfilling. *Revenue* from these instruments has helped intensify waste prevention and recovery measures and awareness-raising campaigns in the context of the wide-ranging 2004 National Waste Prevention Programme. *Closure of landfills* not meeting EU standards has been completed. *Recent initiatives*, notably the 2006 National Strategy on Biodegradable Waste, the 2008-12 National Hazardous Waste Management Plan and the 2007-11 Market Development Programme for Waste Resources, have set out a framework for increasing waste collection and recycling.

Except in manufacturing, however, waste generation has not been decoupled from economic growth. The amount of *construction and demolition waste* increased during the review period in line with rapid housing and infrastructure development. *Municipal waste* generation grew in line with population growth and final private consumption, and per capita waste generation remains among the highest in the OECD. Accelerated implementation of the *National Strategy on Biodegradable Waste* is now urgent following four-year derogations from the 2006 and 2009 EU Landfill Directive targets. *Hazardous waste* has been on the increase and around 10% is classified as unreported, most likely being mixed with municipal refuse. Ireland continues to rely substantially on *foreign infrastructure for recycling and disposal*, sending abroad over 80% of the total waste and almost half of the hazardous waste generated. Despite improvement, *municipal waste collection* is fragmented and not adequately regulated. Some households still engage in *illegal backyard burning and fly-tipping*, and new legislation has been introduced in 2009 to address the issue of backyard burning. Although recovery has increased, waste management still depends heavily on *landfilling*, and Ireland is far from achieving the 2013 target of diverting 50% of household waste from landfills. The *mechanical-biological treatment capacity* is insufficient for residual waste. A comprehensive review of waste management policy, launched in 2008, should assist in setting priorities for a revitalised approach to waste management.

Recommendations

- reinvigorate implementation of the *National Waste Prevention Programme*, in particular priorities identified under its 2009-13 Prevention Work Plan; improve co-ordination of *regional waste management plans* to achieve national waste targets more efficiently, in particular those for biodegradable and hazardous waste;
- extend *producer responsibility initiatives* to cover a wider range of end-of-life products;
- extend *waste collection programmes* further to cover as many properties as feasible; accelerate the roll-out of programmes for separate collection, giving priority to organic and hazardous waste from households and commercial activities;
- strengthen provisions in *contracts and licences for waste management operations* so that all service providers, public or private, have the same obligation to meet high delivery and quality standards; consider transferring the regulatory and monitoring authority for waste management to regional or national level;
- accelerate implementation of the Market Development Programme for Waste Resources to increase *recycling of waste* and the use of recycled materials within Ireland; extend market-based mechanisms for waste collection, sorting and recovery to encourage private investment in waste recycling and treatment facilities.

Nature management

Ireland has adopted its *National Biodiversity Plan* and made good progress with many of the 91 actions the plan identifies. Ireland completed the designation process for terrestrial Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) under the Habitats Directive, and is expected to do the same for Special Protection Areas under the Birds Directive by the end of 2009. The *Natura 2000 network* would then cover 14% of the national territory. Some progress was made with the formulation of tentative management plans for Natura 2000 sites; some 45 had been approved by the end of 2008. Almost a dozen *species management plans* (e.g. for the otter) have been adopted and are being implemented with the active participation of Irish nature NGOs, which carry out some of the work on the ground. The National Parks and Wildlife Service and NGOs also co-operated on the reintroduction of three raptor species (golden eagle, red kite, white-tailed eagle). Ireland has taken a lead role in the Global Plant Conservation Partnership, having adopted its own strategy in 2006. The opening of a Biodiversity Data Centre in Waterford in March 2009 can be expected to lift Ireland's performance to a higher plane as regards safeguarding biodiversity. Agri-environmental measures have been adjusted to give greater weight to biodiversity concerns and have produced some results. *Forestry policies* now encourage the planting of broadleaf species and incorporate guidelines for biodiversity protection.

However, nature protection has remained the poor relative of Irish environmental policy both nationally and locally. A 2008 review presented a disturbing picture of the *poor conservation status of many ecosystem types and species*, and suggested that the 2015 targets of the Habitats Directive will be hard to meet. The constituency for nature conservation is smaller than in most European countries and this may be partly to blame for the relative lack of support. The under-resourced National Parks and Wildlife Service has struggled to meet the workload resulting from the National Biodiversity Plan and EU nature directives. Many proposed natural heritage areas, as well as marine SACs, still await formal designation. Less than 1% of the territory qualifies for the two highest IUCN categories of protected area; just one ecosystem type (bogs) dominates the area protected in the six national parks and the 155 national heritage areas. Protection of the many Natura 2000 sites requires a far more active *monitoring and management* approach than is currently taken. Local authorities have often lacked the capacity (in terms of resources, expertise and access to information), or the motivation, to take up the challenge of the local biodiversity plans they are expected to formulate and implement under the National Biodiversity Plan. Biodiversity considerations receive too little attention in *local land use development plans*. The considerable spending on agri-environmental measures is not yet sufficiently harmonised with ecological needs.

Recommendations

- speed up preparation of *detailed, time-bound management plans* for Natura 2000 sites and natural heritage areas, and implement them;
- improve consistency of the *Planning and Development Act* with the protection and enhancement of biodiversity outside protected areas (e.g. by establishing "green corridors" linking nationally and locally important biodiversity areas);
- improve integration of biodiversity concerns in *sectoral policies and projects*, including through rigorous implementation of SEA and EIA procedures;
- improve the match between spending on *agri-environmental measures* and ecological needs, e.g. by placing more emphasis on measures in or near Natura 2000 sites;
- continue efforts to adopt, resource and implement an *island-wide strategy on invasive alien species*.

2. Towards Sustainable Development

Integrating environmental concerns into economic decisions

From 2000 to the second half of 2008, Ireland enjoyed sustained and rapid economic growth. In this period, Ireland made progress in *decoupling* environmental pressures from economic trends, especially for transboundary air pollutants; CO₂ emissions increased, but at a lower rate than GDP (relative decoupling). *Energy intensity* was considerably reduced, and is now the lowest in the OECD. Material intensity also steadily decreased, reaching the OECD average. These changes were closely linked with the restructuring of the economy towards sectors with low energy intensity and high added value. Governance for *sustainable development* was consolidated. Since 1999, Comhar, the Sustainable Development Council, has served as a multistakeholder forum providing independent advice to the government. The National Development Plans for 2000-06 and 2007-13 have contributed to Ireland's progress in areas such as public transport and environmental infrastructure. Several mechanisms have been regularly used to *integrate environmental considerations in decision-making* at macro and micro levels, including SEA and regulatory impact analysis. Concerning *energy*, measures have been taken to promote the use of renewables and to assist businesses and households in improving energy efficiency. Ireland is on track to achieve the EU and domestic targets on renewable electricity by 2010. Some environmentally related taxes were introduced or revised in the 2009 fiscal package designed to respond to the economic crisis. The vehicle registration tax and annual motor tax were restructured on the basis of CO₂ emission levels.

However, further measures are needed to make economic development and environmental protection more mutually supportive. The growth of energy consumption in the transport, residential and tertiary sectors has resulted in *CO₂ emissions per capita* well above the OECD Europe average. *Waste generation per capita* is among the highest in the OECD and continued to grow during the review period. Despite the decrease in total consumption of *nitrogenous fertiliser*, the intensity of use (per unit of agricultural land) is well above the OECD Europe average; meanwhile *pesticide* use increased. The National Sustainable Development Strategy has lost momentum; progress on *implementation* has not been constantly monitored. There is a need to *integrate further environmental concerns* into sectoral policies and practices, particularly in land use planning, agriculture and transport, and to enhance implementation capacity at local level. *Transport trends* are of concern, with a dramatic increase in road transport for both freight and passengers. Concerning *energy*, there is scope to implement targeted demand-side measures to achieve additional energy savings. *Tax rates on energy products* are relatively low compared to other OECD countries and have not been adequately adjusted to inflation. There is scope to eliminate various *energy tax exemptions* and *environmentally harmful subsidies*, namely for electricity generation from peat and for domestic aviation, as well as to better target *transport-related taxes and prices* on vehicle use (fuel taxes and road pricing). Measures along these lines could help relieve pressures on the public budget and form part of the response to the economic crisis.

Recommendations

- finalise the revision of the *National Sustainable Development Strategy*, make it fully operational with the introduction of targets, indicators and monitoring mechanisms, and assure consistency between it and existing sectoral policy frameworks;
- phase out *environmentally harmful subsidies* (e.g. for electricity generation from peat and for domestic aviation) and tax concessions (e.g. on coal and on fuel oil used by households and farmers) that create economic distortions and social inequity;
- replace some current taxes with appropriate environmentally related fiscal measures in the framework of a *comprehensive environmental tax reform*;
- realise the opportunities that have been identified to further improve *material productivity and energy efficiency cost-effectively*, for example in the residential, tertiary and transport sectors.

Integration of environmental and social decisions

Ireland has made progress in mapping and reducing adverse health effects of pollution, particularly those caused by urban air pollution. *Provision of environmental information* has improved through regular, high-quality state of the environment reporting and the operation of information centres. The creation of an independent Commissioner for Environmental Information under the 2007 regulations on access to environmental information, and the expansion of appeal procedures, strengthened *access to information and justice*. The establishment of an *environmental network* by NGOs and the government has enabled better co-ordination among environmental civil society organisations and facilitated more effective dialogue between NGOs and the authorities. Environmental training for teachers and the establishment of a regional centre on education for sustainable development have supplemented an already extensive network of Green Schools in widening *environmental education activities*. Numerous *environmental campaigns and green awards*, such as Tidy Towns, Green Flags and the Race Against Waste, have stimulated environmental awareness and initiatives at national and local level.

However, some *environmental health impacts* are still of concern: bacterial and heavy metal contamination of drinking water, air pollution from traffic and heating in urban areas, and exposure to naturally-occurring radon. Preparation of a *national environmental health action plan* to address these issues systematically and cost-effectively is long overdue. Historical *low participation of environmental NGOs* in decision-making may impede the way in which environmental sustainability is addressed in national development planning and infrastructure development. Current *regulations contain several provisions that may impede access to information*: the absence of a consistent and appropriate schedule of charges, the lack of a list of public authorities and the fee for appealing denial of requests for information to the Commissioner for Environmental Information. Remaining barriers to *access to justice by the public* still exist, including lack of administrative appeal procedures for projects covered by the Strategic Infrastructure Act, and prohibitive costs of legal

proceedings in appeal and planning decisions. These prevent Ireland from ratifying the *Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters*.

Recommendations

- complete the *national environmental health action plan*, focusing on the major environmental health risks, including those for children and other vulnerable groups; establish quantified targets that would enable the most important health benefits to be achieved, and identify cost-effective measures to address them;
- further improve *access to environmental information* by building capacity in public agencies on rights and obligations related to access to, and provision of, information; apply consistent and fair charges; abolish fees for appealing to the Commissioner for Environmental Information decisions that denied requests for information;
- make sure that Irish legal provisions for *public participation and access to justice* are consistent with the main requirements of the Aarhus Convention, with a view to the ratification of the Convention;
- promote broader *participation by NGOs* and relevant public organisations in the development and implementation of national and local development policies, programmes and projects.

3. International Commitments and Co-operation

Ireland has introduced a 3% *target for annual domestic greenhouse gas reductions* and an annual “carbon budget” to monitor progress. The government is committed to introducing a carbon levy that would apply to sectors outside the EU Emission Trading Scheme (ETS). By improving public transport services, the new transport policy released in February 2009 should help curb CO₂ emissions. A Cabinet Committee on Climate Change and Energy Security was established, chaired by the Taoiseach (Prime Minister). Since 1990, CO₂ emission intensity per unit of GDP has improved faster than the OECD Europe average and is now below that average. Ireland has made good progress in ratifying relevant *international agreements on marine pollution*. Ireland’s “pollution responsibility zone” is its exclusive economic zone, and Ireland is preparing accession to full membership of the Bonn Agreement to enhance co-operation on oil pollution preparedness and response. Steps have been taken to protect cold-water coral reefs from deep-water fishing off the west coast. *Co-operation with Northern Ireland* has been reinforced and extended to all-island issues (e.g. all-island electricity market, spatial planning). The North/South Ministerial Council was established and has met several times to enhance bilateral environmental co-operation, particularly on water quality and waste management. Good progress has been made on co-operation on nuclear safety issues with the United Kingdom. Ireland has built up a strong, internationally recognised *official development assistance* programme in which environment is one of four issues prioritised for mainstreaming.

However, Ireland's *greenhouse gas emissions* in 2007 were 25% higher than the 1990 baseline, well above its EU burden-sharing target of 12.6% for 2008-12. Even taking the impact of the economic crisis into account, the distance to the Kyoto target is 1.3-1.8 Mt of CO₂ equivalent (CO₂e) per year. In a best-case scenario (i.e. including carbon sinks, applying additional measures and considering the reduction of activity in the economic downturn), emission projections in sectors outside the ETS still indicate a distance to target for 2020 of 2.7 Mt CO₂e a year. By 2020, projected agricultural and transport emissions would account for around 70% of total non-ETS emissions. The tax difference between diesel and unleaded gasoline has encouraged the sale of diesel-fuelled vehicles, although CO₂ (and other air pollutant) emissions per litre are higher for diesel. Ireland has not yet prepared its *national contingency plan for pollution by oil and hazardous and noxious substances*; the Irish Coast Guard has very limited means to respond to either type of incident. Nor has enough been done to protect coastal waters from agricultural pollution: Ireland's national agricultural nitrogen balance has increased since 1990 (while it decreased in the OECD as a whole) and is now higher than the OECD average.

Recommendations

- implement the commitment in the 2007-12 Programme for Government to *introduce a carbon levy on sectors outside the ETS*, focusing efforts where further emission reductions can be achieved most cost-effectively;
- consider how payments under the *agri-environmental programmes* could be better linked to meeting the 2020 greenhouse gas reduction commitment;
- complete the preparation of a *national climate change adaptation strategy*, based on expected adaptation costs and benefits, and develop a plan for its implementation;
- speed up preparation of a *national contingency plan for pollution by oil and by hazardous and noxious substances*; increase the means of the Irish Coast Guard to effectively implement it;
- maintain the strong commitment to mainstreaming environmental concerns in *official development assistance*, including by helping partner countries undertake SEA on their development plans and strategies.

OECD Environmental Performance Reviews

IRELAND

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Topics covered:

Air, Water and Waste
Nature management
Environment-Economy Interface
Environmental-Social Interface
International Commitments and Co-operation

The OECD Environmental Performance Reviews Programme conducts peer reviews of environmental conditions and progress in each member country. It scrutinises efforts to meet both domestic objectives and international commitments. The Conclusions and Recommendations presented here are supported by detailed analysis and a broad range of economic and environmental data that will be published in 2010.

The second cycle of *Environmental Performance Reviews*, covering all member countries, will be completed in 2010. It focuses on environmental management, sustainable development and international commitments.

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