

Joint Committee on Environment and Climate Action

Scheduled June 14th

Speaking notes

Deirdre Lynn, National Parks & Wildlife Service

Thank you for inviting me here today.

My name is Deirdre Lynn. I am a Scientific Officer in the National Parks & Wildlife Service in the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage.

The NPWS is the statutory authority for nature conservation in Ireland, with a particular focus on implementation of national, EU and international legislation, plans and policies, in particular the Wildlife Acts, the EU Habitats and Birds Directives, and the National Biodiversity Action Plan.

Biodiversity represents the variety of life on earth and provides us with important ecosystem services such as food, pollination, soil fertility, water and climate regulation. Globally, these services have been valued at 1.3 trillion euros annually.

However national, regional and global assessments have all demonstrated on-going declines in biodiversity.

Globally, we are degrading our natural assets by up to 19 trillion euros annually.

The Dáil has recognised the biodiversity crisis by declaring a Biodiversity Emergency in 2019.

So how has the world been responding to this crisis? At the global level we have the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. This is the sister convention to the Climate change convention, both were adopted in Rio in 1992.

All the countries in the world are parties to this convention apart from the US and the Vatican. Decisions are made by the Conference of the Parties or COPs.

The 3 objectives of the convention are the conservation of biodiversity, the sustainable use of its components (this is to recognise that we are part of the living fabric and we need to use it to exist) and finally that any benefits arising will be shared equitably.

NPWS act as the focal point for this Convention. I am the focal point for the scientific subsidiary body to the Convention.

The Convention is underpinned by a strategic plan and 20 Global Biodiversity Targets which was due to run out in 2020. A new Global Biodiversity Framework is currently being negotiated which was due to be adopted at COP 15 in China in 2020. Due to the ongoing COVID situation, the convening of COP15 has been delayed and is likely to take place in Q4 of this year, with the venue still to be confirmed.

The European Union is also a party to the Convention, therefore all of the negotiations at COP are co-ordinated at the EU level to present a strong EU and Member State position. The Czech Republic will facilitate EU negotiations at COP 15 as they will hold EU Presidency.

There are several drafting groups set up to work on EU positions which are agreed by Member States at the EU Council Working Party for International Environmental Issues. Council Conclusions are currently being prepared that detail the high level EU position on the preparations for COP 15.

Under the draft Global Biodiversity Framework there are currently 4 Goals and 21 targets being negotiated. These targets include protected area targets, restoration targets, targets for biodiversity-

inclusive spatial planning, targets to reduce pollution and invasive alien species, targets to minimize the impact of climate change on biodiversity, targets for sustainable use and the elimination of incentives harmful to biodiversity, targets for business to move towards sustainable extraction and production practices and interestingly a target to encourage and enable people to make responsible choices – if we tackle overconsumption, the knock on consequences will be significant.

There will be another round of global negotiations in Nairobi in June to ensure that the Global Biodiversity Framework is sufficiently advanced for adoption at COP 15. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade have provided €100,000 to support the running costs of this very important meeting in June.

The Convention is underpinned by several programmes of work covering Agriculture, Inland water, Marine & Coastal & Forest Biodiversity. There many cross cutting areas of work including climate change, sustainable use, invasive alien species and protected areas.

EU policy and legislation has both informed and been informed by the Global agenda. The stage has already been set for the EU ambition for the Global Biodiversity Framework with the publication of the EU Biodiversity Strategy in 2020.

The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 is part of the EU Green Deal and it is very ambitious. Firstly, the ambition is to have at least 30% of the EU land and 30% of EU sea in a protected area network.

The EU are due to publish legislation for legally binding restoration targets under Nature Restoration Law. This will include actions that will need to be implemented across many sectors, particularly agriculture, forestry and fisheries.

The stark reality is that we need to restore 1000s of km² of terrestrial land.

There is also ambition in the EU Biodiversity Strategy to halt and reverse decline of pollinators; to reduce use and harmfulness of pesticides and to restore freshwater ecosystems including 25,000 km of free flowing rivers across the EU.

A whole of Government approach will be required in relation to Nature Restoration Law. The Nature Restoration Law proposal and the National Restoration Plan has significant implications for a range of DHLGH business units and other Departments, most notably DAFM and DECC.

There may need to be consultation/coordination with other Member States on specific sectoral aspects of this proposal. These will need to be coordinated across Government and feed back into the overall IE policy positioning.

All of these new and emerging policy areas need to be folded into the 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan which is currently being drafted. We have had many rounds of stakeholder engagement including our recent National Biodiversity Conference attended by over 600 delegates.

We hope to have the plan published in early 2023 to ensure that we consider the recommendations arising from the Citizens assemblies for Biodiversity.

At Ireland's 2nd Biodiversity Conference last week the Taoiseach said that biodiversity loss "will only be successfully tackled as an all-of-Government and all-of-society project, which will require the vigilance of planners, local authorities, agricultural advisers and all manifestations of state who have a hand in regulating interventions in our land, rivers, lakes, seas and air."

The NPWS, with the support of Minister Noonan, are working hard with colleagues across government and society to *Act Now for Nature*.
Thank you