

Opening statement

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Land is a fundamental and finite resource with human and environmental dimensions. Land and its various uses provide the foundation of our national economic prosperity, quality of life and wellbeing, and cultural identity. Its management is also of critical importance in addressing global environmental priorities. These include climate change mitigation and adaptation, addressing biodiversity loss, food and energy security, and sustainable water management.

The Land Use Review provides an opportunity to think about how we use land and how to maximise the benefits for the environment, economy and across society. How we use land can best be thought of in terms of a system. In this context, the land-use system refers to the relationship between human activities on land, socio-economic conditions and the natural environment, and also the systems of governance which manages these interactions. This approach recognises the critical importance of social and economic drivers of land-use change, including demographic changes, social attitudes, traditions and social norms, individual behaviours, ownership, and through competing economic sectors seeking to maximise profit opportunities.

The Land Use Review also provides a timely opportunity to think about the governance of land use. Land-use governance is currently siloed across sectors and (sometimes competing) policy agendas, leading to fragmented policy responses. This includes agricultural policy, spatial planning, biodiversity action plans, forestry, climate action plans, and policies relating to energy and minerals. There is an opportunity to coordinate more effectively to optimise land use across a range of policy objectives, including biodiversity.

Phase 1 of the Land Use Review focused on understanding how we currently use our land. In total 10 reports were published in March 2023, available [here](#). These reports focused on various dimensions of land use, including the impacts of land use change on the environment, the socio-economic aspects, international practice and financial instruments. The reports also highlight key stakeholders, land ownership in Ireland, and a policy catalogue of government policy with a land use dimension. The

overall synthesis report also contained 19 recommendations, primarily related to future data requirements and mapping capability to enhance decision-making and monitoring.

Phase 2 of the Land Use Review has recently commenced. It comprises a Technical Working Group and a Stakeholder Group, both of which reports to an Oversight Group, chaired by Geraldine Talen. I chair the Technical Working Group, which includes officials from across government and related agencies.

The second phase, following on from the first, will seek to optimise land use across key Government objectives improving (1) socioeconomic, (2) climate, (3) biodiversity, (4) water, and (5) air quality outcomes.

The Technical Working Group is at a very early stage of our work. Our workplan includes four WPs

- (i) Clarification of environmental and socioeconomic objectives and data improvement
- (ii) Identification of land-use scenarios to achieve environmental and socioeconomic objectives.
- (iii) Setting out potential policy options
- (iv) Implementing the recommendations of Phase 1

Our current work is focused on understanding land commitments *across* government policy. This builds on Phase 1 which developed a policy catalogue. We are currently collecting data across the full range of government departments and related agencies in relation to land use commitments – this includes land use obligations and discretionary land use commitments and aspirations. This work will examine the compatibility or incompatibility of land use commitments across various policies to enhance our understanding of the potential of multifunctional or stacked land uses. This work will also inform the stakeholder engagement process. A workplan for 2024 is currently under development.