

National Biodiversity *Plan*



**An Roinn Ealaíon, Oidhreachta,
Gaeltachta agus Oileán**

Department of Arts, Heritage,
Gaeltacht and the Islands



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Foreword



Biological diversity - the variety of life on Earth - is experiencing serious and accelerating losses. This National Biodiversity Plan sets out the framework through which Ireland will provide for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity over a five year period. Under fifteen themes and sectors, it details actions which will be pursued to achieve this objective.

The Convention on Biological Diversity was opened for signature in 1992. Ratified at this stage by some 180 countries it is pre-eminent amongst nature/biodiversity-related conventions, both in terms of its widespread support and its comprehensive scope. It represents the charter within which nature conservation and other issues relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity must be addressed on a worldwide basis. By becoming a signatory in 1992 to the Convention Ireland undertook to promote the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. This is a function which I, as Minister for Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands, have particular and explicit responsibility for under Section 9 of the Wildlife (Amendment) Act, 2000. This plan is designed to ensure Ireland fulfils its obligations under the Convention.

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April, 2002

Content





CHAPTER 1:

Overall Context



Preface - Ireland's National Biodiversity Plan	5
International Context	7
Biological Diversity	7
Loss of Biodiversity	8
Significance of the Convention on Biological Diversity	8
Implementation of the Convention	10
Objectives of the Convention	10
Preparation of National Strategies or Plans under the Convention	11

CHAPTER 2:

Action For Biodiversity



Integration of Biodiversity into Sectors	13
Legislation	16
Protected Areas	17
Species Conservation	19
Habitat and Ecosystem Conservation	20
Countrywide Conservation	21
Conservation and Sustainable Use of Genetic Diversity	22
Biosafety - Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs)	24
Knowledge: Identification, Monitoring and Research	24
Public Awareness and Education	25
EU, Regional and International	26
Terrestrial Ecosystems: Agriculture	27
Terrestrial Ecosystems: Forests	29
Inland Waters and Wetlands	32
Marine and Coastal	34

CHAPTER 3:

Implementation, Monitoring and Future Plans



The Plan as Framework for Implementation of the CBD	37
Implementing the Plan	37
Review	39

Appendices

Appendix 1: List of Actions	40
Appendix 2: List of Submissions	47
Appendix 3: Indicative List of Natural Habitat Types Requiring Survey	48
Appendix 4: Bibliography	49

Chapter 1: Overall Context





PREFACE - IRELAND'S NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY PLAN

- 1.1 This document sets out Ireland's National Biodiversity Plan, prepared in response to the obligation contained in Article 6 of the Convention. The Biodiversity Plan spells out a range of measures, involving significant costs, and the time-scale within which they might be implemented. These measures will be considered in due course in the context of available resources. The plan pays special attention to the need for the integration of the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity into all relevant sectors. The full and effective integration of biodiversity concerns into the development and implementation of other policies, legislation, and programmes is of crucial importance if the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity is to be achieved. This is probably the greatest challenge in implementing the Plan.
- 1.2 The principle that environmental concerns should be integrated into all relevant sectors is now widely accepted. Environmental policy in Ireland is now based on the internationally recognised principles of sustainability, "the precautionary principle", the integration of environmental considerations into all areas, "the polluter-pays principle" and the principle of shared responsibility for environmental protection by public bodies, private enterprises and the general public.
- 1.3 The Plan covers the three levels at which biodiversity may be considered, namely ecosystem diversity, species diversity and genetic diversity. It sets out strategies and actions under various themes and focuses on identifying specific measures. Key sectors which impact on biodiversity are also examined.
- 1.4 This National Biodiversity Plan has been developed in parallel with the National Heritage Plan which sets out the framework for the protection and enhancement of all aspects of Ireland's heritage, including the natural heritage, over the next five years. There was a strong interaction between the two drafting processes and the two Plans are complementary. The Biodiversity Plan focuses in detail on biological diversity and the measures required for its conservation and sustainable use.
- 1.5 The Plan has also been developed taking cognisance of the European Community Biodiversity Strategy. The Community Biodiversity Strategy covers areas within Community competence and is intended to be complementary to the strategies, programmes and policies of the Member States. The Community Biodiversity Strategy focuses on integrating biodiversity concerns into areas of Community policy and Community initiatives. It provides the overall framework for the development of Community policies and instruments in order to comply with the Convention and will be implemented primarily through the development of specific sectoral Action Plans (i.e. Action Plans on the conservation of natural resources, agriculture, fisheries, and economic and development co-operation).
- 1.6 The Plan also takes account of the fact that an overview of biodiversity in Ireland was provided in Ireland's National Biodiversity Report published in 1998. That Report also provides information on measures in place for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in Ireland. The information contained in that report is generally not included here and the National Biodiversity Report and this Plan are companion documents.



1.7 From the biodiversity perspective, the all-Ireland context is of major importance and the process of preparing this Plan has benefitted from consultation with the Environment and Heritage Service in Northern Ireland. The Department of the Environment in Northern Ireland has recently published the report “Recommendations to Government for a Biodiversity Strategy” compiled by the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Group established in 1996 to assist Government in conserving biodiversity in Northern Ireland.

1.8 It was also agreed in principle there should be the widest possible participation in the development of the Plan. In order to ensure this, public notices were placed in the national press in July 1997 announcing the preparation of the Plan and inviting submissions from interested parties. Direct contact to invite submissions was also made with relevant organisations, third level institutions and NGOs, representative of both conservation and sectoral interests. Approximately 50 submissions were received (see Appendix 2). These were reviewed and have been taken into account together with relevant submissions made to the National Heritage Plan.

IRELAND’S NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY PLAN

OVERALL GOAL

The overall objective is to secure the conservation, including where possible the enhancement, and sustainable use of biological diversity in Ireland and to contribute to conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity globally.

OBJECTIVES

- Conserve habitat diversity, including all sites of special biodiversity importance.

- Conserve species diversity.

- Conserve genetic diversity, both wild and domesticated.

- Contribute to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and to advancing other obligations of the CBD in the EU, regionally and internationally.

PRINCIPLES

- The conservation of biological diversity is essential for sustainable development, and for maintaining the quality of human life.

- Each form of biological diversity is unique, and of value in its own right.

- All sectors and actors are responsible for advancing the conservation of biological diversity in their respective areas.

- The ‘polluter pays principle’ and the ‘precautionary principle’ will be supported.



INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

- 1.9 In 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development was held in Rio de Janeiro. Nearly 180 Governments were represented at the Conference. This testimony to the importance which our environmental concerns had assumed, resulted in the acceptance of the following:
- The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development - A Statement of Principles on the need to balance the protection of the environment with the need for sustainable development;

 - The Convention on Biological Diversity;

 - The Convention on Climate Change -which aims to stabilise concentrations of 'greenhouse gases' in the atmosphere at a level that will prevent dangerous man-made interference with the climate system;

 - Agenda 21 - a plan which sets out non-binding recommendations on environmental, economic, and social issues, including the conservation of biological diversity;

 - A Statement of Principles for the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests.

BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

- 1.10 The biological diversity existing today is the result of some 3.5 billion years of evolution, involving speciation and extinction. It is the biological inheritance of the earth. Part of the daily lives of every one of us, it is fundamental to human existence and is essential to human survival. Biodiversity is the source of all food, much raw materials, and genetic resources for agriculture, medicine and development generally.

- 1.11 The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) defines 'biological diversity' as 'The variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems.' Thus biological diversity may be considered at three levels, ecosystem diversity, species diversity, and genetic diversity within species.
- 1.12 Estimates of the number of species on the earth vary from 5 to a 100 million, with 13 to 14 million believed to be the best estimate. Only about 1.75 million of the species that exist have been scientifically described. Even for these species, knowledge of their biology, ecology, genetics, or the functions they play in ecosystems is generally poor. Our scientific knowledge on groups of species varies considerably. Groups with which we are most familiar, such as mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fishes and plants, account for only about 3%, of the estimated total number of species with most species belonging to other groups such as insects, fungi, arachnids, nematodes, viruses and bacteria. Knowledge of genetic diversity, which is of fundamental importance, is especially limited. Genetic diversity is based on variation between genes (i.e. in the functional units of heredity in organisms). It is important in that it provides the raw material of evolution, enabling change and adaptation in organisms. It is also critically important for the continuing ability of human society to derive social and economic benefits from biodiversity.



LOSS OF BIODIVERSITY

- 1.13 Species, habitats and ecosystems, the planet's whole natural heritage, is under an ever increasing threat. Many species and habitats are in decline and in some cases their future is endangered. In certain cases irreversible losses have already occurred. Many species have already become extinct and it is considered that impending extinction rates are many times greater than those of the past. The extinction of one species results in the irreversible loss of a unique suite of genetic adaptations that have been acquired typically over very long time scales of hundreds of thousands of years.
- 1.14 Undoubtedly human behaviour causes, directly and indirectly, much of the loss of biological diversity. Globally, the degradation of biological diversity is principally due to habitat destruction, the introduction of non-native species and overexploitation. The relative effects of these three factors varies in time and location. In Ireland today, habitat degradation and loss is the main factor eroding biodiversity.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

- 1.15 When the CBD was opened for signature at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio in 1992, a record number of countries, over 150, including Ireland, and the European Community signed it. The CBD entered into force by 1993. By March 2001 there were 180 Parties to it. Ireland ratified it in 1996. (Signing a Convention does not normally have a binding effect on the State concerned. However, the State must refrain from acts which could defeat the object and purpose of the Convention. By ratifying a Convention, a State agrees to be bound by the Convention).



- 1.16 The CBD represents a watershed in the area of environment and development. It represents the adoption for the first time of a comprehensive rather than a merely sectoral approach to the conservation of the earth's biodiversity and to the sustainable use of biological resources. Previous treaties were limited to particular regions of the world or to the protection of particular types of habitats or groups of species.
- 1.17 The CBD stemmed from a recognition of the need for global action to conserve biological diversity and an awareness that existing international and regional conventions were not sufficient to meet this need. Discussions about the need for and likely form and content of the CBD had taken place for a good number of years prior to Rio. Also important in influencing thinking and progress were reports such as the 'World Conservation Strategy,' published in 1980, the Brundtland Report 'Our Common Future' published in 1987, and 'Caring for the Earth: a Strategy for Sustainable Living,' published in 1991.
- 1.18 The CBD recognises that biological diversity should be conserved for reasons of ethics, economic benefit and human survival.
- 1.19 The CBD encompasses what could be classed as traditional nature conservation, but it is broader than that. It specifically covers biological diversity at the genetic level. It also covers all ecosystems, including marine ones, and it deals with domesticated and cultivated breeds, etc. Such issues as access to genetic resources, sharing of benefits from the use of genetic resources, and access to and transfer of technology, including biotechnology, are included under the CBD.
- 1.20 The CBD operates at the international and the national level. The loss of biological diversity is worldwide and many of the richest areas of biodiversity are found in the least developed countries. It recognises this and consequently includes provisions for the transfer of resources, including financial resources, from developed to developing countries. Ireland, through its contribution to the restructured Global Environment Facility, which is the interim institution for funding under the CBD, plays its part in this respect.
- 1.21 The CBD requires Contracting Parties to take measures for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity in their home territories. One of the main obligations is that each Contracting Party develop national strategies or plans or adapt existing ones for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity.
- 1.22 The CBD is a framework convention. Most of its provisions are expressed as overall goals and policies. It does not contain lists or annexes of sites, habitats or species which must be protected. Each Contracting Party itself decides how to achieve the overall goals of the CBD and meet its various provisions.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION

- 1.23 Implementation of the CBD is inherently integrative and cross-sectoral in character. It requires that biodiversity considerations be integrated into a wide range of policy areas, both at the international and the national level.
- 1.24 While the CBD was agreed in 1992, there is an ongoing process to further elaborate what is needed to implement it. Work is progressed by a number of means, with the ultimate responsibility for implementation resting with the Conference of the Parties (COP). The COP takes decisions which define further obligations which countries must fulfil as well as setting out what is required at the international level. The COP has adopted a thematic or “ecosystem approach” for implementation of the Convention as well as furthering consideration of specific articles. The thematic/ecosystem approach has entailed the adoption of programmes of work for forest biological diversity, marine and coastal biological diversity, agricultural biological diversity and the biological diversity of inland waters as the frameworks for applying the principles of the Convention to specific ecosystems.
- 1.25 A key means of measuring progress in the implementation of the Convention is through the analysis of national reports which Parties have to submit under the Convention. The first national reports were submitted to the fourth meeting of the COP in May 1998. Ireland submitted its first National Report to COP4, as did many other Parties.



OBJECTIVES OF THE CONVENTION

- 1.26 The objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity are:
- the conservation of biological diversity;
 - the sustainable use of its components; and
 - the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources.
- 1.27 The Convention imposes many obligations for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, including: in-situ conservation*, both inside and outside protected areas; ex-situ conservation**, impact assessment; identification and monitoring; sustainable use of ecosystems, species and other biological resources; adopting incentive measures for biodiversity; research and training; public awareness and education; policies and mechanisms for access to and the equitable sharing of benefits derived from genetic resources; policies and mechanisms for facilitating access to and transfer of technology; exchange of information; technical and scientific co-operation; access to and safe use of biotechnology; the provision of financial resources to achieve the objectives of the Convention nationally and the provision of additional financial resources to developing countries to enable them to meet their obligations under the Convention.

* In-situ conservation is defined in the Convention on Biological Diversity as meaning ‘the conservation of ecosystems and natural habitats and the maintenance and recovery of viable populations of species in their natural surroundings and, in the case of domesticated or cultivated species, in the surroundings where they have developed their distinctive properties.’

** Ex-situ conservation is defined in the Convention on Biological Diversity as meaning ‘the conservation of components of biological diversity outside their natural habitats.’



PREPARATION OF NATIONAL STRATEGIES OR PLANS UNDER THE CONVENTION

1.28 As indicated already a key provision of the Convention is the preparation of national biodiversity strategies or plans, and the integration of biological diversity concerns into other sectors. This obligation is contained in Article 6 of the Convention, which sets out the general measures for conservation and sustainable use.

- Article 6A requires each Contracting Party to ‘develop national strategies, plans or programmes for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity or adapt for this purpose existing strategies, plans or programmes which shall reflect, inter alia, the measures set out in this Convention relevant to the Contracting Party concerned.’

- Article 6B requires each Contracting Party to ‘integrate, as far as possible and as appropriate, the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity into relevant sectoral or cross sectoral plans, programmes and policies.’
