

The Irish Environmental Network

Annual Report
2023



**Irish
Environmental
Network**

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1 Green Street,
Dublin 7,
D07 X6NR

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**Irish
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The majority of the work of the IEN is supported by a grant from the Department of the Environment Climate and Communications (DECC).

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Michael Ewing

1951—2023

The Irish environmental movement lost one of its true champions and passionate advocates in 2023.

Michael Ewing was one of Ireland's great environmentalists, he played a central role in the movement and was a leading figure in the Irish Environmental Network and Environmental Pillar for many years.

In 2008, he was employed by the Irish Environmental Network to build the advocacy coalition of 32 national environmental NGOs that in 2009 became the Environmental Pillar, and the fifth national Social Partner.

In 2010, he was appointed to the additional role of Coordinator of the IEN and was a member of the National Economic and Social Council. He also served as a member of the National Climate Dialogue Advisory Committee, the National Advisory Group for the Public Participation Networks and chair of the Green Party Policy Council.

Michael was always an environmentalist, but he was much more than that. He lived sustainably and organically before it was a movement, and he made friends and built communities wherever he went. He had a keen interest in participatory democracy, social inclusion and sustainable development.

When the Government decided to create Public Participation Networks, Michael was one of the small team of people that were asked to create the structures in a six week time period. His influence over this, especially in the flat democratic structure of the PPNs, is obvious and has been key to the success and influence of the PPNs today.

Described by people who knew him and worked with him as warm, generous, determined and a gentleman, his core skill was as a facilitator with

an ability to unite and bring people along. Regularly working 18 hour days, he assisted the disparate members of the IEN and the Pillar to work together and to trust each other so that the environmental movement had a unified voice on environmental matters. This legacy carries on today and the Pillar regularly meets with ministers and officials and nominates people to various bodies.

Always based in Roscommon, Michael used the train journey to and from Dublin to work, send literally hundreds of emails, and hold informal meetings with anyone who had an interest in the environment. Having already done a day's work before he got off the train he would attend meetings, lobby politicians, seek funding for the IEN, and make connections with people and organisations throughout the country. Then it was back on the train to send more emails and keep working until he got back to Roscommon.

It is impossible to sum up how important Michael was to the environmental movement in Ireland and to the IEN and Environmental Pillar. Without him we would not be where we are today. He was and will remain a keystone of the environmental movement in Ireland. Michael will be sadly missed.

The warm and heartfelt tributes from those in the environmental movement and further afield on his passing spoke volumes to the high standing in which he was held, what Michael meant to those around him, what he stood for and what he achieved. He is a huge loss, but his legacy in helping to build a vibrant environmental network and movement and his contribution to sustainable development, social inclusion and local democracy will live on.



Andrew St Ledger

1965—2023

An active member of our network and passionate advocate for native woodland and the wider environment.

We were deeply saddened by the passing in 2023 of our friend and colleague Andrew St Ledger. His energy, enthusiasm, passion and knowledge about our native forests and his willingness to share that knowledge were legendary in the environmental movement and elsewhere.

He was committed to restoring Ireland's native forests. Andrew was co-founder of The Irish Woodland League, an NGO dedicated to restoring the relationship between people and their native woodlands in Ireland. He was a native woodland specialist for guided walks and talks, workshops and presentations and creator/author of "Know Your Native Trees" education modules.

Andrew was actively restoring native forest on his own land in east Clare since 2007 as part of "The Great Forest of Aughty" Native-Forest Restoration plan which he envisioned. He also created The Woodland League "Forest in a Box" native trees for national schools project.

He promoted the potential societal benefits of a return to the wise use and management of the Irish forests for the long-term benefits of Irish communities, and advocated for reform of the outdated State forest policy.

As a member of the team at CELT (Centre for Environmental Living and Training), Andrew was biodiversity officer and basic woodland skills course designer, as well as representing CELT in the Environmental Pillar.

In his advocacy role, Andrew focused on forestry issues and creating agreed forestry policy. As part of the Environmental Pillar Steering Committee, he met with ministers and civil servants

to change forest and agriculture policy. In October 2018, he drafted the Environmental Pillar forestry submission to the Joint Oireachtas Climate Committee and presented it, leading to most of the forestry points being adopted in the committee's final report recommendations to the Government for the National Climate Action Plan.

His forestry advocacy work was not just confined to Ireland. He was recognised by Yale School of Forestry, who invited him in 2013 to join their International Forest Dialogue programme, involving dialogues in Switzerland, South Africa, Chile, Brazil and New Zealand to look at forestry models and issues seeking resolutions via multi stakeholder sessions and field trips.

But native woodland protection and advocacy was just one side of Andrew. He was also a talented artist, wood sculptor and bespoke furniture maker, producing fine quality wooden objects, utilising the beauty of natural woods. The figurehead on the replica famine ship Jeanie Johnston is just one example.

The many tributes paid to Andrew on social media and elsewhere on his passing clearly indicated the work he did and the man he was. His contribution to the environment and biodiversity in the various organisations in which he was involved was immense.

Irish Environmental Network Agriculture Policy Officer, Fintan Kelly, summed up Andrew's passing in one short line – a mighty oak has fallen.

But like a mighty oak, Andrew has left the world a better place for his having been here and the legacy he leaves.

He is truly missed.

Foreword: Gary Freemantle, Chair of IEN Board of Directors



Reflecting on the past year, I am filled with a sense of pride as your Chairman. It has been a privilege to inherit a legacy of dedication and vision from my predecessor, Kate Ruddock. It is truly a pleasure to collaborate with individuals across this organisation who embody the commitment and sense of purpose that define the IEN.

Our focus has been significantly shaped by the challenging landscape of environmental regulation and a particularly troubling gap between declared targets and actual progress in Ireland. A recent intervention by the European Court of Human Rights on climate action has highlighted the vital role of judicial oversight when other parts of government fall short. This context should guide our efforts as we strive to live within the natural limits of our world.

The appointment of an independent trustee, Gary Dempsey, who has oversight of the IEN finances and accounts, has been an important addition to the team of trustees. The trustees, supported by the executive team, have played an instrumental role in driving our strategic initiatives forward. Financially, we are on solid footing, thanks to careful management and the unwavering dedication of our team.

With our incredible employees strategically aligned and under the excellent leadership of our CEO, Karen Ciesielski, IEN is well-positioned to meet the challenges ahead with renewed vigour. As we move forward, we remain committed to upholding our values of supporting our members and promoting inclusiveness and participation. I urge each of you to mobilise within your respective organisations to demand urgent systemic change at all levels. Together, let's harness our collective energy to push for policies that ensure a high quality of life for current and future generations.

That collective energy and the strength of our network was reflected in some of the highlights of the past year, underscoring our achievements:

- **Nature Restoration Law Campaign**
Our campaign on the Nature Restoration Law was one of the most successful in Europe.
- **Publication of 'Linking the Irish Environment'**
This report, published in June 2023, was launched at a special seminar event in Belfast to mark and discuss 25 years of the Good Friday Agreement/Belfast Agreement and the challenges and solutions to protecting the all-island environment.

- **Annual Gathering in Cloughjordan**
This event provided an opportunity for our members to discuss their work and plans for the future.
- **Supporting Training Events**
We have continued to support various training events and opportunities for our members.
- **Electric Picnic Participation**
Attending Electric Picnic under the IEN banner as part of the Global Green initiative.
- **Member Group Support**
We continue to support our member groups through hosting the Fair Seas campaign and Coalition 2030, furthering our efforts to reach the UNSDGs.

On behalf of all the trustees, thank you all for your continued support and dedication. Together, we are working to protect our future. As I step away from the role of Chair, I am confident that the Board remains dedicated to leading this challenge.

Sincerely,
Gary Freemantle
Chairman

The Board



Liam Breslin



Donna Cooney



Gary Dempsey



Kieran Flood



Elaine Nevin



Dermot Tynan



Gary Freemantle



Oisín Coghlan

The Board of Directors has a key role in ensuring the IEN is adhering to principles of good governance. During 2023, the board worked to ensure the IEN's compliance with the Governance Code for Charities to ensure that the charitable objectives of the IEN are achieved effectively and with integrity. A schedule of meetings for the board was set at the start of the year and they continued to be held remotely.

2023 saw a major increase in funding which the board saw disbursed to members.

This was also the year of COP28, held in the United Arab Emirates, where IEN member groups were represented thanks to funding assistance from the IEN.

IEN Directors 2023

Kieran Flood, Gary Freemantle (retired Nov 2023), Nuala Madigan (appointed Nov 2023), Oisín Coghlan, Elaine Nevin, Shane Downer (appointed Nov 2023), Donna Cooney, Liam Breslin, Dermot Tynan, Gary Dempsey

How the Board Makes Decisions

When making decisions, members of the board work to reach consensus and vote on proposals if necessary.

Sub-Committees

The Irish Environmental Network had four active sub-committees in 2023, covering Membership, Human Resources, Governance and Finance, respectively.

The work of each sub-committees is set out in its Terms of Reference. Sub-committees carry out vital pieces of work on the IEN's internal policies and processes and regularly report on their progress and make recommendations to the Board.

The Board of Directors has a key role in ensuring the IEN is adhering to principles of good governance. During 2023, the board worked to ensure the IEN's compliance with the Governance Code for Charities to ensure that the charitable objectives of the IEN are achieved effectively and with integrity.

Our Work

Our work in 2023 has involved strengthening connections between environmental representatives across the country, supporting our members in their work to protect and enhance their environment, engaging with European Commission officials in Brussels and hosting an in-person annual gathering.

On the Ground

Catherine O'Toole heads our effort to increase environmental engagement with the Public Participation Networks (PPNs) and to assist PPN representatives and local environmental networks in building their capacity to operate locally and take part in their PPN.

Work in 2023 included hosting informative events that also allowed for networking opportunities between local groups, individuals and PPN representatives. An in-person gathering was held with Hedgerows Ireland, *All About Hedgerows*, as well as online events. Work with the PPNs included verifying new environmental groups joining their PPN, input into the National Review of Local Authority Strategic Policy Committees, lobbying on behalf of support for the PPNs, and continued engagement with PPNs across the country.

A monthly newsletter helped share announcements between national and local groups. Catherine also led work on National Biodiversity Week, which grew in 2023 to host 213 events nationwide, and included collaboration from Biodiversity Officers and Heritage Officers across the country.

How we engaged with Environmental Law

Attracta Uí Bhroin, Environmental Law Officer of the Irish Environmental Network, was very active throughout the year working on a number of projects to protect the environment through environmental law.

A key issue was the Planning and Development Bill. The Environmental Pillar had significant concerns about the Bill and the Government's approach to the content and framing of it.

Engagement on the Bill formed a large part of Attracta's work during the year, including liaising with Oireachtas Committees and Members.

Attracta also continued to focus strongly on the Aarhus Convention, a key component of environmental democracy. To celebrate the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Aarhus Convention and the 11th anniversary of the Convention coming into effect in Ireland, the Irish Environmental Network hosted a significant Law conference on Friday, 29th September, in the King's Inns.

The event was chaired by former Chief Justice, Mr Justice Frank Clarke, President of the Law Reform Commission and speakers included:

- Ms Justice Marie Baker, Supreme Court of Ireland;
- Professor Áine Ryall, UCC School of Law, and Chair of the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee;
- Ms Sibylle Grohs Senior Lawyer, DG-Envi, EU Commission;
- Mr Michel Forst, Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders under the Aarhus Convention, and former UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights Defenders.
- Dr Tom Ryan, Director of the Office of Environmental Enforcement, EPA Ireland;
- Ms Deirdre McGoldrick, Senior Investigator, Office of the Commissioner for Environmental Information and Office of the Information Commissioner,
- Mr Tom Flynn SC, and
- Mr Gregory Jones KC

Coalition 2030

Throughout the year Coalition 2030's focus was on Ireland's Voluntary National Review (VNR) of SDG progress to the United Nations, something each Member State is asked to do each four years.

In anticipation of an imperfect and incomplete representation of Ireland's progress, the coalition decided to hire a consultant to write a **chapter** that would constitute part of Ireland's VNR, as well as to carry out a civil society shadow or parallel review of Ireland's progress, pulling upon all Coalition 2030 pillars and real-life case studies to paint a picture of those furthest behind in Irish society.

The resulting document, **'Furthest behind First or Falling Behind Further? The human stories that challenge Ireland's claim to leave no one behind'** was launched in May 2023 in Buswells Hotel and a briefing took place in the AV room of Leinster House. This report was further amplified at the UN in New York, where we spoke at an ECE-RCEM side event and also made it onto **Drivetime**, and Coalition 2030 also facilitated the **Irish civil society intervention** on the floor of the UN.

In September, a small cohort of Coalition 2030 members attended the SDG Summit in New York and drew further attention to the discrepancy between Ireland's rhetoric internationally and its commitment domestically to the SDGs.

The Coalition also designed and launched its **new website** and welcomed multiple new members into the fold. Coalition 2030 also spoke in the **Joint Oireachtas Committee on Environment and Climate Action, Social Protection**, attended party conventions/Ard Fheiseanna, and sat on the SDG Stakeholder Forum organising committee.



Above

Aarhus Convention
Conference in the
King's Inns

Right

Furthest behind First
or Falling Behind
Further? The human
stories that challenge
Ireland's claim to
leave no one behind



Tree planting at the IEN gathering in Cloughjordan in memory of Andrew St Ledger



Fair Seas

Fair Seas is a coalition of Ireland's leading environmental non-governmental organisations and networks seeking to protect, conserve and restore Ireland's unique marine environment. Our coalition members include the Irish Wildlife Trust, Birdwatch Ireland, Irish Whale and Dolphin Group, SWAN, Coomhola Salmon Trust, Irish Environmental Network, and Coastwatch. Fair Seas is funded by Oceans 5, the Becht Family Charitable Trust, Blue Nature Alliance, and Wyss Foundation.

Fair Seas' overarching vision is to build a movement of ocean stewardship across Ireland that energises and empowers people to campaign for ambitious and robust legislation, and secure a network of effective well-managed marine protected areas. Fair Seas is hosted by the Irish Environmental Network, and includes two core staff, with additional part-time capacity from a number of the coalition partners.

In its third year, the campaign strategically emphasised policy, advocacy and community engagement, laying the groundwork for Fair Seas to influence and strengthen the forthcoming Marine Protected Area legislation in Ireland. Most notably, through our petition we gained the support of over 24,000 people in Ireland calling on the Government to publish the Marine Protected Area Bill without delay. More

recently, we also launched a new online tool enabling the public to quickly send an email directly to Minister O'Brien and Minister Noonan calling for swift action on the issue.

Continuing our commitment to evidence-based decision making, in the past year Fair Seas has published several reports including 'A Climate-resilient Path for Ireland's Marine Protected Areas Network' and our Offshore Renewable Energy policy position. While internationally, the Fair Seas team attended the Our Ocean international conference in Greece and participated in a high-level discussion panel with other global leaders on topics of marine conservation and community empowerment.

Be it nationally, internationally or through our local events in coastal communities across Ireland, Fair Seas' focus is on ensuring the forthcoming Marine Protected Area legislation is strong, ambitious, fit for purpose, and is enacted as soon as possible.

Annual Gathering

The IEN Annual Gathering took place in Cloughjordan eco-village, Co Tipperary from 24th-26th November.

The weekend retreat was a perfect opportunity for our members to discuss their work and plans for the future, as

well as to grow connections with other organisations and people in the Irish Environmental network.

Members took part in workshops and activities throughout the weekend, while an oak tree was planted in the village in memory of our friend and colleague Andrew St Ledger. Andrew was a passionate advocate for native woodland and the wider environment who worked tirelessly to restore Ireland's native woodlands and to improve Irish forestry.

Biodiversity Photographer of the Year

This competition is held each year as part of National Biodiversity Week.

Winner of the Biodiversity Photographer of the Year competition: Brenda Sheridan — Juvenile StoneChat looking for food from Daddy at Greystones to Bray walk.

Ocean category winner: Mark O'Leary— Lobster in her beautiful home. Illaunabaha, Kilkee, Co. Clare, May 29th 2023.



Above

Ocean category winner: Mark O'Leary—Lobster in her beautiful home. Illaunabaha, Kilkee, Co. Clare, May 29th 2023

Right

Winner of the Biodiversity Photographer of the Year competition: Brenda Sheridan — Juvenile StoneChat looking for food from Daddy at Greystones to Bray walk.



Our Staff

So much of the work of the Irish Environmental Network depends on the hard work of our team who keep environmental issues centre stage and support our members in their efforts to protect and preserve our natural environment and address the climate and biodiversity crises.



Karen Ciesielski
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

Karen Ciesielski is the CEO of the IEN. With 20 years of experience in non-profit management, fundraising, communications, advocacy and campaigning, Karen works to promote the interlinked principles of environmental, social and economic sustainability by supporting IEN members. She also serves as the Coordinator of the Environmental Pillar.



Justin Byrne
Chief Operating Officer (COO)

Justin is the Chief Operating Officer for the IEN, having joined the organisation in 2010. Previously he worked for KPMG as IT Operations Manager and prior to that in management for a division of Unigate PLC in London. He has extensive experience in planning issues.



Attracta Uí Bhroin
Environmental Law Officer

As so many matters pertaining to the environment require legal expertise, our Environmental Law Officer Attracta Uí Bhroin helps develop both the IEN and our members' capacity to leverage the law to support core missions. She is also the facilitator for the Environmental Law Implementation Group (ELIG), which is a joint initiative with the Irish Government and An Taisce to support the proper transposition and implementation of environmental law.



Donal Griffin
Fair Seas Policy Officer

Donal is the campaign coordinator for the Fair Seas Campaign. With a strong background in marine biology and ecology, Donal also has a wealth of policy experience from the UK, including coordinating a coalition of environmental NGOs focusing on MPA management and implementation.



Meaghan Carmody
Coordinator of Coalition 2030

Meaghan supports Irish Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to collaborate to bring the Sustainable Development Goals to fruition. She has over 7 years experience building movements for environmental, social and economic policy change, during which time she has developed a wide skill-set in education, facilitation, advocacy, management and communications.



Ciaran Brennan
Communications Officer & Editor of The Green News

Ciaran joined the IEN as Communications Officer and Editor of The Green News in 2023. He has many years' experience as a journalist and as a public relations/communications specialist, having worked for the HSE, Samaritans Ireland and the Houses of the Oireachtas, as well as a number of national newspapers.



Fintan Kelly
Agriculture Policy Officer

Fintan works to make Irish agriculture and land-use policies more sustainable for nature and people. He has a MSc in Environmental Biology from Utrecht University and a BSc in Environmental Science from NUI Galway. He specialises in Environmental Policy, Advocacy and Planning and has been working within the Irish eNGO sector since 2012, having previously worked for BirdWatch Ireland, An Taisce, SWAN and the Irish Wildlife Trust.



Aoife Ní Lochlainn
Policy Officer

Aoife is the Policy Officer at the IEN. Her work covers the UK Withdrawal agreement as it relates to the environment, as well as broader environmental policy and advocacy work to advance sustainable policy in Ireland on behalf of the NGO sector. She is a public policy analyst and researcher with over 13 years of experience in economic, social and environmental policy.



Aoife O'Mahony
Fair Seas Campaign Manager

Aoife is the Campaign Manager for the Fair Seas campaign, which is working to increase the number of Marine Protected Areas in Ireland (www.fairseas.ie). Aoife has over 20 years of experience in communications and project management working in large multinationals, educational institutions, membership bodies, and start-up organisations in Ireland and Australia. Aoife left her role at the end of 2023.



Catherine O'Toole
Development Officer

As our Local Environmental Development Officer, Catherine is working to increase engagement in the Environmental College of the Public Participation Networks (PPNs). Working with those on the ground for the Irish environmental movement, Catherine works to educate and inspire people in their local communities by providing complimentary training opportunities to environmental representatives.



Alanagh Tennanty
Administrative Assistant

Alanagh brings a wealth of administrative expertise and a heartfelt dedication to environmental and grassroots action to her role as administrator for the Irish Environmental Network. With a robust background in administration and a passion for sustainability, she is committed to supporting the organisation's mission to protect and preserve Ireland's natural environment.



Jack O'Donovan Trá
Fair Seas Communications Officer

Jack O'Donovan Trá is the Communications Officer at Fair Seas. Jack is blending the art of good comms with marine science to bring the message of ocean protection to a wide audience in an engaging and impactful way. Jack is a marine biologist by training and moved into comms and campaigns in 2018, and has since worked with many large international environmental coalitions and campaigns across Europe.

The Environmental Pillar

Established in 2009, the Environmental Pillar is the advocacy arm of the Irish Environmental Network and it represents 32 national independent environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs) all of whom are members of the IEN.

It is a National Social Partner and has its own line of funding to support its policy, advocacy, and campaigning work. Karen Ciesielski serves as the Coordinator of the Environmental Pillar. Overseeing its activities is a Steering Committee, made up of eight members who are elected by the members of the Environmental Pillar and serve one year terms. Its members have a huge reservoir of knowledge and expertise. Their work is diverse, covering a broad range of areas, which includes wildlife and habitat protection and restoration, environmental education, forestry, marine issues, waste, circular economy, planning and development, well-being, community resilience, and energy. The Pillar continued its work in 2023 to meet with and put pressure on elected representatives on all matters related to the climate and biodiversity crisis.

Throughout the year, the advocacy group engaged on a number of different issues by meeting with decision-makers, participating in workgroups, providing input through submissions, and publishing recommendations on key environmental policy.

A snapshot of these topics included:

- The Environmental Pillar and the Sustainable Water Network (SWAN) met with Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius to discuss Ireland's Nitrates Derogation during his visit to Ireland on November 23rd.
- Highlighting concerns and advocating on the new Planning and Development Bill
- Calling for establishment of Climate and Nature Restoration Fund in Budget 2024

- Lobbying political leaders to support an ambitious Nature Restoration Law
- Along with Stop Climate Chaos Coalition and Sustainable Water Network, calling on the Government to amend mandates and legislation to ensure public bodies are fit to deliver on Ireland's climate, biodiversity, and water objectives.

Agriculture and Land Use

Throughout 2023, Fintan Kelly, our Agriculture and Land Use Policy Officer continued to work to make Irish agriculture and land-use policies more sustainable for nature and people.

Our campaign on the Nature Restoration Law campaign was one of the most successful in Europe, we mobilised the Irish public and managed to shift Ireland from an opponent of the NRL to one of its strongest proponents. Irish MEPs in particular played a critical role in helping the draft law progress through a number of tight votes in the European Parliament. The Irish government has already taken steps to address other key asks of ours, announcing a €3 billion Climate and Nature Fund and committing to engaging stakeholders in the design of Ireland's National Restoration Plan.

The Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss adopted a number of our key recommendations which were published in April 2023. In response the Joint Committee on Environment and Climate Action published a report on the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly on biodiversity loss. Their report also included a number of our

priority recommendations, for example our call for reform in the legal mandates of semi-state bodies. We also helped to progress Senator Higgins Private Climate Action and Biodiversity (Mandates of Certain Organisations) Bill 2023, which proposes to make nature restoration and climate action core objectives of Coillte and Bord Na Móna.

Through our engagement with the adoption of the Forestry Strategy we were successful in ensuring better safeguards for biodiversity and peat soils.

The Environmental Pillar worked with our members to successfully influence the design of Ireland CAP strategic plan. An example of this is the government's commitment to a Breeding Waders EIP, to help threatened breeding waders, a major omission from Ireland's draft CAP.

We continued to provide support to An Taisce and our sister coalition SWAN in their efforts to reform Ireland's Nitrates Action Programme (NAP) and the Nitrates derogation.

Brussels

In October a delegation from the IEN travelled to Brussels where it had a series of positive and informative engagements with a number of MEPs and EU officials on key climate and biodiversity issues including emissions reductions, EU environmental law, forestry and nature restoration. The delegation also met with Commissioner Mairead McGuinness.



Top

The Environmental Pillar's Nature Restoration Law campaign was one of the most successful in Europe

Above

Members of the IEN Delegation in Brussels

Right

Sustainable Water Network and Environmental Pillar representatives who met with Commissioner Sinkevičius to urge him to stay the course on Nitrates Derogation.
Karen Ciesielski—IEN CEO
Sinéad O'Brien—SWAN Coordinator,
Dr Elaine McGoff—An Taisce, SWAN vice-chair and Environmental Pillar steering Committee member.





Linking the Irish Environment

Aoife Ní Lochlainn is the Policy Officer at the IEN. Her work covers the UK Withdrawal agreement as it relates to the environment, as well as broader environmental policy and advocacy work to advance sustainable policy in Ireland on behalf of the NGO sector. As part of this post-UK Withdrawal work in 2022, together with Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL), Aoife managed the tendering and production of the research project Linking the Irish Environment.

The report 'Linking the Irish Environment' was published in June 2023. It was launched at a special seminar event in Belfast to mark and discuss 25 years of the Good Friday Agreement/Belfast Agreement and the challenges and solutions to protecting the all-island environment.

Special Guest Speaker on the day was Stewart Maginnis, Deputy Director General at IUCN, International Union for the Conservation of Nature and panellists included:

- **Dr. Jeanne Moore** Senior Policy Analyst National Economic and Social Council

- **Mark Hanniffy** Joint Secretary to the North South Ministerial Council (Department of Foreign Affairs)
- **Malcolm Beatty OBE** Northern Ireland Board Member for the Office of Environmental Protection
- **Dave Foster** Director of Natural Environment Policy, Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (NI)
- **Karen Ciesielski** Irish Environmental Network CEO
- **Peter Day** Director of Engagement, Northern Ireland Community Relations Council
- **Dr. Anthony Soares** Director, Centre for Cross Border Studies
- **Declan McGarrigle** Director of PEACEPLUS Development, Special EU. Programmes Body

The IEN and NIEL were also awarded a €36,000 grant from the Shared Island Fund to finance the first All Island Civil Society Forum on the Environment.

Featured Publication

Linking the Irish Environment builds on the 2019 report written by Alison Hough, 'Brexit, the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement and the Environment: Issues arising and possible solutions' and commissioned by IEN and NIEL. It examines the state of play regarding the current environmental regulatory and governance arrangements on the island, including the Protocol, the TCA, Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, international agreements and the level and experience of practical cooperation on the environment across the island. It also includes a series of recommendations and advocacy priorities to advance citizens' and NGO engagement in all-island environmental issues.

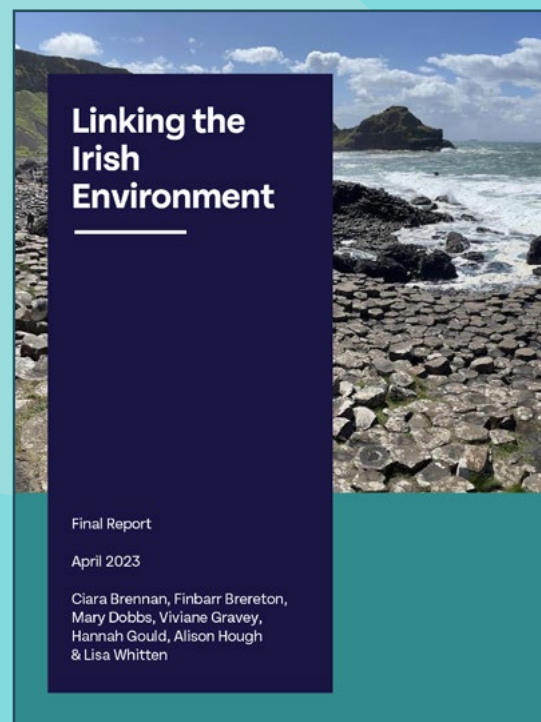
Download the report [here](#).

Above

Aoife Ní Lochlainn, Brexit Policy Officer, IEN; Sean Kelly Development Officer in NIEL; and Ciara Brennan, CEO of EJNI launching the report Linking the Irish Environment

Linking the Irish Environment Report Recommendations

- The Irish and UK governments (in the absence of a devolved government in Northern Ireland) should develop a joint political or legal commitment on the environment.
- The impact of environmental aspects of the NI Protocol/Windsor Framework should be monitored closely by both the UK and Irish Governments.
- The UK and Irish governments must ensure the full potential of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement as a lever for ensuring the environment on the island of Ireland is fulfilled.
- Full and effective implementation of the Aarhus Convention.
- Development of rights to a healthy environment and rights of nature.
- Provision should be made for adequate, ring-fenced funding from the UK and Irish Governments for both short and long-term all-island collaboration on environmental issues.
- Dedicated support should be provided for civil society organisations seeking to operate on an all-island basis.
- The UK and Irish governments should ensure continued and enhanced support for sustained, collaborative research on all-island/cross-border environmental matters.
- Both NIEL and IEN should consider appointing and maintaining a number of individuals within their permanent staff dedicated to cross-border/all-island engagement and issues.
- NIEL and IEN could consider the creation of a joint statement/position on cross-border and all-island environmental cooperation and engagement.
- NIEL and IEN could consider developing a joint strategy focused on cross-border and all-island environmental cooperation and engagement.
- NIEL and IEN could consider establishing a general cross-border/all-island committee to deal with shared environmental issues.
- NIEL and IEN could consider developing a joint research programme for jointly commissioning and engaging in all-island/cross border research from a civil society perspective.
- NIEL and IEN could consider a joint and dedicated workstream to monitor and highlight issues regarding implementation of the NI Protocol/Windsor Framework.
- NIEL and IEN could consider taking joint action to hold critical bodies such as the NSMC accountable.
- Governments must ensure improved, meaningful access to policy-making/decision-making through ensuring existing mechanisms function properly.
- New governance mechanisms could enhance accountability.
- An all-island event/convention/civic forum on environmental matters should be established.
- Existing cross-border/all-island networks and engagements should be expanded and enhanced.
- Support should be provided to enable a broader range of civil society organisations to undertake informed, efficient funding applications.
- Civil society organisations should develop, share and utilise expertise on Aarhus Convention and other 'environmental' rights.
- NGOs and umbrella bodies should collaborate to develop and make freely available a database of environmental actors.
- NGOs and umbrella bodies should collaborate to develop, make freely available and publicise a database of collaborative projects where successful elements are highlighted.





Member Testimonials

The Irish Environmental Network exists because of, and for, its members, who continued to demonstrate their expertise and commitment to their missions and values throughout their work in 2023

Left Ollan Herr, Chairman of ZWAI, adding magnesium salts to urine to recover the phosphorous which will chemically react to make struvite which can be used as a natural fertiliser in agriculture .

Irish Peatland Conservation Council

Throughout the year the Irish Peatland Conservation Council (IPCC) continued to work towards the conservation of a representative sample of Irish peatlands. Action taken through the our longest running campaign ‘Save the Bogs’ included peatland research, site management, education and policy submissions. This work is made possible with funding support from the IEN, Heritage Council, IPCC’s friends of the bog, government agencies and private and philanthropic organisations.

Peatland research included trialling a micro-propagated Sphagnum moss transfer on Girley Bog NHA and working with Killyconny Bog Project to estimate the store of carbon on Killyconny Bog SAC. We engaged with peatland communities and schools nationwide sharing peatland monitoring and management skills and hosting peatland information stands, walks and talks. IPCC responded to 13 peatland site issues and made submissions on 8 policy documents and represented peatlands on stakeholder engagement groups including the Irish Ramsar Wetlands Committee and Peatlands Council.

ipcc.ie

Eco Advocacy

IEN member Eco Advocacy advocates for truth and justice in environmental matters. It focuses on issues of planning and environmental law, biodiversity and specifically invasive species, Sustainability in Energy supply, employment, natural resources, conservation and policy.

In Eco Advocacy, we continue to be concerned by the issue of abuse of process and specifically with Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation of SLAPP type litigation. This accounted for much of our time during 2023.

We have over the past 12 months also done significant work on the preservation of bogs and discovered large numbers of the very rare Marsh Fritillary butterfly in Ballivor bog.

We are also continuing to work on sustainable energy creation with a specific emphasis on Deep-bore Geothermal energy. We are also planning to prepare graphics on invasive alien diseases in the near future.

ecoadvocacy.ie

Zero Waste Alliance Ireland

2023 was another active year for Zero Waste Alliance Ireland (ZWAI). One of the highlights of 2023 for us was attending the Body & Soul music, arts, and culture festival in June held at the beautiful Ballinlough Castle in Co. Westmeath.

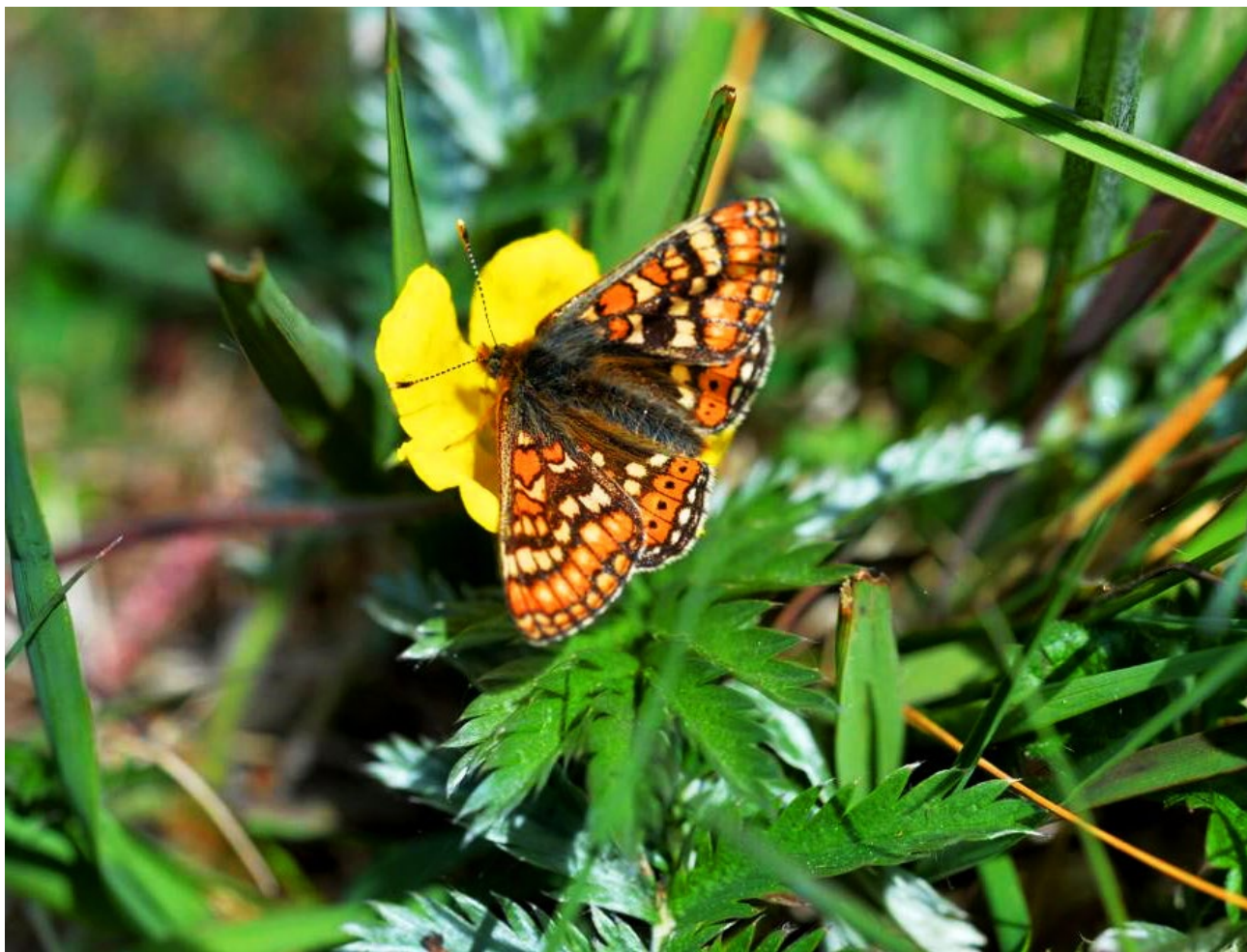
Partnering with Native Events, we put our food composter to the test to tackle the food waste generated by festival attendees, and we are proud to say it succeeded!

Additionally, we demonstrated a pilot-scale struvite reactor, showcasing the ease of recycling phosphorus from wastewater collected through pipes installed in the men’s urinals.

The festival goers showed great interest in our initiatives, leading to engaging interactions and ZWAI even gained some new members!

This event was not just about enjoying the music and arts, but also about promoting sustainable practices and innovations, collaborating with like-minded organisations, making it a memorable and impactful experience.

zwai.ie



Above
Marsh Fritillary,
Ballivor bog, Summer
2023. This butterfly
lays its eggs on the
Devil's Bit Scabious
(*Succisa pratensis*)
and are dependent
on the plant for its
habitat

Right
Water monitoring
by the IPCC on the
raised Girley Bog in
Co. Meath





Above

IWDG Seminar: This seminar brought together those interested in the Shannon Dolphins; a small, unique population of bottlenose dolphins living in the Shannon Estuary.

Right

Day 1, Circular Economy HotSpot Dublin 2023, Mansion House





Left

Friends of the Irish Environment activists at Cork Law conference 2023: Standing: Professor Owen McIntyre; FIE: centre Director Tony Lowes; left: FIE Director Kieran Cummins; Right: Clodagh Daly, FIE activist and coordinator of Climate Case Ireland

The Rediscovery Centre

In 2023, the Rediscovery Centre led a consortium of key collaborators and funders including the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications, Dublin City Council, Eastern Midlands Waste Region and Circulaire, to host the coveted Circular Economy Hotspot Event in Dublin.

The Circular Economy Hotspot Dublin 2023 was a four-day celebration of the Irish circular economy in action that put Dublin on the international circular economy map. With over 92 speakers and 1,700 attendees, the programme offered something for everyone from conferences and exhibitions, workshops, showcases, deep dive sessions, matchmaking events and tours to an exceptional cultural programme.

The event was an opportunity to showcase the very best of Irish circular innovators, inspirational community and NGO circular economy activity and groundbreaking policy. It brought experts on international best practice on the circular economy together in Dublin, creating a melting pot of circular ideas and a catalyst for circular change.

With a particular focus on topics of strategic importance to the city, such as food and the bioeconomy, behaviour change, textiles, social enterprise, design and the built environment, the conference prompted participants to think through solutions together, bringing Ireland's capital closer to becoming a truly circular city.

rediscoverycentre.ie

The Irish Whale and Dolphin Group

The Irish Whale and Dolphin Group (IWDG) made a significant contribution to marine conservation and public awareness in 2023.

We appointed a full-time Marine Policy Officer, made numerous submissions to national plans and Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE) development and actively participated in key governmental meetings.

Our advocacy efforts were strengthened by securing significant funding from various sources, including the IEN, Heritage Council and NPWS. Through the All-Ireland Cetacean Stranding and Sighting Schemes, we collected and validated 2,684 sightings and 406 strandings and reached 40,000 verified sighting records. We have conducted 5 live-stranding courses, trained 61 volunteers, and added 22 new team members.

In 2023, IWDG's Shannon Dolphin Project celebrated 30 years with a successful public awareness campaign. This included the Shannon Dolphins book, a well-attended Dolphin Seminar, and educational school visits. Our events, including bioblitzes and award-winning children's activities, culminated in a series of podcasts produced with support from Clare, Kerry, and Limerick County Councils.

iwdg.ie

Friends of the Irish Environment

It was a busy year for Friends of the Irish Environment. 2023 saw the publication of the organisation's online database of the 47 Judicial Reviews undertaken since 2000.

The year also saw Friends of the Irish Environment acting as the 'client' for UCC's Environmental Law Clinic. Postgraduate students produced specially drafted, accessible case-notes explaining the court's reasoning in an initial 12 cases with their possible implications for the interpretation and application of environmental law.

The database is a key resource for a broad range of interested actors, including journalists, regulators, legal practitioners, civil society and law students. A unique feature is the inclusion of key transcripts, including both the High Court and Supreme Court hearings on Climate Case Ireland.

Professor Owen McIntyre, Professor at the School of Law, University College Cork and Director of the LL.M. (Environmental & Natural Resources Law) says that 'FIE and UCC School of Law are already discussing future 'clinical' research projects which, in addition to benefiting postgraduate law students specialising in this field, will contribute to the progressive elaboration and refinement of the Irish regulatory framework for environmental protection'.

Learn more [here](#).

friendsoftheirishenvironment.org



Roundtable discussion at the Wildlife Crime and Conservation Conference in Co Wicklow— the conference addressed various aspects of wildlife crime, including prevention and enforcement and the broader implications for biodiversity and conservation.

Wildlife Rehabilitation Ireland

During 2023 Wildlife Rehabilitation Ireland continued to create and deliver courses and conferences in wildlife rehabilitation, conservation and crime for veterinary professionals, students and the public.

In October 2023, WRI hosted a major Wildlife Crime and Conservation Conference in Co Wicklow.

The aim was to address various aspects of wildlife crime, including prevention and enforcement on day 1, and then the broader implications for biodiversity and conservation on day 2. It was a hugely successful coming together of state bodies, conservation groups, law enforcement and interested parties.

Speakers included Dr Micheál Ó Cinnéide who spoke about the Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss; Dr Peter Doran, Environmental Justice Network; and environmental journalist John Gibbons. Then there were representatives from the NPWS, the National Wildlife Crime Unit in the UK, Gardai, Inland Fisheries and the IEN.

There was robust discussion and round table talks on how to reduce wildlife crimes, and on initiatives to educate communities about the importance of wildlife conservation.

Attendee feedback was extremely positive and we believe the conference served as a pivotal platform for catalysing action and fostering partnerships.

wri.ie

Hedgerows Ireland

In 2023, Hedgerows Ireland renewed its focus on knowledge-sharing and policy work through collaborations with other IEN members, community groups, farming organisations, and County Councils.

In addition to a stronger social media presence, we hosted 45 hedgerow talks and hedge laying training days across 12 counties to raise awareness of nature-friendly management practices and empower people to apply these skills themselves.

Our 'All About Hedgerows' event in partnership with the IEN was a highlight! As well as leading training days across the island, Hedgerows Ireland welcomed more than 500 people to our All-Ireland Hedge Laying Championships in Co Down and was invited to demonstrate the Irish hedge laying style at international championships in the Netherlands and England.

Building community is vital to changing attitudes, so we also launched monthly virtual members' meetings and in-person gatherings to create a safe space to ask questions and discuss hedgerow topics.

hedgerows.ie

Birdwatch Ireland

2023 proved to be a really successful year for the Little Tern Project in Kilcoole—an NPWS project run by BirdWatch Ireland.

The Kilcoole Little Tern colony saw one of the highest-ever numbers of breeding pairs (around 225) as well as excellent productivity, with each pair fledging 1.5 chicks on average.

We also stepped up our ringing and monitoring at Kilcoole in 2023 through a combination of ring-reading via scope by staff and key volunteers, catching of adult birds in the colony, and nest-monitoring using GoPro cameras. We read the rings of nearly 150 adult Little Terns in the colony, providing valuable data on age structure and survival rates. The highlight was two 19-year old Little Terns, both ringed as chicks at Kilcoole in 2004, making them the oldest known Irish Little Terns on record!

Kilcoole is one of the biggest little tern colonies in NW Europe and so their continued success here is vital for the species fortunes in Ireland and further afield.

birdwatchireland.ie

A full listing of Irish Environmental Network members with links to learn more about them is available at ien.ie/our-members



Above
Richard Markham
binding a laid hedge
at the All-Ireland
Hedge Laying
Championships in Co.
Down, October 2023

Right
Little Tern being
ringed at Kilcoole
(carried out under
NPWS licence) to
allow for future
identification



Funding Statement by Justin Byrne, Chief Operating Officer



The majority of the work of the IEN is supported by a grant from the Department of the Environment Climate and Communications (DECC). In 2022 we received €2,550,000 which was an increase on the total funding that we received in 2022.

We also received funding of €277,635 from the DECC for work on Marine Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE). This is for the first year of a three-year project. This is a very important and developing area and we are happy to have funding to increase our efforts in this area.

Other funding that we received was for the continuation of the Fairseas Project and funding from the European Climate Foundation for work on Agriculture and land use. The funders of the Fairseas Project are in discussions with us to extend the project for a further three years. We received a total of €3,089,070 funding in 2023.

The IEN now has 5 active projects as well as the work of the IEN and the Environmental Pillar and also a number of smaller shorter-term projects. The

management of these projects takes up a considerable amount of our time but it is very worthwhile as it allows us and our members to work on important environmental projects and engage with other stakeholders.

Our 2023 accounts show a large increase in creditors to €845,670. This is due to a reconfiguration of the grant we received for work on Marine ORE and has been regularised in 2024.

We redistribute approximately 75% of the funding that we receive, mainly to our members. All grants are made following rigorous and competitive processes and we use independent assessors to decide on any large grants.

We are very happy to support our members to take part in important

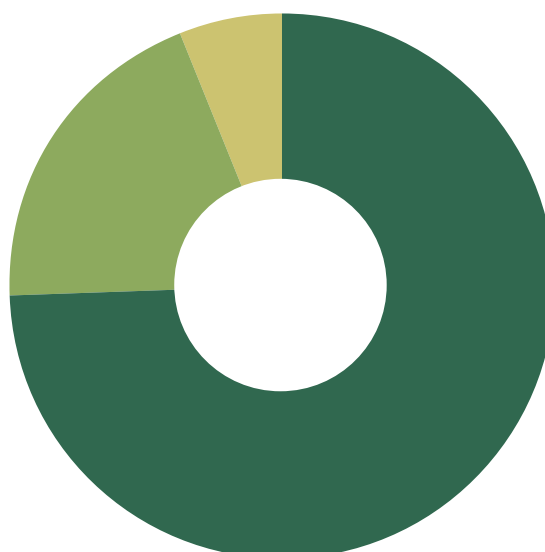
international meetings and conferences such as COP 28 and the HLPF. This year, with the assistance of the European Commission Representation in Ireland we took a party of almost 30 people to meet with Commissioners, MEPs, and Commission staff in Brussels. Half of the party travelled overland via sustainable travel methods. We are very grateful to the European Commission Representation in Ireland for the opportunity, and especially for their support of low carbon travel.

The IEN's finances remain healthy and we are in a good position to help our growing number of members to thrive in the coming year. Some highlights of the 2023 audited accounts can be found on page 26 of this report. The full accounts are available on www.ien.ie.

Main Outgoings

Core Funding	€1,296,000
Policy Submissions	€35,000
Travel (including COP 28 support)	€44,350
Training for members	€16,719
Wages and salaries	€603,434
Pillar Projects	€64,044
Digitisation Fund	€45,292
Support for participation in Government Bodies	€43,950
Biodiversity Week	€44,136

Expenditure



Funding to Members
€2,318,284

Wages
€610,199

Establishment Costs
€182,729

75.5% of our outgoings
were shared with our members.
The majority of this was core funding.

Statement of Financial Activities

(Incorporating an Income and Expenditure Account)
for the financial year ended 31 December 2023

	Notes	Restricted Funds 2023 €	Total 2023 €	Restricted Funds 2022 €	Total 2022 €
Income					
Charitable activities					
—Grants from governments and other co-funders	4.1	3,089,070	3,089,070	2,595,363	2,595,363
Other income	4.2	9	9	9	9
Total Income		3,089,079	3,089,079	2,595,372	2,595,372
Expenditure					
Charitable activities	5.1	3,099,929	3,099,929	2,202,128	2,202,128
Net Income / (expenditure)		(10,850)	(10,850)	393,244	393,244
Transfers between funds		—	—	—	—
Net movement in funds for the financial year		(10,850)	(10,850)	393,244	393,244
Reconciliation of funds					
Total funds beginning of the year	15	1,889,337	1,889,337	1,506,093	1,506,093
Total funds at the end of the year		1,888,487	1,888,487	1,899,337	1,899,337

The Statement of Financial Activities includes all gains and losses recognised in the financial year. All income and expenditure relate to continuing activities.

Statement of Cash Flows

for the financial year ended 31 December 2023

	Notes	2023 €	2022 €
Cash flows from operating activities			
Net movement in funds		(10,850)	393,244
Adjustments for:		3,603	5,007
Depreciation		(9)	(9)
Interest receivable and similar income			
		(7,256)	398,242
Movements in working capital:			
Movement in debtors		21,493	(9,153)
Movement in creditors		838,106	(10,055)
Cash generated from operations		852,343	379,034
Cash flows from investing activities			
Interest received		9	9
Payments to acquire tangible fixed assets		—	(3,295)
Net cash used in investment activities		9	(3,286)
Net increase in cash and cash equivalents		852,352	375,748
Cash and cash equivalents at at the beginning of the year		1,875,433	1,499,685
Cash and cash equivalents at at the end of the year	11	2,727,785	1,875,433

Supplementary Information Relating to the Financial Statements Operating Statement

for the financial year ended 31 December 2023

	Schedule	2023 €	2022 €
Income			
Core Funding		1,300,000	1,075,000
Specific IEN Strands and Projects		570,000	502,500
Environmental Law Implementation Group		90,000	90,000
Environmental Pillar		480,000	322,500
Coalition 2030		110,000	110,000
Other Grants		141,074	33,200
Rockefeller Philanthropic Foundation		—	320,000
Conservation International		32,155	42,365
Becht Family Charitable Trust		88,207	99,798
Marine ORE Project		277,634	—
		3,089,070	2,595,363
Charitable activities and other expenses	1	(3,099,929)	(2,202,128)
		(10,859)	393,235
Miscellaneous income	2	9	9
Net Surplus		(10,850)	393,244

The supplementary information does not form part of the audited financial statements.

Supplementary Information Relating to the Financial Statements

Schedule 1: Charitable Activities and Other Expenses

for the financial year ended 31 December 2023

	2023 €	2022 €
Expenses		
Wages and salaries	603,434	490,692
Social security costs	66,542	53,649
Staff defined contribution pension costs	23,613	21,434
IEN: Training	12,972	20,757
IEN: International NGO meetings	23,482	27,434
IEN: Participation Government Bodies	19,800	10,112
IEN: Policy Subs	35,000	29,514
IEN: Fundraising Capacity Building	18,471	—
IEN: Office expenses	16,287	17,658
IEN: Covid Adaption fund	45,292	22,236
IEN: Agriculture Grants	17,200	—
Ploughing, Electric Picnic, Festivals	10,694	—
Biodiversity awareness project	44,137	25,200
Citizens Assembly Project	—	36,796
Pillar expenses	153,915	66,643
ELIG expenses	43,979	36,473
Coalition 2030	168,616	36,679
Core Funding	1,295,710	1,010,532
Rent payable	7,025	7,064
Rates	2,187	2,147
Insurance	1,980	1,972
MPA (Fairseas) Project	429,484	231,752
Telecoms and internet	33,061	17,339
Directors Expenses	399	—
Legal and professional	14,169	21,655
Auditor's remuneration	7,011	7,011
Bank charges	335	1,570
General expenses	1,531	802
Depreciation	3,603	5,007
	3,099,929	2,202,128

The supplementary information does not form part of the audited financial statements.



**Irish
Environmental
Network**

Irish Environmental Network
1 Green Street, Dublin 7,
D07 X6NR

01 878 0116
office@ien.ie
www.ien.ie