



# A Draft National Landscape Strategy for Ireland 2014-2024



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### Abbreviations

DAHG	Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht
DECLG	Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government
DAFM	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
DES	Department of Education and Skills

## FOREWORD

***Landscape is an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors***

*Article 1.a. of the European Landscape Convention*



The landscape of Ireland is our one and ultimate resource. For millennia, it has been shaped by human activity and has supported, nourished, and sheltered us. The definition of landscape drawn up by the European Landscape Convention reflects the concept that landscapes evolve through time, as a result of being acted upon by natural and human forces. It also underlines the fact that the landscape is composed of various elements that have to be taken together, not in isolation.

Our landscape supports a myriad of cultural, political, ecological, physical, geological, psychological, historical, social and economic processes, imbued with meanings and associations. It is a dynamic, multi-functional, multi-dimensional space hosting many forms of life, and used, experienced and cherished by us. It provides distinctiveness and continuity, yet continues to change through a never-ending dialogue – both intended and unintended – between nature and man. It has inspired literature, poetry, music, song and the visual arts, and is the repository of many of our customs, stories, beliefs, mythologies and histories. A strong tradition of *dinnseanachas* or place-lore surrounds us and embodies both our national identity and our connection to place. The landscape belongs to all of us. However, unless we understand why it is important and work to ensure its safekeeping, it is vulnerable to unplanned, unmanaged and detrimental changes.

Significant development in the past number of decades has brought unprecedented transformation to our cities, towns and countryside. Increasingly we are aware of the value of our landscape and its sensitivity to change. A growing awareness of the effects of climate change, biodiversity loss, ecological degradation, fragmentation, development, urban decay and cultural damage has brought into clearer focus the value, and increasing vulnerability of the Irish landscape as a physical, environmental, economic and social resource. We must start to plan holistically for its sustainable future.

Positive trends are visible. Many industries, organisations, societies and local communities have already put in place programmes, schemes and ways of working with the landscape to the benefit of communities and biodiversity. The landscape, in its many forms, can, and will continue to accommodate social, economic and environmental uses and functions, as well as many different societal perceptions. The Government realises that to have a sustainable society, environment and economy we need to both embrace change and manage our landscape in a considered, integrated and planned way. Using the parameters of the European Landscape Convention as a guide, our challenge now is to achieve this sustainable future by balancing our landscape and our social, cultural and economic needs. This Strategy is a first step in confronting this challenge.

I wish to sincerely thank the Steering Committee for their work in developing this Strategy and all those who have made submissions and who have contributed in any way to its preparation for their support and interest.

**Jimmy Deenihan, T.D.,**  
**Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht**

## 1.0 STRATEGY AIMS

### 1.1 LANDSCAPE STRATEGY VISION

#### *Our Vision*

***Our landscape reflects and embodies our cultural values and our shared natural heritage and contributes to the well-being of our society, environment and economy. We have an obligation to ourselves and to future generations to promote its sustainable protection, management and planning***

The Irish landscape, from city and town centres, to countryside, islands and territorial waters, with its many dimensions, multiple uses and ever-changing dynamics, contributes to the well-being of our society, environment and economy. This draft National Landscape Strategy is the means by which the State, working in co-operation with public authorities, stakeholders, communities and individuals, will provide a framework for the protection of the many cultural, social, economic and environmental values embedded in the landscape. The objectives of this Strategy are to establish and implement through a series of actions, policies aimed at understanding, managing, protecting and planning our landscape. It sets out specific measures to integrate and embed landscape considerations in all sectors which influence the landscape and improve and enhance the quality of decision-making by those who have an impact on it.

The Strategy will inform and assist in the resolution of challenges arising from competing priorities in the landscape – infrastructural provision versus landscape protection, local versus national objectives, etc. By understanding landscape and its dynamic interactive characteristics, it may allow us to deal with competing objectives while improving the decision making process.

The actions of the Strategy will help us to support a living landscape, and strengthen community identity. This will help us gain sustainable societal benefits, and will ensure that the landscapes of the future are as valued as the landscapes of the present and the past.

## 1.2 LANDSCAPE POLICY STATEMENT

The Irish landscape is an integral component of our surroundings and well-being, a visual expression of the diversity of our shared cultural and natural heritage, and intrinsic to our identity as an island nation. The Government recognises the past, present and on-going influences on the landscape from a broad range of sectors and the need to support sustainable landscape change and better promote landscape management, protection and planning.

The objectives of this draft National Landscape Strategy are to:

- implement the European Landscape Convention by integrating landscape into our approach to sustainable development;
- establish and embed a process of gathering, sharing and interpreting scientific, technical and cultural information in order to carry out evidence-based identification and description of the character, resources and processes of the landscape;
- provide a policy framework, which will put in place measures at national, sectoral - including agriculture, tourism, energy and marine - and local level, together with civil society, to manage, protect and properly plan through high quality design for the sustainable stewardship of our landscape;
- ensure that we take advantage of opportunities to implement policies relating to landscape use that are complementary and mutually reinforcing and that conflicting policy objectives are avoided in as far as possible.

A National Landscape Strategy will be implemented and co-ordinated by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in partnership with all key stakeholders.

## 2.0 CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW OF STRATEGY

### 2.1 THE EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

Ireland, in common with thirty-eight other Member States, signed and ratified the Council of Europe's European Landscape Convention (2000), a treaty that came into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2004. It requires certain measures and actions to be undertaken by each party and organises European-wide co-operation on landscape issues.

***The European Landscape Convention introduced a European-wide concept centring on the quality of landscape protection, management and planning.***

***The Convention covers natural, urban, peri-urban and rural areas encompassing land, inland water, coastal and marine areas. It deals with every-day landscapes, degraded landscapes as well as those that can be considered outstanding. In other words, it recognises the importance of all landscapes, and not just exceptional landscapes, as having a crucial bearing on quality of life and as deserving attention in landscape policy.***

The Convention established the general principles by which national policies on landscape and associated international co-operation must be guided, and established that the general framework for protecting the landscape is the responsibility of the State. There is also an international, transfrontier, dimension to landscape protection, management and planning, which will influence how we implement the Strategy.

The European Union has been committed to the assessment and management of resources in order to foster sustainable development, historically through environmental directives and recently through information directives. The proposed common strategic framework for European Structural Funds 2014-2020 prioritises matters such as promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management, protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency. It will be complemented by the proposal for the 7<sup>th</sup> Environment Action Programme to 2020, *Living well, within the limits of our planet* which provides an EU framework for actions to address unsustainable trends in climate change, biodiversity, environment and health, and in the sustainable use of resources and management of waste.<sup>1</sup> Ecosystem services are relevant to understanding the landscape processes that must be maintained to ensure economic growth and balanced development.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/newprg/>

The *2030 framework for climate and energy policies* aims to make the European Union's economy and energy system more competitive, secure and sustainable.<sup>2</sup> The recent publication of *Green Infrastructure – Enhancing Europe's Natural Capital (2013)* is also relevant – promoting the principle that protecting and enhancing nature and natural processes, and the many benefits human society gets from nature, are consciously integrated into spatial planning and territorial development.<sup>3</sup>

An international landscape convention has been progressed by UNESCO, with adoption of the Florence Declaration on Landscape in September 2012.<sup>4</sup> This supports national initiatives and affirms the importance of safeguarding and improving the landscape for the benefit of all.

A National Landscape Strategy will take cognisance of on-going developments internationally and at European level as part of the implementation programme.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/2030/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/2030/index_en.htm)

<sup>3</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2013:0249:FIN:EN:PDF>

<sup>4</sup> <http://whc.unesco.org/en/news/943/>

## 2.2 THE IRISH CONTEXT

This draft National Landscape Strategy is Ireland's way of meeting our obligations and delivering on the objectives under the European Landscape Convention. Its implementation can also assist Ireland in complying with United Nations, EU and national targets to foster sustainable development along with the implementation of *Our Sustainable Future, a Framework for Sustainable Development for Ireland* (2012), the *National Climate Change Adaptation Framework* (2012) and the *National Biodiversity Action Plan 2011-2016* (2011).

The Strategy sets out Ireland's high level objectives and actions with regard to landscape. It also positions landscape in the context of existing Irish and European strategies, policies and objectives, and outlines methods of ensuring co-operation at a sectoral and at a European level by the State.

***A National Landscape Strategy aims to:  
implement the European Landscape Convention in Ireland by  
providing for specific measures to promote the protection,  
management and planning of the landscape.***

The definition of 'landscape' as defined by the European Landscape Convention has been included in the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010 (No. 30 of 2010). The Act also specifies that development plans shall contain particular objectives relating to landscape, including objectives in accordance with '*relevant policies or objectives ... relating to providing a framework for identification, assessment, protection, management and planning of landscapes having regard to the European Landscape Convention*'.<sup>5</sup>

A broad range of national and sectoral policies and activities can have considerable effects – positive and negative - on landscape character or quality, including agriculture, forestry, marine, industry, energy, spatial and development planning, transport, infrastructure, tourism, recreation, natural and cultural heritage, and economic planning. Landscape considerations have been included in some existing strategies, plans and policies but are not currently a requirement in many sectors.<sup>6</sup> Development plans are required to have landscape objectives.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010, Section 2 and Section 7 (b)(ii).

<sup>6</sup> E.g. *Actions for Biodiversity 2011-2016 – Ireland's National Biodiversity Plan; Harnessing our Ocean Wealth – an integrated marine plan for Ireland* (2012).

<sup>7</sup> Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010, Section 10 and Sections 202-204.

### 3.0 OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

The implementation of a National Landscape Strategy will involve six core objectives with associated actions derived from the European Landscape Convention. These will ensure that landscape is integrated in our collective decision-making processes and that all landscapes are recognised in this regard. These objectives are not prioritised in order of importance and there are strong inter-dependencies and synergies between them.

<i>National Landscape Strategy Objectives</i>	<i>European Landscape Convention</i>
• <i>Recognise landscapes in law</i>	<i>Articles 5 (a) and 6 E</i>
• <i>Develop a National Landscape Character Assessment</i>	<i>Articles 6 C and D</i>
• <i>Develop Landscape Policies</i>	<i>Articles 5 (b) and (d); Article 9</i>
• <i>Increase Landscape Awareness</i>	<i>Article 6 A</i>
• <i>Identity Education, Research and Training Needs</i>	<i>Article 6 B</i>
• <i>Strengthen Public Participation</i>	<i>Article 5 (c)</i>

There are nineteen key actions included in this strategy which outline:

- (i) the specific actions pertaining to each of the objectives above;
- (ii) the authorities responsible for implementing each action.

This draft National Landscape Strategy is being brought forward during a challenging period in the public finances. Therefore the implementation of the actions must take place within the context of Government policy on public expenditure and staff numbers and further policy directives as set out by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

#### 3.1 Recognise Landscape in Law

The Strategy seeks to ensure that landscape is recognised as an explicit factor in decision-making under a range of existing and future legislation.

**Action 1** The term ‘landscape’ has been defined in the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010. To support this, complementary legislation and codes will be examined to see whether gaps need to be addressed.

*DAHG and other Departments/Agencies*

### 3.2 Develop a National Landscape Character Assessment

With the co-operation of a range of partners including local planning authorities, agencies and community organisations, and working on a trans-boundary basis, the landscape of Ireland will be identified, characterised and mapped in order to provide the data and qualitative information required to evaluate its current position and underpin effective spatial planning, landscape-centred decision-making and to appropriately evaluate it. This objective will complement *Northern Ireland's Landscape Charter* recently published by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.<sup>8</sup> A National Landscape Character Assessment will be undertaken. It will contain two main elements:

- Action 2**
- (i) A data framework on a national GIS platform to provide the structure for on-going collection, monitoring and review of the landscape's physical, scientific and cultural data. It will reflect existing environmental classifications and national and local initiatives on land-cover and land-use habitat mapping. It will set out objective, consistent descriptions and interpret all elements and characteristics of Ireland's landscape types and areas within a standardised format.
  
  - (ii) A National Landscape Character Map will be prepared using the evidence base to describe and assess distinct landscape character areas at the national scale, ensuring consistency within and between public authority areas and functions. The database and associated maps, incorporating linked, open and online data, will use Landscape Character Assessment methodology along with other appropriate methodologies and will incorporate an outline Historic Landscape Characterisation.

*DAHG/and other Departments and Agencies*

- Action 3** Following completion of the National Landscape Character Assessment, statutory guidelines on local Landscape Character Assessments, following best international practice, and incorporating Historic Landscape Characterisation, and other appropriate assessment methodologies, will be prepared for Planning Authorities under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).<sup>9</sup>

*DAHG / DECLG*

- Action 4** Landscape Character Assessments will be prepared at local and intra-local authority level, building on the National Landscape Character Assessment, using the Landscape Character Assessment Guidelines. These regional and local landscape character assessments will inform and guide landscape policy, action plans and local authority development plans.

*Planning Authorities*

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/landscape\\_charter\\_document.pdf](http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/landscape_charter_document.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/2000/en/act/pub/0030/sec0028.html>

### 3.3 Develop Landscape Policies

Policies will be developed and implemented for the management, protection and sustainable planning of the landscape in all relevant sectors of public administration.

**Action 5** Relevant government departments and agencies including semi-state agencies should ensure that sector-specific policies and strategies and relevant legislation within their remit are fully consistent with the objectives set out in the National Landscape Strategy. Where policy conflicts or gaps are identified, measures should be outlined to resolve them. Department-specific landscape policy plans may be considered and prepared, if appropriate, and any such plans should include policies on the adoption and use of Landscape Character Assessment and landscape quality objectives.

*Inter-departmental*

**Action 6** Periodic 'State of the Landscape' reports will be prepared by each relevant public authority and a summary compilation published by Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. They will take note of changes to the landscape and indicate progress on integrating landscape into the work of the organisation and on meeting landscape quality objectives.

*Applicable Public Authorities*

### 3.4 Increase awareness

A National Landscape Strategy will promote increased public awareness and understanding about landscapes, including the linkage between the land's resources, its layout and ecology and the well-being of its people.

**Action 7** Develop definitions, analytical tools and descriptions to describe, simply but clearly, the nature of landscape and that the processes forming it are dynamic and constantly evolving.

*DAHG/Heritage Council*

**Action 8** Develop public awareness programmes to promote an understanding of the nature of landscape, its value as a cultural and visual resource, its role in promoting Ireland's attractiveness as a tourist destination, and also in ensuring economic prosperity and how it should be managed sustainably and beneficially to meet the challenges of climate change adaptation and mitigation, food-security, health and well-being.

*DAHG/Heritage Council*

**Action 9** Provide appropriate support to public participation initiatives to ensure that landscape change management is effective and evidence based and informed by best practice.

*DAHG/Heritage Council*

**Action 10** (i) Develop national landscape awards in co-operation with relevant professional and educational institutes to generate public interest in and promote wider awareness of the landscape. Encourage participation of at least one nomination a year to the European Landscape Awards.

(ii) Encourage the inclusion of landscape categories in established award schemes, for example those relating to agriculture, architecture, biodiversity, food production, Green Schools, recreation, science, Tidy Towns, urban planning and tourism, etc.

*DAHG/Heritage Council/Others*

**Action 11** Complete and publish the Historic Gardens and Designed Landscapes Survey of the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage.<sup>10</sup>

*DAHG*

### **3.5 Identify education, research and training needs**

The Strategy sets out to identify current knowledge and gaps in education, research and training in relation to the landscape to ensure an all-inclusive and effective approach to landscape management.

**Action 12** In co-operation with the relevant educational authorities and professional institutes, audit the existing level of landscape education modules and landscape research, to:

- a. Identify gaps to be remedied within landscape education and associated disciplines (engineering, architecture, archaeology, planning, environment, tourism, agriculture etc.) and the National Framework of Qualifications levels at which they exist;
- b. Develop appropriate higher and further education programmes in disciplines directly linked to landscape, in compliance with international requirements for undergraduate and postgraduate accreditation. Develop also, as appropriate, modules for use within courses for related disciplines who engage with the physical and cultural environment, with programmes complying with appropriate National Framework of Qualifications levels, to include coursework, evidence-based research and publications;
- c. In consultation with professional institutes, develop and integrate landscape training into Continued Professional Development programmes;

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.buildingsofireland.ie/Surveys/Gardens/>

- d. Develop a landscape module at an appropriate National Framework of Qualifications level to be integrated into agricultural training programmes for advisors, farmers and in agricultural colleges using the experience of the Heritage Council's Landscape Character Assessment Continuing Professional Development training course;
- e. Include internships and training in landscape architecture within existing professional training programmes in State bodies.

*DAHG/DES/DAFM/Heritage Council*

**Action 13** Commission or facilitate the survey and identification of best landscape management and landscape policy practice in Ireland and Europe as evidenced by European Landscape Convention actions to date, and itemise pointers of relevance and future use.

*DAHG/Heritage Council*

**Action 14** Organise multi-disciplinary conferences on practice and research in the area of landscape management/conservation. A working committee of relevant experts will be established to guide the development of a programme of conferences and to co-ordinate the publication of proceedings.

*DAHG/Heritage Council*

**Action 15** Facilitate the introduction of landscape education into the primary and secondary school curriculum through appropriate disciplines exploring the opportunities offered by existing schemes such as Green Schools and the transition year programme.

*DAHG/DES/Heritage Council*

### **3.6 Strengthen Public Participation**

Public participation is one of the essential elements in the design and implementation of landscape objectives. The Strategy will seek effective methods of partnership, engagement and agreement between public authorities, the general public, voluntary organisations and interest groups to promote sustainable landscape change, protection and planning.

**Action 16** Develop methods of participation for organisations, public and private, as well as individuals in the shaping, reviewing and monitoring of landscape policies and objectives and, if necessary, establish new innovative approaches. This includes fostering actions to achieve delivery of these to encourage citizens, as well as the State, in the sustainable management of the landscape.

*DAHG/Other Departments and Agencies*

**Action 17** Raise awareness among and encourage direct involvement by civil society, voluntary organisations and the commercial sector in augmenting and analysing the information within their local Landscape Character Assessments, to develop a detailed picture of the qualities, values, condition, character, strengths and threats to the landscapes where they live, work and spend time, and from which they derive their living.

*DAHG/Heritage Council*

**Action 18** Encourage greater participation in the European Landscape Convention organisations RECEP-ENELC for local and regional authorities; UNISCAPE for universities; and CIVILSCAPE for civil society organisations.<sup>11</sup>

*DAHG*

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<sup>11</sup> RECEP-ENELC is an international association of local and regional authorities promoting the implementation of the European Landscape Convention throughout Europe. UNISCAPE is the Network of Universities especially dedicated to the implementation of the European Landscape Convention. CIVILSCAPE is an international association of civil society organisations which are non-governmental and dedicate their work to landscape protection, management and planning, according to the European Landscape Convention.

## 4.0 IMPLEMENTATION

The Strategy will be managed so as to initially carry out specific actions at national level, such as the compilation of a National Landscape Character Assessment, which underpin other actions. Some of these tasks have been identified in this document, while others will be devised by more detailed consultation and participation by stakeholders and the public. In keeping with the principle of subsidiarity, which is embedded in Article 4 of the European Landscape Convention, implementation of many of the key actions of the Strategy will be at the most local levels possible while ensuring guidance and procedures are co-ordinated at national level.

While further resources will be subject to national policies on public expenditure, the Strategy will help drive efficiencies between Government departments and agencies in managing and implementing landscape objectives. By harnessing the involvement of the public in informing landscape policies, it will bring benefits in reducing conflict, minimising economic risk and strengthening the rationale for decisions made.

### 4.1 Co-ordination of Actions

Shared responsibility between departments and agencies is the key to obtaining successful integration of the National Landscape Strategy into a broad range of policy areas. Each authority will be responsible for the application of the Strategy within its own area of competence. However, in order to be implemented effectively, the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht will lead its co-ordination. Overarching responsibility to co-ordinate inter-departmental delivery and implementation will be the remit of the Minister for Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht. The Minister will also be responsible for conducting a mid-term review of the strategy.

**Action 19** The Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, with the assistance of other relevant departments, agencies, core partners and stakeholders, will set in place an implementation programme to assist in the delivery of actions as set out in the Strategy.

*DAHG/Other Departments and Agencies*

## APPENDIX I

### Glossary of Terms (*European Landscape Convention definition*)

**Landscape** means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors

**Landscape Policy** means an expression by the competent public authorities of general principles, strategies and guidelines that permit the taking of specific measures aimed at the protection, management and planning of landscapes

**Landscape Character Assessment** means inter-connected data and information on the appearance, natural resources, cultural importance and economic, ecological, social and cultural potential of a landscape unit

**Landscape Protection** means actions to conserve and maintain the significant or characteristic features of a landscape, justified by its value derived from its natural configuration and/or from human activity

**Landscape Management** means action, from a perspective of sustainable development, to ensure the regular upkeep of a landscape, so as to guide and harmonise changes which are brought about by social, economic and environmental processes

**Landscape Planning** means forward-looking action to enhance, restore or create landscapes

**Historic Landscape Characterisation** identifies the contribution of the past to the landscape

**Trans-boundary** means across local, regional or national boundaries

## APPENDIX II

### Membership of National Landscape Strategy Steering Group

Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (chair)

Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government

Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport

Geological Survey Ireland

An Taisce

Coillte

County and City Managers Association

Dublin Institute of Technology

Fáilte Ireland

Farming Representatives

Heritage Council

Irish Landscape Institute

Landscape Alliance Ireland

Meath County Council

Teagasc

University College Dublin

## APPENDIX III

### Screening for Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment

#### Screening Overview of the Strategy for SEA

The text in italics after each paragraph title refers to the headings and sub-headings in Schedule 2 of S.I. 435 of 2004 - *European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004*

#### 1. What the Strategy does

*(a) An outline of the contents and main objectives of the plan or programme, or modification to a plan or programme, and relationship with other relevant plans or programmes;*

The National Landscape Strategy will be used to ensure compliance with the European Landscape Convention and to establish principles for protecting and enhancing the landscape while positively managing its change. It will provide a high level policy framework to achieve balance between the management, planning and protection of the landscape by way of supporting actions.

The Strategy has six core objectives with associated actions derived from the European Landscape Convention. The core objectives are to:

- recognise landscapes in law
- develop a National Landscape Character Assessment
- develop landscape policies
- increase landscape awareness
- identify education and training needs
- strengthen public participation

There are 19 associated actions in the Strategy - eighteen actions pertaining to each of the objectives noted above and consisting of four relating to planning, five dealing with public awareness, and the remaining on education and research. The National Landscape Character Assessment will be an important tool to provide the data and objective information required to evaluate the current state of the landscape and underpin effective spatial planning and landscape-centred decision-making

The primary role of planning authorities and the consultative roles of other bodies and persons in decision-making relating to landscape issues will continue to be governed by the provisions of the Planning and Development Acts 2000 - 2012. However, one of the objectives of the Strategy will be to assist in the achievement of greater consistency in decision making across the country when dealing with issues of landscape.

The National Landscape Strategy is a policy framework, to be led by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in collaboration with all key stakeholders, which will put in place measures at national, sectoral and local levels, together with civil society, to protect, manage and plan for the sustainable stewardship of our landscape.

## **2. The Issues that have given rise to the Strategy**

*(b) The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan or programme, or modification to a plan or programme;*

Ireland signed and ratified the Council of Europe's European Landscape Convention which came into effect on 1 March 2004. It obliges Ireland to implement policy changes and objectives concerning the protection and management of the landscape.

The Irish landscape with its multiple uses, ever-changing dynamics, constraints and expectations has been shaped by natural and human action. However the rate and extent of change has increased greatly. This has led, over the last few decades, to the introduction of policies and legislation that aim to protect, manage and plan the landscape for the common good.

The Strategy will inform and assist in the resolution of challenges arising from competing priorities in the landscape. An understanding of its composition and its dynamic interactive characteristics will assist in improving the decision making process.

## **3. The Distinctive Environmental Characteristics**

*(c) The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected;*

The European Landscape Convention defines landscape as "an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors." As such it includes all landscapes, rural and urban, peri-urban and

marine. It deals with every-day landscapes, degraded landscapes as well as those that can be considered outstanding, including the diverse natural and cultural resources which they contain.

The design of plans, policies and programmes initiated by the Strategy will be subject to SEA/AA where required, to describe in detail the environmental characteristics of the areas involved and to assess the likely significant effects on them.

#### **4. Environmental Problems to be addressed in the Strategy**

*(d) Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan or programme, or modification to a plan or programme, including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance, such as areas designated pursuant to the Birds Directive or the Habitats Directive;*

The Strategy is a policy framework which will inform and assist in the resolution of challenges arising from competing priorities when dealing with the landscape. A National Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) will be a critical first step in mapping the character and diversity of Ireland's landscapes which will ensure a consistency of approach to landscapes at local planning authority and agency levels, particularly for neighbouring planning authorities sharing the same landscape and agencies whose functions affect the character of many landscapes.

By establishing a national LCA, existing environmental challenges will be more readily identifiable to all authorities charged with landscape protection, management or planning.

#### **5. Statutory Provisions to be addressed by the Strategy**

*(e) The environmental protection objectives, established at international, European Union or national level, which are relevant to the plan or programme, or modification to a plan or programme, and the way those objectives and any environmental considerations have been taken into account during its preparation;*

The Strategy is Ireland's way of meeting our obligations and delivering on the objectives of the Council of Europe's European Landscape Convention.

It will also assist Ireland in complying with EU and national requirements to foster sustainable development and implement EU environmental directives, and assist with the implementation of Irish policy initiatives and actions.

The primary role of planning authorities and the consultative roles of other bodies and persons in decision-making relating to landscape issues will continue to be governed by the provisions of the Planning and Development Acts 2000 - 2012.

## **6. How is the Strategy likely to affect the Environment?**

*(f) The likely significant effects on the environment, including on issues such as biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between the above factors;*

The Strategy will not directly affect the environment due to the non-invasive nature of its actions. It contains objectives and actions to properly identify, assess and protect, manage and plan for the many aspects of the environment that comprise the landscape (most of which are named in (f) above), including their interrelationship.

The Strategy proposes a process of data collection, which is non-invasive – a National Landscape Character Assessment – to be presented on a national GIS platform. This will provide the data and qualitative information required to evaluate key significant effects on the environment and underpin effective spatial planning and landscape-centred decision making. The transboundary nature of the national LCA will also complement Northern Ireland's Landscape Charter.

## **7. Measures envisaged in the Strategy to prevent, reduce and offset significant adverse effects on the environment**

*(g) The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan or programme, or modification to a plan or programme;*

As this is a high level policy document with no direct intervention on the environment, no adverse effects on the environment are foreseen.

Analysis by SEA of potential adverse effects arising from implementation of specific actions of the Strategy will be carried out, as required, when they are being designed.

The effects of plans or projects to be designed and implemented under the Strategy are intended to support environmental conservation objectives.

## **8. Why this Strategy?**

*(h) An outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with, and a description of how the assessment was undertaken including any difficulties (such as technical deficiencies or lack of know-how) encountered in compiling the required information;*

The NLS is an overarching strategy, with broad objectives set out as required by the European Landscape Convention. The selection of the actions to be taken to implement these objectives, the potential alternative actions, and the impact that they will give rise to cannot be fully described in advance of fully designing each action. At the relevant stage of implementation the assessment of alternative options will be carried out and where required be screened for SEA.

## **9. Implementation and Monitoring of Strategy**

*(i) A description of the measures envisaged concerning monitoring of the significant environmental effects of implementation of the plan or programme, or modification to a plan or programme;*

Shared responsibility between departments and agencies is required for the successful integration of the National Landscape Strategy into a broad range of policy areas. Each authority will be responsible for the application of the Strategy within its own area of competence. However, overarching responsibility to coordinate inter-departmental delivery of actions , monitoring and review will be the remit of the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

## 10. Summary and Conclusion

*(j) A non-technical summary of the information provided under the above headings;*

The National Landscape Strategy is Ireland's way of meeting our obligations and delivering on the objectives of the Council of Europe's European Landscape Convention. It is a policy framework, derived from the Convention, to be designed and implemented in an integrated fashion by government departments, public authorities and civil society. It contains six core, high level objectives with associated actions. The core objectives are to:

- recognise landscapes in law
- develop a National Landscape Character Assessment
- develop landscape policies
- increase landscape awareness
- identify education and training needs
- strengthen public participation

The Strategy's high level objectives will have no direct effect on the environment. Sectoral plans, policies and programmes which are designed or revised by the implementing departments and authorities will comply fully with the requirements of the SEA Directive. The remaining objectives and actions will require further consideration and detailed design. The Strategy has been, on these grounds, screened out for SEA.

## **Screening for Appropriate Assessment**

The purpose of the National Landscape Strategy is to understand and promote the sustainable protection, management and planning of the Irish landscape, including the landscape as habitat. The Strategy is a policy framework which sets out high level objectives and actions to integrate and embed landscape considerations in all sectors which influence the landscape, and improve and enhance the quality of decision-making by those who have an impact on it. The first steps to achieve this purpose are identifying, describing and assessing the environmental resources that give the landscape its multi-dimensional character, and the forces that interact with it, including habitats. This requires the collection and compilation of data and information and the proper scientific analysis of that data in drawing conclusions and reaching decisions.

The objectives and actions will inform many plans, policies and programmes to be designed by government departments and public authorities and implemented in full compliance (where relevant) with the Habitats Directive. In view of the fact that the Strategy is set at a high level, and that further consideration is required by relevant bodies to design and implement each objective and action, this Strategy has been screened out for Appropriate Assessment.