



MAGAZINE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES ASSOCIATION OF IRELAND - AN ASSOCIATION FOR PEOPLE WORKING IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL AREA

* New ESAI web address: esaiweb.org

ESAI forum airs biodiversity concerns

The ESAI's latest annual conference and workshop, "Biodiversity - a natural national resource," was held in the Geological Survey of Ireland, Beggars Bush, Dublin, on 10th-11th November 2000. As evidenced by the large attendance and lively discussions, there is great concern over Irish biodiversity issues today. Ben Phalan, ESAI member, reports



Photographs: Ben Phalan (left), Billy Clarke (centre)



Photographs: Ken Farrar (top right), Billy Clarke (bottom)

Some Irish species (clockwise from top left): hazel catkins, red deer, ragged robin, common frog

The ESAI conference, organised by Dr Susan Iremonger with the assistance of EcoServe, brought together a diverse collection of researchers, policy-makers, educators, environmental professionals and lobbyists with an interest in biodiversity. Over 120 people attended the two-day meeting, which had a busy schedule of 30 talks by speakers from as far away as Sweden and the USA. The large turnout and lively discussions demonstrated the high level of interest in biodiversity in Ireland today.

A major theme of the conference was information. Phil McGowan (Ecoscope Applied Ecologists) reported on a Heritage Council review of the needs for biological data recording in Ireland. Only limited information exists on many aspects of biodiversity, such as fungi and most microorganism and invertebrate groups, and what is there is often not readily accessible. Ecoscope have identified 70 data-sets in Ireland (more than half held by Dúchas and BirdWatch Ireland)

and found almost unanimous support for cooperation between the bodies maintaining them.

One initiative to streamline access to biological data is the internet-based Species 2000 project, described by Frank Bisby (University of Reading). It will link species databases around the world from its website at www.sp2000.org. Éilís Nic Dhonncha (NUI Galway) outlined some of the information provided by another web-based resource, the Seaweed 2000 database (www.seaweed.ie).

The importance of the marine environment was emphasised by Mark Costello (EcoServe) who pointed out that we know least about the most diverse groups of organisms. Anthony Grehan (NUI Galway) drew attention to the threat of trawler damage to biologically-rich coral reefs in Irish waters. Paul Connolly (Fisheries Research Institute) described recovery plans for fish stocks which have been depleted by overfishing, and how problems can be avoided in the future.

Continued next page...



ENVIRON 2001

"Water and Our Environment"
Sciences Building, Dublin City University
Fri-Sat, 26th-27th January 2001

ENVIRON 2001, the 11th Irish Environmental Researchers' Colloquium, will include presentations on air, soil, water, waste technologies for remediation, agriculture, forestry, marine ecosystems, environmental management, environmental quality, food safety, policy, ethics, global issues, ecotoxicology, urban environment.

- ESAI will present the 2001 Environmental Scientist Awards for best student paper and best student poster.
- COFORD, the National Council for Forest Research and Development, will present a prize for the best forest/forestry-related presentation.
- Application forms may be downloaded from <http://www.esaiweb.org>

● Further details at:
<http://www.dcu.ie/~biology/environ2001.htm>
or email: gillian.barry@dcu.ie

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BIODIVERSITY CONFERENCE

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A problem for the collection of reliable information is the lack of training in field skills. That was just one of the obstacles identified by Don Cotton (Sligo IT) in assessing invertebrate biodiversity in Ireland. Among his suggestions were the compilation of a Red Data Book for invertebrates, and for EIA and REPS to place more emphasis on invertebrate fauna.

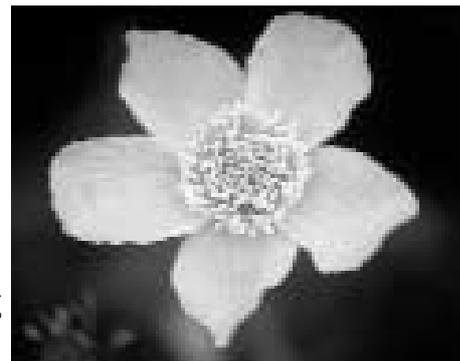
A lack of clear and reliable information on Ireland's flora and fauna limits the potential of REPS to enhance biodiversity, according to Frank Rath (Dept of Agriculture, Food & Rural Development). Although 45,000 farmers have signed up to the scheme, the majority of farmers on large-scale intensive farms (and who hence have a disproportionately large impact on biodiversity) have not, and questions were asked about the new forestry component of REPS, which could impact negatively on certain habitats.

The Forest Strategy was described by Diarmuid McAree (Forest Service). It aims to double forest cover to 17% of Ireland's land area over the next 30 years. More than two-thirds of the trees will be exotic conifers, mostly Sitka spruce. The Irish Forest Soils project (part of the Forest Inventory and Planning System, FIPS) will be used in deciding what trees to plant where, and may also be a useful source of information on existing soils and habitats for biologists. Miriam Ryan (COFORD) reported on COFORD's funding programme for the next six years, which will include research into the effects of afforestation on biodiversity.

The impact of global climate change is even more difficult to predict, but John Sweeney (NUI Maynooth) outlined some of the scenarios envisaged by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). According to IPCC estimates, sea level is likely to rise 50cm by 2100, Ireland will get 0.2°C warmer every ten years and, of perhaps greatest concern, there will be dramatic changes in rainfall patterns. An increase of up to 25% in winter precipitation is predicted for the west and midlands, which will create further flooding problems. It may get drier in summer in other areas, but this is less clear. Even if international agreement is reached soon to cut carbon emissions, it seems likely to be too little, too late.

It is already too late for the corn bunting, which dwindled to extinction in Ireland by the end of the 20th century. Other farmland birds are also declining, probably because of changes in farming methods, according to John O'Halloran (UCC). Stephen Newton (BirdWatch Ireland) reported that 14 of the 18 bird species of highest conservation concern in Ireland are affected by agriculture (see *Irish Birds* 1999: 333-344).

Shirley Clerkin (An Taisce) identified shortcomings in the government's approach to biodiversity conservation, and offered some



Photograph: Ken Farrar

Marsh marigold

solutions. She reported that Ireland has a smaller proportion of its national territory protected to strict international standards than any other OECD country, and that SAC designation and protection have yet to be adequately addressed.

Ireland could learn a lot from Wales and Northern Ireland, where cooperation between local authorities, state bodies, NGOs and other stakeholder groups is at a more advanced level.

Local Biodiversity Action Plans have been developed for many parts of Wales, while Ireland has yet to see the publication of its National Biodiversity Plan. This is due in the first half of 2001, said Philip Buckley (Dept of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and Islands). Its publication will fulfil one of Ireland's obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity, which Ireland ratified in 1996.

There isn't space here to describe every talk, let alone the posters, which included an introduction to the intriguing EcoNet Ireland project (www.econetireland.net), an atlas of Irish marine molluscs, GIS projects in the Irish Sea, and research on GM crops. With so much to take in, there was little time for discussion, but there was general agreement that biodiversity considerations must be incorporated into the agendas, policies and programmes of all sectors of government, perhaps through the establishment of a national forum.

The conference was sponsored by COFORD, Dúchas, the EPA, the Heritage Council, the Marine Institute and ARUP Environmental Engineers. The proceedings will be available in a special issue of *Biology and Environment* (from the Royal Irish Academy), due in 2002. Many papers will be published in full. ■

Articles welcome

- *EnviroNews* welcomes articles and photographs relevant to the environmental sciences in Ireland. *EnviroNews* also welcomes your letters, comments and suggestions. Please write to the editor.

Points raised by conference delegates

Dearbhala Ledwidge looks at the issues and recommendations raised by delegates to the ESAI biodiversity conference

Delegates to the ESAI biodiversity conference were invited to identify the key issues to be addressed in relation to biodiversity in Ireland.

A wealth of suggestions and recommendations were made and these may be used to inform future conferences on the same topic.

The issues raised were as varied and wide-ranging as the topic of biodiversity itself. The main points raised were as follows:

- Need for a National Biodiversity Forum as a forum for debate and developing new initiatives on biodiversity.
- Need for further conferences/workshops.
- Need for improved communication and dialogue on biodiversity to include all

- interested sectors of society.
- Research on biodiversity to be made available to the general public including landowners, media, etc, in non-scientific language and format.
- Need for greater cooperation between biodiversity initiatives in the north and south.
- Liaise with the Department of Agriculture on priority actions to encourage biodiversity in agricultural initiatives, particularly the Rural Environment Protection Scheme (REPS). ■

New ESAI website address

The ESAI website is now at: esaiweb.org

Landscape guidelines

Draft landscape guidelines for planning authorities have been published by the Department of the Environment. Dearbhala Ledwidge reports



Photograph: Paddy Dillon

Glendalough, Co Wicklow. New guidelines aim to protect important landscapes.

In June 2000, the Department of the Environment published draft guidelines for planning authorities on landscape and landscape assessment.

The new guidelines aim to promote the importance of landscape in all aspects of physical planning. They offer guidance to planners and others as to how landscape

considerations should be dealt with, and outline specific requirements for county/city development plans and for development control.

The guidelines propose that all planning authorities classify the landscapes within their jurisdictions. It should be possible for planning authorities to indicate particular landscape areas which would be suitable for particular developments. The guidelines set out the methodology to be adopted by planning authorities in classifying landscapes in their areas. The Landscape Character Assessment Method is the recommended method. The guidelines were issued for a three-month public consultation period.

- Copies of the guidelines are available from the Dept of the Environment Tel: (01) 888 2821 and from the Department's website: www.environ.ie ■

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SUBSCRIBE ESAI <first name> <surname>
in the text (and no other information).

Recent publications

Guide to Chemical Legislation in Ireland

Published by The Irish Pharmaceutical and Chemical Manufacturers Federation in association with the Health and Safety Authority
This short pamphlet outlines the legislation governing chemical import, manufacture, marketing and use in Ireland. It explains the differing legal obligations associated with new and existing substances and preparations, and outlines the classification and requirements for "dangerous" substances and preparations. It also includes a step-by-step explanation of the information contained on Material Safety Data Sheets and a list of legislation relating to the use of dangerous substances in the workplace.

- Further information and copies from: The Health and Safety Authority, 10 Hogan Place, Dublin 2 Tel: (01) 614 7000.

DL

Exploring Irish Mammals

By Tom Hayden & Rory Harrington
Published by Town House Dublin (2000)
ISBN: 1-186059-093-4 Price £20
Exploring Irish Mammals brings one up to speed with great effect on the status, distribution and biology of all our mammals, breaking new ground on bats and on whales and dolphins seen off (or on) our shores. It is impressively illustrated by Billy Clarke.

The authors adopt a highly scientific approach where one would welcome a bit more of the style and anecdotal material that made *An Irish Beast Book* by James Fairley such a compelling read.

It contains a biological history of each species, taking us back to the Woodgrange interstadial, the last warm period before the last Ice Age. A section on the history of recent extinctions such as giant Irish deer, bear, wolf, pig and arctic fox would have been welcome.

One would wish for a greater analysis of conservation issues and some discussion - not only of extinct species but of whether the wolf, for example, could ever be reintroduced. However, as a review of the status and distribution of Irish mammals, this book is a classic and will be used as a reference tool by many for years to come.

CMacL

How to excel in court

The environmental consultant as expert witness

Increasingly, environmental professionals are being called upon to appear as expert witnesses in planning appeals. Being an expert in a particular environmental discipline does not necessarily prepare one to be an expert witness. Caroline Conroy, solicitor and trainer, outlines some of the skills required to be an expert witness.

Defining 'expert witness'

How does one define an expert witness? In general, a witness is limited to giving evidence of fact only, *ie* what he observed, experienced or said. This principle is subject to certain exceptions, one of which allows experts who have the required expertise to give their opinion on issues within their field. The onus of proof on the question of the expert's 'expertise' lies with the party who calls the expert. An 'expert witness' is a person qualified and experienced in a certain field who is asked by a solicitor to give an independent opinion to the court or inquiry on facts arising within their field.

Your role as expert witness

As an expert witness, you must give your independent view on the issues arising in the case. Your opinion must be impartial even though you are paid by one side of the case. Your integrity is important: in fact, it is the most important aspect of being an expert witness. In other words, your duty is to tell the truth and assist the court by so doing. Remember, the court is relying on you to educate and assist the decision-maker with the benefit of your knowledge.

The witness box can be one of society's most hostile environments. Imagine yourself before a tough, experienced cross-examining barrister who is putting you through your paces before a judge or jury. For most, it feels like the barrister is attacking them personally whereas in fact he is just being professional and doing his job. For many, the reason is that they only have a hazy idea of what really happens in a court of law.

Presenting evidence

The evidence of an expert witness is generally in two parts, written and oral. Cases are won and lost on the way evidence is presented. The principle of what I train is that the way you present your opinion affects the weight that is given to it. Below are some of our tips on how to ensure your presentation is excellent:

Get clear instructions

It is vital to ensure that your instructions are clear. Avoid the 'please do a report' style. A poorly-instructed expert can do more harm than good. Make sure you make no assumptions. Work in partnership with the lawyers. Assist them to instruct you properly.

Clarify early on the issue of fees and expenses. Keep up to date and be familiar with developments in your area. In court, excuses don't work.

Preparation

Good preparation is vital. It will give you confidence when you get to court. Spend some time before the trial reviewing the papers and think of answers to the sort of questions you may be asked when you get to court. If there are matters to explain, consider using graphs, photographs and visual displays so that your evidence becomes clear. The simpler and more understandable, the better. Visual information makes the greatest impact. Go through this with your lawyers

beforehand.

Before the hearing, look at all the possible arguments and questions you can think of. Do not think on your feet. Thinking on your feet takes place during preparation. This will give you insights into the strengths and weaknesses of your evidence.

If you have never been to court, go and watch a hearing. Courts are generally open to the public and you will get to see what goes on. You will see how questioning is conducted and get the feel of the proceedings.

On the day itself, double-check everything before leaving for the court. Have your personal checklist. It will save you missing things in the heat of the moment. Make things easy for yourself. Arrive early at the court. Have a look around before the hearing starts. Ask your lawyer or the usher how to address the judge.

Giving first-class evidence

What should you do to give first-class evidence in court? There are some basic pointers that can help when you go to court. The skills required apply to any legal forum, including the courts and inquiries.

It is a difficult job being a judge. If you start thinking you are there to help, it will give you confidence to speak up. Generally you will be a witness and will not be on trial yourself, although you may feel that you are.

Giving oral evidence is basically in three parts. Examination in chief: when questions are asked by the counsel instructed by your instructing solicitors. Cross-examination: when questions are asked by the opposing counsel. Re-examination: when your lawyer can pick up on matters raised in cross-examination.

Clear communication

The essence of good evidence-giving is clear and simple communication. Do not be afraid to explain things in very simple terms. You are not there to impress everyone with your erudition but to help the court come to a decision based on evidence. Treat each question as a 'gift' giving you the opportunity to emphasise your professionalism.

Modulate your voice to make it interesting. Get some voice coaching if you need it! Make sure you speak loud enough for all to hear. If you are asked to examine a document, stop talking. Read, then talk. If you are asked a hypothetical question, state that your answer is equally hypothetical. Distinguish the

Golden Rules

The golden rules for an expert witness are as follows:

DO

- Stay within your expert field
- Have possible answers prepared
- Keep abreast of current knowledge in your field
- Work out answers slowly and clearly
- Address the judge when answering by sitting with feet turned slightly towards the bench
- Arrive early
- Dress smartly but not in a showy fashion

DON'T

- Argue with the barrister or engage in point scoring
- Give opinions unless asked
- Use technical terms without explaining them
- Lose your temper
- Try to think on your feet
- Compare yourself with the other expert; be confident in your own opinion.

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Irish Sea website

There is now a Marine Information System for the southern Irish Sea



A Marine Information System (MIS) gateway website was launched in Ireland and Wales last May; it's at www.irishsea-mis.org

The project is a partnership between the Irish Marine Institute, the Countryside Council for Wales, Wexford County Council and Pembrokeshire County Council. It is funded by the EU Maritime INTERREG Programme and the National Assembly for Wales.

The project seeks to highlight awareness of and access to data sources providing information on the marine and coastal environment of the southern Irish Sea. The site gives a cross-section of sample data sources, with the facility for users to log their data online. It focuses on the area between Pembrokeshire and Wexford.

According to Chris Uttley of the Countryside Council for Wales "there is already a myriad of information and data available about our coasts and seas, ranging from biodiversity to transport. What people need is easy and direct access to it."

Newsletters were issued to advertise the site and a number of regional workshops were hosted to raise awareness and gather user feedback on the form and content of the site.

Monitoring of the website and results from the feedback workshops were used to evaluate the success of the MIS. These pointed to a demand for a web-driven information system for the Irish Sea.

For the MIS to be successful in the long term, it needs a clear, user-driven focus. The project team has recommended that an advisory group be established comprised of those sectors represented on the original steering groups and other key groups identified. The advisory group would 'own' and provide direction on the development of the MIS to meet their needs. The design of the site should be reviewed by the group, taking into account the specialised needs of users.

A proactive approach is required in order to increase the data content, provide ongoing maintenance and general administration for the site and to generate further interest in it. A dedicated project officer is also recommended.

current circumstances from those of the hypothetical. Be pleasant. Do not get into point scoring with the opposing counsel. You will probably lose. Instead, get into a relationship with the judge such that he or she sees you are there to help them.

See 'critical' questions from other barristers as part of the process of testing evidence. Get support from colleagues. Ask a colleague to watch you as you give your evidence and debrief you after you have given your evidence. You can learn from every experience.

If you do not understand a question, ask the judge that it be asked again. Do not ask the lawyer but ask via the judge. If you do not know the answer to a question, say so.

Do not lose your temper as you will lose your credibility. Direct your answers to the judge. The judge makes the decision, not the cross-examining lawyer. Do not argue. You are a witness with evidence. Do not tell jokes. Leave that to the judge.

Be careful who you talk to

Sometimes a court will adjourn for lunch or at the end of the day when a witness has not finished giving their evidence. At these times, imagine you are still in the witness box. Do not speak to anyone about the case. Just as your barrister would not come up to you while you were in the witness box to talk to you about the case, so you must not talk to them or anyone else about the case outside the court.

Before and after giving your evidence be cautious of talking to others. When you get to the court building be courteous to everyone. You do not know who they might be. Do not talk about the case with anyone else unless you know who they are.

Conclusion

If you are asked to act as an expert witness, see it as part of your professional career. Take it seriously and take control of the situation from the start, *ie* from when you are instructed to when the case is concluded. As with every other part of your professional development, you have or can acquire the skills to excel as an expert witness. When the judge says, 'Thank you Mr X, now I understand the case,' you will know you have done your job well.

- Caroline Conroy is a solicitor/trainer and is MD of La Touche Bond Solon, 20, Upper Merrion Street, Dublin 2, a company which specialises in the training of expert witnesses. Tel: (01) 662 3404 Fax: (01) 662 2316 E-mail: latouche@latouche.iol.ie ■

The project team is in the process of identifying the next steps required to take the Marine Information System forward. If you would like to be involved in the process or are interested in receiving further information about the project, please contact:

- Martina Hennessy, Irish Marine Data Centre, Marine Institute, 80 Harcourt St, Dublin 2 Email: Martina.Hennessy@marine.ie Tel: (01) 476 6536 or (01) 476 6500 ■



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Conflict resolution

The potential of consensus-building for resolving disputes



Environmental projects often become the focus of intense conflict. Here, Geoffrey Corry, conflict management specialist, examines the role of consensus-building in resolving environmental disputes

Anyone travelling the roads of Ireland in recent years will have seen the home-made signs nailed to trees: "No Incinerator Here," "Say No to the Dump," "Masts are Harmful to Health," "Pylons over our Dead Bodies." Growing public anger about developments such as ESB pylons, waste management sites and motorway routes has created a new political reality for politicians, planners and developers. In many cases, they have experienced at first hand the wrath of local resident groups flexing their NIMBY muscle.

People are demanding more meaningful input into decisions that directly affect them. Resident groups are doing a lot of homework on environmental issues and learning about their rights.

At the same time, local authorities have had to embrace the concept of sustainable development under the pressure of the world Agenda 21 and Ireland's EU obligations. This has imposed big responsibilities to provide comprehensive waste management systems. Also, the needs of our Celtic tiger economy have pushed politicians to speed up the time it takes for large infrastructural projects to get through the planning system. Some road schemes have taken five or more years to get started. Add to this the cost of legal action: Wicklow Co Council has spent £10 million defending its planning decisions, a sum it could well use on environmental schemes. Huge legal costs have been incurred over Mutton Island in Galway, and over Mullaghmore in the Burren.

Non-adversarial approach

It is time to review the way complex, multi-party disputes are resolved. The adversarial approach is not only costly but the planning appeals, tribunals and court actions put the focus on procedural issues rather than reconciling the concerns of competing interests. When court decisions are handed down, they are frequently based on narrow grounds, leaving important issues unresolved. The win/lose adversarial system does not allow alternatives and non-planning trade-offs to be considered. Had a round-table consensus-making process been used, a very different outcome and set of circumstances would have prevailed.

I have been involved for a number of years with the Consensus-building Initiative set up by the Centre for Dispute Resolution (CDR), a non-profit independent organisation committed to the development of alternative dispute resolution approaches for commercial, business and multi-party conflicts. It seeks to promote creative and innovative solutions to complex planning and environmental problems by bringing all impacted parties and stakeholders together in round-table

negotiations. By making available technical knowledge and expertise at the table, and facilitating joint problem-solving, tough issues get resolved to everyone's satisfaction. When used in appropriate situations, consensus-building is cost-effective. It builds working relationships between stakeholder groups that sustain the implementation of the agreement long after it has been signed.

CDR facilitators designed the consultation process for the EU pilot project in coastal zone management at Bantry Bay, a partnership between Cork Co Council, UCC Coastal Resource Centre and the CIT Nautical Enterprise Centre. We are currently working on building a public consultation process between Dublin Port and resident groups on both sides of Dublin Bay, over plans to reclaim land for deep-sea berthing facilities.

Two-stage process

The starting point is to recognise that fundamental values and intense emotion are involved in resource conflicts. We must find better ways of listening to opposing points of view so that we can accommodate sectional interests and groups who hold deeply-held and differing values. We are convinced that a more effective public participation process at the pre-planning stage would reduce the number of post-decisional appeals. Opportunities for using consensus processes also exist at other stages of decision-making - from the pre-appeals hearing stage or the pre-court hearing stage to long-range planning and the establishment of broad policies and regulations between stakeholder groups.

In the Bantry Bay Charter project, the CDR team first met with all the stakeholders in the bay as part of a fact-finding exercise, to generate an agenda for the consensus-building forum. It also helped disparate groups to have their frustrations heard and their list of concerns circulated to all the participating groups in an anonymous way. Following further consultations with CDR, a set of ground rules for the round-table was developed and the seats allocated to stakeholder groups.

Two factors are important here. Any round-table needs to be as inclusive as possible by ensuring representation of all affected parties - local groups, environmental organisations, business interests and public officials. Secondly, those who attend must have the authority of their group to negotiate and arrive at a consensus. All decision-making is consensual: this creates a culture of shared power, shared expertise and shared responsibility.

The second phase starts once the round-table is

convened. When the agenda of main topics are agreed, the round-table breaks down into joint working groups to work on each topic. In Bantry Bay, this included issues around water quality, ballast water management, shoreline access and marine tourism. Reports from each of the working groups then come back into the round-table where they are strung into an overall package of agreements between stakeholder groups. The consensus should give all those participating more than they could achieve by acting alone or by using any other process.

Consensus-builder

In the public mind, the role of consensus-builder may be interchangeable with that of facilitator or mediator, but these two roles are different:

- A facilitator provides a neutral ground to defuse a charged political atmosphere, keeps the discussion moving and enables all parties to have their concerns expressed and heard.
- A mediator goes further by helping parties examine issues in depth and by generating all-gain solutions; ways are identified by which the parties can move forward, find places where they can agree and get the outcome written into a consensus report.

Trying it out

For such a process to gain ground, there is a lot of work to be done in educating public leaders in how negotiation and a more informal problem-solving forum can manage resource conflicts. Changing how public officials act will not be easy. They will want to see such a process succeed before trying it. A lot of experience has been gained by the Consensus-building Institute in Boston and the Environment Council in the UK, and they have produced successful outcomes in all cases.

There are big possibilities here for public authorities to move away from their traditional way of announcing decisions on the siting of public utilities and defending those decisions in the teeth of local opposition. There is a growing recognition that they can no longer act alone on problems that threaten all of us. Instead of reacting to events and managing a crisis, a more strategic approach is required. Public service managers need to fashion a new style of leadership that relies less on command and more on indirect persuasion strategies. Complex problems require solutions that emerge from shared power, expertise and resources. By enabling informal networks to emerge around local issues, a consensus-building round-table can be created involving all stakeholders and agencies who have a responsibility, big or small, for the problem.

● Geoffrey Corry is a conflict management specialist. He is a director of the Centre for Dispute Resolution, chairman of the Mediators Institute Ireland and a practitioner member of the Academy of Family Mediators. Tel: 087-235 1792 Email: corry@indigo.ie

● A copy of the Bantry Bay Coastal Zone Charter can be obtained from Áras Beantraí, Wolfe Tone Square, Bantry, Co Cork Tel: (027) 52088 Email: bantrybaycharter@eircom.net www.ucc.ie/ucc/research/crc/pages/Life/pages/index.html

The ESAI in action

Compiled by Dearbhala Ledwidge

Irish Sea Forum

The ESAI is presently negotiating with the Irish Sea Forum about co-hosting a workshop on climate change early in 2001. Details will be posted on our website.

Submission on EU policy

The ESAI lodged a wide-ranging submission on EU policy with the European Commission last April, in light of the forthcoming Sixth EU Environmental Action Programme. Our key recommendations were as follows:

- The ESAI expressed its support for integrating environmental policies within Europe's main sectoral policies, and it recommended the integration of impacts on biodiversity into all policies and funding measures.
- The Council made recommendations on issues relating to environmental education, including advocating the establishment of an active educational programme in awareness of environmental concerns for all EU citizens and including a 'green' curriculum in all EU-funded educational programmes.
- The Council urged the EU to improve legislation governing Environmental Impact Assessments and Statements (EIAs and EISs). Specifically, it was recommended that there should be more explicit guidelines on data required to support predictions of impacts, and that regular sectoral reviews of EISs be undertaken in each member state.

Comhar progress questioned

Comhar was set up in 1999 as an advisory group to the Minister for the Environment with a brief to "advance the national agenda for sustainable development." It is composed of representatives from five sectoral groups or nominating panels. ESAI interests on Comhar are represented by Dr Richard Moles who sits on the Professional/Academic panel.

In October 2000, the ESAI wrote to Comhar enquiring as to what mechanism the body operates to source scientific information on ways and means of advancing the sustainability agenda, and requesting an opportunity to present an outline of the work of the ESAI.

The ESAI also urged Comhar to host a conference that would provide a platform for funnelling the fruits of scientific research into decision-making on sustainable development. The Council has as yet received no reply from Comhar.

The progress of Comhar will be reviewed in greater depth in a future *ENVIRONEWS*. ■

Views, opinions welcomed

The ESAI Council welcomes views and comments from all members on any submissions made on behalf of ESAI. If you would like the council to include your views on any future submissions, keep an eye on the website and listserver for details of forthcoming submissions.



Mark Costello departs for Canada

Chris Emblow

At the forthcoming AGM, we will see the chairman of the ESAI, Dr Mark Costello, leaving the committee for the first time since its formation.

Mark was a founder member of the ESAI in 1995 whilst lecturing in environmental sciences in Trinity College, Dublin. Since then he has been a continual member of the ESAI council, holding the position of *ENVIRONEWS* editor before taking over as chairman in 1998.

Mark left Trinity College to establish a private environmental consultancy company, Ecological Consultancy Services Ltd (EcoServe), in 1996. In the summer of 2000, he was offered the position of executive director of the Huntsman Marine Science Centre in New Brunswick, Canada, and left Ireland in October. Although Mark returned to Ireland for the recent ESAI biodiversity workshop, he felt it necessary that he relinquish the chair of ESAI at the next annual general meeting in January 2001.

The ESAI council would like to thank Mark for all his work with and dedication to the ESAI and to wish him success in his new position.

ESAI AGM

The ESAI AGM will be held at the Environmental Researchers' Colloquium in Dublin on 26th January - in Room XG 20, Science Building, DCU, at 6.00pm.

The AGM will include an open discussion, providing an opportunity for you to influence the work of the ESAI, and will elect a new Council. All members are urged to attend.

Call for new ESAI Council members

There are ten vacant ESAI Council posts to be filled at the AGM.

Members who wish to play a more active role are encouraged to stand for election to the Council. Anyone who has been a member for at least one year and who is nominated by two members is eligible to apply.

If you would like to become a member, please leave your name and details with Mary Brennan, Council Secretary, before the start of the AGM. Any Council member will be happy to answer any queries or questions you may have regarding nomination, etc. ■

Careers brochure launched

Shirley Gallagher reports on a new ESAI career guidance initiative

The availability of third-level courses in the environmental sciences has been addressed by ESAI on a number of occasions in the past - for example in our annual workshop in 1999, *Contribution of Third-level Colleges to Training of Environmental Professionals in Ireland*, and the summary of courses compiled for *ENVIRONEWS* by Mary Savage in the same year.

ESAI has now produced a special brochure listing the environmental courses available in Ireland. It was launched at our biodiversity workshop in Dublin in November 2000 during National Science Week.

The brochure highlights the variety of career prospects in this area and the often highly specialised careers available to those who enter this field. The brochure provides information only; we have insufficient information at this time to recommend any course over another.

It is hoped to distribute the brochure to

second- and third-level institutions and to libraries, and to update it on an annual basis. Future editions may include relevant organisations, professions and employment prospects. We would be grateful for feedback on ways to improve the brochure and its distribution.

On a related topic, discussions are underway regarding the possibility of adding links to educational establishments to the ESAI website (esaiweb.org) and possibly adding sound-bites from environmental professionals.

As there is no official definition of environmental professions in Ireland, ESAI is planning to form a professional body. In years to come, this body will provide national statistics on the environmental labour force in Ireland.

- Copies of the brochure available from Sinéad Macken, ESAI Treasurer (see page 2). ■

Conferences

Websites

Econet Ireland

A study of the needs associated with a national ecological network for Ireland has been commissioned by the EPA from Compass Informatics Ltd.

It is being carried out to support the aims of biodiversity conservation within the National Spatial Strategy being prepared by the Department of the Environment. The outcome will be a map, generated using Geographic Information Systems (GIS), of a preliminary ecological network for Ireland. All interested individuals and organisations are invited to participate in structured discussions.

Go to the discussion forum at: www.econetireland.net/econet_forum.html

All participants in the discussion forum will be automatically entered in a monthly draw.

'Hot' journals

Researchers may be curious to see what journals are 'hottest' in terms of citations at the following website: www.isinet.com/isi/hot/research. It even has a page on Science in Ireland 1994-98: www.isinet.com/isi/hot/research/199942/a

Arctic char

The Irish Char Conservation Group was set up in January 2000. If you would like to find out more, have a look at the site: <http://charrsoc.tripod.com> or contact: iccg@oceanfree.net

If you have any information about char in Ireland, the ICCG would be delighted to receive it as they are trying to compile a database of all char records on this island.

Wildlife (Amendment) Act

The Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000 was signed into law on 18th December 2000. A report on any substantial amendments to the Bill and a commentary on the implications of the Bill will be included in a future issue of the newsletter. ■

Coastwatch: A one-day legal workshop on coastal and marine waste

19 January 2001

International workshop providing update on practical aspects of marine and coastal waste management legislation. Organised by Coastwatch Ireland in association with Dept of the Marine & Natural Resources and Keep Wales Tidy Group as part of INTERREG Clean Seas Project.

• Contact: Karin Dubsy, Coastwatch, TCD
Tel: (055) 25843 Email: dubsy@iol.ie

3rd Irish Bat Conference

18-20 May 2001, Portumna, Co Galway.

A weekend of bat talks, workshops and bat detector walks aimed at anyone with an interest in bats. To be held in the Shannon Oaks Hotel, Portumna, Co Galway.

• Contact: (091) 794435 or 086-817 3073. ■

County council websites reviewed

A review of Irish county council websites was recently concluded by the Nature Ireland listserver (natureireland@egroups.com). The table below shows which have websites up and running, which websites have their county development plan available online and which provide access to information on planning applications. The website addresses for each county council can be found at www.irlgov.ie/

Meath Co Council are about to put a planning archive database online which will retrospectively include all planning applications and decisions since 1986.

County council	Planning applications	County development plan
Clare	(in prep)	
Cork	yes	yes
Donegal	yes	yes
Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown	no	no
Fingal	no	yes
Galway	(in prep)	
Kerry	(in prep)	
Kildare	no	yes
Kilkenny	(in prep)	
Laois	no	no
Leitrim	(in prep)	
Mayo	yes	(in prep)
Meath	yes	yes
Monaghan	no	no
Offaly	no	no
Sligo	no	no
South Dublin	yes	yes
Wexford	no	no
Wicklow	no	no

Red-listed species of the world

www.redlist.org/

This website is the 2000 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. It provides taxonomic, conservation status and distribution information on taxa that have been evaluated using the IUCN Red List Categories. The site incorporates data on plants and animals into a single red list which will be updated annually. The list of threatened species is maintained in a searchable database.

All assessments are of the taxon as a whole, ie they indicate global risk of extinction. No national or regional red lists are included.

The site includes a hierarchical list of categories of threats and a list of habitat types. As there is no globally accepted habitat classification system, the IUCN uses one based on the US Geological Service Earth Resources Observation System Data Center. This is largely focussed on terrestrial systems, so freshwater and marine habitats are poorly classified, if at all.

British trees

british-trees.com

This website provides a guide to 33 native British trees (including many native Irish species) with basic but useful information for each species on topics such as description, habitat, natural distribution, methods of propagation and growth, uses of wood and uses for food and drink.

The related information, such as lists of relevant organisations, bibliographies and links to relevant sites, is predominantly of UK interest.

Fisheries website

The Central Fisheries Board has launched its new web-site: <http://www.cfb.ie>

Biodiversity site

A Biodiversity Support Programme website established by WWF and others has lots of information of biodiversity conservation. It's at: BSPonline.org

Woodlands website

nativewoodtrust.ie

The website of the Native Woodland Trust, a new organisation aiming to protect and enlarge Irish native woodlands and establish new areas of native woodland. The site lists the projects which the Trust is engaged in or planning, including a Red List project, a cross-border woodland and a woodland bird repopulation project. With links to other relevant websites.

The Trust plans to use the site to make the information in its database of ancient woodlands accessible to the public. In addition, it aims to have a complete index of all tree species native to Ireland and information on the types of woodland found in Ireland. ■