

Final Report





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An Roinn Tithíochta,
Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreacht
Department of Housing,
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Hi! Introduction

In October 2022, Ireland held its first Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss. Designed with children and young people, the Assembly brought together 35 randomly selected members aged 7-17 from across Ireland to explore, discuss and create calls to action on how to protect and restore biodiversity in Ireland.

The convening of the Children and Young People's Assembly took place at a watershed moment for nature and biodiversity. During the first Earth Summit of 1992,¹ world leaders highlighted the continuing deterioration of the ecosystems on which we depend for our well-being. Despite talks and steps in the right direction, our ecosystems continue to be at risk.

Policy choices made on nature and biodiversity today will profoundly affect children, young people and future generations across a wide range of issues, including soil fertility, water quality, flood mitigation, and climate mitigation and adaptation.

All over the world, children and young people themselves are demanding to be included in decision-making that will protect nature, the environment and their future. This generation may well be the last with the opportunity to reverse the damage that has been done to the natural world and restore balance to our ecosystems.

Over the past decade, Ireland has developed a strong reputation for the inclusion of the voices of the adult population in policy making through citizens' assemblies. In February 2022, the Government of Ireland approved the establishment of a citizens' assembly on biodiversity loss. Between May 2022 and January 2023, 99 randomly selected adults (18 years old and above) came together for a series of meetings to learn, discuss and make recommendations to the Irish government on "how the State can improve its response to the issue of biodiversity loss".



Ireland's Children and
Young People's Assembly
on Biodiversity Loss



There is increasing international interest in how citizens' assemblies can be effective mechanisms for realising children and young people's participation rights. Such mechanisms can foster intergenerational dialogue on issues directly affecting all members of society. Much of this interest stems from learnings from Scotland's Climate Assembly, which was the first to directly involve the views and ideas of children under 16 through a partnership with the Children's Parliament in Scotland.²

Recognising this, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, commissioned the design and delivery of a Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss with the aim of meaningfully realising children and young people's participation rights and creating a space for intergenerational dialogue on how Ireland will protect its biodiversity.

"At the outset, when Ireland's Citizens' Assembly was being developed for biodiversity, I felt it vitally important that young people had a meaningful voice in how we develop biodiversity policy. I see that young people in particular have a viewpoint that is really worth capturing to feed into the next National Biodiversity Action Plan and what Ireland is going to do to respond to the biodiversity crisis.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children states that we must include the voices of children and young people. It's a fundamental right. But it must be done in a way that is meaningful. It can't be tokenistic. We can't be ticking boxes and saying we have consulted with young people. They need to have their voices included.

This is an anxious time for children and young people. They're seeing huge global changes in climate, around biodiversity. I think it's important that they're able to articulate that and be in a position to also say 'Here are our solutions. This is what we can do, and this is the world that we want to see.' "

- Malcolm Noonan T.D., Minister of State for Heritage and Electoral Reform



This report tells the story of the Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss - how it was formed, how we worked together, and what the Assembly produced. We hope you enjoy reading about our journey!



The Project Team

The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage commissioned an independent research consortium to design and run the Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss. The project consortium was led by Dublin City University (DCU) and involved University College Cork (UCC), and terre des hommes (tdh), an international organisation with a focus on children's environmental rights. The consortium brought together leading national and international experts across the fields of environmental governance and deliberative democracy; children's rights, participation, and education studies; and biodiversity and nature. [Meet the team here!](#)

Too often, processes and institutions for children and young people's participation are designed by adults. In order to take seriously our obligation to realise children and young people's rights to have a say in matters that affect them, we sought to create an **intergenerational project team** that included children and young people, as well as the adults in the project team. This was essential to making sure the Assembly was designed and delivered in a way that worked for children and young people.

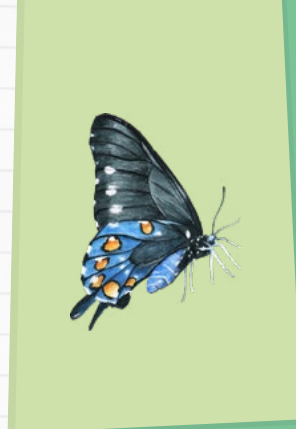
In May 2022, we invited children and young people across Ireland who are passionate about nature, the environment and biodiversity to apply to be a **Young Advisor** in this process. In June 2022, we welcomed 9 Young Advisors aged 8-16 into the team.

Twice a month, the Young Advisors met with the adults in the project team online to co-design the Assembly process.

This included:

- 1 Learning about deliberative democracy and exploring meaningful participation processes.
- 2 Advising the adult project team members on how to create an inclusive and fair selection process for Assembly members - and helping us to spread the word to children and young people across Ireland.
- 3 Co-creating activities and materials to be used for the Assembly.

One of the questions we have been asked is why we chose such a broad age range (7-17) for the Assembly members. It was the Young Advisors' idea! Our youngest Young Advisor felt we should welcome 7 year olds to the process because so often younger children are excluded and, from her experience, 7 year olds would be able to fully participate with the right support in place. This was agreed upon by the wider team.



Filming →

Art ↘



In between the online meetings, the intergenerational project team worked together using online collaboration tools to bring the ideas and vision to life. We then all came together for a weekend residential in September where we worked together on the design of, and preparations for, the two Assembly weekends. This included preparing for how we would create a special, welcoming and joyful atmosphere, how we would work together as co-facilitators, and what we all needed to do (and look out for) to keep everyone happy, healthy and safe.

"I think the Assembly was very meaningful because of meeting other children who were just as interested in biodiversity as me in the Young Advisory Team. It was also really nice to meet people who work in biodiversity who taught us about it and we got to go to nature reserves and just be in biodiversity."

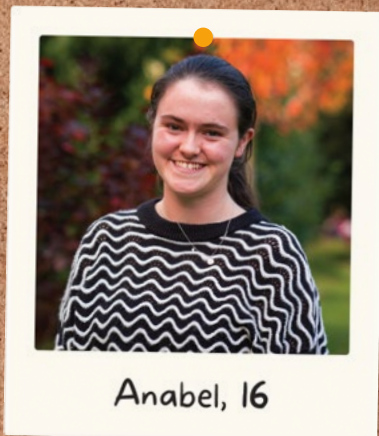
Young Advisor, age 13

The Young Advisors joined for the two Assembly weekends, though they were not formally members of the Assembly. During the two weekends, the Young Advisors each took on different roles that they felt comfortable and excited to lead on. This included co-facilitating activities and group work, capturing the Assembly through film, photography and mural illustrations, encouraging and supporting Assembly members, and even making name badges for all special guests.

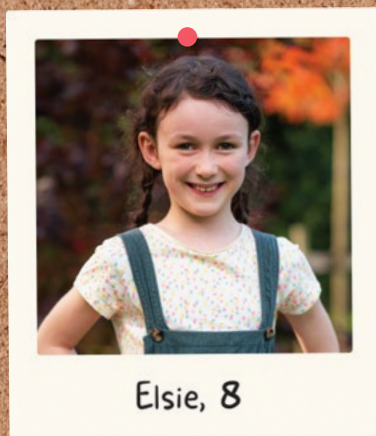


Photography →





Anabel, 16



Elsie, 8



Fiach, 10



Amhairghin, 15



Jesse, 13



Jordan, 10



Marlie, 12



Niamh, 16



Síofra, 12



A Message from the Young Advisors

It is so important that children and young people in Ireland can have their say on biodiversity loss because we are the ones who are going to have to live with whatever happens. Whatever changes are made, we are the ones who will feel the impacts and live with the results, whether they are good or bad.

The Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss has been a special journey for all of us. Although everyone came from different backgrounds and some did not know much about biodiversity at the beginning, we were all there because we wanted to make a difference. Many of us felt we were participating in a unique, democratic moment for nature.

Making friends with each other at the Assembly helped us to work together, and to listen to each other. There was a warm atmosphere of closeness and respect throughout the whole process so that everyone felt heard. The empathy sparked from these feelings was the driving force behind the calls to action that were made.

Many adults don't think children are capable of achieving something like this, but this proves that we can do anything and we have amazing ideas to share. Children and young people should be involved in future citizens' assemblies because we are part of society and everyone deserves to have a say. Our voices need to be heard, especially about issues that are as important as this. We think differently to adults. Our thoughts and ideas should be included if adults want to use all chances to solve the biodiversity crisis. We need to, and want to, be part of the solutions to those problems.

So, what happens now? We want the Assembly's recommendations to be taken on board and taken seriously so it has immediate and long-term impacts for the issue of biodiversity loss in Ireland. This includes the government implementing the Assembly's ideas into policy.

We want the Assembly to be remembered, and for there to be more opportunities for children and young people to share our views and ideas. This is a historic moment for Ireland's climate and nature action and shouldn't just be forgotten.

When reading this report, we want you to feel everything that we (our project team and the Assembly members) felt during the process. But instead of feeling despair about the situation, we want you to feel inspired and determined to be part of the solutions, and full of hope because we can all make a difference.

A Child Rights-Based Approach

At the heart of our approach was a commitment to realising children's rights, as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Biodiversity loss is a children's rights issue, not least because of its impact on children and young people's rights to grow up in clean, healthy, and safe environments now and in the future. Children and young people have the right to be educated and informed on such matters, and to have opportunities to have their say – and be taken seriously – in decisions being made.

Ireland has a longstanding commitment to upholding the rights of children and young people, having ratified the UNCRC in 1992. Under the UNCRC, it is the responsibility of decision-makers to include children and young people as active participants in the development of forthcoming policy-making regarding biodiversity restoration in Ireland.

From the outset, the project team took a child-rights based approach to the design and delivery of the Assembly. We continuously reflected on how to ensure the process would enable children and young people of diverse backgrounds and ages to participate in meaningful, although sometimes different, ways, whilst ensuring that every child and young person was safe, supported and well throughout.

Our Young Advisors' views and ideas about what the Assembly would look and feel like to children and young people were key to the project team's implementation of a child rights-based approach underpinning this project. They emphasised

The UNCRC defines a child as an individual under 18 years of age. We use the phrase 'children and young people' recognising that older children often use 'young people' to describe themselves. However, when using 'children and young people', we are still referring to all those under 18 years of age.

the need to ensure the Assembly weekends were fun, enjoyable, active and creative. They also developed a code of conduct and top tips for the adults involved, highlighting what would help children and young people feel included, respected, valued and listened to.

Reflecting on their own experiences engaging in environmental and biodiversity issues, the Young Advisors also provided invaluable insights into how to ensure our process would support all children and young people to feel empowered and hopeful. With a known rise in eco-anxiety amongst children and young people, we were well aware that children and young people could feel upset or worried as a result of discussing issues related to biodiversity loss. Whilst not shying away from the realities of the biodiversity crisis, we took active steps to ensure activities were designed and facilitated in a solutions-focused way as far as possible, and that children and young people were able to discuss sensitive, difficult topics in a safe, supported and nurturing environment.

Finally, our approach was designed to support the children and young people involved (both Young Advisors and Assembly members) to better understand their rights, so that they are able to influence relevant actors with the changes they feel are needed for children and young people to fully enjoy their rights. This is reflected in their vision, key messages and calls to action, all of which came from the children and young people themselves.



Our Journey

After several months of intensive planning and design work by the intergenerational project team (adult research consortium working in conjunction with the Young Advisors), the Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss took place in October 2022. In this section, we chart the project timeline from September to November 2022, incorporating the Assembly member recruitment process and post-Assembly engagement with the national Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss involving members of the adult population, which was also running during this time.

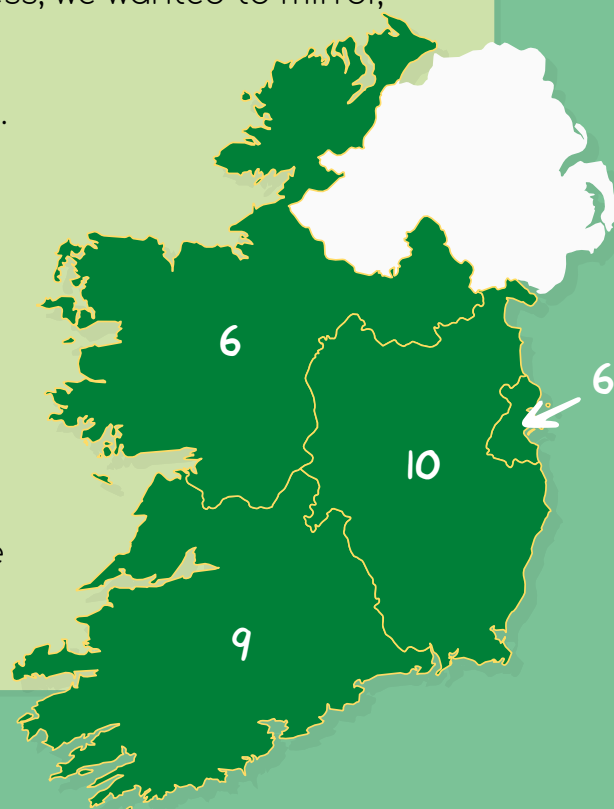
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Selection of Assembly Members

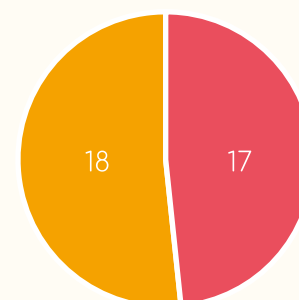
In September 2022, children and young people aged 7-17 from across Ireland were invited to register their interest in being an Assembly member. The closing date for applications was 18 September. 510 expressions of interest were received, from which 35 Assembly members were selected by a **stratified representative sampling process**.

How did the stratified representative sampling work?

Many of the standard recruitment processes generally used for adult citizens' assemblies (for example, using randomly generated phone numbers or postal addresses) are difficult to apply to selecting children and young people. Nonetheless, we wanted to mirror, in as far as possible, the selection practices of adults' citizens' assemblies in Ireland. Using data from the 2016 Census³, we generated the total-population proportions for six characteristics (Gender, Age, Geography, Ethnicity, Disability and Urban-Rural) and used a computer algorithm to select a random sample of 35 from the total pool of 510 applicants, stratified by these six characteristics.

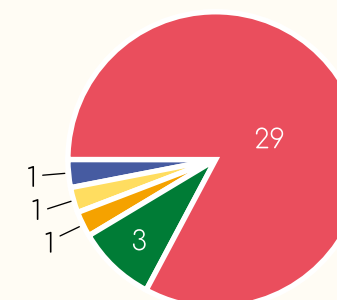


Gender



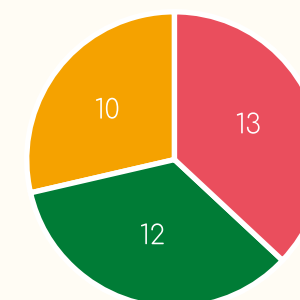
● Male ● Female

Ethnicity



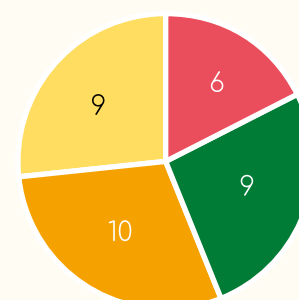
● White Irish ● Any other White background
● Black or Black Irish ● Asian or Asian Irish
● Other including mixed background

Urban-rural



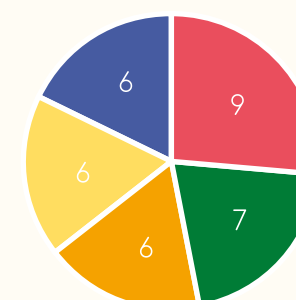
● City
● Town/village
● Rural area

Geography



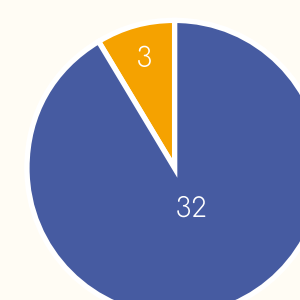
● Dublin ● Connaught/Ulster
● Munster ● Rest of Leinster

Age



● 7-8 years ● 9-10 years
● 11-12 years ● 13-14 years
● 15-17 years

Disability



● Persons with a disability
● Persons without a disability

Designing activities



Assembly Onboarding

To welcome the 35 Assembly members on board, the project team held a welcome online gathering. Everyone got to know each other and the five **Family Groups** chose their team mascots!

What is a Family Group?

Each Assembly member was placed in what we called a 'Family Group' with children of approximately the same age. Each Family Group also had a much-loved mascot. The purpose of Family Groups was to enable the children and young people to connect with others of the same age, and receive age-appropriate wellbeing support throughout the Assembly process. Our Young Advisors were also included as participants in the groups, rather than co-facilitators. Regular Family Group check-ins and team-building activities took place across the two Assembly weekends.



Open Submissions

Acknowledging that the nature of the random selection process would limit the opportunities for other children and young people to share their views, we invited all children and young people aged 0-17 across Ireland to submit their views and ideas to our Open Submissions on the Assembly's web page. You can read more about the submissions received at cyp-biodiversity.ie.

OCT

Assembly Weekend 1

Our first Assembly weekend took place at the Glenree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation, Co. Wicklow on 8th-9th October 2022.

Independent Investigations

Between the two Assembly weekends, the Assembly members were tasked with carrying out their own independent investigation in their communities, using a 'mission pack' created by the project team.

Assembly Weekend 2

Our second Assembly weekend took place at Killarney House and Gardens, Co. Kerry on 22nd - 23rd October 2022. Assembly members presented their vision statement, key messages and calls to action to Malcolm Noonan T.D., Minister of State for Heritage and Electoral Reform.

Presentation to the Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss

On 5th November 2022, six Assembly members presented their experiences and the Assembly's vision statement, key messages, and calls to action to the Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss in Malahide, Co. Dublin. A film capturing the Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss was shown.

More Info:

Assembly Weekend 1

Independent Investigations

Assembly Weekend 2

[Click here](#)



Watch the video



Weekend 1: Learning and Deliberation

The first Assembly weekend took place at Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation in the beautiful surroundings of Co. Wicklow on 8th– 9th October 2022. The first weekend was focused on allowing everyone to get to know each other (there was a lot of excitement and nerves too!), and introducing the core ideas of children's rights and deliberative democracy, biodiversity, and the drivers of biodiversity loss. Below, we outline each of the activities that took place across the two days.

Session 1: What are Children's Rights?

Session led by Dr. Aoife Daly (UCC), Katie Reid (tdh), and Valery Molay (DCU)

This session supported Assembly members to explore the connection between children's rights, biodiversity, and participating in decision-making processes. It was important for Assembly members to explore and understand their rights before delving into the subject of biodiversity, as this was fundamental to their participation in the entire process.

Assembly members learned about the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the 'Lundy Model' which sets out how children's participation rights can be meaningfully realised.⁴

The session included activities developed with the Young Advisors:

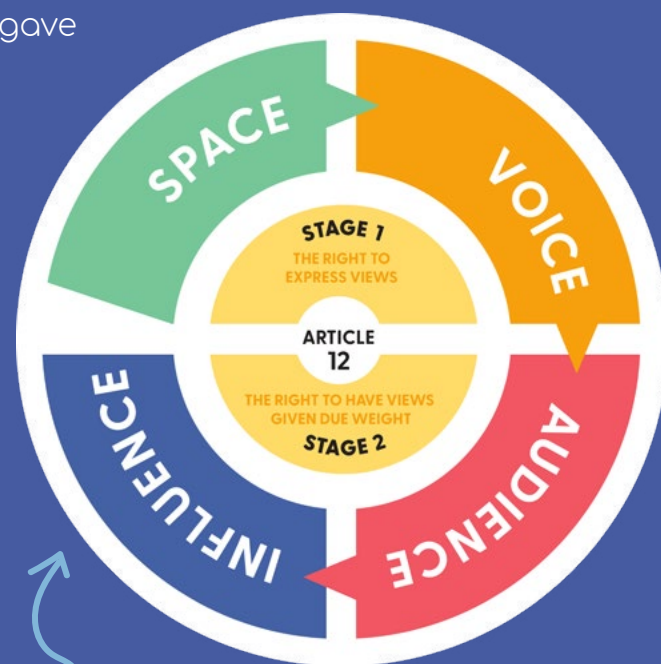
- 'People bingo' helped the Assembly members to identify how different articles of the UNCRC connect to their daily lives.
- 'Agree and disagree' gave Assembly members the space to discuss their ideas of what makes children and young people's participation in decision-making meaningful.



Agree and disagree

"On the subject of children's rights, I don't think it is just about children being heard. I think it is also about children being taken seriously."

Assembly member



Lundy Model

Session 2: What is Biodiversity Loss?

Session led by Dr. Darren Clarke, Dr. Jimmy O'Keeffe (DCU) and Kate Harrington, Trinity College Dublin (TCD)

To build understanding among Assembly members, this session introduced the topic of biodiversity, emphasising its importance and fragility. Reflecting on their learning, Assembly members were asked to describe, in their own words, what biodiversity meant to them:



A key part of this session involved discussing the many connections that exist between the natural and human environments. The session facilitators highlighted this by using examples of how elephants in the Congo Basin create forest clearings where corncrakes – a migratory bird that visits Ireland – spend the winter. The session also focused on the many different habitats in Ireland, from bogs to woodlands to water bodies, and the fact that much of our biodiversity is hidden. The session activities highlighted the impacts humans can have on species and in driving biodiversity loss, including habitat loss, pollution, invasive species, overexploitation and climate change.

Although many Assembly members did not know the scientific terms to describe biodiversity loss, the majority were able to demonstrate a basic understanding that many plants, animals and other species, including their habitats, are at risk. As their discussions evolved, many demonstrated a clear understanding of the link between human activities and the current state of our ecosystems. Many Assembly members also spoke of biodiversity as an essential part of human survival:

"Biodiversity gives us life and keeps us alive."

"If we didn't have biodiversity, we'd all be gone."

"Nature gives us food, oxygen, fertile soil, raw materials, habitat for wildlife and carbon sinks."

In their discussions, many Assembly members highlighted that keeping our ecosystem healthy was the only way to keep the benefits nature gives us.

Most Assembly members saw biodiversity as a global issue. In discussions, several referred to cases of biodiversity loss both in Ireland and in other parts of the world. It was clear that many Assembly members thought restoring biodiversity is important, not just because it affects humans, but rather because plants and animals are living things and therefore deserve protection in their own right.

Session 3: Nature Walk

*Led by Andrea Webb and Olivia Carrington
(National Parks and Wildlife Service)*

Similar to individuals developing empathy in their interactions with each other, spending time in nature has been shown to inspire and motivate engagement in environmentally protective behaviour⁵. We were blessed with beautiful autumnal weather on our first day, which allowed us to get outside to experience and learn about the incredibly rich biodiversity on our doorstep firsthand. Assembly members spent the afternoon exploring Knocksink Wood nature reserve through a guided walk and scavenger hunt.

"The nature walk was my favourite part of the weekend. We saw all sorts of fungus, different trees and berries. It was so nice to see just how many species were living in the forest."



"I loved the nature walk. We got to play with leaves and lots of fun games."

"I really liked the nature walk because we got to go on a walk with nature all around us. I learned so much about the biodiversity of the area."



Session 4: What are the Five Drivers of Biodiversity Loss?

Theme Groups facilitated by Valery Molay (DCU), Dr. Jimmy O’Keeffe (DCU), Dr. Darren Clarke (DCU), Dr. Diarmuid Torney (DCU), Dr. Ben Mallon (DCU), Rowan Oberman (DCU), Kate Harrington (TCD), Martina O’Brien (National Biodiversity Data Centre).

What is a Theme Group?

Biodiversity can feel like a daunting and complicated topic to explore because it relates to the vast variety of living things that exist on our planet. To make sure that Assembly members were not overwhelmed, the children and young people were placed into one of five **Theme Groups**. Each Theme Group specialised in a key driver of biodiversity loss, defined by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES):⁶ **habitat loss, climate change, invasive species, overexploitation and pollution**. Unlike the Family Groups, each Theme Group was made up of children and young people of all ages.

Each group was tasked with exploring the link between their assigned driver and biodiversity loss. Using different creative, participatory activities and resources, Assembly members were guided by project team facilitators to better understand their driver and its impact on the natural world. Assembly members were encouraged to look at both problems and solutions related to their theme.

Habitat Loss

We were looking at different habitats and how they can be destroyed. We watched a video about why we shouldn’t cut down forests. There were also other videos about not overfishing.

Assembly member, age 7



Climate Change

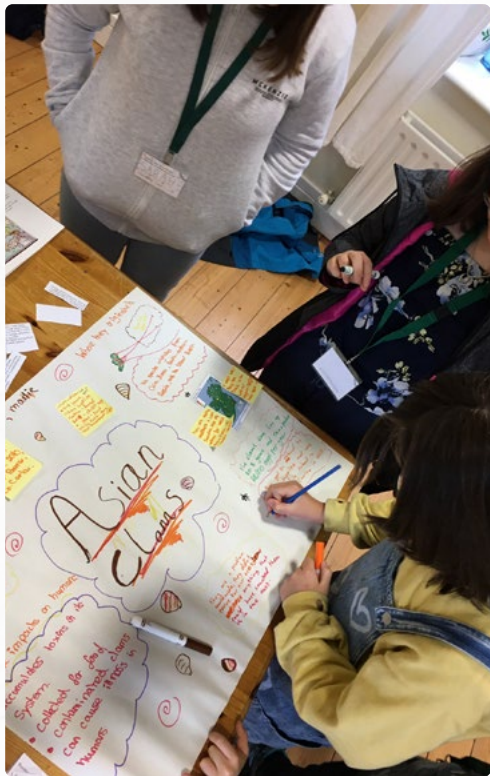
In our group, we learned that you cannot really separate climate change from biodiversity loss and pollution. It is all part of the one problem. We played a game with monopoly money and we all had to ditch out money to different businesses that we thought would help solve the biodiversity crisis.

Assembly member, age 13

Invasive Species

My group looked at invasive species. These are species that are not supposed to be part of biodiversity in a specific area but they are still there and they cause the entire biodiversity to fall apart. For example the water fern. It’s a plant that originates from north and south America but they are now all over Ireland and it gets rid of oxygen in the water which is bad for the fish and blocks sunlight from getting to all aquatic plants. I think it’s bad that people bring species that shouldn’t be here even if sometimes it is not on purpose.

Assembly member, age 11



Overexploitation

We got to learn about overexploitation by playing a game of fisherperson. We were given a napkin to represent our boat and different colours of jelly beans to represent different types of fish. The first time we were allowed to fish, we were too greedy and only left one fish. That was not good for nature. So we played again and this time we learned to leave some fish so we could fish again next year. We even got to introduce a ban for one year but the best part was that we got to eat the jelly beans at the end.

Assembly member, age 10



Independent Investigations

After a weekend learning about biodiversity loss in Ireland and its connections to the wider world, it was time for our Assembly members to explore biodiversity in their local communities. For the two weeks between the two Assembly weekends, each Assembly member began an independent investigation to better understand what biodiversity loss looks like in their own community, and what it means for the people who live there.

Assembly members were invited to create a **community map** telling the story of biodiversity in their community. They were also encouraged to **interview a family member or teacher** about their views on biodiversity loss.

During the first part of the second Assembly weekend, the Assembly members shared their findings back with the wider group. Several children and young people reflected on the importance and value of sharing stories with older generations in their communities. For example, some Assembly members shared that although they had known that some plants and birds had disappeared in their area, they had not realised how much had changed over time until they had spoken to someone much older than them.

Pollution

My group looked at the problem of pollution. We drew a map of our areas and we had to add different types of pollution we think are in our areas. We made a collage of all the maps and we talked about where the different types of pollution were coming from and how they were affecting biodiversity.

Assembly member, age 17



Weekend 2: Developing Calls to Action

The second weekend took place in the spectacular setting of Killarney National Park, Co. Kerry. Building on what had been covered during the first weekend and during the independent investigations, the second weekend focused on supporting the Assembly members to engage in dialogue regarding their learnings from the previous weekend, and develop their collective vision and calls to action. On the final day, Assembly members presented their calls to action to Malcolm Noonan T.D., Minister of State for Heritage and Electoral Reform.

Session 1: What Does Biodiversity Loss Mean to Different People?

Theme Groups facilitated by Valery Molay (DCU), Dr. Jimmy O'Keeffe, Dr. Darren Clarke (DCU), Dr. Diarmuid Torney (DCU), Dr. Ben Mallon (DCU), Rowan Oberman (DCU), Kate Harrington (TCD), Martina O'Brien (National Biodiversity Data Centre)

After reflecting on their findings from the independent investigations, the Assembly members spent the morning discussing how biodiversity loss impacts people's lives in very different ways, and that there are many different perspectives to consider when developing and implementing solutions.

In their Theme Groups, Assembly members were presented with a scenario about a proposed housing development in a fictional town in Ireland called Ballydeas. After reading the story aloud, the Assembly members were each given a card with a fictional character – each representing a different community member or stakeholder. These included local residents, farmers, local councillors, developers, members of local ecological groups, children and young people, and families.

Inspired by participatory methodologies such as participatory theatre and roleplay, Assembly members were asked to consider different views on the issue by 'stepping into the shoes' of their character and to collectively roleplay a town hall meeting being held in response to the situation described in the scenario.

Building on previous discussions about human rights and the rights of nature, this activity sparked a lot of conversation about fairness. Assembly members highlighted how some people might need help to make changes that will positively impact biodiversity, including those whose livelihoods are directly connected to the land and sea that surround us. This led to further discussions about the complexities of making decisions to protect nature whilst responding to the needs of a community.



The Scenario

The town of Ballydeas has a population of 20,000 people and lies on the River Álainn. There are proposals to build a new housing estate with 40 new homes. Half of the houses in the new estate will be social housing, with many reserved for families who have been living in temporary housing. Electric car charging points will be available for residents.

The housing development will also include a playground for children in the centre which many have been calling for because there are few playgrounds in the town.

To build the estate, part of the River Álainn must be straightened and a concrete wall built on one part of the bank. Many local businesses are pleased about this development as there will be more accommodation options available to their employees (the people who work for them). Most councillors (local decision-makers) are pleased as the development will mean more housing and jobs for people in the area.

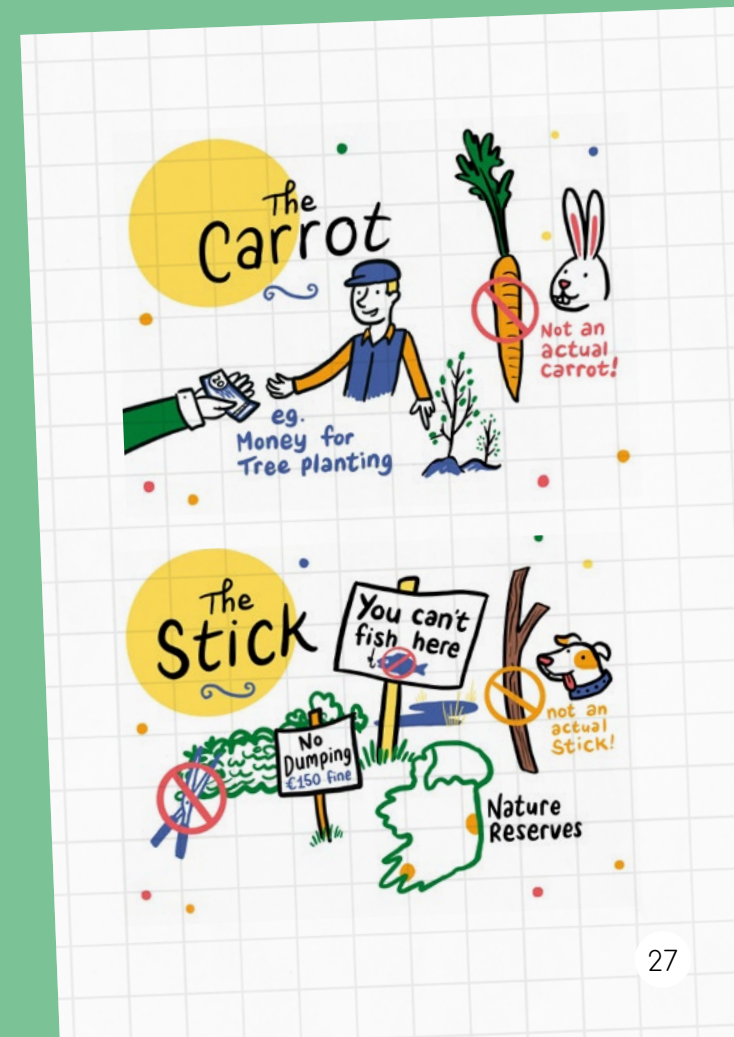
Ecologists and the local river cleanup group are worried that straightening the river will disrupt the breeding of salmon which will have a lot of knock on effects for the rest of the biodiversity in the river. Farmers who own land downstream of the river are worried that the development will lead to more regular flooding of the land.

Session 2: What Are Laws and Policies, and How Can We Influence Change?

Dr. Diarmuid Torney (DCU), Aoife Deane and Dr. Clodagh Harris (UCC)

Assembly members were then presented with an introduction to Ireland's legal and policy context. This included an overview of different types of policy, and biodiversity-related policies that currently exist at local, national, European and global levels. Finally, Assembly members were given an overview of the reasons why biodiversity policies might not be working.

The concept of 'carrots and sticks' in policy-making sparked a lot of interest in the group. Incentives were favoured by Assembly members as a key element to support the communities in their effort to protect biodiversity but some did not find them as very useful for businesses and corporations. Instead, they talked about the need for more rigorous punishment when businesses and corporations continuously broke the rules.



Returning to the 'Lundy model' presented at the first weekend in Wicklow, the Assembly members discussed who needed to hear their calls to action (their audience). They also explored how they could influence change by informing people of the biodiversity crisis, persuading them of the need for immediate action, amplifying their calls for action, and holding those in positions of power to account for their action or lack of action on biodiversity loss.

Assembly members were particularly interested in discussing how best to raise awareness of biodiversity loss, and how policies could support this. Many Assembly members described the current lack of education on biodiversity in schools and in communities. On a number of occasions throughout the session, Assembly members discussed the need for more creative, innovative and fun ways for people of all ages to learn about biodiversity.

Assembly members identified who they would like to listen to their calls to action. They spoke about influencing a diverse audience that ranged from their family and local community to global organisations. Suggestions included local businesses, local schools and sporting clubs. However, both the government and the adults' Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss were named as their priority.

"It's important that young people have access to education for effective action on issues like biodiversity, including education that presents the big picture e.g. on the economic dimensions and sources of our ecological crises."

Young Advisor, age 15



Session 3: Introduction to the Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss

Art O'Leary (Secretary to the Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss)

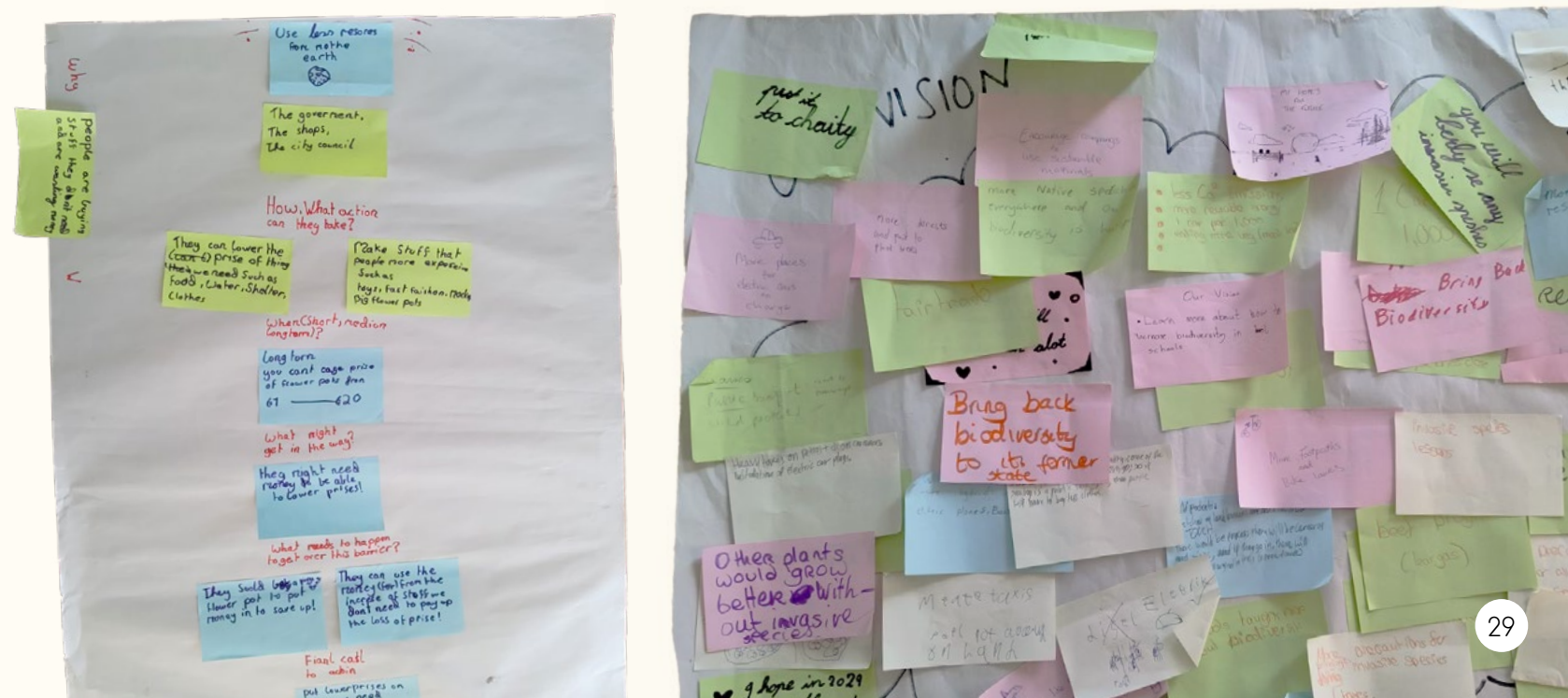
The session on law, policy and creating calls to action was followed by an overview of the work of the Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss by its Secretary, Art O'Leary. He explained that the adults' Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss shared their concerns and were discussing similar topics and themes. He also emphasised that the adults participating in the process looked forward to hearing from the children and young people, and he issued an invitation to the children and young people to present their calls to action to the adult assembly at its next meeting in Malahide, Co. Dublin, on 5 November 2022.

Session 4: Creating Calls to Action

To begin the journey towards developing their calls to action, Assembly members were first invited to imagine their vision for Ireland's future.

Guided by their vision, the Assembly members then worked together in their Theme Groups to create calls to action.

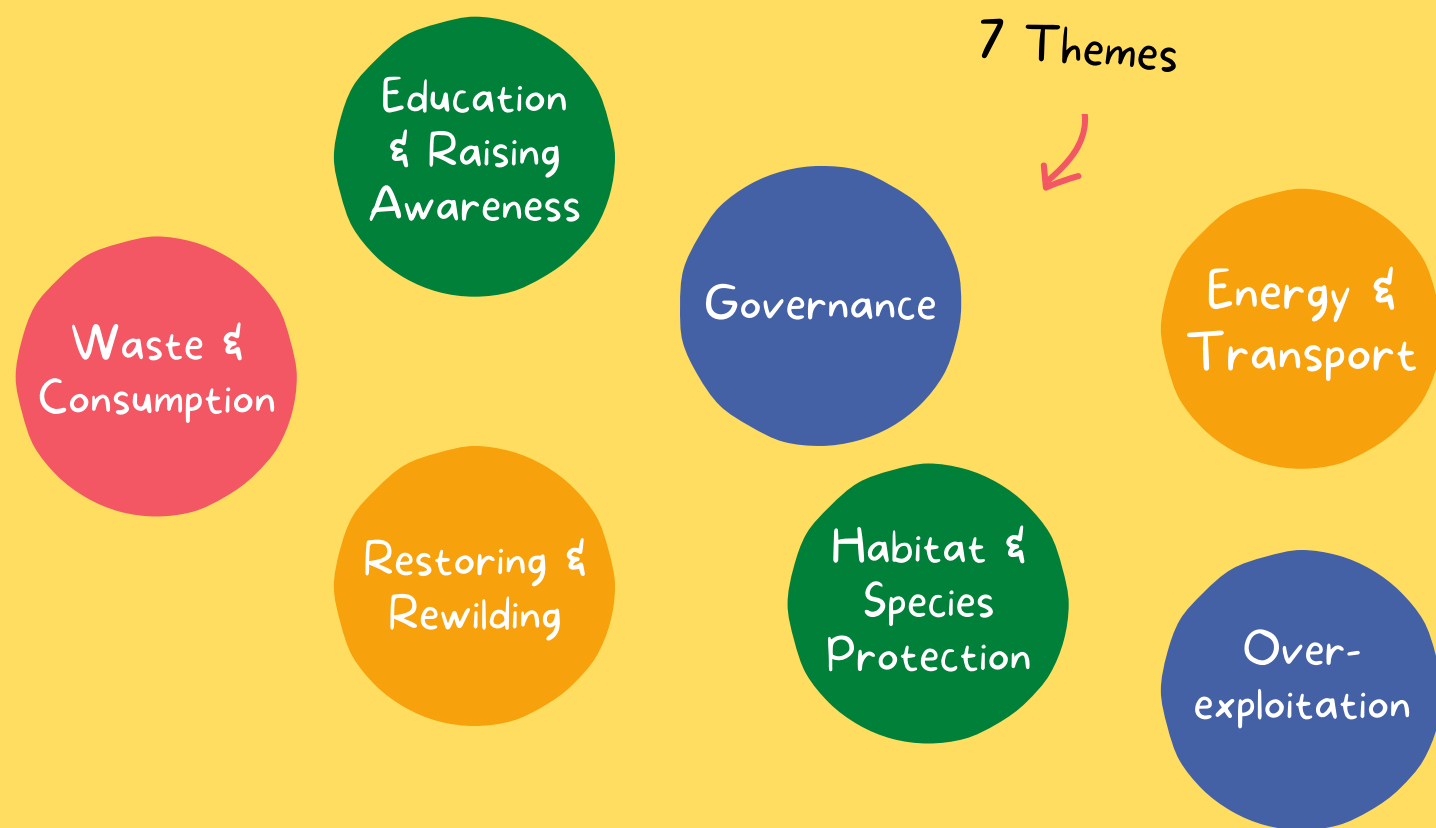
Across the five Theme Groups (*habitat loss, climate change, invasive species, overexploitation and pollution*), Assembly members created over 100 calls to action, many of which were repeated across the groups. At the end of the first day, the project team reviewed and collated the vision statements, and calls to action, from the five groups.



When consolidating the calls to action, the project team found there to be a series of values-based ideas and messages that Assembly members consistently raised.

On the final morning, the project team presented the draft vision, draft key messages and draft calls to action back to the Assembly members and facilitated a space for the children and young people to revise, refine and agree on the values-based ideas and the final text.

This process culminated in the Assembly's final vision, 6 key messages, and 58 calls to action which were organised under 7 themes.



Calls to Action

Our Vision

An Ireland where we are connected to and care for the rights of nature (and each other) so that biodiversity is restored and protected and we live and grow up in healthy, clean and fair environments.





Education and Raising Awareness

To provide education for children, young people and adults that raises awareness and helps them to understand biodiversity loss, the consequences of our actions, and the things we can do to address this issue.

- 1 Make biodiversity and climate education mandatory for children and young people at every level. This would include learning about:
 - Biodiversity loss and climate change
 - Invasive species
 - Habitat loss
 - Economics and politics e.g. circular economy, doughnut economics
 - Skills such as sewing (to repair clothes) and growing vegetables
 - Overpopulation, overconsumption and overexploitation
 - Species protection
- 2 Provide biodiversity education outside of schools (i.e. community learning, on TV, social media, cartoons, comedy, podcasts) for people of all ages.
- 3 Fund local community action groups for biodiversity so people can learn, share ideas and inspire and encourage others to take action.
- 4 Provide education to farmers on how to farm in a way that protects and restores biodiversity, including encouraging a variety of methods for farming (e.g. diversified farming, no monocultures).
- 5 Help farmers to become community leaders to inform and inspire other farmers to make changes needed to value, protect and restore biodiversity.
- 6 Make sure the media gives the same amount of coverage to biodiversity news as to economic and business news. Media coverage should include details and numbers (in a similar way to the COVID-19 pandemic reporting) and less negative portrayals of animals (e.g. sharks).



Governance

To put biodiversity and the rights of nature at the heart of the decisions that we make.

- 7 Every decision being made must consider biodiversity and the rights of nature.
- 8 Involve children and young people in decision-making so that more children and young people are given the chance to speak about climate change and biodiversity.
- 9 Enforce existing environmental protection laws by putting more money into enforcement (as existing incentives haven't been successful).
- 10 Make sure businesses and industries have regulations so they work in green ways.
- 11 Give incentives to people to persuade them to make changes, especially farmers, business people, and companies.
- 12 Put lower prices on stuff we really need and put higher prices on stuff we want but don't necessarily need.
- 13 Put a tax on expansion into biodiversity rich areas (i.e. it should be more expensive to carry out development work/building in biodiversity rich areas).
- 14 Invest in conservation efforts, species protection and environmental causes, and give funding to environmental charities.
- 15 Set up a permanent Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss, and make sure this Assembly's Calls to Action are carried out and not just forgotten.



Energy and Transport

To create energy and transport systems which limit our impact on the environment and biodiversity, and make the most of opportunities for protecting and restoring biodiversity.

- 16 Turn Ireland's energy green by:
 - Cutting out non-renewable forms of energy (i.e. ban coal, peat and oil)
 - Investing in research into new green energy sources, technologies and generators
 - Increasing wind turbines - every house should have a wind turbine!
 - Using kinetic energy in busy places to power electrical needs nearby e.g. kinetic energy generated from people walking and vehicles driving in towns and cities could provide electricity to homes and businesses
 - Providing support and funding for people to install solar panels on their house.
- 17 Improve public transport so that it is good enough to be the preferred option for people. This would include:
 - Making it cheaper
 - Expanding tram and train networks outside of Dublin
 - Replacing parts of the existing road network with trams and trains, and rewilding redundant roads
 - Encouraging one car per household
 - Encouraging car sharing
- 18 Reduce use of fossil fuels and CO2 emissions by:
 - Stopping production of new diesel and petrol cars and making the sale of existing diesel and petrol cars more expensive
 - Encouraging the sale and use of affordable electric cars
 - Creating more bike lanes and footpaths
 - Lowering the number of petrol stations and factories that use fossil fuels
- 19 Reduce the need for mining through improved recycling and reusing materials (e.g. electric car batteries) so that environments and habitats are protected from being destroyed.



Waste and Consumption

To limit the impact of things we buy and use on the environment and biodiversity. To support sustainable ways of living which do not contribute to biodiversity loss, and help to promote biodiversity.

- 20 Ban single-use plastic.
- 21 Make shops and businesses take back and correctly dispose of their waste by law.
- 22 Create refill stations across Ireland (i.e. refilleries/eco-shops for food and other products).
- 23 Reduce clothes waste and fast-fashion.
- 24 Create more specified recycling systems.
- 25 Stop sewage pollution.
- 26 Stop pollution of all waters (i.e. rivers, lakes, oceans).
- 27 Reduce meat consumption by:
 - Introducing a meat tax
 - Stopping the slaughtering of animals unless we really need it
 - Creating more farms for producing vegetables rather than for feeding animals
- 28 Encourage people to grow more vegetables for themselves.
- 29 Encourage plant-based food / vegetarian diets.
- 30 Reduce food waste by educating people and companies about how they can do this, and repurposing food waste into sources of energy.
- 31 If building new homes, build upwards, not outwards. Otherwise, use current housing stock and fix derelict, abandoned buildings for people to live in.
- 32 Make sustainable living more affordable and therefore more achievable.



Restoring and Rewilding

To restore and rewild environments which support our biodiversity, including urban and rural places, and develop national parks with the people who might work in these places.

- 33 Make more national parks, nature reserves, protected areas and safe spaces (a mix of private and public spaces) for animals and different habitats by:
 - Creating more policies for protecting and restoring biodiversity
 - Giving more land to biodiversity
 - Offering to pay people money to encourage them to turn private land into national parks
 - Giving benefits to landowners and farmers to take action on their land to encourage biodiversity
 - Making biodiversity the main focus of all tidy towns groups instead of tidiness
- 34 Restore and reintroduce native species including trees, plants, flowers and predators (e.g. wolves).
- 35 Make more green spaces in cities and urban areas.
- 36 Fund more rangers, forest keepers and other green jobs.
- 37 Give money and support to people who might lose their jobs so they can find green jobs.
- 38 When developing new buildings, don't disturb rivers - protect their natural movement.
- 39 Reforest Ireland! Every time someone is born, a tree should be planted so over time we will have forests full and protected for nature.
- 40 Cut down fewer trees and find new materials to replace paper.
- 41 Increase the number of deciduous plantations in Ireland.
- 42 Prevent deliberate and accidental forest fires.



Habitat and Species Protection

To protect our habitats and native species from the impact of invasive species and land use change.

- 43 Control and manage invasive species by:
 - Not bringing them into Ireland
 - Inspecting goods being shipped to Ireland
 - Paying people to locate invasive species
 - Trapping and releasing to a 'new habitat' (i.e. an animal sanctuary).
 - Introducing and enforcing fines for bringing them in (*fines proportional to wealth).
 - Using camera traps to detect invasive species
 - Raising awareness/telling people about them (through multiple channels - podcasts, social media, comedy)
 - Making them illegal
 - Telling people not to release them
 - Telling people if you see them
- 44 Prevent people from disturbing bogs, wildlife and animals in their natural habitat.
- 45 Create more hedgerows and ditches by providing incentives/rewards for reducing hedge/grass cutting and rewilding hedgerows.
- 46 Create a network of wildlife corridors, paths, tunnels and bridges across Ireland.
- 47 Make cats wear bells (to alert birds to their presence).
- 48 Stop hunting endangered species and birds in the wild.
- 49 Create a penalty point system to stop further destruction of habitat loss. The more points you get, the more severe the penalties become e.g. if a company is illegally dumping, some of their assets (like properties) should be seized.



Overexploitation

To address biodiversity loss caused by overexploitation. To make sure places where we grow and gather our food are places where biodiversity can thrive, and the people who work in these places are helped to tackle biodiversity loss.

- 50 Stop the use of harmful chemicals and pesticides. This would include:
 - Preventing people from spraying plants with pesticides and chemicals
 - Making sure farmers do not spread chemicals on the roads
- 51 Support farmers to grow organic because they are better for the environment and our health.
- 52 Provide greater incentives to reduce methane.
- 53 Enforce regulations and quotas on hunting/exploitation of certain types of species (endangered/protected species). Fine people if they break the quota.
- 54 Reduce overgrazing to limit impacts on grassland habitats. Provide schemes, subsidies and support to farmers so they don't have to overexploit in the first place.
- 55 Give farmers money to support them to make the changes needed.
- 56 Place limits on people for doing different things during different seasons e.g. hunting, farming, fishing.
- 57 Halve the size of the national cow herd.
- 58 Stop overfishing through having restrictions, quotas and regulations on fishing practices (only ethically-caught fish).

Thank You

A message from the adults involved in the project team.

This has been a very special process, and one that has involved many inspiring, dedicated people of all ages. As the adults involved in the project team, we want to say a huge thank you to everyone who has supported this work – from parents, carers and schools, to local community groups, to elected representatives, to organisations near and far, and of course to the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, for demonstrating a commitment to children and young people's meaningful engagement by commissioning this work. We also wish to thank our friends involved in Ireland's national Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss for their support and engagement in our process.

But there are two extra special thanks to share.

Firstly, we want to say a huge thank you to Amhairghin, Anabel, Elsie, Fiach, Jesse, Jordan, Marlie, Niamh and Síofra, our Young Advisors. It has been a huge joy and privilege to work with, learn from (and laugh with!) you over the last six months and the Assembly would not have been possible or the same without you. Thank you for taking the time to share your expertise and passions with us all, and for inspiring a love for nature and biodiversity in many more children and young people across Ireland.

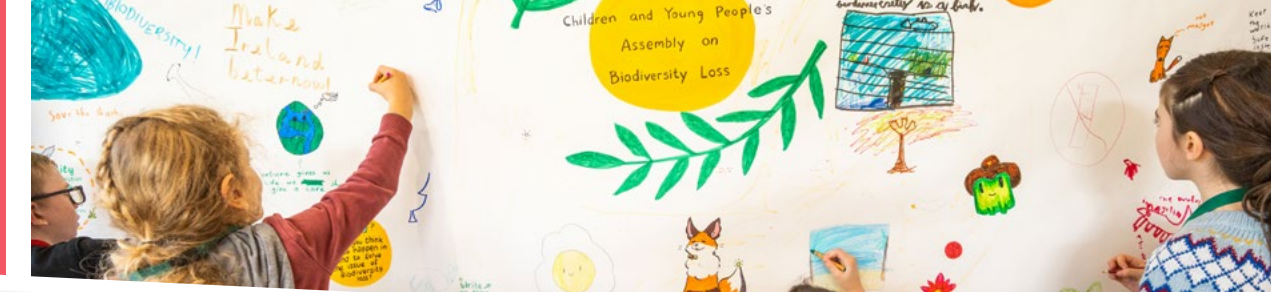
And a huge thank you to the 35 Assembly members. We are so grateful you agreed to come on board this special, new journey – you each brought something so unique, insightful and personal to the Assembly. Thank you for your valuable contributions, and for standing up for children's rights and the rights of nature.

To our Young Advisors and Assembly members – we feel such hope knowing that Ireland's future is in such kind, thoughtful and brave hands. Thank you.



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Meet the Assembly Members



Note: Not all Assembly members consented to having their photos included in this report.

