



Draft Submission to DJEI on Action Plan for Jobs 2015

Introduction:

The concept of greening the Irish economy needs to be central to our economic recovery. The concept of greening relates to efficient use of resources, recognition of a need to reduce dependency on depleting oil reserves, valuing the ecosystem services which our natural capital provides and understanding the need for an economic model that protects the health, well-being and standard of living of the citizens of the country.

The only viable economy will be one built on the principles of efficiency, recognising the measured observable limitations of the environment on which all of our industries depend.

In this context, greening the economy should not appear as a sub section of Sectoral Opportunities with the Action Plan for Jobs. It should be at the heart of the Action Plan, with each job that is created tested for its green credentials – by this, we mean the long term viability of the job, taking all the costs and benefits into account.

Greening the economy is not just about the environment. It takes the environment into account as a key component of decision making. But more than that, greening requires all economic decisions to be made taking previously invisible factors into account. These factors include pollinators, the role of vegetation in flood prevention, ecosystem services, biodiversity on land and sea.

We have already recognised this in some way through [Our Sustainable Future](#)¹, [Delivering Our Green Potential](#)². We are committed to the [European 7th Environmental Action Programme](#)³, and [Resource Efficient Europe](#)⁴ and we need to recognise the lessons from the OECD published [Towards Green Growth](#)⁵, the UN's [Resilient People, Resilient Planet](#)⁶, and UNEP's [5th Global Environmental Outlook](#)⁷.

Ireland should be looking to embrace the opportunity to be a world leader in terms of greening our economy. We should be taking full advantage of our already green image and ensure that the reality on the ground means that a sustainable future is actually a reality on the ground for the citizens.

1

<http://www.environ.ie/en/Environment/SustainableDevelopment/PublicationsDocuments/FileDownload,30452,en.pdf>

² http://www.djei.ie/publications/enterprise/2012/Delivering_Our_Green_Potential.pdf

³ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013D1386&from=EN>

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/resource-efficient-europe/pdf/resource_efficient_europe_en.pdf

⁵ <http://www.oecd.org/greengrowth/48012345.pdf>

⁶ http://uscib.org/docs/GSPReportOverview_A4%20size.pdf

⁷ http://www.unep.org/geo/pdfs/geo5/GEO5_report_full_en.pdf



1. Natura 2000

Action: Develop management plans for Natura 2000 network with specific policy outcome goal of job creation. (NPWS, Forfás, DAHG)

Action: Maximise draw down of Pillar 2 funding under CAP, to allow for significant investment in the network with a specific focus on creating employment through recognition of the role of natural capital in the sustainability of our economic recovery. (DAFM, DJEI)

These actions tie in with what NPWS and DAHG are trying to achieve. The Environmental Pillar has met with DAHG and sought to base our submission of these actions to the Action Plan for Jobs based on our own work that has led to an understanding that the implementing department has the capacity to deliver on the actions. It is critical that investment in managing and developing our Natura 2000 network⁸ of sites is linked to job creation and an improved understanding at policy making level of the value of our natural assets and ecological processes and services to our economic stability. Natural capital has to be given priority and explicit mention in any attempt to expand a greening of the economic recovery.

2. Socio-Ecological Employment Scheme:

Action: Create a register of approved local environmental community groups that can become conduits for delivery of back to work schemes. (DECLG, DJEI, DSS)

Action: Amend back to work schemes (or create new scheme) to allow for registered community and environmental groups to assist in reducing unemployment numbers. (DSP)

An important element of the greening of economies is to include an aspect of a “social economy”. Environmental groups and their work offer social as well as economic benefits at both local and national levels.

Establish a register of environmental NGO’s that can directly offer employment to both recent graduates, and long term unemployed. This would plug the much publicised gaps in the existing schemes. Registered organisations would meet set criteria for example *inter alia* registered charities, limited companies, adequate governance structures in place. This could be linked to Local Government Reform in providing a register of groups which are active in local areas and municipalities.

Allow registered organisations to take people off the live register through a scheme that improves the chances of getting back to work, offers a small financial incentive, creates ecosystem benefits and local community benefits, while supporting a vibrant sustainable community environmental sector.

⁸ <http://www.eeb.org/EEB/?LinkServID=41FFA309-5056-B741-DBFD725B2A886A5F>



Many of these organisations have unemployed volunteers assisting them anyway, so a scheme to formalise this practice would have a positive impact of unemployment numbers at minimal cost.

3. Social Housing –Town Centre Regeneration

Action: Focus social housing development on the refurbishment of existing town/village centre residential properties.

Action: In conjunction with an appropriate third level institution, assess the availability of vacant or derelict residential properties in depressed towns and villages, together with their viability for restoration. Identify pilot locations

Action: Conduct a participatory “Planning For Real”⁹ type exercise in each pilot

It would seem expedient to combine spending on Social Housing with the regeneration of rural towns.

Many rural towns and villages are being hollowed out, with derelict or vacant premises taking over more than 50% of their centres. People will only choose to live in settings that have attractive and lively centres. Active city/town centres are stimulants to economic activity, and reduce the carbon footprint of communities.

4. Living Laboratories

Action: DES establishes institution wide processes in each of the three Green Campuses. This will provide a route by which third level institutions can become living laboratories for a sustainable Ireland, and drivers for green job creation. (DES and DECLG)

Ireland’s competitiveness requires strong investment in Research and Innovation. Using our third level institutions to test concepts for a sustainable future compliments our strategy for smart growth, and our commitment to the Europe2020 Strategy to increase spending on research. Although we are on track to meet our target for this, there is a need for an increased investment in the area. This investment should go towards ensuring that future economic growth has strong sustainable foundations, so that any recovery has long term viability.

What is proposed here is the bringing together of the current on-campus enterprise initiatives with the [Green Campus](http://www.planningforreal.org.uk/)¹⁰ programme to create a cutting edge living laboratory of every campus in Ireland, where: the aspirations for sustainability are tested at every turn; problem solving and research are part of the syllabus from the day a student enters the door of the college; participatory decision-making processes are road-tested; all aspects of the campus are tested against the aspirations of

⁹ <http://www.planningforreal.org.uk/>

¹⁰ www.greencampusireland.org



Agenda 21; and the local community's needs are accepted as one of the key drivers for scientific, technological and social innovation.

This living laboratory model should be piloted over three years, with the three existing Green flag recipients, should they be willing to take up the challenge. The project should be extended out to all the Third Level institutions that have in the meantime achieved their Green Flag status. All third level institutions are to be given direction down this route with the objective of all having Green Flag status within 5 years and 25% progressing beyond this to "Living Laboratory" status.

5. Coastal Flood Defences

Actions: The creation of a data base and recognised network of 'Sea Wall Reporters' and 'Sea Wall Keepers' would help address the lack of information and the maintenance problem with our coastal flood defences.

The membership of the ENGO's that form the Environmental Pillar and other associated local groups have the knowledge to be used as a network of reliable reporters on the state of repair of our seawalls. The damage to these seawalls over the last few winters has been extreme, jeopardising coastal roads of (amongst others) the much publicised Wild Atlantic Way.

Some investment in their monitoring using local expertise would create a working model of a citizen science project. This could be expanded out to include upkeep and repair of the walls when required. It may require some training and certification firstly to have a suitably qualified team of individuals to choose from.

6. Resource Efficiency

Action: Convene a consultative committee on Resource Efficiency which will include representatives from government, private industry, SME sector and the Environmental Pillar.

Action: Publish and implement the national Roadmap on Resource Efficiency

Resource efficiency has to be at the heart of any attempt at greening the economy. Promotion of resource efficiency appeared as action 282 in the APJ2013 but this was completed without adequate levels of achievement. The SEAI energy programmes were used as the total measure of success. There needs to be a more fundamental approach to putting resource efficiency at the heart of decision-making. Resource Efficiency, by embracing the circular economy and eco-design, has the potential to create new jobs while reducing the costs associated with the loss of



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resources. Maximising the efficiency of products, packaging and their component parts is a win-win scenario as Ireland adopts new waste management policies, complies with new EU resource efficiency programmes and promotes job growth..

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