



# IRISH PEATLAND CONSERVATION COUNCIL

COMHAIRLE CHAOMHNAITHE PHORTAIGH NA HÉIREANN

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## Re: Heritage Council “Valuing People and Place” Consultation Document 2018-2022

### 1. What does Heritage Mean to You?

The Irish Peatland Conservation Council are a registered charity that aim to protect and conserve a representative sample of intact peatlands within Ireland for future generations to enjoy. Peatlands is the aspect of Heritage in which we specialise and therefore have the greatest significance when thinking about Heritage. Peatlands provide many services to Irish people free of charge including acting as a source of water, storing carbon, providing land for agriculture, providing a source of fuel for domestic use and a raw material for gardening products and for generating electricity. They also provide an important recreational resource which is becoming increasingly important as urban populations continue to expand. Despite all of these values, IPCC research into the status of peatlands shows that only 18% of the original area of peatlands in Ireland are now deemed worthy of conservation as 82% has been lost to agricultural reclamation, afforestation, infrastructural developments, pollution, wind farms/energy production and peat extraction/ horticultural products (Malone and O’Connell 2009: Irish Peatland Conservation Action Plan 2020).

The heritage of peatlands encompasses not only the natural wildlife, which is the basis of a natural Ireland, but there is also the historic cultural use of peatlands that involves living people and our ancestors. The archaeological heritage of peatlands is where Ireland has gained insight into how people lived including what they ate, what they wore and how they survived in the wild expanses of a pre-Christian Ireland. The recent historical heritage of peatlands has also steered the formation of towns and communities supported by the industrial extraction of peat being the only source of employment for many areas in Ireland. The ancient history of peatlands and recent history of peatlands has had a huge impact on modern day Irish culture and heritage.

### 2. What do you think of the mission and vision set out above?

While the fundamental Mission of the Heritage Council is reasonable, the vision is too local in its focus and a broader regional, national and international perspectives in relation to the protection and conservation of Ireland’s national heritage including all its diversity would ensure a more even spread of action and results across the country.

Two additional bullet points should be included

- \* seeking funding to support heritage projects
- \* The IPCC also would like to see the Heritage Council take a more pro-active role in policy development. The position that the Heritage Council occupies ensures that you have a broad overview of what is needed in terms of policy and a voice that must be listened to.

### 3. Are there other relevant policy areas that need to be addressed?

One area of policy that could be improved is Biodiversity Policy. In terms of providing Policy Advice, IPCC were surprised that we never saw representatives from the Heritage Council either taking part or becoming members of the Peatlands Council. Therefore your role in relation to developing broad and integrated policies regarding the protection and management of peatland heritage and how this impacts into other areas of policy such as climate change management and biodiversity protection was not observable.

## 35 YEARS TAKING ACTION FOR BOGS AND WILDLIFE

Charity No/Uimhir Carthanacht: CHY6829 Registered in Ireland No/Uimhir Cláraithe in Éirinn: 116156 Registered Office/Oifig Cláraithe: Lullymore, Rathangan, Co. Kildare, R51 V293, Ireland  
Governance Code Statement of Compliance: IPCC confirm that our organisation complies with The Governance Code for the Community, Voluntary and Charitable Sector in Ireland.

Company Secretary/Rúnaí Comhlacht: Rachel Kavanagh

Directors/Stiúrthóirí: Martin Kelly, Catherine O’Connell, Rachel Kavanagh, Jennifer Roche, Seán Ó Fearghail,

Patrons/Pátrúnaí: Pauline Bewick, Don Conroy, HRH Princess Irene of the Netherlands,

Eanna Ní Lamhna, Matthijs Schouten, His Excellency Mr Paul Schellekens Netherlands Ambassador to Ireland

As a prescribed body under the Planning and Development Regulations, the Heritage Council should be monitoring planning applications that conflict with the protection of heritage and incorporate findings into policy devised for the Minister and Government Departments. For example a policy on wind farms on upland peatlands would be very beneficial and would greatly alleviate the necessity for IPCC to object to every wind farm proposed on a Special Area of Conservation throughout each year. Furthermore a wind farm policy is also needed for former industrial cutaway bogs which are currently being brought into the planning system by Bord na Mona. IPCC would like to see the Heritage Council engaging on the future use of the cutaway bogs and their potential to provide refuges for wetland species and wild birds in addition to providing a new heritage resource for the country. Another issue that the Heritage Council should turn their attention to would be the plight of Curlew in Ireland. The breeding population is in danger of extinction in Ireland. Currently Curlew have no status in relation to planning in Ireland and wind farm developments are being proposed in sensitive areas for Curlew which should not be happening. This is a gap in which the Heritage Council could have an impact.

#### **4. Are there aspects of heritage to which you feel the Heritage Council should be devoting more attention?**

Natural Heritage is an important part of the Irish psyche which has suffered with the ever increasing industrial, infrastructural and residential developments being responsible for shifting baselines and contributing to the fragmentation and loss of our natural heritage. The Heritage Council could give more attention to raising awareness/advising on the issues facing Ireland as a result of the loss of our natural world. This could be rolled out with more of a focus on climate change which would benefit not only Ireland but the international community.

#### **5. What has been your best experience of a heritage project? Explain why.**

This is difficult to answer as all of the IPCC's projects that are funded by Heritage Council have tended to be a great experience. The reasons why are: the availability of funding; getting nature conserved; the recognition from the Heritage Council, involvement of the public, publicity, ability to build local capacity and the benefits for wildlife.

#### **6. What supports do you think are necessary to help communities develop a sense of place and identity?**

The Heritage Council could develop a networking platform that community organisations, environmental organisations (including non-governmental and governmental) could use to share their expertise and experience of heritage promotion, management and conservation. For instance, members of tidy towns have sometimes been known to look for expertise on what to do with pieces of land that could become wildlife refuges if developed properly, but can spend a lot of time looking for the right people that can help and give them good advice. Such a networking platform would be a valuable resource helping to put people in touch with experts, design projects that can be funded, bring people together and provide the best practice skills.

#### **7. How might heritage education be developed more effectively?**

The Heritage Council could establish a Heritage School/College that provides practical training and academic rewards to students and young people and produces well trained Heritage specialists. This would allow the Heritage Council to promote best practice and would link up with the voluntary Heritage In Schools visit programmes. Heritage education would be greatly improved from the implementation of a Secondary School scheme that would focus on heritage management skills and meet requirements of school curricula. The current Heritage Education being promoted by the Heritage Council has too great a focus on awareness and enjoyment of heritage which is fine, but we also need to focus on management, survey and conservation techniques of our natural heritage. This would help to solidify conservation of our natural landscape including the heritage contained within.

#### **8. Are we supporting the right organisations to do the right things?**

The Heritage Council could give recognition to the Irish Environmental Network (IEN) and the massive amount of work NGO's are doing for heritage and biodiversity within the country who are members of this network. We highlighted this group in our submission to the last strategy of the Heritage Council 2012-17.

#### **9. What are we missing?**

The management of natural heritage and in particular peatland heritage in the next five years could be pivotal in creating sustainable employment. Over 250,000ha of peatlands are earmarked for conservation in Ireland at a number of levels - special areas of conservation, natural heritage areas and local biodiversity areas. All of the sites have been damaged by drainage which is causing a loss of biodiversity, flooding in river catchments, contamination of water supplies and contributing to green- house gas emissions. As peatland scientists around the world have published various methods of drain blocking and restoration of peat forming vegetation on formerly damaged bogs and fens, IPCC would envisage that teams of trained personnel from the community and farmers should be given employment in the restoration of peatland habitats throughout the country. Furthermore a network of peatland sites should be promoted as part of a sustainable tourism initiative, working at grass roots level which would encourage visitors to the peatland heritage of Ireland, thereby increasing revenue in rural communities through the development of fringe services for visitors.



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