

Comhar – the National Sustainable Development Partnership

Annual Report, February 1999 - February 2000

Foreword from Chairman, Dr. John Bowman

Comhar was launched by the Minister for the Environment and Local Government in February 1999. Its terms of reference were: to advance the national agenda for sustainable development, to evaluate progress in this regard, to assist in devising suitable mechanisms and advising on their implementation, and to contribute to the formation of a national consensus with these goals in mind.

In accepting the chairmanship I emphasised to the Minister and to the members of Comhar that I was very aware that there were many full-time professionals in the public service whose duty it was to work with these same goals in mind. Manifestly our efforts in Comhar could not take the blame for any shortcomings in the national performance.

That said, Comhar would hope to minimize any such shortcomings. We would strive to monitor this diverse agenda, concentrating our input in the most effective and flexible manner possible. We would hope to concentrate on qualitative influence: we could provide an intelligent and representative jury for policy planners; we could develop a media strategy to mainstream the basic ideals of sustainable development; and we could undertake initiatives which would have the benefit of raising the awareness of sustainable development for future generations.

To this end we have become sponsors of three special Comhar Awards in the Young Scientist of the Year Competition. We hope to bring forward other educational initiatives which may have a permanent effect on the curricula at primary, secondary and third level.

It is also important to raise awareness of the issue of sustainable development in the short-term, both with the general public and with key policy-makers. I think it can safely be said that sustainable development has now attained the status of being politically correct; but the goodwill towards it is soft. Too often it is an aspiration to be cited rather than a benchmark to be rigorously applied. This may be partly because definitions of sustainable development vary so widely.

But even if a satisfactory definition which might be made operational in all circumstances proves elusive, the incorporation of the general principle of sustainable development in policy-making can only be of benefit. Sustainable development needs to be added to that list of significant goals which all policy-makers need to bear in mind when drafting or implementing policy.

I believe that it is more important to raise the profile of sustainable development as a concept than to claim any special credit for Comhar. Where joint efforts were involved, or where it was impossible to quantify Comhar's input, I personally would be indifferent as to who might get the credit. In the modern world, the messenger too often becomes more famous than the message. I hope that Comhar will avoid this pitfall. It is the essential message of sustainable development which must take precedence. Another point which I emphasised when accepting the Minister's invitation was that given the scale of this agenda – and the very many other players involved – it would be important to avoid duplication of effort.

The scale of this agenda meant that much of Comhar's initial attention had to be given to prioritising areas of work for a 3-year programme, as required under the terms of reference. This was agreed in May 1999, following which four working groups were established during the summer. The early fruits of this programme, which were completed within the period of this report, were twofold.

The first, arising from a proposal raised by one of the working groups and endorsed by Comhar in Plenary session, was to comment on the Planning and Development Bill which was published in August 1999. The second, in response to a request from the Minister for the Environment and Local Government, was to consider and make recommendations on the proposed National Greenhouse Gas Abatement Strategy. Both of these important contributions were finalised before Christmas 1999, and I

would like to thank the members of Comhar for their application and interest in completing this important work at such an early stage, and within tight deadlines.

I would like to acknowledge the support of the Minister and of his Department in assisting the work of Comhar; the friendship and co-operation of the ENFO staff in St. Andrew Street where Comhar's secretariat is now located; especially the assistance of the ENFO library staff whose co-operation has been unfailingly courteous, generous and expert.

I also wish to acknowledge the contribution of Comhar's secretariat staff at headquarters - Maureen Doyle, Damien Markey - and his successor, Marie Hughes - and Ida Connolly. Finally, I would wish to pay tribute to my fellow members of the Comhar partnership who have been so generous with their time and commitment to the work of Comhar.

Réamhra an Chathaoirligh, An Dr. John Bowman

Sheol an tAire Comhshaoil agus Rialtais Áitiúil Comhar i Feabhra 1999. Ba iad seo a leanas a théarmaí tagartha: an clár oibre náisiúnta i gcomhair forbartha marthanaí a chur chun cinn, cabhrú le sásraí oiriúnacha a bheartú agus comhairle a thabhairt ar a bhfeidhmiú, agus cur le foirmiú comhaontaithe náisiúnta agus aird á thabhairt ar na spriocanna sin.

I nglacadh leis an gcathaoirleacht thug mé le fios don Aire agus do chomhaltaí Chomhar, agus leag mé béim air, gurbh eol dom go raibh go leor lucht gairme lánaimseartha sa tseirbhís phoiblí arb é a ndualgas oibriú agus aird a thabhairt ar na spriocanna céanna sin. Ba léir ansin nach bhféadfadh ár n-iarrachtaí i gComhar an milleán a ghlacadh faoi aon locht a bheadh san obair náisiúnta.

É sin ráite, bheadh súil ag Comhar aon locht dá leithéid a choinneáil chomh híseal agus is féidir. Dhéanfaimís iarracht monatóireacht a dhéanamh ar an gclár oibre leathan sin, ag díriú ár n-ionchur sa bhealach is éifeachtaí agus is solúbtha agus is

féidir. Bheimís ag súil go ndíreofaí isteach ar thionchar cineálach; d'fhéadfaimís giúire ionadaíoch agus éirimiúil a sholáthar do phleanálaithe polasaí; d'fhéadfaimís straitéis meán a fhorbairt le hidéil bhunúsacha forbartha marthanaí a phríomhshruthú; agus d'fhéadfaimís tabhairt faoi thionscnaimh a mbeadh de shochar ag baint leo go mbeadh níos mó eolais faoi fhorbairt mharthanach ann do ghlúine atá le teacht.

Ar a shon sin táimid inár n-urraitheoirí ar thrí Dhuais speisialta Chomhar i gComórtas Eolaí Óg na Bliana. Tá súil againn tionscnaimh oideachasúla eile a thabhairt chun cinn a bhféadfadh éifeacht bhuan a bheith acu ar churaclaim ag an mbunleibhéal, ag an dara leibhéal agus ag an tríú leibhéal.

Tá sé tábhachtach chomh maith go músclófaí eolas ar cheist na forbartha marthanaí sa ghearr-thréimhse, leis an bpobal go ginearálta agus le príomhdhéantóirí polasaí araon. Ceapaim gur féidir talamh slán a dhéanamh de go bhfuil an stádas bainte amach ag an bhforbairt mharthanach go bhfuil sí ceart go polaitiúil; ach tá an dea-thoil a chaitear léi ciúin. Ró-mhinic is mian a bhíonn ann is féidir a lua seachas slat tomhais is féidir a fheidhmiú go docht. D'fhéadfadh gur fíor sin go pointe de bharr go mbíonn difear chomh leathan sin idir sainmhínte éagsúla ar fhorbairt mharthanach.

Ach fiú más rud nach féidir teacht ar shainmhíniú sásúil a d'fhéadfaí a chur ag obair i ngach cúinse, caithfidh sé gur chun sochair a rachadh comhshnaidhmeadh phrionsabal ginearálta na forbartha marthanaí i ndéanamh polasaí. Ní mór forbairt mharthanach a chur ar liosta sin na spriocanna suntasacha nach mór do gach déantóir polasaí smaoinemh air agus é/í i mbun dréachtaithe nó feidhmithe polasaí.

Creidim go bhfuil sé níos tábhachtaí próifíl na forbartha marthanaí a ardú mar choincheap ná aon chreidiúint speisialta a éileamh do Chomhar. San áit ar bhain comhiarrachtaí leis, nó go raibh sé dódhéanta méid ionchuir Chomhar a aithint, níor mhiste liom féin go pearsanta cé a gheobhadh an chreidiúint. Sa domhan nua-aimseartha, is ró-mhinic a thuilleann an teachtaire níos mó cáile ná an teachtaireacht féin. Tá súil agam go seachnóidh Comhar an gaiste sin. Is í teachtaireacht bhunúsach na forbartha marthanaí a chaithfidh tús áite a fháil. Ba phointe eile ar leag mé béim air agus mé ag glacadh le cuireadh an Aire ná ós rud go bhfuil scála an chláir oibre sin

chomh forleathan – agus an iliomad daoine eile a bhaineann leis – bheadh sé tábhachtach go seachnófaí dúbailt a dhéanamh ar an iarracht.

Chiallaigh scála an chláir oibre sin gur caitheadh go leor d’aird thosaigh Chomhar le tosaíocht a thabhairt do réimsí oibre do chlár 3-bliana, faoi mar a bhí riachtanach de réir na dtéarmaí tagartha. Comhaontaíodh sin i mBealtaine 1999, agus ina dhiaidh sin bunaíodh ceithre ghrúpa oibre i rith an tsamhraidh. Bhí leagan amach dúbailte ar thorthaí luaithe an chláir sin, a críochnaíodh laistigh de thréimhse na tuarascála seo.

Ba é an chéad cheann acu sin, a d’eascair as moladh a d’ardaigh ceann de na grúpaí oibre agus a d’fhorhuinigh Comhar i seisiún Iomlánach, tagairt a dhéanamh don Bhille Pleanála agus Forbartha a foilsíodh i 1999. Ba é an dara ceann acu sin, mar fhreagra ar iarratas ón Aire Comhshaoil agus Rialtais Áitiúil, moltaí a mheas agus a dhéanamh ar an Straitéis Náisiúnta um Laghdú Gháis Cheaptha Teasa. Tugadh an dá mhír rannpháirtíochta sin chun críche roimh Nollaig 1999, agus ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghlacadh le comhaltaí Chomhar as a bhfeidhmiú agus as a suim i gcríochnú na hoibre tábhachtaí sin ag tréimhse chomh luath sin, agus laistigh de spriocanna diana ama.

Ba mhaith liom aitheantas a thabhairt do thacaíocht an Aire agus a Roinne i gcabhrú le hobair Chomhar; do chairdeas agus do chomhoibriú fhoireann ENFO i Sráid San Aindrias áit a bhfuil rúnaíocht Chomhar lonnaithe anois; go háirithe do chabhair fhoireann leabharlainne ENFO a raibh a gcomhoibriú go síoraí cúirtéiseach, flaithiúil agus oilte.

Ba mhaith liom aitheantas a thabhairt chomh maith do mhéid rannpháirtíochta fhoireann rúnaíochta Chomhar ag an gceanncheathrú – Maureen Doyle, Damien Markey – agus a chomharba, Marie Hughes – chomh maith le Ida Connolly. Ar deireadh thiar, ba mhaith liom onóir a léiriú do mo chomhaltaí ar fad i bpáirtnéireacht Chomhar a bhí chomh flaithiúil lena gcuid ama agus a bhí tiomanta d’obair Chomhar.

Introduction

Comhar, the National Sustainable Development Partnership, was established by the Government in 1999 as the forum for national consultation and dialogue on all issues surrounding Ireland's pursuit of sustainable development. Its full terms of reference are set out in *Appendix 1*. *Comhar*'s purpose is to advance the national agenda for sustainable development, to evaluate progress in this regard, to assist in devising suitable mechanisms and advising on their implementation, and to contribute to the formation of a national consensus in these regards. It is also intended as a means of increasing participation and consultation in matters relating to sustainable development.

Comhar's 25 members are drawn from a wide range of nominating bodies covering five pillars or areas of society – representing the State sector, economic sectors, environmental NGOs, social/community NGOs and the professional/academic sector. This broad membership also reflects the three distinct aspects of sustainable development - environmental, economic and social interests. The Chairman of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Environment and Local Government is an *ex-officio* member of *Comhar*, which is chaired by the historian and broadcaster, Dr. John Bowman. The full list of members is given in *Appendix 2*.

As *Comhar* began its work at the end of February 1999, this first annual report covers the period up to end February 2000.

Launch, 26 February 1999

Comhar was officially launched by the Minister for the Environment and Local Government, Mr. Noel Dempsey, T.D., on 26 February 1999. Addressing the Partnership, the Minister said that *Comhar*'s broad terms of reference reflected the premium the Government places on cross-sectoral participation in the shaping of policy and in policy delivery. He encouraged members to focus on their shared responsibility within *Comhar*, so that all participants have a sense of ownership in its products and outcomes. He also told them that they had the potential to be compelling and influential in the areas they decided to prioritise within their broad remit. Their breadth of representation would promote creativity, giving *Comhar* real

scope to build a national capacity for finding solutions to the challenges of sustainable development.

The Partnership held its first Plenary session that afternoon. Three further Plenary sessions were held in the period covered by this report.

Mission Statement

Under its Mission Statement, which was agreed by members in September 1999, *Comhar* seeks to work in partnership to encourage sustainable development across Irish economy and society, and to advise Government on policies which support and promote sustainable development.

Work programme

Comhar was required, under its terms of reference, to finalise its first three-year work programme within three months of its establishment. Initial discussion at the first Plenary centred on broad themes and considerations; this was followed by the circulation of draft papers on a range of issues suggested, which were subsequently discussed in depth at the second Plenary, held in May 1999. Among the criteria which *Comhar* saw as particularly relevant in defining its work programme were:

- that it should add value to existing work being done by other bodies or organisations;
- that it should position itself at the developmental end of policy, and to this end should assess the policy relevance of issues;
- that it should avoid duplicating work being carried out by other bodies; and
- that it should use its unique nature and the strength of its broad representation to come to informed and balanced perspectives and recommendations.

While seeking to be reasonably comprehensive in drawing up a three-year programme, *Comhar* recognised the need for more focused definition in respect of the broader topics. A degree of flexibility was also needed to allow for adjustment in the light of experience or to take account of new issues arising over the three-year period.

Comhar's work and products may take a number of forms, including:

- advice to Ministers, to specific sectors, or to the general public;
- opinions on critical issues in relation to the environment and sustainable development;
- recommendations on policy development;
- research and preparation of reports; and
- sponsorships or other means to raise awareness.

The work programme for the period 1999-2002, as agreed in May 1999, is set out in *Appendix 3*.

Establishment of Bureau

A Bureau was established following the second Plenary meeting, to assist the Chairman in managing *Comhar*'s business. The Bureau consists of five members, one from each of *Comhar*'s pillars. The members appointed to the Bureau in 1999 were Ms. Geraldine Tallon, Dr. Mary Kelly, Ms. Jeanne Meldon, Mr. Seán Regan, and Dr. Richard Moles.

The functions of the Bureau include

- monitoring (and amending as necessary) both the work programme and structures/working arrangements on an ongoing basis;
- dealing with new issues as they arise, and deciding how they should be handled; and
- addressing ongoing issues – e.g. raising awareness, *Comhar*'s profile/identity, considering how *Comhar* can interact with other bodies/sectors, etc.

From its establishment in summer 1999 to the end of *Comhar*'s first full year of operation, the Bureau met on five occasions. It is intended that it will continue to meet at approximately 6-8 week intervals, or as required to deal with particular items of business.

Establishment of working groups

In its work programme, *Comhar* identified four major work areas, comprising clusters of related issues, as the focus for its consideration. Working groups were established in summer 1999 to address these areas, namely:

- National Policy and Mechanisms
- Spatial Planning
- Waste Prevention and Management
- Local Sustainability, Participation and Education

National Policy and Mechanisms

The purpose of this group is to address not only policy consultation and advice, but also means and instruments which may be used to implement policy and ensure better integration of environmental and sustainability considerations in economic sectors. Such instruments may include, for example, eco-labelling, environmental taxation, voluntary agreements, sustainability proofing/eco-auditing of policies, indicators, and communication strategies. These may be addressed in their own right, or in the context of particular policy proposals.

The group's first item of work was to prepare a draft response from *Comhar* to the Minister for the Environment & Local Government concerning the draft National Greenhouse Gas Abatement Strategy (see pages). This was completed in December 1999.

It had originally been intended to address the sustainable development profile of the National Development Plan; however, there was no opportunity to consider the draft Plan in advance of its agreement by Government. It was decided therefore to focus on its implementation, including issues relating to the new Operational Programmes for the period 2000-2006. The group's emphasis in early 2000 therefore moved to considering issues arising from the National Development Plan, in particular transport-related issues which are to be incorporated in the Economic & Social Infrastructure Operational Programme.

Spatial Planning

Comhar recognises that spatial planning is critically related to the pursuit of sustainable development. This working group was established to examine a range of associated issues, such as sustainable settlements, planning and land use, agriculture and rural development, and coastal zone management. A medium-term focus of this work will be to contribute to the development of the national spatial planning policy, as proposed by Government.

There has been an accelerated rate of change in economic development over the last eight years and consequent pressures on the environment and on communities' capacities to absorb change. There is huge pressure to get major infrastructure projects and housing projects started as soon as possible. Many of these projects raise points of conflict that need to be addressed in a nationwide plan as much as within a County Development Plan which only sets out the framework for appropriate planning and development within that county. The members of *Comhar* were informed that the Government had agreed to prepare a national spatial strategy within the next two years, and they felt that it was important for *Comhar* to contribute to this emerging policy.

The Working Group on Spatial Planning held its first meeting on 8 July 1999. In its initial meetings it identified some of the issues concerned, i.e. rural development, disadvantaged areas within urban areas, the inclusion of all the stakeholders in the plans for an area and how to address national issues at local level. The principal planning advisor from the Department of the Environment & Local Government attended the next meeting to set out the current position and how the Department proposed to bring forward the issue of national spatial planning.

The primary item on the agenda from early September onwards was to formulate *Comhar*'s response to the proposed Planning & Development Bill. A period of intensive work produced a draft response which was circulated to *Comhar* members for comment and feedback. The comments were further discussed and where possible included in the document. Two comments were attached as dissenting on specific points and these were forwarded along with the final response. This was submitted to the Minister for the Environment & Local Government on 24 November 1999.

The first task in 2000 is to formulate an initial response from *Comhar* to the call for comments on the proposed National Spatial Strategy.

Waste Prevention and Management

Modernising waste performance is a key national policy objective. *Comhar* has identified a need for focus on the higher elements of the waste hierarchy, and in particular on options for waste prevention, minimisation, reuse and recycling, but may also address options for waste disposal. It also considers that case studies and best practice models, which may illustrate principles or problems and help to promote more sustainable performance, should be developed.

During the period under report, the working group considered a number of issues, including the possibility of introducing taxes and/or deposit and return systems on waste items such as plastic bags and drinks containers. The Group also met with representatives of the Environmental Protection Agency to update information concerning landfill, including the new licensing requirements. These are issues of public concern, and the group is considering the desirability of a public information leaflet on this diffuse subject. The group also considered the proposed National Hazardous Waste Management Plan published by the EPA, and raised a number of issues in a meeting with EPA representatives. These included concerns that the projections of growth figures were not realistic, the need for more stringent targets in relation to waste quantities, and a recommendation that the proposed Prevention Team be established as a priority and funded adequately.

Local Sustainability, Participation and Education

This working group reflects the importance attached by *Comhar* to promoting local initiatives moving towards sustainable development, and in particular in promoting Local Agenda 21. Its work will encompass guidance on the pursuit of sustainable development within reformed Local Government structures, issues relating to Local Agenda 21 and other forms of community action for sustainability. It recognises the importance of broad public participation and involvement in these regards, and will address means of securing more effective participation across communities and the general public. Identifying and disseminating models of good practice may also be a

focus of work. Finally, education and information on sustainable development also fall within the remit of this group.

In February 2000, the group held a Roundtable with a number of people active in/with expertise in the area of local sustainability, to discuss how best *Comhar* can promote the implementation of Local Agenda 21, and add value to the work already being carried out. The discussion focused on what was currently happening in relation to Local Agenda 21, including barriers experienced and possible solutions in a range of areas. The changes and new structures in local government were considered in relation to how they might contribute to sustainable development. The meeting explored key barriers to local sustainability, and considered possible areas where *Comhar* might make a contribution to overcoming these.

Suggestions for possible action by *Comhar* included:

- linking with the new local government processes, in particular the Directors of the new County/City Development Boards and the related Community Forum process, and supporting the Local Agenda 21 Officers Network;
- Considering means of increasing awareness and understanding of sustainable development/LA21, such as an easily-understandable pamphlet, engaging with the communications/cultural industries on making the message attractive and accessible, and serving as a networking point for exchange of information;
- Examining local authority strategies and emphasising the need for integration of sustainable development – perhaps providing guidance on corporate strategy; and
- Preparing a charter that each local authority could sign up to or that individuals in the local authority could sign.

Work items concluded

Submission on the Planning and Development Bill, 1999

One of the first decisions taken by the working group on spatial planning, in deciding its priorities, was to address its initial work to the Planning and Development Bill, published in August 1999. This decision was endorsed at the Plenary meeting in September, when members were strongly of the view that *Comhar* should make a submission in relation to the Bill. While acknowledging that this was a lengthy and complex piece of legislation, it was felt important that *Comhar* should make its submission as early as possible, in order to maximise the time for its consideration as the Bill went through the Oireachtas.

Accordingly, the working group gave considerable thought to the issues involved and engaged in substantial discussion and debate regarding both the underlying principles and the drafting of the Bill. The Group prepared a draft text on the basis of their agreement, and this was circulated to the wider membership for approval. The final submission, which reflected a significant degree of consensus, was sent to the Minister for the Environment & Local Government on 24 November 1999.

In its submission, *Comhar* welcomed the broad thrust of the Bill, in particular:

- increased public participation in the planning process
- the placing of a framework for assessing environmental implications of regional planning guidelines, development plans and local area plans
- the reintroduction of environmental considerations at local authority level for activities that require Integrated Pollution Control (IPC) or Waste licences.

Comhar's principal concern with the Bill reflected its members' commitment to sustainable development, and noted in particular the social aspects, i.e.

- promoting social inclusion,
- minimising unfair distribution of the costs of environmental protection, and
- maximising local input to decisions that have effect locally.

Comhar welcomed the fact that third party submissions were given a statutory basis and would therefore have to be taken into account by the Planning Authority. However, it opposed the principle of charging persons to make submissions and recommended that this should be omitted. It was felt that a prescribed fee for making

submissions would be contrary to the principle of participatory democracy; would be costly for local authorities administratively unless a higher fee was charged; and could lead to the exclusion of comments made in the interest of the public good.

Comhar did not agree with the proposed restrictions on the right to appeal to An Bord Pleanála, considering that these were contrary to the principle of the right to appeal for all those who would be affected by the proposed development. It also recommended that the requirement that the applicant should have a substantial interest in the matter in order to apply for judicial review should be deleted.

Comhar felt that the implication that an Environmental Impact Statement should be produced would not be appropriate for development plans and regional planning guidelines. Instead, it proposed that Development Plans should be subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment. It further recommended that the proposal to bring the public consultation process to the beginning of the preparation of development plans should be carried through to the preparation of local area plans, and that the provisions of local area plans should be taken into account in considering applications for planning permission.

Comhar considered that the making of regional planning guidelines should be mandatory, and that such guidelines should be reviewed every six years and new guidelines made every ten years. It also suggested that there should be an explicit time frame for the life of a Strategic Development Zone.

Comhar welcomed the initiative to bring housing need into the centre of the planning and development process, and considered that aspects of the housing strategy would require review on at least an annual basis. Owing to the time required to make a variation to the development plan, it recommended that adjustments to the housing strategy should be exempt from the requirement to carry out a formal variation of the development plan.

Comhar also welcomed the proposal to include environmental considerations when a local authority decide to refuse a grant of permission for activities that require IPC or Waste licences. Finally, it noted the major resource implications of the Bill, and

stressed the need to provide adequate resources, including staff, for its implementation.

Comment on draft National Greenhouse Gas Abatement Strategy

In October 1999, the Minister for the Environment & Local Government invited *Comhar* to comment on a draft National Greenhouse Gas Abatement Strategy being prepared by his Department. The Partnership was happy to accept this invitation, recognising that climate change abatement policies will have a continuing relevance across the range of sectoral and cross-sectoral issues which *Comhar* will address. Initial work on considering the draft Strategy was undertaken by the Working Group on National Policy and Mechanisms, which over the course of several meetings prepared a draft response on a number of issues arising from the draft strategy. In addition to their own deliberations and discussions, the group took account of input from other members of *Comhar* in preparing the draft response, which was the subject of intensive discussion at the Plenary in December 1999.

In its agreed response to the draft Strategy, *Comhar* endorsed the need for early action by all the economic sectors and at all levels of society. It welcomed the emphasis on broadly based measures and on equitable burden sharing. It noted that much needed to be done to raise awareness in the sectors and among the general public, and to encourage, support and, where required, enforce action. In this regard, it recommended that the Strategy should highlight the reality that some changes of lifestyle on a national basis were required to achieve its goals. It also stressed the need to ensure that the Strategy's message is clearly understood by all those who would be called on to take action, especially the general public.

Comhar recommended that the guiding principles underlying the Strategy should include, amongst others, greater acknowledgement of the global context (social justice, equity, sustainable development); integration of environmental considerations with economic policy; and a shift from economic growth to sustainable economic development. The social equity aspects of proposed action also needed to be fully taken into account, and proper public participation needed to be integrated throughout the Strategy and its implementation, and extended to other policy areas and relevant negotiating structures and processes.

Comhar highlighted a number of areas of sectoral policy, including transport, agriculture and energy, where specific action would be required to meet climate change targets, and recommended that careful examination of the issues – including social aspects – be undertaken in relation to the implications of both current policy and future measures. The need to give similar careful consideration to a range of possible instruments, including economic instruments and emissions trading, was also noted.

Comhar particularly stressed the importance of strong implementation and monitoring procedures, which should be set out as early as possible. The need for clear indicators to be devised and put in place to measure progress was an essential part of the process.

Proactive information and education measures were seen as paramount to the success of the Strategy. *Comhar* suggested a number of elements which might be used in a communications strategy, including tailored measures targeted at specific sectors as well as means of raising general awareness.

Following agreement by Plenary, *Comhar*'s comments on the draft Strategy were delivered to the Minister for the Environment & Local Government on 17 December 1999.

OECD environmental performance review of Ireland

As part of the OECD environmental performance review of Ireland, the Chairman of *Comhar* and three members of the Bureau met with the OECD review team on 4 October 1999. Issues discussed included the role of *Comhar*, and in particular its contribution to promoting sustainable development and integration and public participation.

General awareness raising

In line with its work programme, a number of general awareness raising measures were undertaken during the year. These included the wide circulation of a general information leaflet and the work programme, as well as representation from *Comhar* at a number of conferences and other events – including addresses from the Chairman in some cases.

The sponsorship of awards in Young Scientist & Technology Exhibition (starting January 2000) is seen as a means of both raising awareness of *Comhar* and its purpose, and also encouraging greater involvement/interest by young students in sustainable development issues. The award in the 2000 competition was given to Grainne O'Kane, Joanne Casey and Catherine McEleavy from Thornhill College, Derry, for their project, “Home Grown Energy”. It is anticipated that with increased awareness of the prize in the coming years, three prizes will be awarded annually (i.e. one in each of the competition’s three main categories).

Appendix 1

Terms of Reference for Comhar

- (1) The Terms of Reference of the National Sustainable Development Partnership are to advance the national agenda for sustainable development, to evaluate progress in this regard, to assist in devising suitable mechanisms and advising on their implementation, and to contribute to the formation of a national consensus in these regards.

The Partnership will:

- (A) Have a specific focus on:-
- Consideration of policy proposals and issues relating to the environment and sustainable development, and advice to Government on them;
 - Researching and making recommendations, tailored to national conditions, on specific approaches to, or instruments for, environmental management and protection, employment creation in the environmental sector, environmental performance in economic sectors;
 - Reviewing the implementation in Ireland of Agenda 21 and the other Rio Agreements, and contributing to annual national reports to the UN Commission on Sustainable Development;
 - Reviewing/responding to national data on environmental quality trends;
 - Recommending mechanisms for greater integration of environmental and sustainable development considerations into the development and implementation of all Government policies;

- Promoting information exchange, dialogue and consultation on environmental policy and sustainable development among the social partners and non-governmental organisations;
 - Advising on means of raising public awareness of sustainable development and environmental issues, and encouraging positive behaviour at individual, community and sectoral levels.
- (B) Examine and make recommendations on other issues related to environment and sustainable development.
 - (C) Review and monitor the implementation of the Partnership's recommendations and if necessary make further recommendations; and
 - (D) Examine and report on relevant matters referred to it by the Minister for the Environment and Local Government or any other Minister.
- (2) The Partnership may consider sustainable development issues on its own initiative or at the request of a Minister of the Government.
 - (3) The Partnership will work in three year cycles and will inform Government, through the Minister for the Environment and Local Government, of its programme of work within three months of the beginning of each cycle.
 - (4) In drawing up its work programme, the Partnership will take account of the role and functions of other bodies in areas related to sustainable development (environmental, social and economic) such as the NESF, the EPA and the Heritage Council to ensure complementarity.
 - (5) The Partnership may be invited/designated by the Minister for the Environment and Local Government to attend relevant international fora, including the UN Commission on Sustainable Development.

- (6) The Partnership may invite Ministers, Public Officials, Members of the Partnership, and outside experts to make presentations and to assist the Partnership in its work. It may also constitute appropriate subsidiary, consultative fora to assist in its work.
- (7) The Partnership will publish and submit all its reports (which shall include annual reports on progress) to the Minister for the Environment and Local Government, who shall bring them to Government; to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Environment and Local Government; and to such Government Departments and bodies as may be appropriate.
- (8) The Partnership will be drawn from five broad pillars:
- State/public sector;
 - economic sectors;
 - environmental NGOs;
 - social/community NGOs;
 - professional/academic sector.
- (9) Bodies designated by the Minister for the Environment and Local Government under these five pillars shall nominate candidates for the Partnership, and the Minister shall appoint no less than three of the nominees from each pillar to the Partnership.
- (10) The Partnership will have an independent Chairperson appointed by the Minister for the Environment and Local Government. The Chairperson's term of office shall be five years, and may be extended by the Minister.
- (11) The term of office of members will be three years during which term members may nominate alternates. Casual vacancies will be filled by the Minister for the Environment and Local Government from among the original nominees within the relevant pillar and members so appointed shall hold office until the expiry of the current term of office of all members. The size of the membership may be varied by the Minister for the Environment and Local Government on the approval of the Government.

- (12) The Chairperson of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Environment and Local Government shall be an ex-officio member of the Partnership.

- (13) The Partnership is under the aegis of the Department of the Environment and Local Government and is funded through a Grant from that Department. This Grant is part of the overall estimate for the Department of the Environment and Local Government.

Appendix 2 : Membership of Comhar

Chairman: Dr. John Bowman

Ex-officio member: Mr. Jackie Healy-Rae, Chairman, Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Environment and Local Government

Pillar 1

<i>Name</i>	<i>Representing</i>
Mr. Declan Burns	Environmental Protection Agency
Dr. Paddy Fitzmaurice	Central Fisheries Board
Mr. Joe Gavin	County & City Managers' Association
Mr. Joe O'Gorman	Irish Assembly of Regional Authorities
Ms. Geraldine Tallon	Department of the Environment & Local Government/Green Network of Government Departments

Pillar 2

<i>Name</i>	<i>Representing</i>
Mr. Des Cummins	Small Firms Association
Mr. Jim Devlin	Irish Farmers' Association
Dr. Mary Kelly	Irish Business & Employers' Confederation
Mr. Brendan Leahy	Irish Tourist Industry Confederation
Mr. Terence O'Donnell	Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers' Association
Mr. Fergus Whelan	Irish Congress of Trade Unions

Pillar 3

<i>Name</i>	<i>Representing</i>
Ms. Karin Dubsky	Irish Coalition for Sustainability/NIEDO, Earthwatch, Coastwatch, Global Action Plan, Irish Wildlife Trust, VOICE, Birdwatch Ireland
Mr. Philip Geoghegan	An Taisce

Ms. Jeanne Meldon	Irish Uplands Forum
Ms. Gráinne O’Leary	ECO (The Irish Environmental Conservation Organisation for Youth)
Ms. Sadhbh O’Neill	Irish Coalition for Sustainability/NIEDO, Earthwatch, Coastwatch, Global Action Plan, Irish Wildlife Trust, VOICE, Birdwatch Ireland
Ms. Jennifer Wann	Irish Women’s Environmental Network

Pillar 4

<i>Name</i>	<i>Representing</i>
Dr. Anne Clune	National Women’s Council of Ireland
Ms. Josephine Henry	National Youth Council of Ireland
Ms. Liz O’Brien	PLANET (Partnerships for Local Action Network)
Mr. Seán Regan	Community Platform, CORI, National Association of Tenants’ Organisations, Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed, Community Workers’ Co-operative, ACRA
Ms. Bernie Walsh	Community Platform, CORI, National Association of Tenants’ Organisations, Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed, Community Workers’ Co-operative, ACRA

Pillar 5

<i>Name</i>	<i>Representing</i>
Mr. T. Kieran Kennedy	Royal Town Planning Institute
Dr. Richard Moles	Environmental Sciences Association of Ireland, Universities Research Group on the Environment
Ms. Máire Ní Chionna	Institution of Engineers of Ireland

Appendix 3

Work Programme, 1999-2002

Introduction

Comhar, the National Sustainable Development Partnership, was formally established on 26 February 1999. Its terms of reference are, in brief, to advance the national agenda for sustainable development, to evaluate progress in this regard, to assist in devising suitable mechanisms and advising on their implementation, and to contribute to the formation of a national consensus in these regards.

These terms of reference provide a very broad scope for *Comhar*'s work programme. Within them, *Comhar* has an independent brief to design its own agenda. It may also be asked by the Minister for the Environment and Local Government, or by any other Minister, to examine and report on relevant matters.

In defining its work programme, *Comhar* considers that the following criteria are particularly relevant:

- adding value to existing work;
- assessing the policy relevance of issues, with a view to positioning itself at the developmental end of policy;
- avoiding duplication of work being carried out by other bodies; and
- using its unique nature and the strength of its broad representation to come to informed and balanced perspectives and recommendations.

Under its terms of reference, *Comhar* will work in three-year cycles. This work programme accordingly outlines, in broad terms, the main areas in which *Comhar* will concentrate its contributions over the period from 1999 to 2002. While seeking to be reasonably comprehensive in this regard, *Comhar* recognises the need for more focused definition in respect of the broader topics. Members also consider it important to retain a degree of flexibility in the work programme, to allow for

adjustment, if necessary, in the light of experience or to take account of new issues arising over the three-year period.

In delivering on its work programme, *Comhar* will give careful consideration to the most appropriate vehicles to disseminate its message. In this regard, its work and products may take a number of forms, as appropriate to particular issues, including:

- advice to Ministers, to specific sectors, or to the general public;
- opinions on critical issues in relation to the environment and sustainable development;
- recommendations on policy development;
- research and preparation of reports; and
- sponsorships or other means to raise awareness.

Comhar will publish all its reports, opinions, and other products, using a range of relevant means for their dissemination, including electronic media. It will also submit its reports to the Minister for the Environment and Local Government, for appropriate referral to Government, to the Oireachtas Committee on the Environment and Local Government, and to relevant Government Departments and other bodies.

Major work areas

Comhar has identified four major work areas, comprising clusters of related issues as set out below, as requiring examination in its initial work programme. Working groups are now being established to begin the task of addressing these major areas. A first step for the groups will be to develop more detailed terms of reference in each area, to define and guide the work and establish more specific timetables and targets for each issue. The groups will also consider, *inter alia*, what sustainability means for the various issues, and the sectors or groups which they wish to address.

National policy and mechanisms/instruments

Comhar's remit concerns not only policy consultation and advice, but also means and instruments which may be used to implement policy and in particular to ensure better integration of environmental and sustainability considerations in economic sectors. Initially, *Comhar* will offer advice on the sustainable development profile of the new

National Development Plan. In relation to mechanisms and instruments to promote and pursue sustainability, options which may be examined by *Comhar* over the period of the work programme include:

- environmental management;
- eco-labelling;
- environmental taxation;
- voluntary agreements;
- regulation;
- sustainability proofing/eco-auditing of policies;
- green procurement;
- indicators; and
- effective communication strategies.

Spatial planning

Comhar recognises that spatial planning is critically related to the pursuit of sustainable development, and has decided to establish a working group to examine a range of associated issues. These may include, for example, sustainable settlements, planning and land use, agriculture and rural development, and coastal zone management. The ESRI, in its report to Government on “National Investment Priorities for the Period 2000-2006” (March 1999) recommended the preparation of a long-term strategic physical planning framework for Ireland, incorporating a settlement strategy and an assessment of development needs in the future. The Government has decided in principle to develop a national spatial planning policy. It is anticipated that contributing to the development of this policy will be a medium-term focus for *Comhar*.

Waste prevention and management.

Comhar recognises that modernising waste performance is a key national policy objective. This is a very broad area, and research, recommendations or other inputs by *Comhar* will be informed by the waste hierarchy, prioritising prevention, minimisation, reuse and recycling and options for disposal. *Comhar* is aware that substantial work is underway by local authorities to complete the preparation and formal adoption of Waste Management Plans under the Waste Management Act,

1996. It has identified a need for focus on the higher elements of the hierarchy, and in particular on options for waste prevention, minimisation, reuse and recycling, but may also address options for waste disposal. There is a particular need for education and awareness raising in these regards. *Comhar* also considers that case studies and best practice models, which may illustrate principles or problems and help to promote more sustainable performance, should be developed.

Local sustainability/public participation and education

Sustainable development considerations are relevant at all levels of government and society, and must also involve communities and individuals. Guidance on the pursuit of sustainable development within reformed Local Government structures, issues relating to Local Agenda 21 and other forms of community action for sustainability will be encompassed by this working group. *Comhar* recognises the importance of broad public participation and involvement in these regards, and will address means of securing more effective participation across communities and the general public. Identifying and disseminating models of good practice may be a focus of work in this regard. Education and information on sustainable development will also be addressed within the remit of this group.

Ongoing work

Comhar recognises that a number of ongoing and recurring issues arise from its terms of reference, including

- monitoring overall progress under the National Sustainable Development Strategy, and progress towards sustainable development in general (having regard to the remit of other bodies working in this area, notably the Sub-Committee on Sustainable Development of the Oireachtas Committee on Environment and Local Government);
- reviewing the implementation of Agenda 21 and the other Rio agreements; and
- generally reviewing relevant policy proposals and developments as they arise.

Comhar will maintain an overview of these issues, and make appropriate provision to address these tasks on an ongoing basis, using a variety of suitable means.

Awareness raising

To some extent, *Comhar*'s mandate in relation to general awareness raising will be met in the course of delivering on its key objectives. In publishing its conclusions, opinions, reports, and recommendations, for example, *Comhar* will

- raise awareness of environment and sustainable development issues in general;
- reinforce the value of pursuing sustainable development policies and provide influential and representative guidance for economic sectors and the general public; and
- seek to build consensus around best practice models for better environmental and sustainable development performance.

Comhar will undertake specific awareness-raising actions from time to time as part of its work programme. In this regard, *Comhar* has decided in principle to provide some sponsorship in areas where this could highlight sustainable development concerns and draw attention to its agenda and implementation.

Other issues

Alongside major work areas, individual members also have the option of proposing/developing initiatives on particular areas of interest, which will then be submitted to the wider membership for consideration. Such initiatives could facilitate *Comhar* input to a range of issues, some of which may require short-term attention, or may subsequently be further developed within the work programme.

Areas which the Minister asked *Comhar* to examine

The Minister for the Environment and Local Government asked *Comhar* to consider three issues in preparing its work programme:

- how best to influence behaviour across the economy and society to support Ireland's international commitments on climate change, including limiting growth in greenhouse gas emissions;
- to inform Ireland's input to this year's Community-wide assessment of EU environment and sustainable development policy; and

- to identify and develop good practice models and instruments which will promote environmentally sustainable behaviour.

Climate change

Climate change abatement policies will have a continuing relevance across *Comhar*'s work programme, impacting on and influencing a broad range of sectoral and cross-sectoral issues. Climate change will therefore be taken into account across the work programme and by all the working groups already referred to. A National Greenhouse Gas Abatement Strategy is currently being prepared, with a view to meeting Ireland's commitments under the Kyoto Protocol to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. *Comhar* will now give consideration to appropriate advice and recommendations on economic and social behaviour in support of progressive action to limit and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Review of EU policy on the environment and sustainable development

Comhar notes the importance of the current review of EU policy on the environment and sustainable development, which is due to be completed by the end of 1999 and to lead to a new policy programme for the period 2000-2005. It notes that the European Commission is preparing a communication for Council, containing a global assessment of performance under the Fifth Environment Action Programme, by summer 1999. *Comhar* will encourage public and stakeholder consultation on the new communication during autumn 1999, as well as making its own contribution to the debate.

Good practice models and instruments to influence behaviour

Work in these regards will be substantially addressed by the working groups already referred to. In relation to models of good practice, *Comhar* recognises the value of identifying and disseminating such examples to encourage practical action for sustainability. Given that good practice models may be found across a range of issues and sectors, it is intended to pursue this throughout the work programme, including the areas of local sustainability, waste prevention and management, and sustainable planning/land use issues.

Contribution to international policy and review

Comhar's input to the current review of EU policy on the environment and sustainable development has already been referred to above.

Contribution to national reports to the UN Commission on Sustainable Development

The Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) is tasked by the UN with furthering and monitoring the global implementation of Agenda 21. As part of its work, specific topics are designated for review at each of its annual meetings. The over-arching issues for the period to 2002 are poverty and sustainable consumption and production. Sectoral and cross-sectoral themes to be examined in 2000 are integrated planning and management of land resources; financial resources/trade and investment/economic growth; and agriculture. In 2001, the themes will be atmosphere; energy; transport; and information for decision-making and participation.

National reports are prepared annually, on the basis of questionnaires issued by the CSD, and are submitted in late autumn for the following year's meeting. The Department of the Environment and Local Government will provide draft reports to *Comhar* in good time, seeking its opinions/recommendations on the content

OECD environmental performance review of Ireland

The Environment Directorate of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) implements a programme of environmental performance reviews, whereby member countries submit themselves for peer review of their environmental policies and performance. A commitment was given in the National Sustainable Development Strategy (1997) that Ireland would seek review under this programme.

The review will be carried out during 1999, with a preliminary visit during the summer, and the main review in the autumn. *Comhar* welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this major review, and to work with and advise the OECD as appropriate.

Review

This three-year work programme will be reviewed at the end of 1999, which is an introductory year. *Comhar* has established a Bureau, whose tasks include monitoring and guiding the overall work programme between Plenary sessions.

Annual report

Comhar is required to report annually on its progress and activities. Its work will therefore include the preparation and publication of an annual report, which will, *inter alia*, include an update on the work programme.

25th May 1999