

Community Conversations

WORKSHOP 05 OUTPUT REPORT
CARLINGFORD, CO. LOUTH



Community Conversations

WORKSHOP 05 OUTPUT REPORT | CARLINGFORD, CO. LOUTH



Date	Saturday 11 TH October 2025
Workshop Event Venue	Omeath Dolmen Centre
Nature Event	Omeath Carlingford Greenway Coastal Walk
Facilitators	James McConville*, Lucy Taylor**
	*ACT, **Hometree
Relevant Ecosystem	Upland & Coastal
Total Events & Outreach	21
Participants	

FACILITATORS' NOTE

Facilitators answered the following 3 questions post the Community Conversation:

- How did you feel the Community Conversation event went?
- What was the general make-up of the room and the overall mood?
- Were there any key stories that stood out?

Facilitator 1 - James McConville (ACT)

The Omeath Community Conversation event went very well with a decent turnout. Having the nature event beforehand helped people focus on the “why” and gave them confidence to speak during the workshop.

The room was quite balanced in terms of gender, though mostly older, generally over fifty. There were about four or five farmers present. What stood out was the number of people from the northern side of the Lough. Even though the event was held in Omeath, many participants came from Northern Ireland.

A lot of this interest likely stems from the recent [Creative Ireland Shifting Tides project](#), which brought together coastal communities from both sides of Carlingford Lough to foster new connections with local marine environments through practical ecology and collaborative creative arts. The project led to the creation of the cross-border ‘Lough Keepers’ community group, several of whose members attended the Community Conversation.

A few key stories stood out. One was about the river, where a man described how his children became sick from the water, which later led to a community clean-up effort. [Please see the River Cleaning story in the appendix](#). Another was about the use of rope culture for mussel farming. [Please see the Mussel Farming story in the appendix](#).

Facilitator 2 - Lucy Taylor (Hometree)

The audience in Omeath was very engaged and well informed. Many people had a strong awareness of environmental issues, nature, heritage and folklore. It was a more expert audience than we have had elsewhere.

During the Greenway walk beforehand, there were strong discussions. People understood the trade-offs involved in projects like greenways. One man spoke about how the Greenway had split his property in two. The group showed a good understanding of these local challenges and there was active participation throughout.

At the main event, several people challenged us, which was positive. There was a strong sense of cynicism and scepticism about how environmental systems are monitored and managed. Some felt that the NPWS was intentionally underfunded so it could be blamed for environmental decline while the government avoided responsibility.

Because of Carlingford Lough's position on the border, there was also a lot of discussion about the lack of clear responsibility between agencies. Participants said when someone reports a problem, they are often told it's the other side's issue. For example, if a boat was doing something questionable, authorities in the north would say it was the Republic's problem. Some issues were described as being "a freshwater agency problem, not a saltwater agency problem," or passed between the EPA and the National Parks. Everyone was blaming someone else and that came through very strongly. Please see both the [Border Line story](#) and the [Dredging story](#) in the appendix.

In other events we have heard more sadness and loss. Here, the mood was mostly frustration and anger about things being lost and not being implemented.

Most of the group were over fifty, with one younger participant in his twenties. There was a local artist trying to become more involved in environmental work, as well as a mix of part-time and full-time farmers, around five in total. There were also some people involved in rowing, though no one directly from aquaculture or fisheries, even though those industries are very present in the Lough.

REPORT METHODOLOGY

This Summary Output Report has been compiled from the contributions of 21 participants who took part in the Workshop Event. During the workshop, participants were asked to reflect on the same three core questions, ensuring consistency in the responses gathered.

Participant contributions were recorded using written post-its across three rounds of questions. To support discussion and reflection, facilitators introduced prompt cards based on the seven Articles of the Nature Restoration Law and satellite maps of the local area. For Question 2a, a show-of-hands response method was used to capture collective sentiment.

To support the work of the Independent Advisory Committee, this report aims to collate and summarise the general responses while also reflecting the weighting participants placed on the sentiments and stories shared during the workshop. Participant responses are presented in bullet-point format to support ease of reading. As participants occasionally addressed topics beyond the specific questions, our team has reallocated their responses to the most appropriate question (1, 2, or 3). Where this was not suitable, the response has been placed in the 'Additional Comments' section.

All responses have been grouped under the seven Articles of the Nature Restoration Law. While overlaps inevitably occur across themes, every effort has been made to present them as distinctly as possible to provide a clear and structured representation of community perspectives.

In addition to the three core questions, participants were invited to share personal or local stories about nature. Our team has transcribed these stories as verbatim as possible, with only light edits for clarity and legibility while preserving the original meaning. These stories are included in full in the Appendix and are also quoted and location-referenced where relevant throughout the report.

Finally, as a disclaimer, ACT and Hometree are acting solely as facilitators for the Community Conversations. The contents of this report, including any statements that may be inaccurate or non-evidence-based reflect participants' views, and should not be interpreted as endorsed positions of either organisation.



Community Conversations Workshop Event (Image credit: ACT)



Community Conversations Workshop Event (Image credit: ACT)



Community Conversations Nature Event (Image credit: ACT)

Q1. What nature in your community matters most to you and why?

By 'nature' we mean places, spaces, plants and animals.

Terrestrial, Coastal and Freshwater Ecosystems:

- The ditches, clean streams and old trees. [Please see the Ancient Tree Stumps story found in the appendix.](#)
- The otters which are regularly spotted in the middle of Newry.
- The wetlands, clean beaches, upland wilderness and nature-friendly gardens
- Wetlands and bogs.

Marine Ecosystems:

- Coast and sea. Seals.

Urban Ecosystems:

- Public access to our nature through paths, parks and clean waterways.

Natural Connectivity of Rivers and Floodplains

- The rivers that flow into Carlingford Lough including the Clanrye, the Fairy Glen, the Ryland River.
- Herons in the local rivers as well as the kingfishers and the dippers.
- Access to nature including the walks and paths like along the waterways.
- Mill Bay wetlands and their bird populations.

Pollinator Populations

- The insect diversity
- Wildflower meadows

Agricultural Ecosystems:

- The hedgehogs and badgers.
- Upland areas and wild areas.
- The foraging along the hedgerows in Omeath.
- The green hills and open grass areas are a necessary environment to alleviate stress and meet people thus helping mental health.

Forest Ecosystems:

- Native woodlands.
- Protected woodlands, trees.
- The ancient oak forest attracts a lot of interest.
- The sound of the buzzard's call.

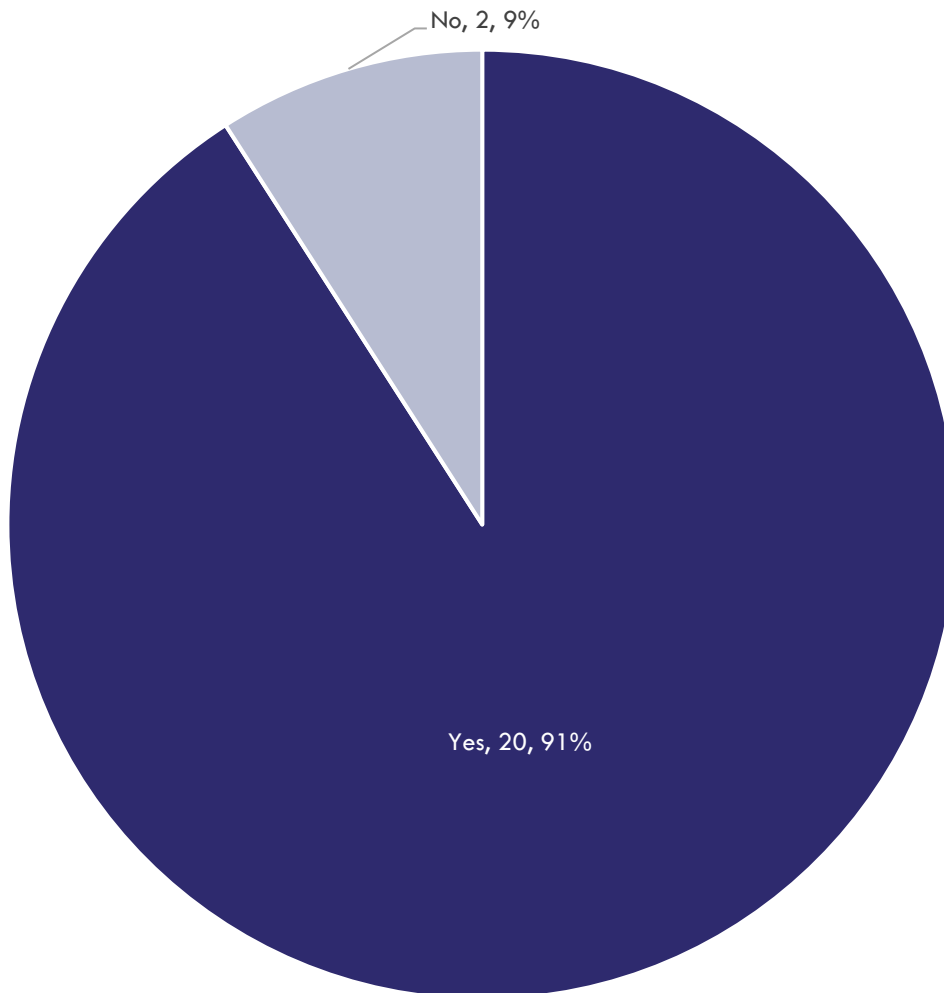
Additional Comments:

- "We are fauna".
- Walkers in the hill areas and older people walking their dogs is a lovely sight.

- To see and be inside an intact ecosystem.
- I love even tiny habitats.
- Native plant species.

Q2a. Have you noticed any changes in your local nature over your lifetime? (Yes or No)

By 'changes' we mean positive and or negative changes in your area.



Q2b. If yes, can you tell us about these changes and how they made you feel?

This could be in relation to a particular story or place in your community. What made this particular change come to mind?

Terrestrial, Coastal and Freshwater Ecosystems:

- Bale wrap all through the rivers, more litter on coasts and more seaweed washed up.
- Lots of birds in decline, including the gannets, which are gone from Carlingford Lough.
- Increase in some wild birds such as buzzards, peregrine, osprey and hen harrier.
- Return of the red deer.
- When I came to live in Omeath 5 years ago, there were bats from a nearby colony flying every night during the summer. They have not been flying for 3 years now.
- When I grew up the corncrake's call was a nuisance in the morning but now it is gone.

Marine Ecosystems:

- Carlingford Lough is ruined by mussel dredging

Urban Ecosystems:

- Bats lived in areas just off Patrick Street in Newry. they made squealing noises, sometimes as children we got a bit frightened.
- As a child I saw foxes roaming in the fields which was commandeered to build the "Buttercrane Shopping Centre".
- The marshes in Dundalk were replaced by 'The Marshes' shopping centre. [Please see The Marshes story in the appendix.](#)
- Land and property prices increasing make it difficult to get land set aside for nature.
- The canal was home to huge water rats that sat on the stones for all to see. The locals were not bothered at all by their presence.

Natural Connectivity of Rivers and Floodplains:

- My local river is being polluted by diesel oil run off. I am upset that the government doesn't seem to be doing anything about it.
- Loss of trees, loss of hedges, loss of ditches and drainage of wetlands.
- Positive note at Greer's Quay, there are now more birds nesting like a bird sanctuary after 11 years living here.

Pollinator Populations:

- Very few insects, less birdsong
- Less bees, butterflies and birds. It all contributes to a feeling of loss
- No wildflowers in fields, so very few bees, butterflies etc.
- Insects on windscreens no longer seen

Agricultural Ecosystems:

- There is a loss of trust in big business and agribusiness
- More density of cattle in the fields. Less tree in the centre of fields and the hedges have been taken out.
- More wildfires.
- Birds following ploughs no longer seen.
- I believe there are underground pipes carrying slurry around the clock that aren't properly monitored next to my home. [Please see the Slurry story in the appendix.](#)

Forest Ecosystems:

- In our local forest in Ravensdale, there's been huge deforestation. Since then, we've had one of the worst flooding events in Newry and Ravensdale. The roads were nearly shut down for two days because the water is literally just running off the mountain now since the trees were removed.
- The successful return of the red squirrel and return of the pine marten.
- Trees being felled including very old ones. With small changes in regulation this could be improved.
- Loss of the fairy tree in Omeath.
- The trees behind the Dominican church were home to crows, hundreds of them roosted there at 8pm nightly in summertime. This happens no more.

Additional Comments:

- We used to see external polluters like the nuclear plant, now it is us to ourselves. I think my parent's deaths came from rare diseases which came from the water pollution.
- Where people come together to enhance nature, this gives me hope.
- The seasons are now messed up. I don't get as much joy as the seasons change.
- There is a raised awareness amongst the population in relation to environmental issues.
- There is an increased number of raptors.
- Habitats are destroyed by development with no mitigation. It seems there is no policy on nature at all?
- This was our playground but now it's gone!

Q3a. What opportunities to experience local nature would you like your community to have in the future? How can we make this possible?

Think about how your community could enjoy and connect with its local nature in the future.

Terrestrial, Coastal & Freshwater Ecosystems:

- Encourage wilding and rewilding at a local level. Encourage it at junior school and continue on and make it a school subject.
- To be able to see more places where wildlife and plants thrive.
- Celebrate and boost our wetlands.
- Scale Abbyleix bog project so there's a similar project in every county.
- Make the Mourne Mountains and Cooley Mountains a cross-border national park.

Marine Ecosystems:

- Clear and open management of Carlingford Lough environment with the laws strictly enforced. This will encourage more people to get involved and if people see government acting this will provide more motivation to join.
- Celebrate Carlingford's Dúlamán story. [Please see the Dúlamán story in the appendix.](#)

Urban Ecosystems:

- Stop promoting gardening. Change people's mindsets and get them away from manicured landscape. Take gardening programmes off the TV.
- Citizen science at a town land level.
- Safe walking and cycling routes through natural environments.
- Develop 'every household' menu of actions which goes beyond recycling.

Natural Connectivity of Rivers & Floodplains:

- Restore the wetland areas.

Pollinator Populations:

- Plant more wildflower meadows.
- Creation of meadows on public land. Reduce mowing and reframe responsibility within council workers and land managers.

Agricultural Ecosystems:

- Remove sheep from uplands, remove industrial plantations and allow nature to recolonise with low-level management practices.
- Educate and incentivise our farmers.

- Common sense payments for farmers. [Please see the Stone Walls story in the appendix.](#)

Forest Ecosystems:

- Create a native woodland on the Cooley Mountains.
- Create protected areas for the woodlands to grow back. [Please see the Fairy Tree story in the appendix.](#)
- Rewilding of the forest and mountains on Slieve Foy and Rostrever

Additional Comments:

- More funding for local conservation projects. Make grants available from council to existing community groups to support nature. For example, the Men's Shed. Important to get local councillors and community groups plus celebrities to be involved in their local areas' nature. Schools and businesses to help with fundraising and publicity.
- Constitutional rights of nature needed urgently. Similar to Ecuador put the rights of nature into both Ireland's constitution and Northern Ireland's de facto constitution.
- I want to feel safe from pollution and chemicals in all ecosystems, parks, in urban and rural areas.
- Citizen assemblies, local versions of deliberative democracy to give binding choices from communities to governments.
- Promote camping weekends, bringing different age groups together from different areas to better contrast the flora, landscapes and sceneries.
- More information boards placed along local walls for local people to inform and educate.
- Blanket bans do not work.
- More workshops and information sessions about nature to local groups and education centres.
- AI could be used for measurement, monitoring and intervention and to create a local composite nature dashboard that's visible to the community.
- Opportunities for all to spend time in native habitats. Nature walks for all with a guide who is knowledgeable about the local area.
- Children to have freedom to play in natural, safe environments with good air. In which positive development outcomes are fostered.
- More land access with accessible routes in natural environments in which people with disabilities can access nature.
- Commercialise globally proven nature interventions to support scaling. For example, the Eco Mooring project.
- Develop an environmental health disease registry or both humans and animals.
- Crowdfund scientific inputs like the recent The Great Irish Fossil Hunt conducted University College Cork.

- Should nature always be experienced? I have a problem with the question as it is. For example is it best for nature to bring 'greenways' through them. It enables for disturbance.
- Nature should be on the curriculum. More display of nature along the east coast.
- Use artists to help promote and help with nature restoration. I would like as an artist who uses a microscope to include community groups in water testing, showing the results on screen and use of visual art to show water quality.

Appendix: Community Nature Stories

Stone Walls

I had an acre of ground surrounded by stone walls. I was being paid for maintaining them, and the department came to inspect the land.

They couldn't see the stone walls on arrival due to the growth of natural vegetation around them, so they were going to dock the payment for that area. However, they said they would give me a chance to expose them.

I duly complied, cleared all of that area, and informed the department of what I'd done. They thought I'd done a great job. In my opinion, though, the damage I was doing to the wildlife that was surviving in that vegetation surrounding the stone walls was far worse.

Ancient Tree Stumps

When I was a young kid, I remember a very, very low tide when we walked out as far as we could, maybe a couple of hundred metres or more.

At that low tide, we found loads of tree stumps coming out of the seabed of the lough. Thousands of years ago, before the sea level rose, these trees would have grown there. They were four or five metres below sea level.

There used to be loads of them, but now they've all been dredged up, I think, by mussel dredgers. I don't believe they're there anymore.

Border Line?

At the time of partition, the Boundary Commission never fully resolved where exactly the border runs down through both Carlingford Lough and Lough Foyle.

There's still a disputed understanding of where the border is. It makes a bigger difference now that the UK is out of the EU as before, it was all under EU law. Now there's no agreement as to where the seabed belongs to the Republic of Ireland or the UK.

I think the Loughs Agency exists for that very reason because there's no agreed jurisdiction.

Dredging in the Lough

One morning, I remember seeing a dredger coming down and doing a full 360 in the water. The churning of the water was unbelievable.

I queried the legality of this with the Loughs Agency, and they said, "That's not our problem."

I asked, "What side of the Lough was it on? the North or the South?" Talk about passing the buck!

They are technically responsible for both sides. It was very disingenuous of them to say that because they control the fishing. I challenged them on the day, so I did.

Omeath's Fairy Tree

We had a fairy tree in Omeath that was valued by the local community.

When the bridge was being developed at Narrow Water, the developers were asked to protect and look after the fairy tree.

One night, it was chopped down. The community was really upset and a land healer was brought in to try and restore the feelings of the community.

People were very distressed for some time, and I suppose it's emblematic of our loss of nature in this area. It was an important event for our community.

Dúlamán

There's a special type of seaweed in Irish called dúlamán (Channel Wrack). Its scientific name is *Pelvetia canaliculata*, and there's a song that likely originates from this region called "Dúlamán". (Listen here: [YouTube Link](#))

The people who collected the seaweed were also called dúlamán. The song connects to this place with one verses saying, "We will go to Newry with the seaweed to buy expensive black shoes."

It speaks to the connection between the people who collected seaweed and the markets where they sold it to make a living. Dúlamán was used for dyeing clothes and was also edible. Other types of seaweed were used as fertiliser.

The song probably originated here and, as it spread across Ulster, it reached Donegal, where the Irish speakers changed "Newry" to "Derry", their nearest big market.

The Marshes

There's a shopping centre in Dundalk called The Marshes. Before it was built, when I was a child, I used to walk around that area with my grandfather.

There used to be a big forest, a swamp, and fields of bogland and that's why it was called The Marshes.

It was completely torn down, cemented over and replaced by a huge shopping centre, a car park and a new road system. The name 'The Marshes' is all that remains of what was once there.

Mussel Farming

I went on holiday to Galicia in northwest Spain nearly 20 years ago, and what struck me there was the scale of the mussel industry. They employed thousands of people, hundreds of boats and used rope culture for mussels.

They suspended ropes from floating buoys on the surface and the mussels naturally seeded onto them. These created vertical reefs that filtered and cleaned the water, allowing sunlight to reach the seabed. They became entire habitats for numerous species, especially juveniles.

The boats harvested by lifting the ropes, stripping the mussels and replacing the ropes with no damage to the seabed, no sediment disturbance and no habitat destruction. I've always wondered why we can't adopt this approach in Carlingford Lough instead of the destructive bottom dredging we have now, which has turned the seabed into a lifeless desert.

I raised this with the Loughs Agency 20 years ago. Their director said people wouldn't want to see buoys and ropes as it would spoil the view. When I argued about the ecological damage, he said people don't care about what they can't see. That attitude sums up why things haven't changed.

River Cleaning

A couple of years ago, we started trying to clean the river that flows past the bottom of our fields. When we were kids, we used to play in it. One summer, my own kids played there and came back violently sick. We investigated and found sewage pipes, rubbish, and pollution upstream.

Each week over a summer, we cleaned about 100 metres of the river. We found everything; carcasses, rubbish, bale wrap, farm waste, computers and even an old Morris Minor car!

One farmer was hosing dog waste into the river. Another had a piggery with a pipe running straight in. We even found round bales dumped in the water. As we worked upstream, the farmers and landowners began cleaning their own areas before we reached them. It made a difference.

Slurry

I believe there are underground pipes carrying slurry around the clock that aren't properly monitored next to my home.

Water quality reports show it's poor but people are still told to drink it. I want an investigation into whether those pipes are legal, if they're monitored and whether the slurry is directly impacting water quality.

I also believe there are clusters of cancer and rare diseases in the area linked to slurry pollution. My parents both developed very rare conditions and as a doctor, I believe they are slurry-related.

I don't think we should have industrial slurry spreading on our land and, with respect, I don't want slurry imported from Northern Ireland to the South to get rid of it.