

# **Independent Advisory Committee on Nature Restoration**

**Meeting 8:** 24 September 2025  
**Venue:** Custom House Dublin 1  
**Time:** 11am – 3.30pm  
**Attendees:** See Annex I

## **Meeting report**

The eighth meeting of the Independent Advisory Committee (IAC) on Nature Restoration took place on 24 September 2025. The Committee received presentations from Bord na Móna (BnM) and Dr Katherine Cronin, Chair of the Marine Interdepartmental Working Group (IWG). Updates were also provided on the progress of the other IWGs.

The Committee continued its discussion on its draft recommendations to the Minister on the National Restoration Plan (NRP), considered engaging with the Just Transition Commission and the National Biodiversity Forum in relation to the NRP and received an update on stakeholder engagement and future events.

### *1. Minutes / Governance / Matters Arising*

The minutes of previous meeting were agreed with no amendments.

Under Matters Arising the IAC Chair noted that she had been advised that the Minister intends to issue a statement on nature-related allocations within the NDP in the coming weeks.

### *2. Bord na Móna*

BnM has gone through a significant period of change in the last decade. Since BnM committed to taking peat out of the energy system, the scale of the company has changed dramatically: in 2015 there were 2,500 staff versus 500 staff today (20% of whom work on estate management). Today, its core function is to help the State meet its energy needs by installing an additional 3GW of generating assets by 2040 (on top of the 1GW that they currently have). The estate

comprises 79,336ha in total, approximately 70,000ha of which will be available for non-energy activities such as nature restoration and rehabilitation once the full suite of energy generating assets have been consented to. BnM's Integrated Land Use Strategy to 2040 envisions the provision of energy generating assets alongside rehabilitation, public good and amenity provision.

BnM defines restoration in a narrow, ecologically-specific way – to return to blanket or raised bog. Restoration started in 2009, targeting raised bogs that were drained but never developed and had the potential to support obligations under the Habitats Directive (around 4,100ha). Rehabilitation, meanwhile, has a broader definition that can include rewetting, agricultural grasslands, conifer plantations and renewable infrastructure. Rehabilitation through the EDRRS scheme started in 2021 and 24,000ha will have been rewetted by 2026. This is not in line with previous BnM commitments to rehabilitate 33,000ha. There is some overlap between the two initiatives. Restoration and rehabilitation cost approximately €5,000 per hectare. Lastly, BnM noted that rewetting is more about hydrological management and this has a range of habitat outcomes.

There is potential to achieve restoration objectives on the non-energy portion of the estate (c. 70,000ha) in an integrated way with the achievement of energy objectives, however it is not currently possible to plan for this due to timing challenges, specifically around receipt of renewable energy planning consents through the planning system. BnM has mapped areas for potential energy development (approximately 30,000ha, of which approximately 9,000ha will be developed) but the specificity on locations for installation will not be confirmed until the planning process is completed. Until that is achieved, it is only possible to proactively plan for nature restoration on the portion of the estate that is a) not subject to consideration for potential energy installation, b) not already under restoration or rehabilitation. The other key enabler is funding commitments, including the potential extension of the EDRRS. BnM seeks finance on international markets to enable its delivery of onshore renewable energy. This is not the case for nature restoration so other funding models are required.

The Committee expressed concern at the seeming inability to plan for the achievement of restoration objectives, the potential implications of this for landowners who have lands that could be subject to rewetting targets, and also at the apparent reliance on public funding for nature restoration in the context of a profitable commercial operation that returns an annual

dividend to the State. Committee members noted that public bodies will be critical to delivering on Ireland's obligations under the NRL.

The Committee sent a number of questions to BnM in advance of the presentation and requested responses to them.

### *3. Update on Marine Ecosystems*

Dr Katherine Cronin (DCEE Marine Section), Co-Chair of the Marine IWG, provided an update on the ongoing development of proposals to fulfil the requirements of the NRL in relation to marine ecosystems.

Since the last update provided to the Committee in May, significant work including a data and mapping workshop in early July has been progressed on NRL Annex II Group 7 habitats (soft bottom sedimentary habitats up to 1,000m in depth). Under the regulation, and in contrast to habitats in Annex II Groups 1-6, Member States can define their own restoration targets on a percentage of the total area in order for measures to be put in place on two thirds of that area by 2040. Existing Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) targets of restoring 75% of areas to good condition without suspending commercial activity must be aligned with the requirements of the NRL. The intention is therefore to set an overall percentage restoration target for Group 7 habitats in the first iteration of the NRP without identifying specific areas. This approach seeks to reflect the fact that the MPA LIFE process is commencing which will work on this issue and more detailed consultation with the fishing industry is required. The IWG Co-Chair will be presenting initial proposals to industry bodies on 4 November.

In the subsequent discussion Committee members highlighted the importance of engaging with the fishing industry – noting that this can be challenging – and with NGOs. The IWG Co-Chair advised that this is already happening as organisations such as Birdwatch Ireland, Coastwatch Ireland and Ceann Beo are already being engaged with. Committee members also offered to assist this process by engaging with representatives of the Fisheries section of the Department of Agriculture who are scheduled to present at the next IAC meeting.

### *4. Continuing work on the IAC recommendations*

Hannah Hamilton set out the process to finalise the Committee's recommendations on public participation and stakeholder engagement. This involves scoping potential recommendations, developing drafts, discussing them in IAC sessions, including relevant comments received, and finally seeking formal sign off from the Committee.

The IAC Chair noted that the meaning of public participation in the draft encompasses formal education and communication and that the draft should emphasise the importance of nature in society and in formal curricula and of ecological literacy as a core competency.

It was agreed that the reference to "plant biology" in paragraph 1 would be removed and that civil society and eNGOs should receive specific mention in the first bullet point. Changes were also agreed to reflect the importance of raising awareness around the links between nature and food systems.

Further changes were suggested to include educating parents, the judiciary and the media and working with local landowners, to add "and nearby green spaces" to the third bullet point following "school grounds", to link schools with farming for nature and to include a reference to coastal communities and location-specific nature. The IAC Chair advised that comments could be submitted in writing over the coming days.

The Chair also clarified in response to a question from the Committee that the IAC is drafting recommendations on the specifics of the NRP and its enabling environment. It was suggested that a coding system to clearly identify the different categories might be used and this would be critical for aligning the NRP with the National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP). It was noted that the 2026 mid-term review of the NBAP may provide a good opportunity to progress this alignment which could assist in enhancing implementation due to the biodiversity duties imposed on public bodies under the Wildlife Amendment Act. Under these provisions, public bodies report to the Minister on their biodiversity work. Following a review, the Minister can instruct these bodies to reconsider their approach. Hannah Hamilton was requested to review the NBAP to inform the IAC recommendations.

The Committee agreed that engagement with the Just Transition Commission on the potential socioeconomic impacts of the NRP and with the Climate Change Advisory Council to ensure coherence with their work would be sensible.

It was proposed that a discussion of the proposed monitoring approach for the NRP may also be useful at a later stage. In this context it was noted that the Biodiversity Forum oversees the

monitoring of the implementation of the NBAP which is also tracked via the cross-Departmental Biodiversity Working Group (BWG) coordinated by NPWS. It was suggested that the IAC could recommend that the current IWGs be retained for the implementation process and that their outputs could feed into the BWG and the Biodiversity Forum.

Comments were made on the draft IAC submission on nature credits. This included emphasising public funding in paragraph 2 of the draft, including a reference to the long-term sustainability of private finance mechanisms in paragraph 3, adding “2000” to references to the Natura network and highlighting that offsetting by private bodies must still comply with existing legislation such as the Habitats Directive.

#### *5. Updates on progress of the Interdepartmental Working Groups*

Dr David Fenner (NPWS) provided a brief update on the progress of the IWGs. To speed up the delivery of the ecosystem workstreams, meetings of the three technical IWGs were suspended following the last series of sessions before the summer. The article leads have been progressing work and reporting on progress using a planning tool based on the EU’s NRP template. A series of IWGs to consider initial outputs from this work is scheduled for 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> October and it is expected that a number of draft proposals will be sent to the IAC for their consideration in advance of the next meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> October.

#### *6. Brief update on other Stakeholder Engagement Planning & Events*

Hannah Hamilton provided an update on the ongoing Community Conversations which were launched on 14<sup>th</sup> September in Lahinch. A second session will take place on 25<sup>th</sup> September in Iveragh in Co. Kerry. Based on the first report provided by the facilitators ACT/Hometree the attendance is good and participants have voiced frustration at the state of nature, raising water quality as a major issue. Each session will produce a report and a final combined report on all sessions will be completed at the end.

In the discussion it was noted that the initially proposed thematic focus of the sessions was subsequently removed to avoid limiting discussions. Committee members suggested that more

sessions in more locations including the midlands are essential to enable them to improve awareness and tackle distrust. The Chair agreed to engage with NPWS on expanding the series of Community Conversations.

#### *7. Review of Actions from Meeting*

- The IAC's paper on nature credits will be submitted in response to the ongoing consultation.
- The IAC Chair will draft a submission to the Just Transition Commission.
- The IAC will engage with the Committee Secretariat on the IWGs and including outputs in upcoming IAC meetings.
- The IAC will examine the possibilities of aligning the NBAP and the NRL.
- The IAC will request that the technical specialists (e.g. NPWS/Land IWG Chair/DCEE ecologists as appropriate) engage with BnM on the specific requirements of the NRL, including on definitions and identification of habitats for potential restoration/rehabilitation.
- The IAC's questions will be re-sent to BnM with a request to respond in writing and share the slides used during the meeting with the Committee.
- DAFM will be contacted regarding their previous statement to the IAC where they said that BnM would re-wet 33,000 hectares by 2026, which is not in line with BnM's current projections.
- The next IAC meeting should receive updates from the IWGs and a presentation from the DAFM Fisheries Section.

## **Annex I – IAC Meeting 8 Attendees**

- Dr Aoibhinn Ní Shúilleabháin, Chair
- Dr Micheál Ó Briain
- Prof Tasman Crowe
- Fintan Kelly
- Paul O'Brien
- Coilín O'Reilly
- Norah Parke
- Linda Lennon
- David Kerr
- Vincent Roddy
- Hannah Hamilton
- Dr Katherine Cronin, DCEE Marine
- Dr David Fenner, NPWS
- Marcus Maginniss, NPWS

## **Apologies:**

- Eamon Carroll
- David Flynn
- Colm O'Donnell
- Marina Conway
- Áinle Ní Bhriain, NPWS