

Community Conversations

WORKSHOP 01 OUTPUT REPORT
LAHINCH, CO. CLARE



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Date	Sunday 14th September 2025
Workshop Event Venue	Leisure Centre Conference Hall, Lahinch, Co.Clare
Outreach Location	Lahinch Promenade
Nature Event	Coastal Walk with Cormac McGinley
Facilitators *ACT, **Hometree	Caroline Stott**, James McConville*, Philip Corrigan*, Ray Ó Foghlú**
Relevant Ecosystem	Coastal
Total Events & Outreach Participants	57

FACILITATORS' NOTE

The kick-off event in Lahinch was a strong start to the Community Conversations. Despite the blustery, wet conditions, there was good attendance at both the workshop session and the guided nature walk. The outreach activities along the promenade also captured some interesting perspectives from families enjoying the seaside.

Overall, there was a positive attitude towards the enactment of the Nature Restoration Plan, with a clear consensus that "something needs to be done" in response to the biodiversity crisis. Water quality emerged as a key concern for many participants. During the workshop, emotional responses revealed a deep sense of frustration, grief and anger at environmental degradation and ongoing societal inaction. Many expressed feelings of powerlessness, disappointment and disconnection, pointing to a lack of respect, accountability and imagination in both communities and leadership.

Yet, there was also hope, particularly where strong community engagement and education were evident. A key highlight was the Restore Ballymacraven River Association's presentation of their local restoration efforts. Their story resonated deeply with participants, creating a very moving and uplifting moment. It demonstrated the importance of grounding any national restoration plan in localism, ensuring delivery is rooted in the lived experience and initiatives of communities themselves.

REPORT METHODOLOGY

This summary output report has been compiled from the contributions of 57 participants across three complementary formats: the Workshop Event, the Outreach Location, and the Nature Event. In each setting, participants were asked to reflect on the same three core questions, ensuring consistency in the responses gathered.



Community Conversations Workshop Event Materials (Image credit: ACT)

In the workshop event participant contributions were recorded using written post-its during three rounds of questions. Additional insights came from transcribed conversations with participants during discussions. To support dialogue, facilitators introduced prompt cards based on the seven Articles of the Nature Restoration Law and satellite maps of the local area. For Question 2b, a show-of-hands response was used; this should be read as indicative rather than formal, with a view to developing a more structured approach in future Community Conversation events.

Outreach surveying was conducted along Lahinch Promenade using clipboards. Responses were recorded directly by ACT and Hometree team members, capturing the views of families and individuals who may not have attended the formal workshop.

During the guided coastal walk 'Nature Event', responses were captured by ACT and Hometree through attentive listening to conversations and discussions prompted by the natural setting. Several of these responses have been included in the "Any Other Comments" section of this report to ensure these more informal yet valuable perspectives were not lost.

To support the work of the Independent Advisory Committee, 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 collate responses as distinctly as possible to provide a clear and structured representation of community perspectives.



Community Conversations Workshop Event (Image credit: ACT)



Community Conversations Nature Event (Image credit: ACT)



Community Conversations Outreach (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: Water quality is the most repeated concern by participants, with mentions of pollution, poor drinking water and fish kills. Clean water for swimming and surfing is important. Locations such as Lahinch, Ennistymon, Lickeen Lake, Ballymacraven River and the Dura floodplain in Ennis, County Clare are highlighted. Natural features like bogs, grasslands, riparian woodlands and green spaces are valued. Species such as curlew and otter are mentioned repeatedly, with calls for undisturbed habitats. Storms and high winds are seen as growing future threats to trees and coastal protection.

Marine Ecosystems: Concerns focus on sea water quality, marine biodiversity and the impact of agricultural nitrate runoff. Surfing and swimming safety are linked to clean seas. The recent population increase Weever fish is mentioned in relation to barefoot surfing. Respondents want more positive news about marine health and resilience.

Urban Ecosystems: There is a disconnect between people and nature, especially among young people. Education, especially via the TY programmes and biodiversity centres are suggested to improve awareness. Clahane Shore area is noted for tourism pressures. Respondents call for more public engagement, green spaces and nature connection.

Natural Connectivity of Rivers and Floodplains: The Dura floodplain, Ballymacraven River and Shannon Town Community Wetlands are highlighted for restoration. Pollution, fish deaths and water quality are repeated concerns. Riparian woodland and personal connections to rivers are frequently mentioned.

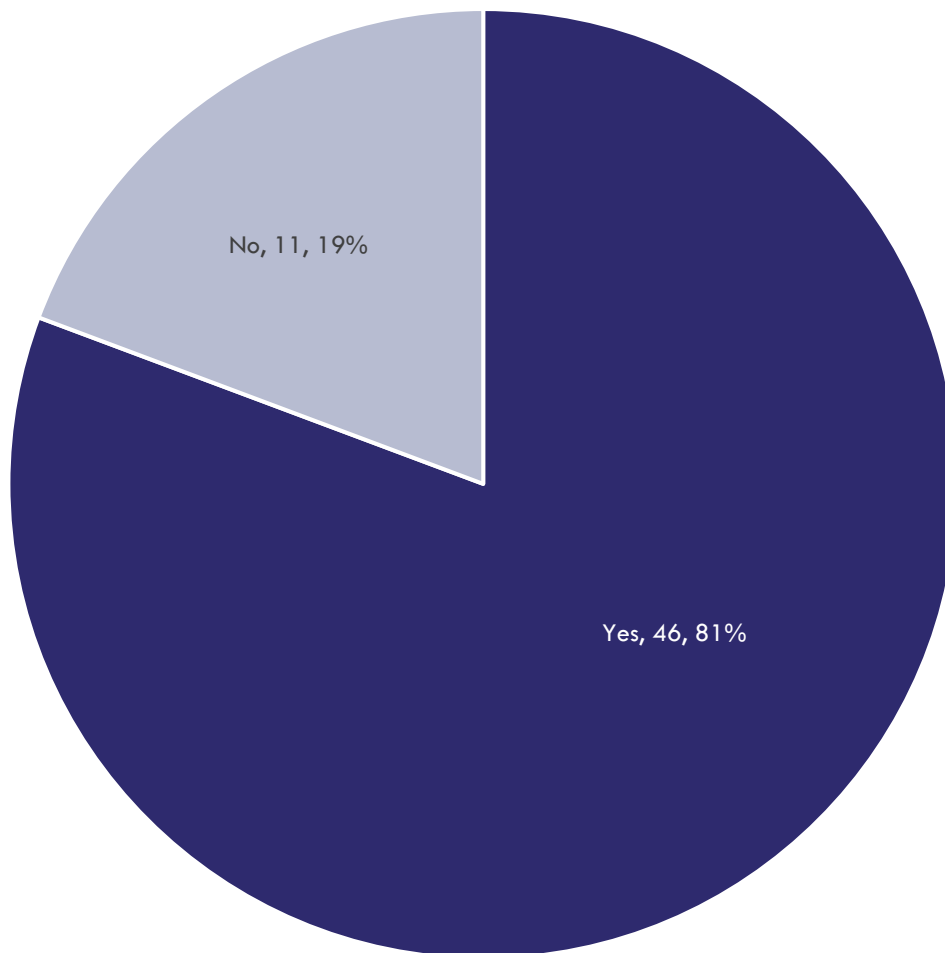
Pollinator Populations: There is a noted decline in insects, pollinators and small animals like hedgehogs and beetles. The reduction from six bee varieties to one is alarming. Respondents call for biodiversity protection and habitat restoration.

Agricultural Ecosystems: Intensive farming and soil health are key concerns. The Burren is mentioned in relation to unsuitable policy changes. Lough Avalla is praised for preservation. Dialogue between farmers and environmentalists is encouraged.

Forest Ecosystems: Respondents want diverse native woodlands instead of monocultures from Coillte. Riparian woodland and the woods in the Road Oak are mentioned. Storms and wind threaten tree survival. Woodland is valued for both ecological and therapeutic benefits.

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: Respondents expressed grief and frustration over habitat loss and poor water quality. Places like Spanish Point, River Moat, Doe Castle and Lahinch were mentioned. Species such as curlew, corncrake, linnet, snipe, yellow bittern, woodcock, otter, trout, eel and salmon were repeatedly cited as declining. Concerns include fish kills, blocked culverts, coastal erosion, tourism pressure, septic tank pollution and the loss of traditional landscapes. Bogs are rejuvenating but rivers are overgrown.

Marine Ecosystems: The sea is described as filthy, with fewer crabs and unusable seaweed due to sewage contamination. In the past seaweed use as a food and medicine was part of our culture, now people are scared to continue this practice due to the seaweed being contaminated with sewage and run off from slurry/farming. People were passionate about how seaweed as a food and medicine source is an integral part of Irish culture and history that needs to be maintained. Beach closures and their economic impact were noted. Respondents are saddened by the lack of restoration efforts.

Urban Ecosystems: Concerns include weed killer use, increased litter, light pollution and car emissions. Ennistymon was mentioned for poor air quality. Suggestions include reintroducing Nature based solutions (green areas) and regulating LED lighting to protect nocturnal wildlife.

Natural Connectivity of Rivers and Floodplains: Rivers and floodplains are emotionally significant to many of the participants as while the rivers possess a natural capacity for self-purification (cleaning) they are still polluted which suggests consistent pollution.

Flooding and blocked culverts are major concerns. While bogs are recovering, rivers are neglected. Flooding of land and homes is increasing.

Pollinator Populations: There is a clear decline in insects, butterflies, moths, worms and pollinators. This is linked to fewer birds, bats and frogs. The absence of bugs on windscreens is a repeated observation.

Agricultural Ecosystems: Respondents criticised intensive farming, soil degradation and the disconnect between landowners and environmentalists. The Burren and post-colonial agricultural policy were mentioned. There is a call for long-term thinking and local responsibility.

Forest Ecosystems: Storms, disease and poor planning threaten woodland resilience. Ash dieback and conifer pressure are concerns. Respondents support native planting and noted the hopeful return of buzzards and pine martens.

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: Improve access to nature via walkways, cycle paths, townland paths and public transport. Examples include the Moyhill Community Garden, The Glen/Ballymacraven River project, Ennistymon to Lahinch cycle path/walk way, and the Greenway to Milltown. Develop native woodlands and coastal paths, especially along historical routes. Address landowner liability and fund fencing to reduce conflict with walkers and dogs. Preserve green areas, reduce one-off housing and prevent dune erosion through marram grass planting and stricter planning. Promote nature for mental and physical health; invest in recreational parks, especially for teenagers. Increase school engagement with woodlands, lakes, rivers and peatlands. For example there was a discussion about adopting the Māori practice of *pepeha*, an introduction in which a person shares their connections to significant ancestral places such as mountains, rivers and lakes. The idea was to introduce this method across all schools as a way of helping students understand and frame their relationship with their local natural environment. Support land purchase for public access and build national trail programmes with facilities like toilets.

Marine Ecosystems: Ensure access to clean, healthy seas for all, especially for children who lack beach experiences. Ban large-scale trawling to restore fish stocks, notably salmon. Increase water quality testing and enforcement. Improve public education on water safety beyond signage. Address concerns about illness from polluted surf waters.

Urban Ecosystems: Support community groups like Tidy Towns and improve public transport. Tackle urban sprawl, lack of green spaces and housing issues. Regulate Airbnb to protect local renters. Reduce noise pollution and road dangers to wildlife. Provide outdoor gyms and parks linked to local GAA clubs. Address insurance and liability barriers to nature access. Reduce plastic waste and enforce cycle route safety.

Natural Connectivity of Rivers & Floodplains: Expand ecological corridors and promote dark sky areas. Fund water treatment and support public engagement with nature.

Pollinator Populations: Reintroduce wildlife, especially birds of prey like the eagle, to support biodiversity.

Agricultural Ecosystems: Encourage farmers to participate in restoration projects and support small-scale farming. Promote intergenerational storytelling and citizen science to reconnect landowners with place.

Forest Ecosystems: Develop native woodlands with public walkways, especially between Ennistymon and Lahinch. Increase school interaction with forest ecosystems. Reintroduce eagles and other wildlife to forested areas.

Additional Comments

Notable comments from participants:

'I moved from Dublin to the West of Ireland to be closer to nature, but now I often find myself having to drive just to take a walk. The Nature Law needs to prioritise accessibility to nature for all, otherwise 'nature' risks becoming a luxury reserved for the wealthy.'

'The pace of change and consolidation in the fisheries over recent decades far exceeds anything happening in farming on the mainland. What was once the livelihood of hundreds of fishing families has now been concentrated into the hands of just one or two millionaire families.'

'Ireland should consider the American model of nature enforcement, where the burden of proof rests on the accused, 'guilty until proven innocent', rather than the other way around. This approach gives a voice to the 'silent victim,' nature, by requiring those who may be causing harm to demonstrate their innocence. The United States has successfully employed this model, for example in environmental pollution cases and wildlife trafficking enforcement.'

'There is a clear need for more creativity and partnerships in how managed forests are used. One participant shared the story of the *12 O'Clock Hills* managed sitka forest, where the local community had created a much-loved "fairy trail" for children. However, the trail was lost when the forest was totally felled for harvesting. The participants felt that greater collaboration and planning could create opportunities for shared community use of managed forests, ensuring they provide economic, environmental and social value.'