

Community Conversations

WORKSHOP 03 OUTPUT REPORT
KILLYBEGS, CO. DONEGAL



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Date	Thursday 2 nd October 2025
Workshop Event Venue	Forester's Community Hall, Killybegs, Co.Donegal
Nature Event	Easkey Britton's talk moved to start of Workshop
Facilitators	Philip Corrigan*, Ray Ó Foghlú**, Katie McGettigan*
	*ACT, **Hometree
Relevant Ecosystem	Marine
Total Events & Outreach	26
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 - Philip Corrigan (ACT)

Overall, the workshop event went well despite heavy rain and strong winds, which required adapting Easkey's planned outdoor nature event talk into a 20-minute indoor introduction. This helped set the tone for the workshop.

The group was diverse including upland farmers, students, families, foresters, and individuals with a general interest, many of whom were new to the facilitators, which added freshness to the discussion. While there was slightly less feedback and fewer stories compared to previous community conversations (Lahinch and Iveragh), the event was still productive.

The mood in the room reflected frustration about how government policies are implemented and the perceived lack of meaningful support for local people, especially farmers. Some tension arose when upland farmers objected to a slide linking peatland practices with marine pollution, which they saw as misrepresentative. Ray managed this well by clarifying that the slides illustrated broader societal impacts on nature. The exchange, though tense, added useful depth to the discussion.

One farmer shared how he now uses technology to move livestock between fields and leaves riparian areas to regenerate naturally, a positive local example of adaptive practice utilising modern technology.

Facilitator 2 - Ray Ó Foghlú (Hometree)

The event was challenging due to poor weather, though those who attended were very representative of the local community, including fishers, farmers and townspeople. Key themes centred on the "small person losing out," particularly small farmers and fishers who feel left behind by changing policies and economic shifts.

There were strong emotions around the decline of local fishing opportunities, but also some uplifting stories. One participant spoke about leaving commercial fishing because it was no longer viable and instead starting a charter boat business. He now takes anglers out to catch and release tuna, which have recently returned to the bay in large numbers as part of a monitoring programme. This story captured both cultural continuity and environmental responsibility.

Positive notes were also struck around the return of large marine mammals to the bay. However, a group of hill farmers expressed frustration, feeling that farming was being unfairly targeted as the main cause of biodiversity loss. While their view wasn't widely shared in the room, their presence and contribution were valuable.

A recurring concern was scepticism about how state rules and consultations have historically failed to benefit local people. Participants voiced doubts about whether such engagements truly influence decisions, describing them as "listening exercises" rather than genuine discussions.

Education was a major recurring theme, particularly the belief that fostering a love and respect for nature among young people is essential. Participants questioned how this could be achieved within an already overburdened school system.

Education arose again as a topic, with participants expressing that overburdened teachers may not be best placed to lead environmental education. The conversation turned toward exploring alternative ways to engage young people. Many participants remained after the session for informal discussion, suggesting the event resonated despite the weather challenges.

Facilitator 3 – Katie McGettigan (ACT)

The event went smoothly, with a good balance of participants across age, gender and occupation. Although engagement started slowly, the group became more comfortable as the discussion progressed.

Contrary to expectations, there were more farmers than fishers present, perhaps influenced by the weather warnings that likely affected turnout. Some attendees expressed disagreement with parts of the presentation, but Ray managed these interactions effectively and kept the conversation constructive.

A few participants commented that the pace felt slow and that too much time was given to open discussion, while others found the format allowed deeper conversation. These were individual preferences rather than widespread feedback.

REPORT METHODOLOGY

This Summary Output Report has been compiled from the contributions of 26 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

- Blanket bogs and for the environment and cultural connection, clean water for biodiversity and for drinking.
- Durnesh Lake and Murvagh Beach.
- Caves and hide holes, soil for plants, water in my tap, my backyard stream, the lake, the river and the sea.
- Fields and natural habitats for native species and animals, bluefin tuna, red squirrels, and hedgerows.
- Rivers, the sea, Donegal Bay, deep harbours, sea life, ancient hedgerows and the bog.
- Bird life including waders, birds of prey, songbirds and Corncrakes. I want to hear and see more of them.
- Coastal ecosystems, lagoons, dunes, native woodlands.
- Trees, birds, clean water, fish, meadows.
- Coastal seabirds

Marine Ecosystems

- The sea and the life it contains.
- Surfing.
- Healthy fish populations.

Urban Ecosystems

- Open spaces and places for families and people to hang out and play.
- Bring people together, communities, excitement, connection of people through watching the wildlife.
- Respect of local people, tradition, heritage, the environment.
- Rural communities, the heart of the place.

Natural Connectivity of Rivers and Floodplains

- My backyard stream.
- Rivers, the sea, Donegal Bay, deep harbours.
- Clean water for biodiversity and for drinking.

- Durnesh Lake.

Pollinator Populations

- Insects.

Agricultural Ecosystems

- Trying to make a living from farming.
- Potatoes.

Forest Ecosystems

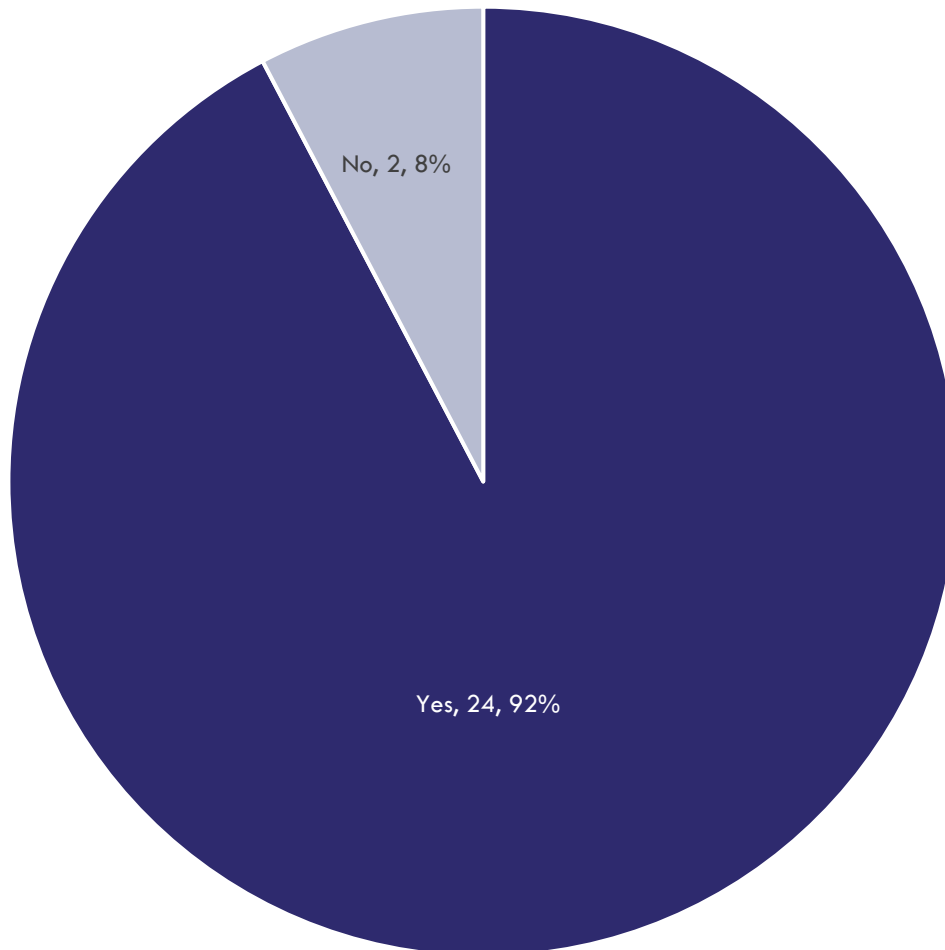
- Native trees for future proofing, it is authentically what's supposed to be there.
- I grew up around woodlands and feel connected to them.
- We planted a woodland four hectares at Durnesh.
- Trees because I like to climb them and we'd all be dead without them.
- Tree canopies.

Additional Comments

- A sense of urgency, it's intuitive and from reading and listening to experts and podcasts, I'm very connected, I'm a nature lover, we are not above nature.
- Preserving the uplands environment, custodian of the land, parting knowledge and interest to younger generations.
- Nature providing food for human survival.

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

- Curlew decrease leading to a feeling of species loneliness.
- Eurasian Sparrowhawk was in our own garden resting for a day.
- Breeding pairs of Marsh Harriers have returned.
- More interest in bird species.
- Water quality. Durnesh Lough special area conservation is deteriorating. An increase in algae bloom.
- Loss of corncrake on farms. Corncrake used to nest beside our own house, but no more.
- Coastal erosion. Sand dunes in Fintra feel sad. We are not able to climb them but understand the role they play in protecting the coast.
- Big increase in red deer. Decline in curlew, red grouse and corn crake. More moths less butterflies.
- Increase in rhododendron, Japanese knotweed, lake pollution, Lough Neagh polluted.
- Invasive species from America. Fewer ferns, orchids, acidic pine needles, less ash trees. Curlew population decrease.
- Big empty lands devoid of nature.
- Sand dunes are coming back. They have improved over years.
- Area totally invasive species such as rhododendron.
- Less butterflies, wetter generally, conifer forests, bees, butterflies, insects, wind farms, example of major bogslide in Donegal, feeling sad.
- Sea, mountains, and the uplands.
- More storms, stronger storms, sand dunes receding, head removal, herbicide use, insect loss, salmon loss, seaweed, less in places where foraging was a tradition. Sad, little, bit hopeless.
- On bog land, loss of generational adventure and stories.
- Less birds of prey, lake below me grown in due to too much slurry spreading and runoff.

- No longer hearing the corn crake, annoyed, damage cause was easily avoided, too much overgrazing, fertiliser, mink, spraying overfishing, completely unnecessary.
- Out of touch with nature, no, less gardens, forest, population decline in many areas.
- Decline in domestic birds, continuing to see increase in pests.
- Decline in curlews.
- Fintra beach is recovering, I have a fear of development.
- Sand dunes at Fintra Beach, wouldn't like to see any development, grass growing back on the dunes.

Marine Ecosystems

- Loss of abundance of seabirds.
- Microplastics on every tide line.
- Warming waters, different species, closer to the bay, nice to see, very happy.
- Return of the humpback to the bay is a joy.
- New species of jellyfish. More jellyfish coming into the shore including Lion's Mane.
- Salmon loss, seaweed, less in places where foraging was a tradition.
- Iniskeel Island has lost 100% of ground nesting seabirds due to mink.
- Fishermen only work two and a half months per year, detrimental to their mental health.
- Less fish, almost no salmon compared to 40 years ago.

Urban Ecosystems

- Depopulation of town lands sad to see. I'm the only person living in my town land. I've no one coming after me. No pathway.
- Losing urban green spaces for housing, commercialisation and rezoning has encroached on space for invertebrates to move from habitat to habitat.
- Existing hedgerows are being cut back in season leaving no room for life.
- Out of touch with nature, less gardens, forest, contributed to population decline in many areas.
- Far more houses scattered everywhere in the landscape, not enough trees in Ireland.
- The last flood on Bridge Street was very bad.

Natural Connectivity of Rivers and Floodplains

- Water quality.
- Durnesh Lough special area conservation is deteriorating. Algae bloom.
- The river runs all along my land. I leave it to grow wild.
- More conscious of spraying near waterways. Rhododendron, how is it treated? Pouring into our rivers, is there other ways to deal with it?
- Fishing of local rivers, no trout, no pike.
- Lake below me grown in due to too much slurry spreading and runoff.

Pollinator Populations

- Hedgerows are vanishing. Where did the earthworm and bugs go?
- Decline in curlew, red grouse, rhododendron, corn crake, more moths, less butterflies.
- Less butterflies, wetter generally, conifer forests, bees, butterflies, insects.
- Herbicide use, insect loss.
- So, sad and angry, hopeless, more butterflies.
- 80% less insects, less wildflowers, like bluebells.
- Coming to Ireland since 2000, where have the insects gone?
- The bees and the loss of them, as a result of pesticides, it needs more research.

Agricultural Ecosystems

- More intensive farming, bigger yields, more awareness about what's there and a connection through citizen science and farming for nature projects.
- A lot more awareness of biodiversity.
- More consciousness of spraying near waterways.
- Too much overgrazing and use of fertiliser.
- Land abandonment and the need for some cattle like Galloways, Highlands and Dexters.
- Use of satellite monitoring, navigation, virtual fencing, an app on our phone, sound keeps them together, music, pulse. More and more technology allows you to adapt your farming.
- Farmers and their livelihoods are facing major changes. Older EU regulations are impacting their way of life, raising concerns about mental health. Many wonder what they'll do next as farming has been their entire life.

- Farmers would have worked in fish factories in the winter however now there is not enough work for them. This has led to poor mental health and socio-economic impacts.
- Cattle and sheep farming in the upland communities has changed hugely as a result of the peatlands designation which has led to land being ineligible to be farmed. The result is a loss of livelihoods and poor mental health.

Forest Ecosystems

- Native trees are growing fast in our woodland at Durnesh.
- They took out all the trees in Bonny Glen and replaced them with native ones.
- Oak saplings are springing up.
- Area totally covered in invasive species like rhododendron. Cover of conifer plantations increasing. Feeling deflated, deflated, distrustful.
- Less butterflies and wetter generally.
- Glenlee Forest, during COVID we discovered nature and forests, experienced a good relationship with Coillte authorities for local funding.
- Not enough trees in Ireland.
- Pine spruce plantations and clear fellings are a negative example.

Additional Comments

- The red grouse, the curlew are scarce, what was the cause of their demise? Was it as a result of nuclear radiation?
- Finches, red deer have come back, but now a problem and for road crossing.

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 and Freshwater Ecosystems

- Reconnect people to nature, establish riverside walks, forest walks, nature friendly farming
- Improve water quality
- Better access to nature for school children, school, woodlands, school, social farming. This will help with keeping people wanting to protect their environment
- Establish nature protection centres all over the country
- Educate coastal communities in Killybegs
- Natural wetlands, larger natural area with more sustainable farming allowing more movement of people to use wild areas.
- More or extended areas of special conservation, access to land for the public and derisk this for the farmer (insurance wise).
- More forest walks and instil through education the value of nature in children
- Normalise, fund and incentivise community action for local forest and beach regeneration

Marine Ecosystems

- Protect fishing stocks from overfishing.
- A productive fishing environment with a sustainable harvest.

Urban Ecosystems

- Funding community gardens
- Public basketball court with trees, farm shop, a maintained field that is well kept for the local wildlife.
- More bird houses, more workshops like this in schools, more play time in the outdoors
- More horses and less cars for local transport
- More outdoor classes in schools, make it part of the curriculum
- Rethink how we house the population

Natural Connectivity of Rivers and Floodplains

- Reconnect people to nature, establish riverside walks
- Effect on water quality
- Ponds, water
- Natural wetlands
- Access to direct nature-based solutions
- Sharing knowledge on what works.

Pollinator Populations

- A maintained field that is well kept for the local wildlife

Agricultural Ecosystems

- Increase nature friendly and social farming
- More bird houses
- Leave the hedgerows to grow out.
- Look at land use and have a holistic approach. Different groups need to collaborate in this including farmers and landowners.
- Landowners should allow hill walking and receive funding to support this.
- Would land be better bought up by young farmers instead of NPWS?
- End the misrepresentation of peat farming
- Grow our own food using polytunnels
- Better communication to landowners on the options for helping their land
- Support programmes that help can access more financial support for community groups and farmers to get involved in nature restoration
- More financial incentives for farming
- Civil service to be structured to keep the environment safe.
- Be paid to be a custodian of the land
- Respect the right of landowners to enjoy their own property and to utilise it on their own economic benefit
- Speak more with farmers
- Larger natural areas with more sustainable farming

- Reward those who are farming for nature or landowners protecting/restoring their habitats
- Better enforcement of existing environmental legislation

Forest Ecosystems

- Turn woodlands into native woodlands, no clear felling and maintain continuous cover
- Normalise and incentivise reforestation
- Northern Irish Agroforestry is in agriculture in Northern Ireland, in Ireland it's in forestry
- Walk extended through Glenlee
- Provide more access to farms and forest land
- Clean up areas that can provide a natural environment for walking and forest bathing

Additional Comments

- End the lack of leadership from agricultural departments
- Very little information on the numbers involved in this nature restoration plan
- Make education about nature fun with theatre, art, carnivals and a 'library of nature'
- Greater awareness of how our health is linked to the health of the environment through campaigns
- LAWPRO has been very helpful
- Campaigns to recognise nature's connection, storytelling, access to direct nature based
- Help with the feeling of abandonment in relation to nature
- Support intermediate groups to help communities
- Create a Youth Advisory Council for the nature restoration plan
- Local authorities are key. We need a 'Council for Nature' in Donegal.
- Make it possible for sharing information, ideas and solutions. Make it accessible to all associations and get them to work together. Sharing knowledge on what works.
- Vibrant local communities with each area having a project to 'buy into'.
- Make it viable for people to work and live in their own area
- More outdoor classes in schools, make it part of the curriculum
- The Killybegs Regeneration Committee are very urban agenda focused.