

Community Conversations

WORKSHOP 02 OUTPUT REPORT
IVERAGH, CO. KERRY



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Date	Thursday 25 th September, Friday 26 th September 2025
Workshop Event Venue	Brú na Dromoda
Nature Event	Uplands Hometree Site
Facilitators	Philip Corrigan*, Lucy Taylor**, Ray Ó Foghlú**
*ACT, **Hometree	
Relevant Ecosystem	Uplands
Total Event Participants	30 In-Person & 8 Online Survey Respondents

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)

I think overall it went well. We had a good, engaged group. I felt that the majority if not all who attended had some level of understanding, not necessarily of the law itself but of the climate crisis and the need for the law, and were fully supportive of anything restorative. The group was made up of a couple of farmers, four or five I think. Others came from an educational background, some were working for NGOs and there were people from the NPWS. The overall mood was conversational with back-and-forth exchanges across the room.

A lot of frustrations, anger, dismay and even a sense of grief or mourning were expressed. One farmer I spoke to shared how much times have changed since he was growing up. He talked about the idea of self-sufficiency in the home, growing your own food, only going a couple of kilometres for groceries and how farming methods were different then. Today much more food is imported, fewer people cook at home and farming is more intensive. He felt it was inevitable that these changes would have negative impacts on nature.

The video at the start went down really well and definitely pulled on the heartstrings. There were however frustrations with the questions. Some people felt they were too generic. One woman said the question "What nature in your community matters most to you and why?" felt useless. After that first question many found it hard to answer. Perhaps it is because they are not used to talking about nature in that context but it may also not be the kind of question that really sparks conversation.

Facilitator 2 – Lucy Taylor (Hometree)

I felt the event went really well and we got some good feedback. For me it was a bit of a home crowd, there were quite a lot of familiar faces but I was happy with the turnout. It was people I expected but not an overly homogenous crowd. I thought there was a good mix of ages, genders and backgrounds.

There was a fair number of native Irish speakers born and bred in Kerry along with some long-term residents who had moved in from elsewhere. A few people even drove from Cork and Dingle, two hours away, which shows a real dedication to being involved. There was a strong willingness to engage and not ignore the opportunity.

We had farmers and landowners, not all of whom were farmers, and people interested in what nature restoration really means. One table had a local farmer and a ranger from NPWS. They connected on issues like culling certain animals but clashed on the

reintroduction of white-tailed eagles. For the ranger it was a positive story, for the sheep farmer a threat to his livelihood.

There was a real strength of feeling in the room. Many were angry at the lack of action from state agencies to restore nature, pointing out that even where there are conservation areas and legal protections little is being done. At the same time there was a strong desire to care more for nature and a lot of conversations around the importance of farming, the role of people in the landscape and actively restoring nature.

There was grief too, especially about farms not being passed on. One farmer explained that because he has no children inheritance tax would make it a burden to leave his farm to a nephew. He worried what would happen to the land after he was gone despite it having been managed for generations as low-intensity biodiverse farmland.

Overall there was strong evidence of people having witnessed many negative changes and very few positive ones within their lifetimes. The next day on the walk it was clear that people wanted to see how nature restoration works in practice. They wanted to understand what land like Hometree's could look like in the future and to see conservation in action. I did not sense pushback, judgement or cynicism, just curiosity and engagement.

Facilitator 3 – Ray Ó Foghlú

There was a good turnout, the room was basically full with maybe only a couple of seats empty. Most tables had a full complement around them. There was good diversity and probably more farmers than at the Lahinch event, around five in the room. Maybe 60% of attendees would have identified as environmentalists either professionally or as amateurs. That is probably inevitable, when you hold a conversation about nature, nature lovers show up despite best efforts to broaden representation.

The main sentiment expressed was loss. People remembered things that used to be there, shrimps and mackerel came up quite a bit. There was talk of loss in nature but also of loss of human culture in these places. And, as was said, if we are nature then human loss must also be counted when we talk about nature.

There was also acknowledgement of gains, people had seen white-tailed eagles, buzzards and pine martens return. But there was a lot of concern about the spread of plantation forestry which many saw as negative.

Views were quite balanced, people recognised the need for progress, we need fibre, timber and food but we also need nature. There was acknowledgement that restoration requires people. Farmers and local communities are essential not only to provide food, fibre and wood but also to do the work of restoring landscapes.

There did not seem to be tension but there was maybe a sense of fatigue, that the same people who care about nature or the farmers who show up are always at these events talking. Some impatience to see action was clear.

Still, there was good clarity from the hosts that this was not just another talking exercise. They explained clearly how the information gathered here and in the seven other events and two online workshops would feed into the report, either directly or thematically.

The location was good though it would also be interesting to see what turnout would be like in a town such as Killarney.

REPORT METHODOLOGY

This summary output report has been compiled from the contributions of 38 participants across three complementary formats: the Workshop Event, the Nature Event and the online survey. In each setting, participants were asked to reflect on the same three core questions, ensuring consistency in the responses gathered.



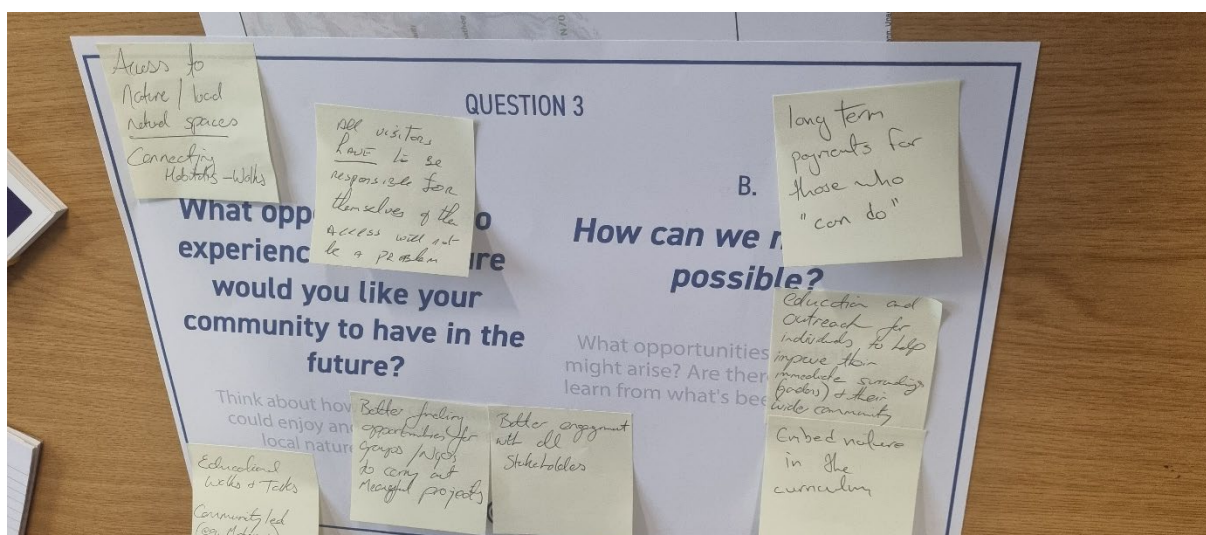
Community Conversations Workshop Event Materials (Image credit: ACT)

In the workshop event, participant contributions were recorded using written post-its during three rounds of questions. 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 2a a show-of-hands response was used.

To support the work of the Independent Advisory Committee, the output report aims to collate and summarise the general responses while also reflecting the weighting participants placed on the sentiments and stories shared in the room. 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.



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: When participants were asked about nature that was important to them diversity of landscapes to support all nature including us and nature-based practices came up. People stressed the importance of quiet open spaces, habitat connectivity and replanting in the area of native breeds and varieties as well as species habitats. Some participants talked about the bogs in the community stressing the importance of a healthy bog, including cutaway bogs. The wetlands were highlighted for their nutrients and wildlife biodiversity and abundance of nutrients. There was a sense of loss and nostalgia when it came to speaking about nature. Deer population management came up, some participants taking about the culling of non-native deer.

In terms of freshwater ecosystems participants highlighted the fish in the river and dragonflies as being a sign of healthy waterways. For some participants clean drinking water was important and keeping the rivers clean for the freshwater pearl mussel. People had some concerns about hedgerows stating that they are disappearing at an alarming rate especially on Valentia Island. Another concern was that that Molinia was too dominant in the upland habitats and landscape heterogeneity was also a concern.

Marine Ecosystems: The sea and the ocean were included as places of importance; for health, recreation and the economy. Coastal areas including Valentia, Portmagee, Derrynane Strand and Ballycarbery were mentioned with Portmagee SAC being called a "wonderland" by one participant. Some participants brought up concerns about run off and wastewater on the sea and seashore and stated that they valued being able to swim in clean water, in the sea and the rivers. Species that participants mentioned were basking sharks, whales, dolphins and the seabirds and coastal habitats that included seagrass and seaweed. The oyster farms were also mentioned. There was some concern about the fish stock with one participant saying that they would like to be able to catch a fish without feeling bad about it.

Urban Ecosystems: Responses indicate that there is value for unspoilt places and indicate a desire for more eco-tourism guided walks with local knowledge. Participants stated they liked places where there is less visible trace of human influence in terms of consumerism. Having nature in urban spaces improves day to day quality of life and the quiet was also mentioned as important. Streetlights were mentioned in a response in regards to nocturnal wildlife such as owls, bats and insects. One participant who had travelled from Cork city to attend described the rivers in Cork city as polluted, impacting aquatic life and public health.

Natural Connectivity of Rivers and Floodplains: Responses highlight the cleanliness of rivers in the area saying that they are not clean in places like Cork city and the importance of keeping them clean for species such as freshwater pearl mussel. A participant said that they wanted to be able to swim in the clean water of the river and sea. The river Ferta in Cahersiveen was mentioned. Participants highlighted the importance of wetlands for their nutrients and wildlife biodiversity. habitat connectivity was mentioned as well as clean

drinking water. Some participants brought up the fish in the river with one response being “I’d like healthy fish stocks”.

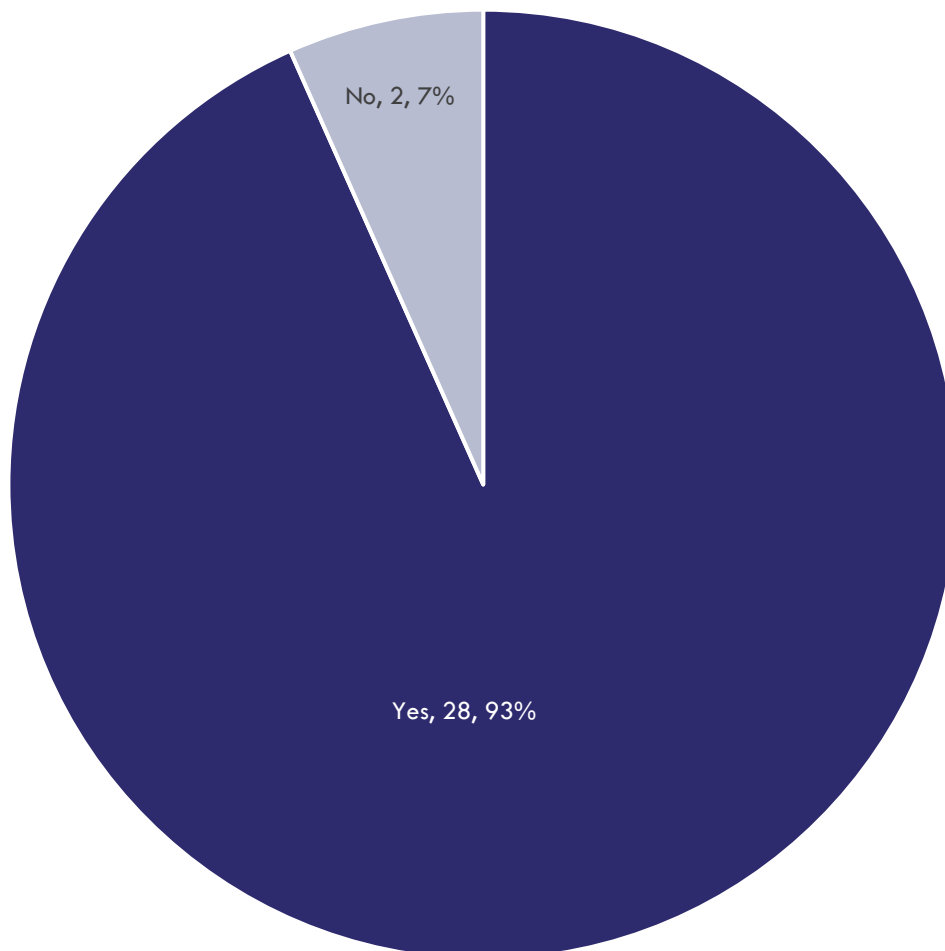
Pollinator Populations: Pollinators including bees, bumblebees, butterflies and insects were mentioned a few times. Hedgerows, wildflowers, hay meadows and native planting were considered crucial for their survival. Threats included loss of hedgerows and silage cutting.

Agricultural Ecosystems: When it comes to agriculture farmers were recognised as the caretakers of nature by show by balancing skills with planting indigenous species, upland management. Farmers and landowners manage nature in their spaces. The hay meadows were brought up for species including frogs, birds, hares, ants and beetles. There were some concerns about runoff from farming and silage cutting causing harm to insects. Participants said that for nature restoration there needs to be objectivity and that native breeds and varieties as well as species habitats need to be protected.

Forest Ecosystems: Forests were brought up as big areas of nature in this community. Participants said that the woodlands are valuable habitats and are places of connection to nature. The native woodland expands biodiversity and it is beautiful to walk in. Local places mentioned were Ballyseedy woods which are “full of wildlife” and Alderwood Rd. on which there are pockets of Alder Willow. The forests are praised for being good for biodiversity and retainment of water. By planting indigenous species wildlife is supported. Some participants see this as primarily bird life, old pockets of oakwoods support visiting birds in the summer and native woodlands support hares and other wildlife. Other participants had concerns about the woodlands in Kerry and places that they can go walking.

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: There has been a change in the type of winter precipitation and less snow and wetter in nature. The seasons have changed and there's less hard frost. In Killarney Lake there is little salmon now. There's a decrease in sightings of coastal birds such as curlew and the golden plover for some people. Some feel that the corncrake is gone. The plant Rhododendron is seen everywhere, some people feel it is taking over the land. Japanese knotweed is also spreading and there are invasive species along roadsides and private gardens. There are less hedgehogs seen and someone said they only see badgers when they are roadkill. One participant said that their local lake is not safe to swim in anymore due to blue-green algae and they feel angry over the inaction to solve that. There is more clearance of the wet fields and spaces for hares. Participants felt depressed and angry at the loss of soil, plants, meadows and the corncrakes. There are more gorse fires now partially as a result of tourism and a lack of fire management.

For positive changes, in the River Inny there have been more kingfishers spotted. Other participants have said that the land gives them hope. The dune restoration at Maharees was very positive thanks to community engagement.

Feelings expressed include sadness, anger, disbelief and grief.

Marine Ecosystems: One participant described the sea and beach as having no life at all apart from repeated increases in jellyfish. There was a reduction of fish species in the bay and deep-sea fishing with one species being mentioned with this was mackerel especially off Hogs Head. Less crabs and shrimps are seen, a participant says they used to be able to catch shrimp every day. Now they can't and feel guilty about this. There is more plastic being noticed on the beach along with rope which is dangerous for marine life. There is a Reduction in salmon and sea trout numbers has impacted local economies as less fishermen use it. Participants express disbelief, unhappiness, guilt and the feeling of powerlessness at these changes.

Urban Ecosystems: Changes noticed in an urban sense was that there is less wild nature in places where people live. There are housing estates where there were once trees. The bog is used as a dumping site. There are more roads through wild place. The sprawling town developments come at the loss of farmland and hedgerows. These changes are seen as negative. Once participant felt that there was a lot of imported food in the area which makes it difficult for people to stay loyal to their area in terms of local produce. There are too many lights which cause concern for their effects on people and the natural world.

Natural Connectivity of Rivers and Floodplains: Changes noticed on rivers was the lack of salmon and trout present. People say it is no longer possible to swim in the local lake. The quality of the river water everywhere has decreased which brings feelings of sadness. There

is a reduction in the access to rivers. One participant wrote "Access to rivers was much more accessible because there was less fencing adjacent to rivers". Places that were brought up were the River Flesk,

Pollinator Populations: Participants have noticed a radical reduction in insects. There are less butterflies, bees and dragonflies and that bees and wasps are seen later in the year. One participant said that when there are lots of newts and insects, they felt joyful.

Agricultural Ecosystems: In this community some farms have gotten more intensive and some have basically been abandoned. There is an intensification of farming, increased drainage and increased mechanisation. There is more land clearance which are unforeseen consequences of policy. On farms there is a higher use of artificial fertilisers than natural fertilisers. Land is being overrun with hares and foxes. There is the removal of hedgerows and trees from farmland. Hay meadows are being converted to silage and there is a loss of soil. Track machines and big tractors have compacted the soil and killed worms. Continental cattle and new breeds replaced traditional ones, while sheep and cattle grazing practices changed

Some participants that grew up on farms feel there is a decline in self-sufficiency. Growing up on farms they had to make their own butter and cream. People are eating less locally grown potatoes and instead are eating take away and "junk" food.

Positive changes mentioned here were around agri environmental scheme like the Headage payments and ones supporting the return of bog flora. There are more bees and sheep on the mountains in places.

Forest Ecosystems: Positive changes mentioned was the return of the red squirrel, more trees in certain areas which are followed by more birds and other wildlife. Some participants said they had noticed that forest seeds are rewilding, and more native forest is appearing. There are more sightings of some hawks and owls. A participant described the return of the buzzard as "wonderful" and that pine martens are back too.

Negative changes noticed was the influx of sitka spruce which is killing nature and displacing people. There is a landscape change noticed with forestry leading to loss of nature and increased flooding.

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.

“To see Kerry as a kingdom”

Terrestrial, Coastal & Freshwater Ecosystems: In this community there is the want for more access to suitable recreation spaces that include wildlife and a variety of community owned habitats, water meadows, hedgerows, meadows etc. Open up and make existing wild places accessible to everyone and have more education of young people to appreciate and understand these places and get involved in restoration and conservation. There is value in small spaces such as gardens. People want to see more of particular habitats and species in action. People want to walk outside under dark skies, value small wild spaces such as gardens and hedgerows, and see pride in living within SAC and SPA areas. One participant said that they want to **“To see Kerry as a kingdom”**

Marine Ecosystems: Future experiences that are wanted is to be able to continue to swim in clean seas which can be completed by preventing runoff from drains, especially forestry and roads. Once participant said “I'd like them all to see all the natural beauty I was lucky enough to experience, to climb mountains covered in vegetation and animal life, to swim in clean water”.

Urban Ecosystems: Participants would like for there to be more access to nature and for the spaces to be connected rather than looking like pieces of a jigsaw. “Nature is everything, so it cannot be a luxury.” Ideas include installing cycling paths away from the roads, having a nature corridor in urban areas and policing over powerful lighting. One participant said they would like to see every star at night. Another idea is to add more town incentives such as a tidy town category for biodiversity.

More education is wanted, making schools and playgrounds more natural looking. more education of young people to get them to appreciate natural places and to get involved in restoration and conservation. Another idea is including gardens in the school curriculum.

Participants want more public walkways and to have less roads through the remaining nature in the area. A participant asked to “stop building new developments on green space. Fix and sort derelict buildings in existence. Design development for nature.”

Natural Connectivity of Rivers & Floodplains: Participants came up with the ideas including cleaning the local rivers, rewetting floodplains and doing away with the drainage act and connecting habitat walks. It was suggested to bring back meadows along the river and to prosecute environmental crimes to make them a high deterrence to pollution.

Pollinator Populations: Participants would like there to be a nursery planted in the community with native trees. They'd like a variety of community owned habitats, water meadows, hedgerows, meadows, etc and the opportunity to have food in hedgerows, in open spaces that encourage wildlife, as well as a healthy locally produced food.

Participants would like for weeds and messiness to encourage pollinators.

Agricultural Ecosystems: There is a desire for better interactions between farmers and general public a better understanding of how farming benefits nature. People feel that landowners and farmers need to be involved in the process. There is a serious need to support landowners not just farmers to keep support of nature and ideas include tax breaks incentives for non-farmers who want to manage for nature. Some feel it needs to be made the farmer's while so more incentives for the farmers to be involved. People would like to see more locally produced fresh food support farmers country markets. Some participants felt that the agri environmental schemes need to be kept going and to avoid stop and start results-based payments. Other participants feel that current grants are causing resentment between farmers and wonder if there's a non-monetary way of to achieve their support.

There is the demand for more community interaction with farmers and for more education within farming. To redesign how agriculture is taught in agriculture. Integrate ecological and environmental knowledge. To farm for nature, not-for-profit. Educating farmers, especially in training facilitators. More effective encouragement and permission to protect and love nature by the authorities, local and national government and ensure the relevant state agencies are resourced adequately to enact the legislation.

People want genuine nature restoration with long term planning and for every piece of available land should be engaged with, especially non farmed, privately owned gardens, land holdings and public lands.

Forest Ecosystems: People in this community would like a nurse planted in the community, to reverse the Sitka spruce plantations. They would like a mix broadleaf forest, one that has been thinned out at an appropriate stage of growth, one that is planted by the county. Other ideas include a community woodland and educational facilities for nature-based centre for teaching woodland management and also appropriate rewilding. More nature walks through a variety of environments native woodland, mountain streams, estuaries, bogs etc. Local access to woodlands is desired, both public and private. Indemnity for owners needed is needed for this.

Additional Comments

Notable comments from participants:

There were some Irish responses recorded:

- I dteanga dhúchais.
- A bheith beo agus a labhairt go flúirseach.
- Dearg le fearg.
- Tá áilleacht gan teorainn mórthimpeall orainn.