



An Roinn
Ealaíon, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta

Department of
Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

30th March 2015.

Dear Sir/Madam,

Consultation Paper for Successor to STI Strategy

The Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht welcomes the opportunity to respond to the publication of the document entitled “Consultation Paper for Successor to Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation.”

The Department recognises that we are living in challenging times. Now more than ever, Ireland must have a strong and excellent research base as we continually explore more efficient and effective ways of doing business, supporting job creation and inward investment. In times of difficulty, it is easy to underestimate the importance of our natural heritage. However, our Department is strongly of the view that our natural capital has an important contribution to make to Ireland’s economic recovery. The conservation and enhancement of our built heritage plays a major role in increasing Ireland’s attractiveness as a tourism destination and in advancing national economic recovery.

The Irish environment plays a direct and substantial role in supporting employment and economic turnover. Research into its biodiversity may support limited direct employment but there is now ample evidence that the absence of such research can impede informed regulation thereby crippling sectoral development causing job losses and stunting inward investment. Compounding this is the reality that the sectors often most acutely impacted (agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries, and forestry) are crucial to the sustainable development of rural and peripheral communities for which there are limited economic alternatives.

A critical challenge in the natural heritage area over the coming period is to achieve compliance with EU Directives and avoid censure and potential fines from the European Commission and the European Court of Justice. Under the EU Habitats Directive, the Department reported 91% of the 58 listed habitats as being in unfavourable conservation status and not meeting international requirements. For the 61 resident protected species (including 3 species groups) under this Directive, 32% are in unfavourable conservation status and the status of a further 16% is unknown. Under the EU Birds Directive, 27% of species populations were reported as decreasing in the short term while 28% were decreasing in the long term. The current state of Ireland’s protected environment risks tarnishing the international image presented of a green and sustainable economy and certainly provides the clearest indication yet that related priority research areas (as outlined by the Report of the Research Prioritisation Steering Group) are not receiving sufficiently focused research support. Ireland’s environmental reputation is currently further diminishing with the onset of new infringement proceedings being initiated by the European Commission at the European Court of Justice.

Our Department is currently leading on a number of pilot research and development projects to deliver sustainable land use management for rural communities with the support of the EU LIFE Programme in collaboration with other Departments and Agencies. However, the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht cannot deliver the scale of research and development investment necessary to ensure claims of “sustainable development” and “green economies” represent more than just a sound bite. We believe it will take a renewed and collective prioritisation and focused implementing structures but, with even a modest increase in research prioritisation for biodiversity, truly sustainable employment and development particularly in rural communities can be delivered.

The Department was not represented on the Research Prioritisation Steering Group and is not represented on the Interdepartmental Committee on Science, Technology and Innovation. However, the Department has in the past led on identifying biodiversity research priorities in conjunction with relevant stakeholders in the public and private sectors through the National Platform for Biodiversity Research

(http://www.biodiversityresearch.ie/NPBR_Research%20recommendations_All%20sectors_Final.pdf).

In view of the conservation status of protected habitats and species outlined above and fresh court proceedings initiated against Ireland at the European Court of Justice, we would strongly endorse a more urgent, focused and prioritised approach to sustainable food delivery to secure the employment of over 150,000 people and the contribution of approximately €24 billion to the Irish economy. It is critical that such practical research and development to inform policy and decision-making receives renewed prioritisation.

Our Department is keen to support the work of the Interdepartmental Committee on Science, Technology and Innovation as it further develops this strategy and remains available to provide supporting details upon request.

Yours sincerely

Dr Eamonn Kelly

Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht,