



VOICE is a member-based Irish environmental charity that empowers individuals and local communities to take positive action to conserve our natural resources. It also advocates for the government and the corporate sector to adopt environmentally responsible behaviours, and for the development of strong national policies on waste and water issues.

VOICE is an active member of the [European Environmental Bureau \(EEB\)](#), [Seas at Risk](#), [SWAN](#), [Stop Climate Chaos](#) the [Irish Environmental Network](#) and the [Environmental Pillar](#).

Some of our work on tackling climate change with a focus on waste includes;

- The introduction of the plastic bag tax in Ireland which was adopted as a national policy in 2001. We continue to campaign for a ban on single use plastics and promote recycling and a deposit return on plastic and glass bottles and aluminium cans moving Ireland towards a more circular economy.
- Being the leading Irish environmental organisation promoting sustainable waste management policies. This includes consistently fighting against the construction and operation of waste incinerators in Ireland; making policy submissions to government on waste management policy; and informing public debate on waste.
- We have just launched a Recycling Ambassador Programme, reaching out to communities through informative workshops to help them manage their waste.
- Creating public awareness on food waste and the environmental and social implications through Food Rescue events and campaigns. We will be launching a new Food Waste educational programme for Home Economics students later this year.
- Establishing Ireland's first Zero Waste Community in Cashel, Co. Tipperary, an effort to move towards a more circular, sharing economy promoting reuse, repair and recycle.

Food Waste

According to the UN, if food waste was a country, it would be the 3rd highest global greenhouse gas emitter. Methane is 10 times more potent than CO₂, and when food goes to landfill mixed in with other materials it produces methane because of the absence of oxygen. Over 1 million tonnes of food waste is discarded in Ireland annually.

The disposal of food waste has a direct impact on climate change, and the Irish Government needs to address this urgently by adopting and enforcing policy that encourages the reduction of food waste all along the food chain and directing surplus food for redistribution and food waste to compost instead of landfill.

Action Points;

1. The Irish Government must ensure that all households have access to food waste bins including apartment blocks and rural areas throughout the country. Although regulations are in place requiring a three bin service, many constituencies still do not have the organic/food waste bins. Local governments must enforce the Household Food Waste Regulations¹ and penalise waste collectors who don't provide and collect organic/food waste bins.
2. The take-up of food waste/organic waste bins by households must be compulsory unless the householder can prove that s/he composts at home, brings food waste to a permitted industrial composting facility or community composting unit or shares a bin with family or neighbours.
3. Farmers, supermarkets and restaurants should be prevented from binning surplus food and instead direct such food to charities and communities in need via food banks to avoid food unnecessarily ending up in landfill. This is currently being done in France.²
4. A holistic food donation liability relief statute should be enacted to encourage the donation of surplus food. Many suppliers do not donate surplus food because of their fear of litigation if someone becomes ill from eating donated food. Other countries have adopted liability relief statutes to encourage food donation³, but have safeguards in place to prosecute suppliers who are grossly negligent when supplying spoiled food.
5. Anti-competitive contracts between supermarkets and farmers, which require farmers to supply all their produce to one shop, must be investigated and if contributing to the abundance of food waste, this practice must stop. In other countries, these type of contracts prevent farmers from selling rejected produce (those fruit and vegetables that do not meet strict visual aesthetic standards -- so-called ugly fruit and veg) to other producers/vendors at a reduced price. Additionally, if there is a glut, farmers are prevented from selling the surplus fruit/veg to other vendors, resulting in the produce being plowed back into the land or used for animal feed.

Circular Economy & Recycling

By encouraging the collection, recycling and use of secondary materials, we reduce the extraction of virgin materials. For example, by reducing the amount of new plastic we are eliminating the need for the exploration and extraction of oil, of which around 8-10% of the world's supply is used to make plastic. International climate experts state that 80% of the known fossil fuels have to stay in the ground if we want to avoid going over the safe 2 degrees limit of global warming.

Likewise, when we reduce the amount of virgin paper and wood, we eliminate the need for further deforestation. Forests play a huge role in the carbon cycle on our planet. When forests are cut down, not only does carbon absorption cease, but also the carbon stored in the trees is released into the atmosphere as CO₂.

¹ <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2013/si/71/made/en/print>

²

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/jul/13/action-to-cut-food-waste-gains-momentum-across-europe>

³ <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-report/104th-congress/house-report/661/1>

By transitioning to a circular economy, where products are made from recycled materials and can be recycled again saves our natural resources and protects natural habitats and forests which all play a role in the biodiversity of the planet. Recycling is 60% cleaner in terms of emissions than the manufacture of new materials. Recycling aluminium cans for example uses 95% less energy than producing new aluminium.

Ireland needs a climate friendly strategy for managing its waste where materials are recycled and repurposed instead of ending up in landfill or incineration and new materials being manufactured.

Action Points;

1. The Irish Government needs to take more action to transition Ireland to a more circular economy and move away from single use, throw away consumption. For example, we want to see the Irish Government
 - a. introduce a deposit and return system for plastic and glass bottles and aluminium cans,
 - b. Ban single use non-compostable products (such as disposable coffee cups, all forms of polystyrene, plastic containers, cutlery and straws).⁴
2. Make recycling more accessible to people, not only in people's homes but on the street in towns and cities, to reduce the amount of waste going to landfill or incineration. In order for a material to be recycled it needs to be separate from contaminants such as food and nappies. We need separate bins on streets, in restaurants, in businesses and in the home. In addition we need a nationwide effort to educate people about waste and the environmental implications of waste mismanagement.

Incineration & Landfill

Incineration goes against the principles of reduce, re-use and recycle.

Incinerators contribute to climate change by emitting greenhouse gases and undermining waste prevention and recycling. The most common greenhouse gases associated with the incineration process are carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide, carbon monoxide, and sulfur dioxide. The presence of these gases in our atmosphere speed up the effects of climate change. Incinerators do not support a healthy or sustainable world. Incinerators encourage further resource extraction and production rather than reusing and recycling. Incinerators are a step in the wrong direction for future waste management.

We need to support a sustainable form of waste management, such as the four r's, refuse, reduce, recycle and rot. Reusing material is easier on the environment than constantly trying to support production demands by new resource extraction.

⁴ See Waste Reduction bill introduced by the Green Party July 2017

As it stands there is no transparency in the amount of emissions being released from the incinerators in Ireland. There needs to be easily accessible public information to reassure the local residents and wider Irish public that these neighbourhoods remain safe places to live, raise children and grow food.

Action Points;

1. The Irish Government must require incinerator (waste to energy) facilities to be more transparent with the amount of emissions released (in real time format) and easily accessible by the public. They must ensure they are not posing any health or environmental risk to our people, agriculture and wildlife.
2. Prevent another incinerator from opening in Ireland.

Waste prevention is the most beneficial option from a climate point of view, followed by reuse and recycling; landfill and incineration are worse options.

According to EPA figures the municipal waste generated in Ireland in 2012 was 2,692,537 tonnes. 2,478,337 tonnes was managed. 427,093 tonnes of this managed waste was incinerated. 828,492 tonnes was recycled and 156,212 tonnes was composted and digested. 38,914 tonnes was recovered in other ways. 1,027,577 tonnes was landfilled. 34% of municipal waste managed in Ireland was exported for incineration in 2012.

These statistics reflect the need for Ireland to increase recycling and food waste facilities and reduce and eventually remove non recyclable materials from consumption.

There is only a five per cent chance of meeting the Paris Agreement target of limiting the increase in global temperature to below 2 degrees Celsius, a [new US-based study](#) has found.

The Paris Agreement set two major temperature goals: a long-term goal of keeping the increase in global average temperature to “well below” 2°C above pre-industrial levels, and a second goal to limit the increase to 1.5°C.

The Irish Government must take Climate Change seriously and play a real role in reducing emissions.

How we deal with our waste, moving away from landfill and incineration to promoting waste prevention, reuse, recycling and composting will greatly reduce Ireland’s carbon footprint.

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