



Annual Report 2014

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Introduction

Established in 1997, VOICE is a registered charity supported by public membership, donations and bequests.

Patrons

Darina Allen
Pauline Bewick
Don Conroy
Christy Moore
John Feehan
Brendan Kennelly
Sr. Mary Minehan

Directors

Dr. Ruth McGrath (Chair)
Brendan Bartley
Gay Brabazon
Gary Clare
Ken Kilbride
Michael O'Dwyer

Vision:

Promoting the wise use of natural resources for a sustainable future.

Mission Statement

VOICE promotes a respectful relationship with the Earth by encouraging a way of life in harmony with nature rather than in conflict with it.

Objectives

VOICE strives to achieve this mission by:

- Informing the public on environmental policy/issues
- Empowering individuals and local communities to become environmentally active to protect Ireland's resources.
- Advocating on behalf of our members to influence policy and practice with government and other stakeholders.

An Overview of 2014

Characterised by exciting projects and events, the last 12 months has been a busy and successful time for VOICE.

We have continued our food waste campaign through many different projects, including 'Food Rescue', the Stop Food Waste Challenge and the Dun Laoghaire food waste apartment pilot project. We have also pursued the resource efficiency agenda through the establishment of the Resource Efficiency Working Group through the Environmental Pillar. Mindy is the convenor of this group, which has seven Environmental Pillar members. Mindy is also the environmental representative on the Regional Waste Management Plan Advisory Committee commenting and participating in the development of the new seven year waste management plans. We continue to pursue the government to adopt a container deposit/refund scheme and have developed a pilot programme proposal. Lastly, we have reinvigorated our water campaign by investigating the local authorities handling of Section 4 discharge permits and through our involvement in SWAN.

Staffing:

We have brought on board a new part-time bookkeeper, Jonathan Forsythe, to handle our accounts. We have also brought on several new people as interns/volunteers:

Niamh Madden: Newsletter
Lorna O'Driscoll: Food Rescue pack and project management
Chris Hayes: Waste research (has now left)
Declan Breen: Food waste assistant
Aidan Kelly: Water research (has now left)
Melissa Rosenberg: Social Media intern (has now left)
Liz Evers, who is working on our website
Azarah Minehan: JobBridge intern working on waste policy and 'food rescue'.

Strategic Planning:

The board met twice to develop its strategic plan. Preliminary plan attached (Attachment A). VOICE is to continue its work on food waste, resource efficiency and water.

Governance:

Mindy sent documents and governance information to Paul Bracken, who has reviewed this material. He has outlined what we need to do, both on a Board member level and at the Coordinator's level. The Board will meet in January 2015 to adopt its governance code as well as the Fundraising Principles.

Funding:

American Ireland Fund:

VOICE made a grant proposal to fund a food waste collection pilot in apartment buildings. Unfortunately, we did not receive this funding.

Irish Environmental Network:

VOICE submitted its funding application and received around €11,000 core funding and received around €500 for its government submissions. We will receive more money for plenary and steering committee attendance, ELIG meeting attendance, resource efficiency working group participation and government meetings.

Local Agenda 21:

VOICE received €5,000 from Fingal, Wicklow, Wexford, Kerry and Carlow to conduct 'festival food rescue' events. We will identify 7 festivals and hold 'food rescue' events during these festivals in 2015.

Apartment Food Waste Pilot Project:

VOICE made a proposal to Dun Laoghaire to conduct a food waste collection pilot project in an apartment building. We have received €3,260 to date for the work.

Membership:

Our membership numbers continue to reduce slightly each year. However, we received €8,338 from our members both in membership and in donations

An Post Study:

We received €1,638 from the an Post study

Campaigns:

Food Waste:

Education and Presentations:

Mindy has made presentations to two secondary schools (Walkerstown and Donahies) on food waste and recycling.

Mindy made two presentations to Adobe staff (food waste and resource efficiency): Also she made a presentation on food waste to US Bank. They want their employees to get involved and this contact may also lead to a food waste reduction challenge or food rescue event. If this goes ahead, this may be another funding opportunity.

Mindy attended the Health Food Fare at the Northside Shopping Centre (where I was interviewed by Near FM) and made a presentation about food rescue at the Food Cloud dinner.

Stop Food Waste Challenge:

We received funding from Offaly, South County Dublin and Meath to conduct community food waste reduction challenges. I travelled over to Tullamore and made a presentation to the Tidy Town groups. We eventually conducted a challenge with the Tidy Town group in Clonbullogue, Co. Offaly. We also conducted similar challenges in Oldcastle, Co. Meath and in Tallaght, South Dublin. It was a challenge for me to find groups to participate in each area and a challenge to keep participants coming and weighing their food waste. While each participant brought home good information and were happy with the programme, the whole process took enormous time and effort with little result. It would have been better to have slightly larger groups. VOICE will not conduct these challenges again. It works better for local organisers to do these challenges and Stop Food Waste is working directly with county council environmental awareness officers to better effect. We provided a good pilot experience from which to learn.

Food Rescue:

I have been working with Lorna O'Driscoll, who is the volunteer project manager for the Food Rescue pack. We received a little funding from Sligo and County Cork to run these events. The pack is complete and we have run our first event at Eithne's by the Sea Restaurant in Mullaghmore, Co. Sligo. It was a very successful event with Eithne making a meal with food that would have been thrown away by the local Supervalue. Mindy made a food waste presentation and Eithne conducted a cooking demonstration and the attendees ate the lovely meal of smoothies, roasted pumpkin seeds and skins, vegetable and bacon risotto and carrot and parsnip cake. We had extensive coverage through our Facebook and Twitter accounts and were featured in the Sligo Champion. We are also working with the Tidy Town group in Clonakilty to run this event along with ancillary activities in February 2015.

Food Waste Apartment Pilot:

Mindy made a proposal to conduct an apartment food waste collection pilot project in Dun Laoghaire. The county council was very keen on this and got Department funding for it. Together with the county council staff we worked together with Aramark, the management company with the Beacon Court apartment block and the waste collection company, AES. This pilot started in October and the county conducted a characterisation study at the end of

November. VOICE designed teaser posters throughout the pilot encouraging the separation of food waste. (See Appendix B) The characterisation study found that within two months there was a 50% separation of food waste. We will work with Dun Laoghaire in the new year to look for further funds to finance a survey to understand why people participated and why they didn't in this pilot. This pilot may provide structure for further food waste diversion programmes in other apartment buildings.

Food Waste Reduction Network:

VOICE drafted a proposal for businesses to join in this network. I worked with BITC on this and am awaiting a meeting with Kelloggs. However, due to resource constraint, I have not been able to work much on this. In June I attended the EEB Waste meeting/Green Week and met with representatives from the EU Food and Drink Industry who started such an organisation last year. They are keen to get something similar going in member states. I have a contact for the Irish representative at IBEC and will try to follow up on this. This could be a revenue generator. Mindy met with IBEC, who was very interested, but have not been contactable recently.

Waste:

Household waste Regulations:

VOICE drafted and submitted its comments to the government's household waste regulation proposals.

Deposit Refund Scheme:

VOICE completed its report on the feasibility of conducting a pilot container deposit/refund scheme (written by Miguel Parra Sierra, our intern) and I met with Shane Colgan from the EPA about this. I sent him a copy of the pilot proposal as well as our full report on the success of deposit/refund schemes internationally. He was originally very enthusiastic, but I have not heard from him since although I have sent him numerous emails.

During meetings with the Regional Waste Plans Advisory Council, I mentioned the possibility of conducting a container deposit/refund scheme and several of the other government participants were interested, including Jonathan Derham from the EPA Waste Prevention Office. I will follow up on this in 2015.

EEB:

I went to the EEB Waste 2-day conference in Brussels and attended Green Week in June and again in December, where the central premise was the circular economy. It was very worthwhile attending and meeting environmental representatives from all over Europe. I also learned what is happening at the EU level on waste issues as well as initiatives in other countries. Mindy also met with the Irish Permanent representative on the EU waste package.

Environmental Pillar Resource Efficiency Working Group:

VOICE organised and set up the Resource Efficiency Working Group within the Pillar. We have held two Skype meetings and another face to face meeting. Because many of the government waste initiatives came forward in the 4th quarter of the year, much of the work was delayed. We are now working on a submission.

I made a presentation about our work to George Lee. He is the new environmental correspondent for RTE and the Pillar organised these presentations.

Water:

Irish Water Stakeholders Forum:

VOICE has been a vocal participant in the Stakeholder's Forum, which has representatives from all sectors. We are there as a SWAN member. The forum seems to be fairly toothless and may just tick the public participation box. I have attended four meetings.

Mindy spoke on Prime Time on VOICE's support for water charges and attended a second Prime Time programme, both with Ruth McGrath.

Investigation into local authority monitoring and enforcement of water regulations:

VOICE has reignited its water campaign by sending out an Access to Information on the Environment request to all local authorities. This request asks Local Authorities how well they are monitoring local discharge licenses and how well resourced will they be once many of their employees have moved over to Irish Water. We asked a series of around 20 questions. Responses have come in and Michael O'Dwyer is currently looking analysing the data.

Mindy went to the EPA Water Conference in Galway, where much of the focus was on the implementation of the Water Framework Directive and a bit on Irish Water.

Mindy also attended several SWAN board meetings and plenary meetings as well as participated in the reviewing of the Fracking research commissioned by SWAN. The fracking study is underway and has taken much more time than originally anticipated.

Conferences, government meetings:

Mindy attended the Water Conference in Galway, EPA environmental conference in Croke Park, the Environmental Law Conference at the RIA, an Environmental Pillar meeting with the EPA, numerous Irish Water Stakeholders Forum meetings, two meetings of the Regional Waste Management Plan Advisory Council and EPA's conference on food waste.

Environmental Pillar:

Mindy was elected as a steering committee member of the Pillar and as such has attended one meeting. She has also attended four plenary meetings, a meeting with George Lee, numerous resource efficiency working group meetings, ELIG meetings and the Green Economy meeting.

Work within the Pillar has taken up more and more time as Mindy has to review a plethora of policy position papers and policies and press releases.

Social Media, Newsletters, Website and Messaging:

We had a social media intern, Melissa Rosenberg, with us for around three months. She updated our Twitter and Facebook pages, created a YouTube channel, Google+ page and a Pinterest page. She also created a storybook for a potential video. There is a photographer interested in learning how to use video/film-making who has offered her services free of charge. Due to lack of resources, this has stopped for the moment.

We have posted 14 blogs, sent out 3 e-newsletters and sent out our Summer and Winter 2014 newsletters. We are active on Twitter and have increased our followers from 900 to 1,400 and a little less so on Facebook, although we have 775 likes.

Our website is also undergoing an over-haul, which should be finalised shortly. Liz Evers and Ken Kilbride are spearheading this.

Press and Media:

VOICE's food rescue event was featured in the Sligo Champion; Mindy was on Prime Time on water charges, on Near FM to speak on food waste and on News at One Sunday RTE1 radio programme on the Poolbeg incinerator.

Board Recruitment:

Mindy has used BoardMatch to recruit board members. Three people have come forward as potential board members: Ken Kilbride from DrinkAware, Liz Evers from Trocaire and Michael O'Dwyer from Environmental Evolution, formerly from the Dublin City Council Water Department. Ken and Michael as come on as board members.