



# Annual Report 2018

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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)  
Gay Brabazon  
Gary Clare  
Ken Kilbride  
Brendan Keane

## **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 2018**

VOICE's work on waste exploded this year with expanded new campaigns and policy work both nationally and in the EU. We continued with our Zero Waste Cashel pilot, ran the Recycling Ambassador Programme, expanded and successfully ran the Conscious Cup Campaign, established the 'Sick of Plastic' campaign with Friends of the Earth, ran several food waste business workshops in companies around the country and piloted our Home Economics Food Waste pack in several secondary schools.

In terms of policy work, our Coordinator testified before the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Communications, Climate Action and the Environment in support of the Waste Reduction bill. We worked to promote this bill through the legislative process, secured grassroots support from over 60 tidy towns organisations and it succeeded in advancing through to third stage. However, the government wouldn't move any further until the EU passed its Single Use Plastic (SUP) legislation. Our Coordinator worked extensively on this through our membership of the Break Free From Plastic international network and went to Brussels to lobby our Irish MEPs and Permanent Representative. A comprehensive EU SUP bill has been agreed with a final vote to be taken in early 2019 to ratify.

Our work in the water arena has been mostly limited to the Coordinator as vice-chair of SWAN and VOICE's membership of SWAN, as well as sitting on the National Water Forum. However, water continues to be a hot topic, both in the development of the River Basin Management Plans and identifying Significant Water Management Issues. Irish Water continues to be controversial and VOICE has been an active member of the Public Water Forum and the National Water Forum.

### **Staffing:**

**Mindy O'Brien**, Coordinator, VOICE

**Azarah Minihan**, Bookkeeper (part-time), resigned in October

**Jonathan Forsythe**, Administrator (part-time), started in October

**Claudia Tormey**, Communications and project manager (part-time) to organise our food rescue and food waste home economic module pilot. (resigned in November)

**Derry O'Donnell**, Project Manager (part-time) of Zero Waste Cashel. (contract ended in July)

**Sorcha Kavanagh**, Project Manager (part-time), Conscious Cup Campaign

Recycling Ambassador Team who includes:

**Suzie Cahn**, Project Manager

**Aoife Brittan**, Liaison Officer (part-time), Connacht Ulster Region

**Tad Kirakowski**, Liaison Officer (part-time), Southern Region

**Michele Hallahan**, Liaison Officer (part-time), Eastern Midlands Region (resigned in February and became a recycling ambassador)

**Clodagh Kelly**, Liaison Officer (part-time), Eastern Midlands Region

In addition, we had around 30 recycling ambassadors around the country who ran 700 workshops. They were paid on a per workshop basis as independent contractors.

Our volunteers for the year include:

Angela Kenny, Researcher on Litter

Jonathan Forsythe: Accounts

**Governance:**

We are in compliance with the governance code, have registered as lobbyists and have registered with the Charities Regulatory Authority. All our filings are up to date.

**Funding:**

Irish Environmental Network/Environmental Pillar:

VOICE received funding from the IEN in various forms:

Core funding	€15,974
Other funding	€1,771
Total Received in 2017:	€17,745

## Local Agenda 21:

We received €3,950 for Food Waste Home Economics initiative for 2017/2018 and €2,123 for our Conscious Consumption Communities and €750 for the Conscious Cup Campaign responsive website map.

### Membership:

Our membership numbers continue to reduce slightly each year. However, we received €6,431 from our members.

### Donations:

We received €4,909 in donations.

### Corporate Donation:

We received €25,000 from Repak to run our recycling coaches programme in 2018. This is the second tranche of a total of €50,000

### Conscious Cup Campaign:

We received €32,529 from the Eastern Midlands Waste Management Regional Office to run this campaign.

### Recycling Ambassador Programme:

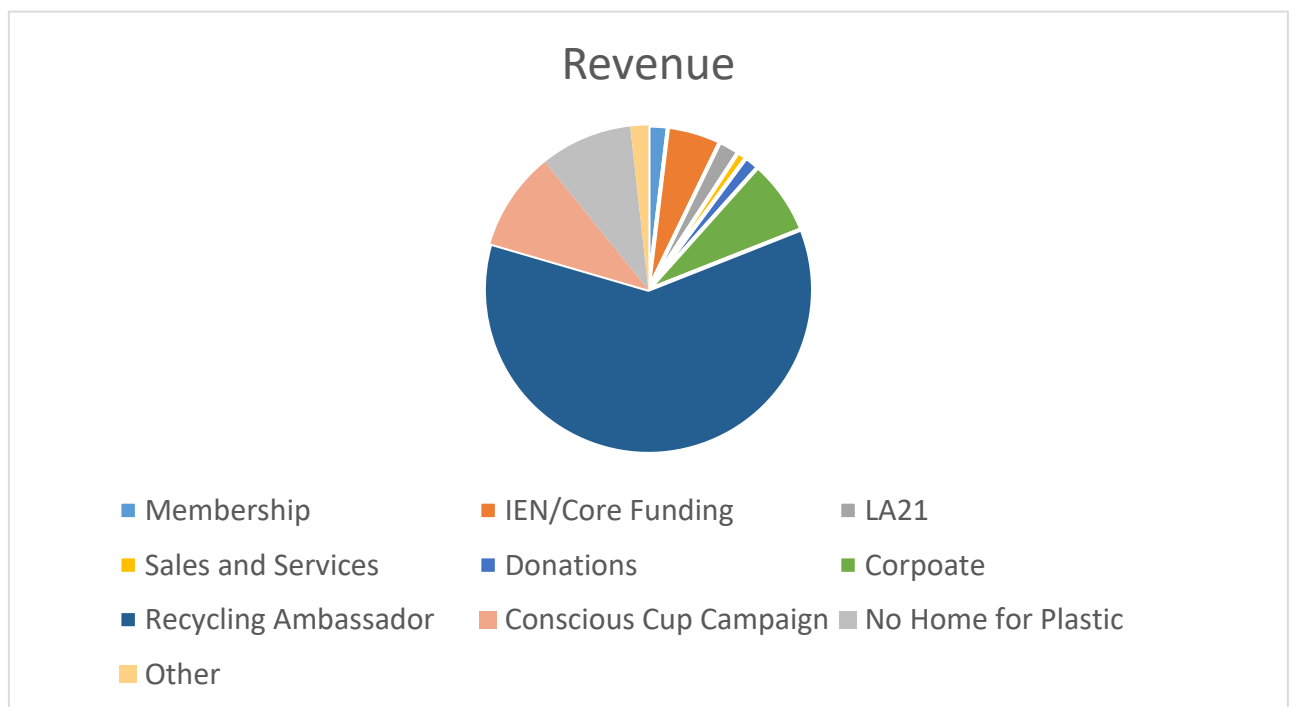
We received €204,200 for this programme.

### No Home for Plastic Research Project:

We received a €30,533 prepayment for our plastic in the home research project. This will be a year-long, fully funded project in 2019.

Total Funding Received in 2018:

Source	Amount (€)
IEN/Pillar	17,745
LA21	6,823
Membership	6,431
Donations	4,909
Sales and Services	3,162
Corporate	25,000
Recycling Ambassadors	204,200
Conscious Cup Campaign	32,529
No Home for Plastic Research	30,533
Other	5,960
<b>Total funding for 2018</b>	<b>337,292</b>



## Campaigns:

Waste:

Zero Waste:

We completed this pilot in July of this year. We had some victories and some setbacks along the way. We have also developed a [Zero Waste Community Toolkit](#).

The Zero Waste Cashel pilot was launched in March 2017 and continued to operate until July 2018. During this time, we hired a part-time project manager, hosted numerous recycling, composting and repurposing workshops, organised two ReUse Month calendar of events in 2017 and 2018, hosted a Zero Waste Festival in 2018, created a Zero Waste map of Cashel, engaged with all community groups, schools, and many businesses, organised the installation of street recycling bins and overall raised the awareness of waste management and waste prevention throughout the town.

Below are our Results and Lessons Learned:

## Results/Outcomes

### Target 1: Reduce per capita residual waste by 25-50%,

One of our targets was to reduce residual waste by 25-50%. After the waste characterisation, we felt that the easiest way to achieve this target was to divert food waste and recyclables from the residual bin to the correct organic and dry mixed recycling, respectively. As we only received the results from the characterisation study at the end of 2017, we were only able to respond to the findings in May and in a limited fashion. As detailed above, we commenced a food waste pilot in Spafield Housing estate. In two months, on average, we reduced the weight of the residual bin by around 14%. However, to get a more comprehensive picture, we would need a longer measuring time period to assess long-term impact.

Additionally, we have had a very difficult time obtaining data from waste companies as we do not have the authority or gravitas to demand such. Therefore, we were unable to determine whether we were able to reduce the amount of residual waste generated throughout the town. [See recommendations in Lessons Learned below.](#)

### Target 2: Create new indigenous businesses

There has been one furniture upcycling business started in Cashel to date, Revamp Furniture, and there are several individuals who run workshops on recycled art, sewing and making bees wax cloth wraps.



### Target 3: Encourage the development of social enterprises

We coordinated and encouraged the Cashel Meals on Wheels to start a community fridge. We got as far as sourcing a contact for the fridge and working with the organisation, but the coordinator at the meals on wheels decided not to move forward with this initiative.

### Target 4: Promote the reuse/repair/recycling community

We held numerous workshops, talks, festivals, events as detailed above which promoted the reuse/repair/recycling community. Additionally, our website had a sharing page to encourage Cashel residents to offer or share their items or skills with their neighbours. Unfortunately, this element of the website did not take off.

## Lessons Learned

Looking back on the project it was a very ambitious undertaking. Things can move a lot slower than one would like. When dealing with any organisations, be they local groups or state bodies, you often have to wait until a meeting is had before a decision can be made to adopt a particular policy or try a new initiative. This can be frustrating when you have a new idea and are full of enthusiasm to do something new. There is also a wide variety of types of waste to reduce which can be further divided up between commercial and domestic. Single issue campaigns can be easier to manage such as 'Plastic Free', 'Reusables', 'Recycling', 'Stop Food Waste' etc.

In Cashel we were focussing on all these issues and more. The community in general seemed to embrace the project, with most of the local groups having participated in events or being involved in one way or another over the 18 months. Through all the media coverage in national and local papers, local radio and on social media, the message has been delivered widely throughout Cashel and beyond. Anecdotally people will tell you that they've changed their ways and are more conscious of the waste they generate. People on the street proudly show their reusable bags, coffee cups and water bottles.



This video voxpop highlights how one business owner found attending the green Business seminar benefitted him:-

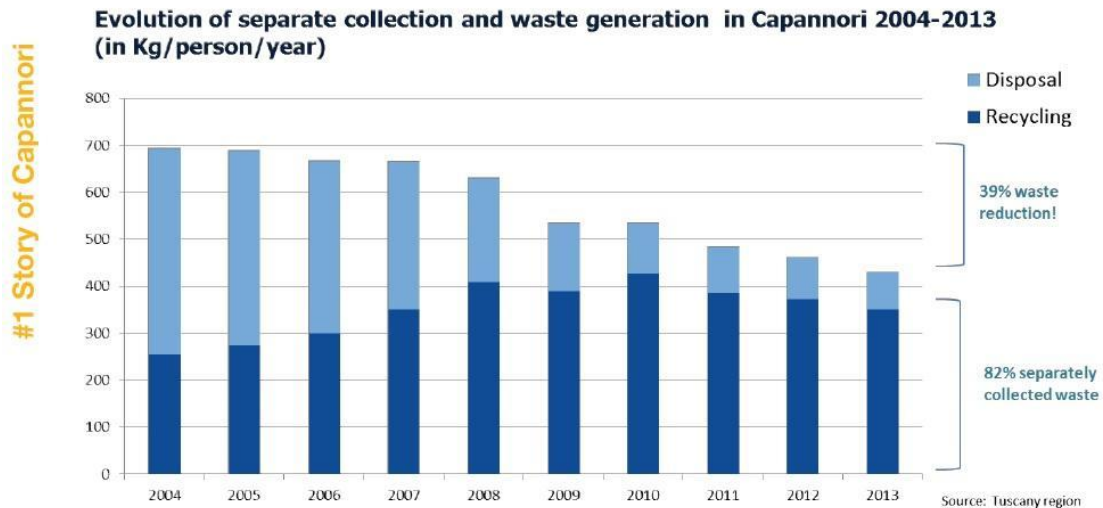
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GhvA2ltx9iM>

The fact remains however that much of the waste is hard to avoid as producers continue to use excess single use plastic packaging and products often have in-built obsolescence.

Any such Towards Zero Waste initiative in the future should focus on the following:

- Ensure that the targeted community is primed to take an environmental project and has an active environmental group or zero waste volunteers. In Cashel, it was challenging to find volunteers to help as many active citizens were involved in other worthwhile organisations. Much of the work fell to the part-time PM.
- Conducting a waste characterisation at the beginning gives you a good baseline from which to start. Now that there is a national waste characterisation study underway, this should add needed information to any community wishing to embark on their zero waste journey.
- At the beginning of any new zero waste initiative, the community must have the active support of the government, both national and local to obtain necessary data. Communities must be able to access base-line and other data for bin collections and weights. While we received base-line data from Clean Ireland, we were unable to access the final data. Additionally, we were unable to get baseline and follow-up data from Ryan Brothers as they determined that it would take too much personnel time to pull together. However, they did give us data for the food waste pilot. As a charity, we do not have the authority or ability to demand such data from private businesses. We have to rely on goodwill from such businesses to get this information and oftentimes the data is very late in arriving or limited in scope. For any future endeavours, the Department, EPA or local authority should step in to assist in acquiring this essential data.
- Focus on one or two areas of waste management. The concept of 'zero waste' or even 'towards zero waste' is hard for individuals to get their heads around. Communities should try for the easier, lower hanging fruit such as plastic straw-free, plastic-free, conscious cup, recycling town.
- Zero Waste Cashel started before the adoption of the new recycling list and had only 8 months to go in the pilot when the list came out. Promoting the new recycling list may have had an unexpected impact of increasing the amount of waste thrown away in the residual bin, as much of this material at the beginning of the project was considered recyclable and encouraged to be placed in the mixed dry recycling bin. Any weight statistics may be skewed due to this huge policy change.

- Looking at other zero waste communities, most of them spent two years to properly sort their waste before they were able to focus on waste prevention. It took Capannori five years to effectively reduce their waste generation. See [below the results from Capannori, Italy:](#)



- Any town trying to go towards zero waste must sort their bins correctly first, removing food waste and clean recyclables from the residual bin and placing them either in the organic bin/home composting system or uncontaminated into the dry mixed recycling bin. Only when this proper separation occurs and people are more aware of their waste creation and habits will the community be ready to look more towards waste prevention.
- Any community must engage in recycling/brown bin workshops so that there is a consistency between actions at home and out and about.
- Conducting market research is a good tool to understand the community's priorities and should be done at the beginning of any project.
- Engage with every community group and business and get their commitment to sort their bins...provide recycling and brown bin workshops. Get their commitment to adopt some zero waste initiatives and promote their effort and success.
- We discovered confusion with the brown bins as one waste company provided small food caddies to households as they did not want garden waste. Another company only provided the larger 120l organic bin without the corresponding food kitchen caddy. These waste customers didn't know that they could put

food waste in the larger 120l bins and were therefore throwing their food waste into the residual bin.

- If a town puts in place recycling or organic street bins, there must be effective signage/labels on the bins and corresponding public awareness. Also, the local government must commit to send material collected in recycling bins to materials recycling facilities.
- The town/county council must engage with the waste collectors on the price of collecting recyclables as we found that the cost for collecting recyclables was more expensive than residual waste collection due to the beneficial rate county councils receive at landfills.
- Street recycling bins are easily contaminated by food and liquids. Paper is likely to be too contaminated to be recyclable. We recommend that any street recycling bin only include empty plastic bottles and aluminium cans.
- Communities need longer than 18 months to achieve effective and everlasting behavioural change. A step-by-step approach towards waste reduction, rather than an all-inclusive approach that we tried in Cashel (prevention, reuse, repair, recycling, rot) is the best way forward. Get the easy wins first.

### Conscious Cup Campaign:

Over the course of 2018 we have seen a significant increase in the number of people carrying a reusable cup and reports back from Cafes are very positive, almost every cafe you visit will now be selling reusable cups and there is nearly always someone in the queue with a reusable cup. Cafes now actively seek us out to become supporters and are proud to offer a discount to their customers and display our logo on their window, we now have 1,000+ participating Cafes nationwide and even a few in the UK already

A significant number of companies, with our guidance, have launched reusable cups and campaigns within their workplaces, encouraging their employees to carry a cup and seeking advice from us on how best to get the message to their staff.

Our social media platforms have been very active and following is increasing monthly, there is an excellent baseline of consumers who are now interested in REUSE.

Platform	October	Reach	Engagement
Facebook	2204	117,048	26,304
Twitter	1,800	11,900	1,549 (imp)
Instagram	1,098	2588	6060 (Imp)

We have been featured on The Late Late Show, Ireland AM and Q102 regularly as a recognised National Campaign.

We were shortlisted for a Green Award 2018 and shortlisted and won European Week of Waste Reduction 2017 for Citizen Engagement.

### Recycling Ambassador Programme:

With significant funding and support from the Department on Communications, Climate Action and the Environment and the three waste regions, we brought the knowledge of the new Recycling List to individuals and households in every Irish county. We worked very closely with the three waste regions, REPAK and industry and established a very lean but effective management structure with a full-time project manager and three part-time liaison officers who identify workshop opportunities and directly manage our 30 regionally-based ambassadors. Additionally, our liaison officers developed an impressive data base of community

groups and businesses that have attended workshops throughout the country, which has been secured on our Salesforce CRM system. Our ambassadors went through presentation training, were given workshop materials and have continued oversight by their liaison officer. As we have ambassadors throughout the country who are part of their community, they have been very well received by workshop attendees. RAP was launched by the Minister in November 2017 and the programme concluded at the end of 2018 having run 700 workshops and reaching 25,000 people face to face. We exceed our goal of running 650 workshops and reaching 15,000 people by the end of the year. The Department, Regions, REPAK and industry were delighted with the programme and we have anecdotal information that contamination of the recycling stream is down as a result of the government's advertising campaign and our workshop outreach. A full report can be seen [here](#), and a summary, [here](#).

We also received €50,000 from REPAK to run a grant programme for sustainable community actions. Out of 117 applicants, we had 85 groups throughout the country participate and each one received €500. They all had to conduct 50 paper waste surveys, which will be part of our recycling behaviour report, and carry out some type of sustainable action. Actions varied from new recycling bins and education in sports clubs to plastic straw-free communities to upcycling and repair workshops. This initiative was very well received and helped communities try new environmental initiatives.

### Waste Reduction Bill:

The Green Party has submitted a bill to ban single-use non-compostable items and establish a deposit/refund scheme for closed drinks containers. We are helping with its promotion and getting political support for its passage. We have secured support from 60 tidy town groups and have held a waste event at Buswell's Hotel with Friends of the Earth to encourage TDs to pressure the government to move this bill along legislatively. Friends of the Earth gave out free KeepCups to TDs and we provided informational handouts about the amount of single use plastic packaging consumed in Ireland and how this bill would address this. We worked closely with Eamon Ryan, leader of the Green Party. This bill passed out of committee, but it has languished ever since.

Our Coordinator testified before the Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Climate Action and the Environment in January and answered questions along with a panel of industry witnesses.

## Plastic Work:

### Break Free From Plastic:

VOICE joined Break Free From Plastic, an international network of environmental groups lobbying for the reduction of plastic. Mindy attended a conference in Zagreb last April with groups from all over Europe and beyond. We discussed strategy on passing the Single Use Plastic legislation going through the EU and policy on reducing our reliance on plastic. Mindy has kept active in this group, attending Zoom meetings and webinars. She lobbied Irish MEPs via email and travelled to Brussels before a big vote in the Parliament to meet with MEPs. A strong bill was passed by Parliament that would ban 10 plastic single use plastic items, requires a 90% collection rate for plastic drink containers and puts more financial responsibility on producers to help fund litter clean-up, street bins and public awareness. This legislation is due to be finalised in March 2019.

### Sick of Plastic:

VOICE and Friends of the Earth joined together to create a public campaign to push the Waste Reduction Bill as well as organise a public action event. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> April, we urged shoppers to leave their unwanted plastic packaging behind in their supermarkets. We had actions throughout the country at around 100 shops with over 250 volunteers. This 'Shop and Drop' initiative got great coverage on RTE, TV3, Newstalk, numerous radio stations, Eco Eye and national papers both before, during and after the event. Shoppers were asked to sign a petition with the following demands:

1. Offer more items without packaging, such as fruit and vegetables (without plastic trays, wrapping and nets).
2. Make their own-brand packaging easily compostable or recyclable, and use less plastic.
3. Demand, through their purchasing power, that other brands they carry have easily compostable or recyclable packaging, and use less plastic.
4. Blaze a trail in Ireland by implementing a plastic free aisle, as has been done in the Netherlands.
5. Provide items in bulk, where possible, to reduce packaging.
6. Allow shoppers use their own containers to buy dried goods, buying only what they need.

## Other Projects:

### Home Economics Food Waste Pack

With funding from Dublin City Council, Fingal County Council, Kildare County Council and Wicklow County Council, we ran 7 interactive workshops in Home Ec Classes. We developed a comprehensive resource for teachers of Home Economics, Ag Science, TY Cookery and CSPE to easily incorporate food waste and sustainable consumption education into their existing classroom activity.

VOICE presented interactive workshops to inform them about the social and environmental implications of food waste and how they can become empowered to take action in preventing food waste in their daily lives.

The presentation was followed by a quiz and moving debate to engage the students in conversation and debate on the topic. The introduction focuses on food waste from farm to fork, where food is lost and what impact that has on the environment. We highlight various initiatives in Ireland working to tackle the problem of food waste on industry level as well as discussing what actions can be taken at school and at home.

The Food Waste Pack includes various practical and interactive teacher-led activities to support what the students are learning from the existing curriculum. The class were asked to take on at least one activity in order to complete the project, these include; food waste reduction challenge, food awareness poster making, grow your own herb garden and various food practical activities such as making stock, pickle and preserves.

Additionally, we provided an educational food waste documentary 'Just Eat It' to the class to watch in their own time. Our pack has been taken up by other schools and content used in the development of a food waste module in the new Home Economics Junior Cycle Curriculum, which was launched late in 2018.

### Food Waste Reduction Outreach to Companies

With funding from Limerick County Council, we developed a food waste presentation and pack to present to 5 companies in Waterford, Tipperary, Limerick and Clare. Our presentations varied from workshops, to cooking demonstrations to stands. We gave out Smart Cooking cookbooks to make shopping and cooking easy.



## Access in Information on the Environment (AIE) Request for Litter

We sent out an AIE Request to all local authorities about the amount of litter and street bin waste generated and managed in their areas, the number of fines issues and also the amount spent on managing this waste and spent pursuing fines and penalties in court. We are collating the information and will have a full report released in Spring 2019.

### **Waste Prevention Advisory Committee:**

Mindy O'Brien is the environmental representative on this committee. Thus far this committee receives information from the government on the successful measures and actions taken on waste prevention. We suggested that more be done to tap into the expertise of the committee in terms of policy proposals.

### **Water:**

#### ***National Water Forum:***

We sit as an environmental representative on the newly established National Water Forum which oversees all water issues and makes submissions on water policy. We have meetings nearly every 6 weeks, which has taken up a lot of time. Mindy in early 2019 has stepped off this committee as she couldn't devote enough time to it and it distracted from her work on waste issues.

Our coordinator is on SWAN's Board and is the Vice Chair.

### **Meetings:**

- Our coordinator continues to meet with the three Regional Waste Prevention Officers and with Community Reuse Network Coordinator on waste issues, including RAP, Zero Waste Cashel, food waste and the Conscious Cup Campaign.
- She attended the REPAK Plastic Strategy launch She attended the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals Plan and met with DCCAE staff on potential of becoming a SDG champion.
- Our coordinator attended the National Economic Dialogue forum as a member of the Pillar.
- Our coordinator attended the National Waste Prevention Committee as a Pillar representative.

- We have attended SWAN's board, plenary meetings and AGM.
- Our coordinator attended National Water Forum meetings
- Met with the department and politicians re: waste reduction bill and recycling

### **Conferences, Presentations, Government meetings:**

- Mindy sat on panel at the Bord Bia Irish Foodservice Seminar on coffee cups and plastic
- Mindy presented at the EPA Plastic Economy Seminar
- Mindy attended the Significant Water Management Issues Conference at Farmleigh House
- Mindy presented at St.Columban's in Meath about plastic (Sean McDonagh)
- Mindy presented on plastics at the West Cork Food Festival
- Mindy presented on Zero Waste Cashel as the LAPN Conference
- Mindy sat on a panel at the She is Sustainable conference

### **Environmental Pillar:**

Mindy has gone back on the Pillar Steering committee, and heads up the Sick of Plastic working group and as such attended meetings with Eamon Ryan and other TDs and testified before the Oireachtas Committee on the Waste Reduction bill.

Our coordinator participated in an EP meeting with DCCAIE to discuss waste policy. She also attended the National Economic Forum as an EP representative.

### **Irish Environmental Network:**

Our Coordinator is on the board of the IEN is active in the internal issues of the IEN and attends the board meetings.

### **Social Media, Newsletters, Website and Messaging:**

We have posted 55 blogs, sent out over 12 call to action emails, sent out 5 e-newsletters and sent out our Winter 2018 paper newsletter. We are active on Twitter and Facebook and have increased our followers from 2,886 to 3,885 and

from 1,687 to 2,847 followers on Facebook. We also have a YouTube channel, which has just become a bit more active with our RAP initiative and an Instagram account. Our website underwent a full facelift, [www.voiceireland.org](http://www.voiceireland.org).

We also have Facebook and Twitter accounts for Zero Waste Cashel with 808 followers on Facebook and 749 followers on Twitter. Zero Waste Cashel also has a website, [www.zerowastecashel.org](http://www.zerowastecashel.org) and an e-zine sent out every few months. This initiative was funded by EPA and in July, came to its conclusion.

Our RAP initiative has a Facebook account with 535 followers and our website page is [www.voiceireland.org/rap](http://www.voiceireland.org/rap). Facebook was very effective for promoting our various workshops and events. We also promoted RAP through our VOICE Twitter and Instagram accounts.

Conscious Cup Campaign has an active facebook page with around 2,400 followers and a twitter account which has 1,607 followers. The website is [www.consciouscup.ie](http://www.consciouscup.ie).

We have shared news and other actions from other environmental organisations through our mailchimp and email accounts.

Claudia Tormey handled our social media and communications pulled together a full strategic communications plan to ensure that we bring all our various campaigns under one VOICE umbrella. Claudia left VOICE at November and Tad Kirakowski has taken over the role.

## **Press and Media:**

We issued two press released and our Coordinator interviewed with the following media outlets over the year with approximately 30 interviews:

Newstalk Radio: Eleven times on such topics as waste and waste bill, food waste, bin charges, DRS, compostable cups, straws, recycling and plastic

Pat Kenny (8/3/18; 24/10/18; 12/12/18)

Ciara Kelly (17/1/18; 29/1/18; 14/3/18;15/6/18)

Morning show (28/3/18; 26/4/18;15/6/18)

RTE Morning Ireland (17/1/18)

Claire Byrne (30/1/18; 19/11/18)

Drivetime (14/3/18)

George Lee (28/5/18)  
TV3 for Sick of Plastic  
Near FM  
Flirt FM (Galway)  
Kfm (Kildare) x 3 times  
Shannonside x 2 times  
Eastcoast x 2 times  
Q102  
Tipp FM (zero waste Cashel)  
Tipp Midwest FM (zero waste Cashel)

Irish Times (feature in Waste Supplement for RAP and recycling and on work for the Single Use Plastic EU legislation)

Our Zero Waste Cashel Project Manager has been a regular feature on local radio and papers.

Conscious Cup Campaign has been on Q102 and featured on other stations.

RAP has featured in local papers and radio stations where there are workshops being held.

### **Training:**

- Sage training for our staff
- GoDoVideo for 3 staff to understand how to use mobile phones for quick videos