Supporting farmers to support wildlife

A new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) must support farmers to deliver a wide range of public benefits, a healthy natural environment and strong rural communities. Public money for public goods should be the underpinning of a new social contract between farmers and society.

Iconic farmland birds that we associate with the Irish landscape have shown dramatic population and range declines since the 1970’s. In Ireland, Lapwing and Redshank declined by 88% between 1993 and 2008, Curlew by 84% and Snipe by 73%. At this rate, extinctions could occur within 30 years, sooner for Curlew. Without successful CAP reform we can expect to see continuing declines in wildlife including farmland birds and a range of important habitats.

Policy changes

Many traditional farming systems, particularly low intensity grazing of semi-natural grasslands, play an important role in nature conservation. High Nature Value farming systems should be supported to ensure their longer term viability.

The Natura 2000 network of sites provides the largest network of protected areas in the world, covering 17.5% of EU territory. Many of the species and habitats in these designated areas depend on sensitive farm management, these need targeted support.

The Financial Perspectives for 2014 to 2020 need to bring CAP, CFP, and Cohesion policy in line with agreed objectives of making Europe more resource-efficient, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and restoring biodiversity and ecosystems. Increasing the share of LIFE funding to 1% will facilitate this.

Ireland’s agricultural sector depends on a ‘green’ image. CAP must be able to incentivise sustainable production which has credibility and meaningful delivery of environmental objectives. Ireland needs to secure legal text for meaningful greening.

Agri-environment schemes are the green backbone of CAP. Ireland must ensure a minimum spend of 50% on ‘agri – environment – climate’ as part of the Rural Development funding in a new CAP.

Subsidies need to be re-directed towards increasing the value of the farming enterprise by delivering multiple public benefits, driving innovation while maintaining traditional knowledge and practices, and reducing land abandonment which is a significant problem in many parts of Ireland.
Managing our marine resources

A new Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) must bring an end to overfishing and damaging fishing methods; healthy seas can secure a future for fish, other wildlife and our fishing communities.

Ireland’s seabirds are of global importance as they navigate around the globe. Recent population declines and lack of data remain a great concern with most seabirds now red or amber-listed, alerting us to changes in the marine environment and the risk of extinction. Damaging fishing methods threaten the future of fish stocks and healthy seas. In 2006/7 estimated seabird mortality was 53,000 birds per year including Manx Shearwaters, Fulmars and Gannets, and involved fisheries in Irish waters.

Policy changes

A new Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) must bring an end to overfishing. The ongoing damage being caused in the marine environment is so severe that radical action cannot be further delayed.

Our society needs a healthy environment to thrive and build an economy that supports jobs, our health and our future. The true cost to society of environmental damage needs to become transparent across all sectors.

Dealing with climate change

Nature is our natural ally in dealing with climate change. Healthy ecosystems are more resilient to a changing climate and can help communities adapt to the changes we are already seeing.

Our changing climate is having an impact on people and on wildlife. By building resilience in nature through protected areas, wetland restoration and creation and ‘soft engineering’, we can help protect communities and businesses too.

Policy changes

Environmental performance needs to be reflected in country reporting under the EU2020 Strategy. The 7th Environment Action Programme and the Semester process need to reflect social and environmental progress in a transition to sustainable economies.

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