

## NESC Roundtable on the Challenge of Environmental Policy Integration

Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> November

### Purpose of the Roundtable Discussion

NESC is pleased to organise this roundtable event. A Secretariat discussion paper, *Greening the Economy*, prepared as part of NESC's work on the *Five Part Crisis: Five Years On* has been circulated to participants. That paper discussed some ways in which the environmental agenda has been integrated into Irish policy and how this might be taken further.

It has long been argued that a challenge is to place environmental considerations at the centre of policy and decision making at EU, national, regional and local levels (EPA, 2012).<sup>1 2</sup> This is referred to as 'environmental policy integration' (EPI) and, at international level, the stated goal has, since the late 1980s, been to 'systematically integrate environmental factors into all stages of government policy making regardless of sector' (WCED 1987: 314)<sup>3</sup>. But many observers are disappointed with some of the main approaches adopted, such as ex ante 'proofing' of policy decisions for their environmental, gender, poverty and other impacts (NESC, 2001)<sup>4</sup>; while one response is to put proofing procedures on a stronger statutory footing, others doubt that this would solve the problem.

Another response, which clearly has very significant long-term merit, is to generate more environmental data with a view to recasting national income accounting, facilitating research and informing policy. Implicit in any proposal for generation of environmental data is some view of the policy process in which such data and research will be used. At a time of scarce resources, it is worth thinking carefully about the *use* of environmental data and what kinds of additional environmental data would be most effective in advancing policies for sustainability. NESC has recently commissioned a small study on some aspects of this issue.<sup>5</sup>

A key purpose of the roundtable is to discuss ways in which the environmental agenda has been integrated into Irish policy, instances where this has proven difficult, and how NESC's work on sustainable development in the coming years can be designed to really probe the integration challenge. As in other countries, the way in which environmental and sustainability issues are formulated and institutionalised in the policy system and society matters. There is more than one way of successfully integrating sustainability and more than one way of failing. The challenge of integrating environment and economy is complex, for a number of reasons. Some of these apply in most countries most of the time, and some are particularly relevant at times of economic crisis, unemployment and fiscal constraints.

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<sup>1</sup> This is not a uniquely Irish problem. An Irish Presidency discussion paper notes that across Europe and in high-level EU decision-making it is continuing to be difficult to integrate environmental policies into economic decision-making. *Building the Single Market for Green Products in a Resource Efficient Europe* (2013), Presidency Discussion Paper, Informal Meeting of EU Environment Ministers, 22 – 23 April, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> EPA (2012) *Ireland's Environment 2012: An Assessment*. Wexford: Environmental Protection Agency.

<sup>3</sup> World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) *Our Common Future: Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development*. Published as Annex to General Assembly document A/42/427, Development and International Co-operation: Environment August 2, 1987.

<sup>4</sup> *Review of the Poverty Proofing Process*, NESC, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> 'The Role of Data for Greening the Economy: an Exploratory Study of Its Use and Value' (October 2013)

*First*, in most democratic countries public policy and politics tends to be strongly influenced by economic concerns, but interest in environmental protection certainly tends to increase with national income.

*Second*, environmental issues, and the policy instruments than can address them, do not fall within the control of a single government department or agency; effective policy responses to cross-cutting issues are a challenge to all modern government systems which find it hard to incentivise and coordinate action across policy silos, and not just in the environmental area.

*Third*, in times of acute economic crisis, unemployment and fiscal deficit, policy priorities tend to narrow in ways that can, but perhaps don't have to, weaken the focus on the environment and sustainable development.

*Fourth*, in the past decade there is, internationally, much greater awareness that long-term prosperity is dependent on ecology, but the practical implications of this, and its interaction with short-term economic concerns, is only being discovered gradually. While gross damage to water sources and large-scale waste disposal are widely seen as wrong – in economic, environmental, social and health terms – the cost of losing biodiversity can be opaque and practical implications of protecting it while improving prosperity remain unclear to many economic actors.

*Fifth*, it should not be surprising that real integration of economic and environmental perspectives is challenging. In the case of both society and environment it is relatively easy to enunciate the need for an integrated approach, but hard to make this real and comprehensible. A review of environmental policy integration (EPI) research and practice across Europe shows how such policy integration is both complex and contingent and there are few 'best practices' that can be shared between countries (Jordan and Lenschow, 2010).<sup>6</sup>

We hope this roundtable will provide a forum to debate these, and other significant issues that may arise on this challenge of environmental policy integration.

### **Draft Roundtable Programme**

9.30am	Introduction to Roundtable
9.40am	The Challenges of Environmental Integration
11.15am	Coffee/Tea
11:40am	The Role and Value of Environmental Data for Greater Integration
12:30pm	Institutional Mechanisms Connecting Environment and Economy
1:15pm	Light Lunch and Close

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<sup>6</sup> Jordan, A. And Lenschow, A. (2010) Environmental Policy Integration: A State of the Art Review. *Environmental Policy and Governance*, 20, 147-158.