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Rapporteur Report on NESC Roundtables: Accounting for Nature in Ireland



RESEARCH PAPER

No.28 January 2024

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Eacnamaíoch agus Shóisialta
National Economic & Social Council

An Oifig Náisiúnta um Fhorbairt Eacnamaíoch agus Shóisialta
National Economic & Social Development Office NESDO



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Summary

A series of three roundtables designed by the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) and supported by Natural Capital Ireland (NCI) enabled high-level policy dialogue on valuing nature in Ireland, including the potential of the natural capital approach and natural capital accounting in policy.

Themes that emerged from the policy dialogue were:

- Nature is poorly recognised and undervalued in Irish policy; there has been a lack of vision for nature in Ireland; there is a lack of recognition of nature in decision-making.

- Issues around communication on natural capital and biodiversity, and uncertainty around the language, definitions and meaning of natural capital and natural capital accounting and issues around communication on biodiversity and natural capital.

- Concern about the fragmentation of current national nature policy and how proposed European policy on natural capital will be integrated.

- The perceived misalignment of agricultural policy and nature policy.

- The lack of tools available to enable natural capital accounting in Ireland and how such tools could be developed and implemented.

- The need for a whole of government, whole of society approach to valuing nature.

- The relationship between nature policy with health and well-being policy.

The roundtables were organised by the NESC as part of the project *Accounting for Nature in Ireland*. Natural Capital Ireland (NCI) were commissioned by NESC to provide a briefing paper in advance of the roundtables on valuing nature in Ireland; to attend each roundtable as independent rapporteurs to support the NESC Secretariat; and to provide a Rapporteurs' Report after completion of the roundtables.

These high-level policy dialogues brought a wide range of policy makers, together with some experts and stakeholders, to discuss the potential and challenges of using the natural capital approach and natural capital accounting within the policy system in Ireland. NCI acted as independent rapporteurs for each roundtable to complement the NESC Secretariat.

Introduction

The natural capital approach and natural capital accounting is growing in significance at the global and European levels within policy goals, targets and indicators with which Irish national policy should necessarily align. The European Green Deal recognises the key role of natural capital, and future mandatory reporting of natural capital accounts is under discussion in the EU Parliament and Council.

Natural Capital Ireland (NCI) was commissioned by the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) to support their project *Accounting for Nature in Ireland*. NCI is a not-for-profit organisation leading the national conversation on natural capital. Natural capital is an economic metaphor that frames nature's entities and processes as assets or stocks that yield a flow of benefits to people. NCI's mission is to value, protect and restore Ireland's natural capital and ecosystem services, by supporting the adoption of the natural capital approach in public policy and corporate strategy, promoting informed public and private sector decision-making, and assisting in the establishment of a national natural capital accounting standard. NCI and NESC both prepared separate briefing papers to inform policymakers in advance of three roundtables on natural capital and natural capital accounting.

Following on from the roundtables, NCI has prepared this Rapporteur's Report which sets out a brief description of each roundtable and describes the themes that emerged from the policy dialogue.

Roundtables

The roundtables were facilitated by Deirdre Joyce, Climate Mediation Ireland, and attended by the NESC team, and NCI who were acting as rapporteurs for each session, bringing together a wide range of policy makers, together with some experts and stakeholders (Table 1). Roundtables 1 and 2 were opened by Larry O’Connell, Director, NESC, and Roundtable 3 was opened by Jeanne Moore, NESC Project Lead.

Table 1: NESC Roundtable details

Roundtable	Date	Topic	*No. participants
Roundtable 1	9th May 2023	Understanding benefits and perspectives in valuing nature.	20
Roundtable 2	23rd May 2023	Agro-ecological Accounting in agriculture, forestry and other land use.	17
Roundtable 3	2nd June 2023	Operational challenges in natural capital accounts.	11

The programme and focus of the roundtables was designed by NESC. Each roundtable commenced with a welcome from NESC, followed by an introduction by Deirdre Joyce. The atmosphere at the beginning of each roundtable was relaxed. There was a sense of enthusiasm in relation to discussing the topic of accounting for nature in Ireland and a willingness to discuss, debate with and listen to each other. Although the slow progress in the area of natural capital and natural capital accounting was highlighted by some, all participants welcomed the opportunity the roundtables provided in bringing together in the same room a variety of stakeholders with differing perspectives on valuing nature in Ireland and enabling high-level policy dialogue.

Similar issues and challenges arose at each of the roundtables and the overall themes that emerged are set out later in this document. Resources and reports highlighted by participants are set out in Appendix 1.

Below is a brief summary of each Roundtable:

Roundtable 1: Understanding benefits and perspectives in valuing nature

The aim of Roundtable 1 was to explore the current developments and practices in valuing nature and natural capital across the policy system and to try to identify areas to strengthen practice and policy.

During the roundtable a number of short presentations were given as follows:

- Gemma Weir, National Parks and Wildlife Service – briefly discussed the upcoming National Biodiversity Action Plan.

- Alan Cahill, Central Statistics Office – briefly discussed the current work of the CSO around developing national natural capital accounts.

- Gemma O'Reilly, NESC - briefly discussed her current work on a paper on international natural capital accounting looking at the different approaches taken.

- Iseult Sheehy, NCI - briefly introduced the role of NCI in developing the briefing paper for the NESC Roundtables and the work that NCI is involved in.

Roundtable 2: Agro-ecological accounting in agriculture, forestry and land use

The aim of this Roundtable was to explore the current agro-ecological accounting in agriculture, forestry and other land use and discuss recent developments in payments for ecosystem services, carbon farming and other areas for potential benefits from accounting for nature.

During the Roundtable a number of short presentations were given as follows:

- Mark Scott, UCD – spoke about the socio-economic aspects of land use and the challenges on how we value land.

- Marc Kierans, DECC – spoke about the bioeconomy and how it spans all sectors in Ireland.

- Niamh Garvey, NESC – spoke about just transition in agriculture and land use change.

- James Moran, Atlantic Technological University – introduced the Waters of Life EU Life IP to restore our most pristine waters.

- Nova Sharkey, CSO – discussed the challenges of developing national natural capital accounts from the CSO's perspective.

- Ciaran Fallon, Coillte Nature – briefly discussed Coillte forestry and private forestry and Coillte Nature's aim to deliver on biodiversity.

Roundtable 3: Operational challenges in natural capital accounts

The aim of this Roundtable was to explore the development of the System of Environmental Economic Accounting framework ([SEEA](#)) and natural capital accounts in Ireland and what is required to enable further progress and try to identify opportunities and enablers for future utilisation of accounts in decision-making and the enabling policy framework that is required.

During the Roundtable a number of short presentations were given as follows:

- Jane Stout, TCD – spoke about research for natural capital accounting approaches and aligning natural capital approaches with other frameworks (i.e. research with [BiOrbic](#)). Research projects using the SEEA approach were outlined, including the INCASE, ForES, Farm Zero C and Nature+ Energy projects. She highlighted the need to build capacity nationally via such research projects.

- Sylvie Clappe, CSO – spoke of the CSO’s work on ecosystem accounting using the SEEA. She highlighted the need for collaboration for compiling national natural capital accounts and the need for the CSO Ecosystem Accounting Division to be properly resourced. The importance of raising awareness of the work of the CSO on EA was highlighted. The taskforce for ecosystem accounts is led by [EUROSTAT](#) and is at EU parliament at the moment.

- Catherine Farrell, [LIFE on Machair](#) – spoke about the challenges, opportunities and key learnings in relation to the [INCASE](#) project that she worked on (the report for this is due to be published shortly).

- Gerry Clabby, DECC – gave some policy reflections. He stated that we are damaging the environment and need to do something about it and noted that, in policy, the environment is usually considered be external to society and the economy.

Jeanne Moore, NESC closed the final Roundtable, thanking all in attendance for the time and valuable input. She advised that NESC will consider all the material from the roundtables in their final Council report, NCA: A guide for action, to be published early in 2024.

Roundtable themes

A summary of principal observations made during the roundtables are set out below. The policy dialogue on natural capital was advanced in seven key areas:

1. Nature is poorly recognised and undervalued in Irish policy; there is a lack of vision for nature in Ireland; there is lack of recognition of nature in decision-making

Nature is poorly recognised in Irish policy

‘The economy is embedded in the department system – we need them to embed nature in the department system and thinking too’

There were differing views on how nature is valued in Irish policy. Several participants noted that economic and social issues presently take precedence over nature in decision making because there is a lack of real understanding of our absolute reliance on nature for functioning societies and economies, as well as our very survival, with it considered that nature is often just an afterthought or an add-on, with one participant saying that *‘the environment is a poor relation to the social and economic arguments’*.

It was noted that natural capital is missing from many policies that do not directly pertain to nature (including health and well-being, finance, etc.). Others remarking that the multiple values of nature and the interconnectedness between natural systems are not recognised or understood within policy. It was noted that focussing on tangible ecosystem services such as pollination, water and air filtration, carbon sequestration and storage is a useful starting point for understanding the necessity of valuing and accounting for nature.

Others felt that currently the economy is embedded in department systems, with the suggestion that nature should be embedded in each department and in department thinking too. One participant stated that *‘the value of nature grows the more we destroy it’* emphasising the need for government to be proactive, not reactive in relation to nature and environmental policy. It was suggested that it is necessary to re-engineer the economic and social systems into earth system boundaries – *‘It is about sustaining life on the planet’*.

It was stated that although one could consider legislation such as the EU Habitats Directive as valuing nature, this only relates to designated areas, and even then, there are issues with enforcement. It was pointed out that large swathes of habitats are not subject to the EU Habitats Directive. The Irish Wildlife Act was cited (which includes providing licensing), with the observation that it does include a certain amount of accounting for nature, but also has issues with enforcement.

Outside of designated species and habitats (SACs, SPAs, NHA, etc.), some considered that certain policy outcomes prioritise benefits to people over nature, whilst others considered that benefits to people are also important, with recognition of the importance of striking a balance between each.

Attention was drawn to the value of the marine environment, which occupies an area ten times the size of our land, but its value is not reflected in policy. One participant added to this that the seafood industry is disproportionately impacted by climate change and is reliant on natural capital.

Participants generally agreed that the cultural value of nature is difficult to quantify but is hugely important. The SEEA-EA was cited. It was mentioned that it is a useful system for valuing nature and making visible the benefits people get from other ecosystem services, i.e. provisioning, regulating, and supporting services. It was also noted that it doesn’t do a great job of accounting for the non-use values of nature such as many cultural ecosystem services like spiritual

meaning, aesthetic experiences, relaxation, and education, which are often the values that communities resonate with most.

There is a lack of vision for nature in Ireland

'We need a vision for nature'

There was broad agreement on the need for an overarching government policy on nature. Several participants noted that there should be acknowledgment that perceptions around nature, and how we value it, need to change and, although this will be challenging, it needs to be addressed. A national discussion to understand what our values are regarding nature at the citizen level was suggested. It was mentioned that nature seems more valued by people since the COVID 19 pandemic, but that this is not reflected in policy. Natural capital accounting was highlighted as a useful tool for valuing nature as it has an integrative power and that *'natural capital accounting can bring the hidden value of nature into plain sight'*, such as the value of forests for flood mitigation, or biodiverse coastlines to prevent erosion.

It was highlighted that a lot of what we're seeing at the moment (i.e. different cost trade-offs etc.) need to be framed within the context of a long-term vision, noting that it should be seen as a national mission or challenge and that we'll sink or swim on this together. The need for a joined-up approach to nature policy was discussed. A suggestion was made that there should be a Nature Unit for each department (similar to Climate Units). One participant noted that the Climate Units are still siloed in different departments, stating that this would need to be addressed if Nature Units were to be considered.

One participant mentioned that all Irish environmental policy has been driven by the EU and this means we haven't 'owned it' for ourselves, noting that in this respect we need a vision for Ireland for 100 years' time. It was added that because we have underinvested in nature there are legacy problems to address and so this could be generational work. We need to consider future generations.

How to operationalise Natural Capital Accounting in Ireland

There was discussion about the level and scales that natural capital accounting should be undertaken at in Ireland. One perspective was that it should be entrenched at local level first, but that scalability is questionable. A second perspective was that we don't yet have the correct data to create accounts at local level. A third view was that natural capital accounting should be robustly introduced at state level first so as to set a standard of quality for other scales of accounts. It was mentioned that signalling at the government level is very important and that policy makers are adept at using CSO data. Local Authorities are good at responding to signalling and may need to be re-tooled and resourced.

It was pointed out that the landscape level is often where the ecosystem services are delivered and that different scales have different ecosystem services and levels of those services. It was suggested that if we have data we can make accounts at these scales, but operationalising these approaches is what requires work.

It was noted that compiling national natural capital accounts requires wide collaboration across all sectors. It was proposed that at state level, the government could look at the examples of the national natural capital accounts developed in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands where different approaches were taken, with the UK focusing on producing monetary valuations, and the Netherlands producing granular ecosystem maps that give an overall sense of health in the country.

The lack of recognition of nature in decision-making

‘There needs to be a community check-in and an ecological check-in at the start of the planning process’

Issues with planning were highlighted, specifically the lack of inclusion of the protection of nature at the early stages in both policy development, planning, and in green infrastructure development, (an example was given of developing green infrastructure that may impact on protected species or habitats). A review of the systems that manage our natural resources was suggested as a way to understand where the gaps are and the effectiveness of current systems.

It was argued that the focus should be on nature at the very beginning of policy development to ensure that it is truly accounted for, and to avoid lengthy, time consuming processes of community engagement after plans have already been made. The community and other stakeholders, including ecologists, should be involved at the planning stages and be part of the decision-making process.

It was suggested that including farmers in decision-making on valuing nature on farms and in the farming sector will enable better engagement and buy-in from farmers. Recognising the value of nature in our cities was also mentioned, with the recent [UK Biodiversity Net Gain](#) requirement cited.

It was discussed that monetising natural capital accounts can be divisive. It was noted that when a monetary value is calculated, for instance the value in euros of pollination services, there needs to be clear communication as to what this value means. Several participants said that monetised accounts shouldn't be the main output of natural capital accounting – but that there is high value in these for certain audiences where the monetary value enhances decision-making ability. Another perspective shared was that putting a monetary number on things is not always the most important way to value nature, that we should value nature for just 'being'. It was highlighted that identification of natural assets is important, for example, coastal defences were not identified by local authorities as assets in the way that infrastructure is. It was noted that natural capital accounts can help to identify the loss of nature (based on data and local knowledge) to show what we have lost due to degradation and what we have presently, so we can measure the difference.

2. Issues around communication on natural capital and biodiversity, and uncertainty around the language, definitions and meaning of natural capital and natural capital accounting

Lack of awareness or knowledge of biodiversity and natural capital concepts

‘We need awareness raising, communication and standardised data - we need to create a virtuous cycle’

It was widely agreed that nature needs to be part of the national conversation noting that an ongoing dialogue around nature and biodiversity loss is important. In addition to this, it was further noted that an understanding of the interactions between natural systems and their interconnectedness will help clarify our reliance on nature.

It was pointed out that explaining natural capital can be challenging to convey very complex messages in simple terms. A second perspective was that although this may be difficult, it is not impossible. It was noted that being intentional with language to communicate is very important. An example was given that when trying to convey new language about restoration in agricultural spaces, it is sometimes best not to use the term 'restoration' in the messaging but to distil the information into basic principles such as those used on the LIFE on Machair Project¹ - 1. Do no harm, 2. Secure the future. It was suggested that the natural capital language does not always need to be utilised, particularly in a public communications context, if the concepts will be better received and understood through other approaches. Participants highlighted the importance of knowing the audience, with an example given of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan (AIPP) which distilled the language of pollination to convey their message to different audiences. Another example was given that when conveying a message to urban planners regarding the benefits we gain from ecosystem services, such as

¹ LIFE on Machair Project website <https://www.lifeonmachair.ie/>

flood prevention/mitigation, the term flooding is one that resonates with them due to the risk of damage to infrastructure due to flooding.

There was discussion on the need for a recognition of the multiple ecosystem services provided by an ecosystem. One participant made the point that we can't focus on a single ecosystem service, with another participant agreeing and further noting that changes to any single ecosystem service can have an unintended impact on other ecosystem services (either positively or negatively) within a given ecosystem.

There was debate around the language of natural capital, with many considering that it is not generally understood. One participant expressed that '*natural capital language does not win the hearts*', with another participant questioning '*do we need to be stuck with the term natural capital?*'

It was stated that a lack of understanding of the natural capital language can be a barrier to communication, knowledge-sharing and policy cohesion. It was felt by some that natural capital language does not resonate with the general public or with farming communities in many cases. However, a participant noted that there are examples in Irish farming where peer-to-peer education has worked well to overcome this issue, such as the Burren LIFE Project². It was pointed out that farming communities play an important role in communication and that strong farming communities can teach us about reconnecting with nature.

It was suggested that the natural capital language can be impenetrable and that there are different perspectives on natural capital and ecosystem services. Simplifying the language and concepts of natural capital would help address this challenge. One participant noted that the term *nature's contribution to people* (NCP) is often used now in place of *ecosystem services* as NCP moves away from an economic analogy and gives more of a from-the-heart framing. Other suggestions for natural capital language included describing hedgerows as *green arteries of the country* and using this analogy to show what hedgerows provide to farmers; hedgerows can also be described as *highways for bats*. One participant noted that nature is steeped in the Irish language.

A number of participants noted that the natural capital approach and natural capital accounting are not widely understood and stated that clear definitions are needed to address this barrier. Overcoming this barrier could be achieved if the same language is used across the policy landscape, which could enable cohesion across different policies. It was also suggested that natural capital language and guidelines could be co-created with different sectors. However, it was argued that the language used in policy won't necessarily resonate with other sectors of society. There are distinct communication challenges with different sectors. It was suggested that different language should be considered for different sectors.

It was noted that when communicating with a diversity of audiences about natural capital, more positive language should be used (not all doom and gloom), for example language to show that we are investing in nature, rather than it being considered a cost. It will be necessary to change the mindset from 'cost' to 'benefit' to gain widespread support.

One participant said that bringing natural capital into the language politicians use when discussing nature and the natural environment would be a useful way of helping mainstream the language. Furthermore, it was generally agreed that it would be useful for politicians to frame how they speak about nature differently, no longer in terms of cost and risk, but in terms of assets, opportunities, 'surviving and thriving' and as a public good. It was expressed that framing nature as a public good, similar to public libraries, would be very useful, giving the example that we invest in public libraries for the public good without question - it should be the same for nature and the natural environment.

Another view was that the 'capitals' language (i.e. human capital, social capital, economic capital, natural capital) is not emotive and does not engender an emotional reaction from people. This was perceived by some participants as a negative attribute under the assumption that emotive language is necessary to make people care about or feel connected to nature. It was noted that when natural capital language is used it is not currently integrated with the other 'capitals' including social, economic and human capitals, arguing that using integrative capitals language could be a positive communication tool, making it clear that natural capital underpins all the 'capitals'.

² Burren Programme website <http://burrenprogramme.com/the-programme/funding-team/>

Lack of expertise in the field of natural capital accounting

‘Currently natural capital discussions are based on constraints, not based on opportunities’

Attention was drawn to the lack of knowledge and expertise in the area of natural capital, including at the local level both in county councils and businesses such as farms, highlighting the lack of knowledge among farm advisors who work directly with farmers to communicate relevant information to this community. It was stated that currently there are only c.700 farm advisors in the country, which does not meet the national demand.

Several participants noted that collaboration on education and raising awareness of our dependence on nature (human health, societies and economies) is necessary, with it noted that natural capital is not currently represented in the education system and should be included within the curriculum for primary, secondary and tertiary education. It was expressed as a problem that in second level education students often think of the topics covered as just a school subject and forget about it outside the classroom, noting that the values of nature are not being instilled at this level. Having the Department of Education involved in discussions about bringing natural capital concepts into the education system was considered to be very important. It was noted that there is enthusiasm to embed natural capital accounting in third level education (TCD, UCD, DCU) wherein a multidisciplinary educational approach is required. The role of accounting bodies was highlighted and one participant noted the importance of lobbying them to make natural capital accounting an accredited accounting course, as the lack of accreditation is a barrier to implementing natural capital accounting courses in third level education. Attention was drawn to the big difference between delivering a bespoke student class on natural capital as compared with the wider student community. It was felt that the message of the biodiversity crisis and loss of nature is not getting through to the wider student community.

It was suggested that an awareness raising campaign could include funding competitions such as the [Creative Ireland climate action](#) competition, with reference to a campaign carried out in the [Netherlands](#) to engage stakeholders on the topic of natural capital accounting.

Constraints around collaboration were mentioned, with the need for a network of stakeholders from the whole island at government level to introduce and to lead on the natural capital approach, as highlighted in the draft 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP)(Action 5d(1)). Further reference was made to the NBAP regarding the need for the development of standards that will be used, and that the involvement of all stakeholders is essential.

Several participants highlighted the need for ecologists to understand the frameworks that policy makers and the CSO are working with, for example the SEEA-CF and SEEA-EA frameworks. It was noted that at present, there is a lack of capacity in the ecological field, noting specifically that there are fewer ecologists than economists in the civil service in Ireland. Several participants expressed the need for upskilling and training of ecologists in natural capital concepts in order to bring them on board. One participant referred to the complexity of ecological systems, which are measured in different ways, as compared to the economic system which uses mainly monetary values, noting that it is important that this difference is recognised.

Uncertainty around knowledge gaps was highlighted as an issue, however, a number of participants agreed that we need to consider certainty versus knowledge in moving forward, stating that we need to work with what we have and aim to fill the gaps as we go.

3. Concern about the fragmentation of current nature policy and how proposed European policy on natural capital will be integrated

Current policy landscape issues including fragmentation and lack of cohesion

'We need coherent national policy'

There was overall agreement on the need for an overarching environmental policy. Such an overarching policy is needed at state level to set the new nature-positive agenda for Ireland.

There was an overall consensus that current national legislation is fragmented and not cohesive and that much of our land and water bodies are not subject to legislation. A number of participants noted that stronger legislation is required in order to protect nature, with some expressing frustration around compliance and delivery of current legislation and a concern around how new national policy will be enforced and resourced (i.e. delivery of national natural capital accounts). One participant added that until natural capital accounting is mandatory there is little to incentivise organisations to participate, stating the need for a policy driver or directive to encourage implementation of natural capital accounting.

The lack of enforcement of current legislation was considered problematic by some participants who expressed a strong need for better policies that protect soils, waters, forests and wetlands. Several participants stated that at present these are secondary considerations in policy.

A participant argued that government leadership regarding policy that protects nature is imperative, with the example given of the leadership that provided for the implementation of the plastic bag levy (Ireland was the first country in the world to introduce a plastic bag levy) and the smoking ban (Ireland was the first country in the world to introduce fully smoke-free workplaces). These bans were difficult to bring in, but because of government leadership the bans worked - Ireland were global leaders on both these issues.

Integration of proposed European legislation

'Policy makers are more motivated by EU legislation'

Ireland is required to conduct ecosystem services accounting through EU policy, law and regulation to protect and restore our natural capital, citing the EU Green Deal and the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 (including the proposed Nature Restoration Law (NRL) and Soil Health Law). It was noted that the NRL could be an important vehicle to integrate decisions around land use and land cover and could play a role in communicating the importance of conserving, restoring, and protecting nature into the future. However, it was argued that from a farming perspective, the NRL is an example of lack of clarity or understanding around farming. It was countered that policy always includes trade-offs and there should be transparency in decision-making and the trade-offs being considered, particularly when they could be at the expense of nature.

Implementation of the SEEA framework already forms part of European policy, with implementation of SEEA-EA likely to become mandatory too (the proposed amendment to EU regulation (No. 691/2011), on delivering national ecosystem accounts has been approved by the EU Commission and is currently with the European Parliament and Council for final approval).

4. The perceived misalignment of agricultural policy and nature policy

Historical context and trust

‘Some farmers are seeing their payments decline’

It was stated that a just transition in agriculture and land use change needs to be socially inclusive, economically viable and sustainable for the long-term, noting that stakeholder engagement and co-creation of policy must be part of the process.

It was argued by some participants that there is a lack of trust within the farming community in agro-ecological schemes and with some previous schemes, with it being stated that trust will need to be rebuilt. It was also considered by several participants that the rewards for high value biodiversity on farms are not currently sufficient, noting that farmers need to be able to make a living. It was broadly agreed that coherence of policy incentives and clear vision is needed, with some noting that protecting nature should not become a barrier to progress. A few participants expressed concern around the impact of environmental policy on public and private lands, in particular around private lands used for agriculture and forestry.

Agro-ecological schemes

‘Current payments are not sustainable – when does it become self-sustaining?’

It was widely agreed that there should be recognition and rewards for increasing Ireland's natural capital on farms. However, a number of participants referred to the lack of coordinated incentives in farming for nature as an obstacle for farmers. One participant noted that the government is investing less in protecting the environment than 30-40 years ago, stating that farmers are currently receiving less agro-ecological payments than they historically did. As such, it was felt by some that farmers don't feel rewarded for the work that they do. One participant noted that farmers understand ecosystem services and protection of cultural heritage, however, changes in these areas may diminish the current economic model of the farm, stating that this needs to be addressed.

A participant expressed the view that there is some confusion in the farming community in relation to agro-ecological schemes. They argued that it would be helpful to have clear communication from the government about the payments available to support farmers in farming for nature, including communicating the expected outcomes and which schemes best suit the particular farm type, and taking into account both the needs of the farmer and the needs of nature. An example was given that in the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), there are provisions for halting the removal of hedgerows and for leaving areas of scrub, which needs to be communicated to and discussed with farmers.

There was some further discussion on the CAP, noting that the payments are insufficient for compensating farmers adequately to protect nature. It was stated that there is not enough funding in the CAP for all farmers to be in the scheme. The CAP Strategic Plan was mentioned noting that agro-ecological schemes within were considered to be well designed, but lacked detail, which is problematic. An example was given that figures and targets for improvement set out in the Strategic Plan are not always achievable, e.g. the requirement for hedgerows to be 10m wide. It was further noted that reliance on short-term funding is problematic, and that CAP funding can't be relied on, in part, due to its short term (7 years), however, it was also noted that the CAP is constantly evolving and that Ireland is ahead of other EU states in terms of subsidies.

A number of participants pointed out that the short-term nature of agro-ecological payments is concerning for farmers. It was highlighted that forestry has a longer-term commitment than agricultural schemes, but still not long-term enough, which leads to a lot of uncertainty for farmers due to longevity of schemes and concern about farming that land after a 20-year forestry scheme is completed. It was also noted that Sitka spruce is considered the only productive (timber) tree at present based on government incentives.

Another participant noted that incentive schemes have already moved on from Payments for Ecosystem Services to Results-based Payments schemes and that we have too many buzzwords which makes it difficult to understand the different agro-ecological schemes. It was highlighted that the results-based process is not just about payments, it includes communication, education, engagement with communities and other stakeholders. However, it was argued that there can be challenges with a results-based approach, including the lag-time between action and result.

Opportunities for creating business models to incorporate protecting nature with results-based payments, i.e. the Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES) were highlighted. Results-based schemes were considered to be more positively viewed by farmers over other schemes. However, it was argued that commercial farmers see ACRES as a non-event, and that it is a missed opportunity.

Education and communication between policy makers and the farming sector

We need communication with the farmers on the ground, otherwise all the money in the world won't stop the problem'

Increased education around natural capital within farming communities was considered necessary. One participant noted the need to define farm assets and condition. It was suggested that payments for ecosystem services and results-based payments are not adequately rewarded. A few participants highlighted the need for mapping extent and condition of natural capital on farms and that this will need to be communicated to farmers, saying that the explanation should be related back to policy, i.e. the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, which highlights protecting Europe's natural capital, as does the Food Vision 2030 Strategy. It was considered by a number of participants that this information has not been communicated properly up to now.

One participant highlighted the need for communication with the farmers on the ground, noting that all the money in the world won't stop the problem without proper engagement and communication.

Capacity building within the farming sector, including carbon farming and financing

'Pride of farmers can be eroded by payments to not work the land'

Several participants expressed frustration at the large divides created between farmers and nature by designation, new technology and policy, which can divorce farmers from nature, with one participant noting that the pride of farmers can be eroded by payments that incentivise farmers to not work the land (so as to protect nature).

One participant expressed the need to have a clear vision for farming with nature, then a metric, and then the supports, measures and structures in place to help farmers achieve that vision. It was noted by some that this area is continuously progressing with reference to the model for the Results-Based Framework being based on the learnings from the Burren LIFE Project. One participant highlighted that the results-based framework approach is adaptable and dynamic and will evolve with new learnings.

Carbon farming was mentioned, noting the significant policy interest in carbon farming in the EU. However, a number of participants expressed wariness at the potential for carbon offsetting and continuing business-as-usual. From a farming perspective, it was highlighted that carbon farming needs to be clearly defined and that there needs to be more understanding of, and engagement with, this topic before implementing it.

One participant stated that there is a need to ensure that private financing is not only going to carbon farming projects, but goes to other projects such as just transition too. Another participant added that there is a need to look at the carbon economy and localised carbon trading, especially for food production. In relation to food production, one participant added that environmental costs are not internalised in the market for food, noting that supermarkets in Ireland have a lot of power in setting costs and should therefore also be brought into the conversation.

A number of participants were of the view that there could be greater clarity on the level of emissions in LULUCF and agriculture or AFOLU (Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land use). Some suggested that sequestration produced within the AFOLU sector should be prioritised or ringfenced for offsetting other emissions within the AFOLU sector. An example was given of a localised carbon trading model that looked at the whole farming system (i.e. pasture and cattle).

It was highlighted that farmers need to be involved in co-creating for carbon farming, adding that this can connect to forestry too. It was suggested that there should be a system in Ireland that allows farmers to get credit for everything done on the farm to make it carbon neutral, noting that this will only work if done from the bottom-up. Co-creation with farmers will mean they will understand each step to becoming carbon neutral and understand the subsidies available for carbon neutrality, i.e., understand what incentive/scheme to apply for. It was suggested that an Environmental Credit

rather than a Carbon Credit would be more useful as it would show the value of multiple assets and ecosystem services, i.e. forestry.

The need for private sector investment was highlighted, with the participant noting the need to be mindful of where and how investments are being made. There was also a view by several participants that the term *investment*, which implies the need for profit, may not be suitable for nature and that the private sector should instead be funding nature restoration without the expectation of a return. Failures in the area of extracting profit from natural capital were highlighted, with an example from Scotland of zero carbon beer which bought out farmers and planted monoculture trees. Some were wary of large finance/investment companies operating in this space, with tech companies also interested in carbon farming. It was further noted that carbon farming appears to be on a 'solo run' with the participant stating that it should instead be integrated into existing programmes.

The Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme (ASSAP) was highlighted as a useful initiative for farmers.

5. The lack of tools available to enable natural capital accounting in Ireland and how such tools could be developed and implemented

'Natural capital accounting is not the silver bullet for nature protection and restoration – but is a very useful tool'

Many participants considered that the natural capital approach can be a useful tool for valuing and accounting for nature, whilst others pointed to the need for more information and clarity over how it would be used. It was also widely agreed that other values need to be recognised as well, such as the intrinsic and relational values of nature. Some participants expressed caution about any potential over-reliance on natural capital accounting as the 'silver bullet' for nature. Some participants were of the opinion that natural capital accounting won't drive government decision-making unless government chooses to change, noting that natural capital accounting is important for informing debate, but that a broader conversation needs to be had on nature in Ireland, including how we value nature and the realities of the climate and biodiversity crises.

Multi-Criteria Analysis (MCA) was suggested as another way to account for nature which can include integrating measures of ecosystem services in local areas and scoring them in a MCA. It was queried if MCA brings in non-monetary values. [After the Roundtable, it was noted that there is a potential for MCA to include monetary and non-monetary evaluation criteria.]

With regard to natural capital accounting, it was stated by one participant that there should not be an over-reliance on nature valuation as it hasn't been proven to protect nature yet, even at SEEA level, noting that SEEA is still in its infancy. It was noted that this issue has been flagged before and needs to continue to be, citing that identification of biophysical flows is not fully developed yet. The participant noted that different valuations exist for different services so it's not as straightforward as comparing them all together.

It was suggested that basic extent accounts, which could be produced from the current land cover maps, would be a key tool to feed into education about natural capital and ecosystems in government and society. One participant noted that once the accounts are developed, applying them is the most important step.

The value for a risk register to inform and guide action was expressed by a number of participants, with one stating that every business and government department has a risk register. One participant noted that once extent accounts are available, the risk register can be started, i.e. we can consider what a business will lose if an ecosystem is lost, citing the risk register developed for the INCASE Project. Others agreed that resources such as risk registers would be incredibly useful, especially in planning.

One participant highlighted that local authorities have a green infrastructure scoring approach at county level but it was noted that often local authorities' interpretation of green infrastructure are cycle-ways. One participant said there is a need for an ecosystems services approach to green infrastructure in local development plans that takes nature into account.

Issues with access to useable data

‘We can’t let the lack of data hold us back’

It was stated that it is key that conversations are had about data and access to information to guide decision making. One participant argued that we shouldn’t wait until we have perfect data, as policy makers are currently working with little to no data, so even basic data will be an improvement. A lack of access to useable data was highlighted as a key constraint in developing natural capital accounts.

A number of participants noted that Irish ecosystem accounting is still in its infancy and issues around data gathering have been identified. A useful report on Data for Nature³ was recommended by one participant as it includes recommendations for gathering and storing nature data.

It was overwhelmingly accepted by participants at each of the Roundtables that the data currently available are not enough. Development of a national data hub was suggested for housing all nature data with the suggestion that this may be a role that could be carried out by the National Biodiversity Data Centre, but that such a role would need to be adequately funded. It was suggested that a data gap analysis should be carried out. One participant considered that the lack of data should be a political issue posed the question ‘how to make this issue political’?

Several participants noted the need for consensus on the data that is being used for developing natural capital accounts and highlighted the need for standardised data. One participant reflected that the data only works to shift perception, but to shift behaviour, there needs to be feedback, with an example given that there has not been a national soil survey since the 1980s, and as such, we don’t have the data on soil biodiversity and soil carbon, etc. Regarding resourcing soil surveys, this participant noted that in the United States there is a budget of €100m per annum for soil surveys, but that in Ireland the cost would scale down to €1m per year.

Access to usable, transferable data was highlighted as being particularly challenging for ensuring that nature was adequately considered in policy making and in relation to creating natural capital accounts at scale. It was noted that integration of data sets would provide a truer picture of the natural environment, i.e. social, economic, human and natural capitals.

A comparison was made with data availability for the economic system, with a number of participants observing that there are vast amounts of data available for the economic system due to the investment made in collecting it, and that we need this same drive for the collection of ecological and environmental data.

The topic of resourcing came up with participants noting the need for adequate resourcing for those involved in producing data for national natural capital accounts, i.e. the CSO, and also a need for better coordination at national level to standardise data across organisations. However, it was pointed out that there are challenges with how we use the data and in determining if it is useful.

It was highlighted that the data required is influenced by the questions that need to be addressed, but that the necessary data is not always available.

Issues with access to data were highlighted, with particular reference to the ACRES score cards, noting that at present there is no open access to ACRES score cards, though the data within would be very useful, noting that this may be due to legal issues. In addition, it was also noted by one participant that data from the 1990s Rural Environmental Protection Scheme (REPS), including farm maps, no longer exists as the database wasn’t maintained, because it wasn’t valued. This participant argued that the way forward is to collect the data, store it and learn from past mistakes.

An example of Rapid Assessment of Wetland Ecosystem Services (RAWES) in Monaghan was given (report here⁴) with the suggestion that RAWES could be done outside of protected habitats, and in smaller scale habitats.

³ Nature Capital Ireland (2021). Data for Nature Report. Available online at: https://www.naturalcapitalireland.com/files/ugd/94066f_9cdc0d494b734b06ac6be6a9007e9dc5.pdf

⁴ County Monaghan Wetland Action Plan. Online at: https://monaghan.ie/heritage/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2022/08/MWAP-2021-Report-FINAL_comp-compressed.pdf.pdf

Citizen science and farmer data such as Agri-snap⁵ were highlighted as useful but also difficult to access due to legislation such as GDPR. It was suggested that farmers should be paid to provide data. It was widely agreed that, despite the considerable investment needed in overcoming the current problems with Irish nature data, it is key that this work is done so that data can guide decision making and drive natural capital protection and restoration.

Issues with access to maps

‘We need an ecosystem map of the country’

A number of participants referred to mapping as a good way to contextualise the relationship between people and the environment. The publication of the National Land Cover Map for Ireland (NLC 2018⁶) was welcomed by all participants, but it was noted that in order to remain relevant, it needs to be kept up to date. It was highlighted that the current iteration is based on 2018 data so it is not a reflection of our current land cover but represents a particular point in time. It was widely agreed that access to up-to-date maps is critical. It was highlighted that it took twelve years of lobbying to get the NLC Map. It was noted by one participant that the EPA and Tailte Éireann teams that worked on the NLC have since been disbanded, and concern was expressed that this will negatively impact the ability to publish updated maps, which are supposed to be being produced on a three-yearly cycle. However, another participant countered that updating the NLC won't be as challenging as its original development and therefore the anticipated three-year cycle update should be achievable. [After the Roundtable, the EPA noted that Tailte Éireann have indicated (at recent EPA climate conference) that they will redo the land cover maps each time they capture new aerial photographs for Ireland. Their aim is to capture a third of Ireland each year and to then run the national land cover mapping process once the data is capture. There should be a new full iteration every 3 years based on this. More certainty on this timing would be welcome given the current map is using 2018 data.]

A number of participants highlighted that there are challenges with accessing data on extent (particularly regarding resolution and frequency of extent data) and condition, and there are still questions on how best to quantify condition. One participant referred to research being carried out on scoring condition of forestry in terms of its value for biodiversity, with the aim of converting a score to a value. However, it was also noted that only a limited number of ecosystem services can actually be mapped with accurate scalability so choosing which ones is a challenge, noting that it is all well and good to get the data and maps, the next challenge is how we use them.

Another participant agreed that at present there is a limited number of ecosystem services that we can map with any scalability and this is due to both a lack of mapping (i.e. habitat or ecosystem maps), and a lack of data at the granular level. It was mentioned that the CSO is currently working on ecosystem accounts (using SEEA-EA) and is at present focussing on a limited number of ecosystem types, at a national scale, not a local scale.

The need for ecosystem maps and habitat maps in addition to the NLC map was highlighted, with the NLC map being noted as a useful starting point for developing other maps.

⁵ AgriSnap app – geotagged photograph app for farmers. Online at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/422d2-a-description-of-the-agrisnap-app-its-use-and-where-to-download-it-holding/>

⁶ National Land Cover Map (NLC 2018). Online at: <https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring--assessment/assessment/mapping/national-land-cover-map/>

Resourcing to ensure that environmental policy can be implemented

‘We need funding to match the ambition’

Participants recognised the complexity around policy for nature. It was stated that the government has chronically underinvested in nature for years and now needs to start investing. It was agreed by numerous participants that when the value of natural capital (including ecosystem services) is known (not just in monetary terms), investment will be more readily made, reflecting that this will involve financial ministries recognising nature’s value and reallocating resources accordingly.

It was widely agreed that policy related to the protection, restoration and conservation of nature should include a provision for adequate resourcing to ensure policy implementation and enforcement, with a number of participants repeating the need for a just transition. It was suggested that explaining the protection of nature as an investment, not a cost, is a better approach, and that healthy natural environments are a public good and should be invested in adequately. In addition, it was suggested that protection of nature in cities should include funding from developers in these areas.

It was argued that the development of national natural capital accounts by the CSO will be resource-heavy as it continues to develop, with a number of participants expressing the importance of this being properly funded. It was highlighted that learnings from the work of the CSO will be helpful in developing natural capital accounts at different scales.

One participant stated that resourcing the provision of updated national land cover maps each year would be costly, noting that at present the EPA plans to update the map in three-year cycles, which will need to be adequately funded and resourced.

In relation to farming, in particular regarding the many farming schemes, it was highlighted that the funding should match the ambition. It was suggested that the forestry sector would be a good place to pilot land use change noting that at present forestry cover is stuck at 11%, which shows that the subsidies are not working. It was noted that there needs to be a 7-8% land use change for forestry, with a number of participants stating that trees need to be planted in the right place and that adequate resources would need to be allocated to support such a project.

It was queried if the shadow price of defensive natural infrastructure (i.e. sand dunes and wetlands) was coming to the fore. Currently, for every project under the public spending code, the shadow price of carbon is one size fits all. It was suggested that this would not be the same for natural capital accounts, which are complex, and place based.

Capacity building through research

‘Building on natural capital research at different scales’

One participant said there is a ‘diffuse’ understanding about ecosystem services such as pollination and clean water in policy, but that we don’t know how to quantify this, posing questions like: What does it mean to have pollination? How much pollination do we need? How much are we saving by supporting pollinators? This participant expressed that policy makers find it hard to understand because these questions haven’t even been fully realised through the research yet.

Many participants agreed that building on Irish natural capital research projects is important, including understanding the challenges faced and what is needed to overcome identified challenges.

A number of research projects relating to natural capital accounting using the SEEA approach, were referred to, including the INCASE Project⁷ which trialled the SEEA-EA at catchment scale; the ForES Project⁸ which is developing natural capital accounts for forest site scale; Farm Zero C Project⁹ which is a collaboration with TCD, BiOrbic, Carbery and others addressing carbon neutral farming; and Nature+ Energy¹⁰ which is working at the wind farm scale.

⁷ INCASE Project website: <https://www.incaseproject.com/>

⁸ ForES Project website: <https://www.for-es.ie/>

⁹ Farm Zero C Project website: <https://biorbic.com/farm-zero-c/>

¹⁰ Nature+Energy website: <https://www.marei.ie/project/natureenergy/>

It was generally agreed that focussing on building capacity nationally via these, and other natural capital research projects will help deliver on the expertise and knowledge needed to develop national natural capital accounts, noting that learnings from global leaders such as Carl Obst and Lars Hein (natural capital statisticians) who are building methods for natural capital accounts will be very useful.

A participant referred to a new project that is RCSI funded started this month (June, 2023) with Science Foundation Ireland (SFI), noting that Jimmy O’Keefe in DCU (and NCI Steering Committee Chair) will quantify the health benefits of exposure to nature as part of this project.

6. The need for a whole of government, whole of society approach to valuing nature

A whole of government, whole of society approach

‘How do we manage biodiversity recovery – what will people accept? What part will they play?’

It was recognised by participants that policy needs to be long-term, not just within the political cycle, with one participant expressing that it needs to work at the speed of nature. Collaboration between government departments, government agencies, communities, farmers, the general public, NGOs and academia was highlighted as being necessary to bring the public on board and to ensure that all of society takes ownership of their role in protecting nature.

Numerous participants said that government departments don’t often understand the impacts on nature of the decisions they make, with one participant saying that their understanding of the ‘value of nature’ comes from EU targets, with nature being treated more or less as a piece of infrastructure. In contrast, in a natural capital framing, it was stated that nature would be viewed as an asset.

There was some discussion about the tools used currently by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) to value natural capital and ecosystems, and general agreement that these were unsatisfactory. However, there were suggestions about how these could be improved collaboratively. An example was given that currently environmental assessment is concerned about ‘the state’ of the habitat, whereas in a natural capital framing it would also address the flows of ecosystem services that the habitat creates and the benefits these services have to people.

It was recognised that a whole-of-government approach is not easy, as the environment has not necessarily been taken into account before this, with one participant saying that hard questions need to be asked. This participant further expressed the importance of the environment being included in economic modelling.

A further perspective shared was that the issue isn’t solely with the tools but also the kind of mindset we come to it with. This participant noted that economic concerns, such as cost, are high up in our awareness so these are given more precedence, but that nature is often low in our awareness, not because it is less important, but because we have not built an awareness of it in the same way. Many agreed, expressing that there is a behavioural aspect to understand, and that clear messaging and education for the whole of government and society is necessary in order to change mindsets. There were assertions that there is low-hanging fruit in this respect, for instance Ireland’s hedgerows, which could be used to communicate the value of ecosystem services through a story-telling lens and information campaigns.

It was further highlighted that there is a need to take ownership of all of society’s role in nature degradation and also the role each plays in reversing our damaged nature. It was noted that this requires informed decision making, stating that acknowledging our reliance on nature is key to engaging a diversity of sectors from society (i.e. the recommendations from the Citizens’ Assembly on Biodiversity Loss report¹¹). It was also pointed out that different sectors of society will need different kinds of communication and that in both Citizens’ Assemblies on Biodiversity Loss the sense was that the assembly members had no understanding of nature and there was shock at how bad things were, and that the assemblies reflected that the rest of society should have the opportunity to be educated in this area.

¹¹ Report of the Citizens’ Assembly on Biodiversity Loss (2023). Available online at: https://citizensassembly.ie/wp-content/uploads/Report-on-Biodiversity-Loss_mid-res.pdf

There was discussion about economic growth with perspectives such as the balance that needs to be reached that allows for sustainable growth of the economy, but not at nature's expense, with a number of participants recognising that pursuing continued economic growth is not possible.

Collaboration, education and raising awareness of our dependence on nature (human health, societies, and economies) was considered by participants to be necessary. Strengthening of nature education at every level was considered necessary. It was generally agreed that awareness is of key importance so that people can make informed decisions.

One person gave an example of the Oireachtas Committee on Climate driving climate action, stating that we need something similar for environmental policy.

There was discussion about the fact that the more that people participate in nature activities, the more they want to continue participating, with one participant noting that this is supported widely by research. In this context it was suggested that there is a lot of scope to enhance citizen science contribution in Ireland, which would increase data and people's connection to nature. One attendee shared that there are sophisticated tools worth exploring. Another countered that we don't have enough systems for the data we need, noting that there are opportunities, but citizen science is not the only answer. The All-Ireland Pollinator Plan was cited noting that it has one system monitoring one species and habitat and still there is not enough data to make statements around whether decline has been reversed by the program.

Shared island perspectives

It was broadly agreed that the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan (AIPP) was an excellent example of a data-driven shared Island initiative that was also embraced by the general public.

One participant mentioned, in relation to tourism, that protecting our natural capital is important to that sector across the island of Ireland.

The relationship between nature policy and health and well-being policy

'Integrate health and well-being with natural capital'

It was noted that health and well-being benefits should be considered in terms of our relationship with nature and that we need healthy biodiverse ecosystems and the services they provide in order to live. It was suggested that recognising the value of nature for well-being and quality of life could help wider society understand the need for policy to protect nature. *The 5 ways of working* (sustainable development principle) was given as an example by one participant (Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015).

It was noted that when considering a better quality of life for people, nature is not usually accounted for, which diminishes the value of nature to people. One participant said that nature increases human quality of life in numerous ways including good physical and mental health, sense of place and belonging, recreation, solace, relaxation, etc.

It was mentioned that the Sustainable Tourism Development policy is being revamped to value recreation and well-being in relation to nature. The [Sustainable Tourism Action Group report](#) has 30 actions aiming to look at natural resources and heritage.

It was suggested that a business case for investment in greenways could be made with reference to monetisable benefits, which include the health care and residential care cost savings arising from improvements in population health arising from use of greenways for exercise. It was argued that this focuses solely on benefits to people, giving an example that development of greenways can negatively impact nature due to the material used for their construction and the increase of people visiting such locations. Tools were suggested which can support decision making, such as Multi-Criteria Analysis (MCA) and Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP).

Conclusion

The high level of engagement across the roundtables brought perspectives together from a diversity of stakeholders and experts in environmental policy and natural capital concepts. The challenges and potential for using natural capital accounting to value nature were teased out, with many considering that it has potential to be a very useful tool but shouldn't be considered a 'silver bullet' for nature. It was considered that an over-reliance on natural capital accounting, which reveals the instrumental value of nature, could lead to other values of nature being overlooked or not recognised, i.e. the intrinsic and relational values of nature.

Throughout the roundtables, themes around language, communication, access to data (including maps) and resourcing were all highlighted. There were robust discussions on the language of natural capital, with many feeling that it may not resonate with wider society, with it considered to be a language well suited to policy. The challenges with having so many environmental policies that can sometimes conflict with each other was discussed, with it being broadly agreed that there is a need for an overarching environmental policy to bring policy cohesion. There were valuable debates regarding the perceived misalignment of agricultural policy and nature policy, with the need for cohesion of policy being reiterated. There was frustration expressed by some in relation to the lack of communication regarding agro-ecological schemes. In addition, the issue was raised regarding the lack of available tools, expertise and resourcing in the area of natural capital accounting in Ireland.

Although it was recognised by some that there has been slow progress in Ireland in utilising the natural capital approach and natural capital accounting, there was an appetite to engage further with this topic, especially as future mandatory reporting of national natural capital accounts is under discussion in the EU Parliament and Council.

Discussions on the topic of current legislation for the protection of nature and the lack of enforcement caused some to question how proposed legislation (such as the Nature Restoration Law and the proposed amendment to EU regulation (No. 691/2011)) could be enforced, with many expressing frustration about current lack of environmental policy enforcement.

This high-level policy dialogue has been an important step towards breaking down the silos that exist within and between government departments and agencies, and also academia, NGOs and other organisations in regards to nature. This policy dialogue provided insights into the many different views on the topic of valuing and accounting for nature in Ireland and has opened the door to further discussions on this topic in the future.

Appendix 1: Resources mentioned during sessions:

Roundtable	Resource
Roundtable 1	International report – Including <i>Wealth Report (UN Env Prog)</i> – economic, social and natural capital).
Roundtable 1	The Sustainable Tourism Action Group report has 30 actions aiming to look at natural resources and heritage. Online at: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c0cd3-sustainable-tourism-working-group-report/
Roundtable 1	Rapid assessment of wetland ecosystem services (RAWES) in Monaghan (report here). Could be done outside of protected habitats, looking a smaller habitats. Online at: https://monaghan.ie/heritage/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2022/08/MWAP-2021-Report-FINAL_comp-compressed.pdf.pdf
Roundtable 1	The Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme (ASSAP) was mentioned. Online at: https://www.teagasc.ie/environment/water-quality/farming-for-water-quality-assap/assap-in-detail/
Roundtable 1	<i>The 5 ways of working</i> (sustainable development principle) was mentioned (Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015). Online at: https://www.futuregenerations.wales/about-us/future-generations-act/
Roundtable 1	The Creative Ireland climate action competition. Online at: https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/app/uploads/2022/12/CreativeClimateActionFundII-Guidelines.pdf
Roundtable 1	Inclusive Wealth Report mentioned at the very end of Roundtable 1. Online at: https://www.iisd.org/events/inclusive-wealth-report-2022-launch-cop-15
Roundtable 1	An example from the Netherlands on raising awareness on natural capital. Online at: https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/towards-natural-capital-accounting-netherlands
Roundtable 2	CSO a key publication is due at the end of the year (2023) on forests and woodlands with a subset looking at biodiversity
Roundtable 2	An example of Irish farming where peer to peer education has worked well was Burren LIFE IP Project . Online at: http://burrenprogramme.com/the-programme/
Roundtable 2	The Agri-Snap app was mentioned as a way of gathering farm data. Online at: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/422d2-a-description-of-the-agrisnap-app-its-use-and-where-to-download-it-holding/
Roundtable 3	Life on Machair was given as an example of distilling information on restoration. Online at: https://www.lifeonmachair.ie/
Roundtable 3	The All-Ireland Pollinator Plan (AIPP) is a useful example for distilling information to a wide audience. Online at: https://pollinators.ie/
Roundtable 3	James/Corina to share the Results-Based Approach Framework and green architecture.
Roundtable 3	The proposed Naturel Restoration Law (NRL) was highlighted. Online at: https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/nature-and-biodiversity/nature-restoration-law_en



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