TOURISM AND THE ENVIRONMENT
Fáilte Ireland's Environmental Action Plan
2007-2009

Fáilte Ireland
National Tourism Development Authority

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The future of Irish tourism is inextricably linked to the quality of the environment. Our scenic landscapes, coastline, rivers and lakes, and cultural heritage are the bedrock upon which Irish tourism has been built. The economic viability and competitiveness of the Irish tourism industry can only be sustained if the quality of these resources is maintained. Now, more than ever, Ireland's tourism industry relies on strong and appropriate environmental policies.

As a common property resource, the environment is vulnerable to damage because people can benefit from exploiting it without having to pay any 'owners'. Overuse and conflicts between users result, which have to be resolved by a variety of policy interventions, including laws, agreements, charges, rights allocation, and other such measures. These are the main options for policy.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITMENT

In 2005, Fáilte Ireland set up an Environment Unit which is now part of the Policy and Planning Unit. The purpose of the Unit is to advocate a high quality physical environment for tourism and to promote good environmental practice throughout the tourism sector. As part of its role as a prescribed body in the planning process, Fáilte Ireland also aims to strengthen its partnerships with Local Authorities.

In carrying out its functions, Fáilte Ireland will also work with other public bodies such as the Environmental Protection Agency, the Heritage Council, Sustainable Energy Ireland and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, in advocating a sound tourism basis for effective environmental policies.

ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION PLAN 2007-2009

Fáilte Ireland's three-year Environmental Action Plan discusses the environmental challenges facing the Irish tourism industry and sets out what Fáilte Ireland will do to address these challenges in order to ensure the sustainable growth of the sector. It also sets out a range of partnerships that are necessary between Fáilte Ireland and other agencies and bodies in order to achieve its objectives.

The Action Plan also takes account of national policy on sustainable development, *Sustainable Development: A Strategy for Ireland*, which was published by the Government in 1997. This document was updated in the document *Making Ireland's Development Sustainable: Review, Assessment and Future Action* in 2002. The Environmental Action Plan 2007-2009 also takes account of the EPA's state of the environment report, *Ireland's Environment* (2004), its *Environment in Focus* report (2006); and the report of the Tourism Policy Review Group, *New Horizons for Irish Tourism: An Agenda for Action* (2003).

The importance of
the environment
for tourism

In 2006, overseas tourist visits to Ireland increased to an estimated 7.4 million; tourism total foreign exchange earnings were €4.7 billion; and the tourism and hospitality sector supported 12% of jobs in Ireland.

Annual visitor surveys repeatedly confirm that Ireland is prized by overseas visitors for its clean, green image[1]. In 2006:

- 80% of visitors rated Ireland's scenery as an important reason for visiting Ireland;
- 74% said they were attracted by the natural unspoilt environment; and
- 58% mentioned Ireland's attractive cities and towns.

In addition, in 2006, 75% of overseas visitors agreed with the statement that "Ireland is a clean and environmentally green destination". The tourism industry has successfully traded on Ireland's positive environmental image for decades, but unprecedented economic growth in recent years has put the quality of this core tourism product under increasing pressure.

Strategic tourism assets, which are important for the sustainable growth of tourism in Ireland, should be safeguarded from encroachment and damage by inappropriate development. These assets include special landscapes, important views, good water quality, the setting of historic buildings and monuments, biodiversity and access points to the coast and open countryside.

Anything that impacts on the environment, in which tourism is a stakeholder, is Fáilte Ireland's concern. The industry is dependent upon the country's natural environment and cultural heritage to sustain the distinctive Irish tourism product and to develop environmentally-based ecotourism products. Fáilte Ireland must ensure that the beneficial uses to tourism of a range of environmental resources - particularly water - are made clear to those with a responsibility for protecting them.

The importance of high quality water for angling, cruising, water sports and bathing cannot be overemphasised. There has been sizable expenditure on infrastructure to clean up Ireland's waters in recent years. However Lawlor *et al*.[2], 2007, show that spending has not always been well targeted at the objective of improving water quality, and that the results of investment were not properly tracked subsequently, in order to learn from experience. Similarly, according to Fáilte Ireland's annual Visitor Attitudes Survey, the attitudes of overseas visitors to litter have changed very little since 1999 despite various central and local government schemes aimed at litter reduction and control.

The importance of accurate and credible data relating to the relationship between tourism and the environment

1 Fáilte Ireland, (annually), *Visitor Attitudes Survey*, Dublin.
2 Lawlor, J., C. McCarthy and S, Scott, (2007), "Investment in water infrastructure – findings from an economic analysis of a national programme", *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, Vol. 50 No. 1, January, Taylor and Francis, London.

cannot be stressed enough. In particular, there is a need for data on the economic value of a high quality environment for tourism. For example, a study by Curtis[3] (2003) indicates that Irish rivers, wetlands, estuaries and seas are highly valued commodities. However, more studies like this are required as there is a shortage of relevant assessments and evaluations, unlike in the UK for example[4].

IRELAND MUST LIVE UP TO ITS IMAGE

Ireland's strong clean green image provides the basis for the marketing campaigns of both Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland. The future success of those campaigns depends upon the continuing credibility of that environmental image. We must ensure that Ireland lives up to its reputation as an island with:

- a relaxed feel and great scenic beauty;
- a distinctive heritage and culture;
- a friendly welcoming people;
- high-quality facilities; and
- a superb, unspoilt environment for outdoor activity.

In the long term, our environmental image as a destination will only be ensured by our success in protecting the quality of the environment.

3 Curtis, J. A. (2003), "Demand for Water-based Leisure Activity", *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, Vol. 46 No. 1, January, pp65-77.

4 Environment Agency (England and Wales), (2004), *Benefits Assessment Guidance for Water Quality and Water Resources Schemes*. Eight volumes.

Environmental
challenges facing the
tourism industry

EPA Image Bank

The unprecedented rate of development in Ireland over the past 15 years has brought many benefits to the Irish economy and to our tourism industry in particular. However, this economic growth is still closely linked with environmental degradation, often resulting in a negative impact on the quality of the tourism product.

The negative effects of development can include:
- a decline in the scenic and amenity value of landscapes and seascapes (due to poor planning and lack of coastal zone management);
- a decline in water quality (due to eutrophication and increased pressure on sewage waste facilities); and
- a loss of historic character in cities, towns and villages (due to insensitive development).

One of the most urgent environmental challenges facing the country is that of water quality. According to the EPA's *Environment in Focus* report[5] (2006), while river water quality has improved marginally, the rate of improvement will need to be significantly increased if Ireland is to meet the requirements of the EU Water Framework Directive and achieve 'good' status for all our water bodies by 2015. Almost 30% of our river length still remains slightly or moderately polluted, and 30% of our groundwater is contaminated[6]. Significant improvements are also required for lakes, estuarine and coastal waters in order to comply with the Directive.

Other environmental challenges which need to be addressed to ensure continued benefits to tourism include:

- managing the implications of climate change;
- ensuring sustainable, co-ordinated management and development of the coastal resource;
- managing threats to biodiversity and natural resources;
- managing the increased generation of waste;
- dealing with growing energy consumption and rising greenhouse gas emissions; and
- controlling litter in urban, rural and coastal areas.

CHALLENGES FOR THE TOURISM INDUSTRY
There are a number of challenges relating to the environment that need to be addressed by the tourism sector. The EPA's state of the environment report *Ireland's Environment*[7] (2004) noted that tourism was a key economic sector at national and EU levels, but that it needed greater sustainable management. It is especially important for tourism stakeholders to take a more proactive role to preserve environmental quality, because tourism depends so heavily on the environment.

The challenges for the tourism sector in increasing levels of sustainability include:
- promoting the principles and practice of 'sustainable tourism' throughout the industry;

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5 Environmental Protection Agency, (2006), *Environment in Focus*, Wexford.
6 Environmental Protection Agency, (2005), *Water Quality in Ireland 2005 – Key Indicators of the Aquatic Environment,* Wexford.

7 Environmental Protection Agency, (2004), *Ireland's Environment*, Wexford.

- achieving greater regional and seasonal spread of visitors;
- decreasing the environmental impact of tourism travel;
- minimising the environmental impact of tourism related development;
- improving energy efficiency, waste management and water conservation within the sector; and
- dealing with traffic congestion and damage to roads in some areas.

GROWING VISITOR NUMBERS

Overseas tourist numbers are expected to increase to 10 million by 2012[8]. In order to facilitate this growth without increasing pressure on the environment, Ireland needs to make meeting international commitments on air emissions and waste management, and European commitments on water quality, a priority.

8 Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, (2003), *Report of the Tourism Policy Review Group - New Horizons for Irish Tourism: An Agenda for Action,* Dublin.

Sustainable tourism

Bottlenose dolphins in the Shannon estuary
by Simon Berrow / Shannon Dolphin and Wildlife Foundation

Tourism, when it is well managed and properly located, should be recognised as a positive activity which has potential to benefit the host community, the local environment itself and the visitor alike. Sustainable tourism requires a balance to be struck between the needs of the visitor, the place and the host community.

'Sustainable tourism' is based on the principles of sustainable development. It is proposed as a way "minimising adverse impacts on local communities, our built heritage, landscapes, water resources, habitats and species while supporting social and economic prosperity[9]."

Taking care of the environment means taking care of the visitor. For example, high water quality and improved destination management contribute to a safer and more enjoyable stay for the visitor.

Built development and other activities associated with tourism should in all respects be appropriate to the character of the place in which they are situated. This applies to the scale, design and nature of the place as well as to the particular land use, economic and social requirements of the place and its surroundings.

Sustainable tourism management policies have been used at places like the visitor centre at Brú na Boinne, Co. Meath. The centre uses a quota system to control the number of visitors accessing the sensitive sites of Newgrange and Knowth. It accommodates other visitors with off-site interpretation in a state of the art visitor centre.

Tourism can only be 'sustainable' if everyone in the industry assumes responsibility for these issues. The principles of sustainable tourism are outlined in the *Charter for Sustainable Tourism,* which was agreed by the World Conference on Sustainable Tourism (Lanzarote, 1995).

EU SAYS PROGRESS IS TOO SLOW

In 2003, a European Commission Communication (COM2003 716) said that while many initiatives had been taken to encourage more sustainable tourism patterns, progress in this area was slow. While high level strategic policies were formed, often they did not translate into action by tourism operators or tourists themselves. The Commission said that to encourage more sustainability in the tourism industry, public authorities should:

- lead, promote and facilitate the Local Agenda 21 process;
- influence the consumption patterns of tourists;
- develop practical ways to make those who generate social and environmental costs pay for them;
- develop, promote and use market instruments, voluntary agreements, and labelling and certification schemes;
- implement suitable training and education schemes for people working in tourism;

9 Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, (1997),
   Sustainable Development: A Strategy for Ireland, Dublin.

- use structural funds to enhance the sustainability of tourist destinations; and
- pay particular attention to quality and carrying capacity considerations.

ACTION BY THE INDUSTRY

If Ireland is to achieve sustainable tourism, all stakeholders must focus on alleviating the environmental pressures and impacts generated by tourism itself. The sector needs to take a much more proactive role than it has done in the past if any lasting effect is to be achieved:

- All tourism operators must handle energy, waste and water more efficiently;
- Credible environmental certification schemes linked to policies and practices are required;
- The sector needs to examine ways to reduce the environmental impact of tourist travel;
- The sector must work with Local Authorities to manage increased tourist numbers while avoiding further environmental damage;
- Practical, sustainable tourism indicators are required (Such indicators are currently being devised and tested by DIT in a pilot project involving Lough Derg, Co. Tipperary[10]);
- The sector needs to identify the impacts of tourism on biodiversity, cultural heritage and scenic landscapes and take action to reduce any negative impacts;
- The sector urgently needs to address the problem of litter and fly-tipping in both urban and rural areas;
- The potential of the ecotourism sector needs to be identified and developed.

THE ROLE OF FÁILTE IRELAND

As the National Tourism Development Authority, Fáilte Ireland has a central role to play in ensuring that the principles of sustainable development are at the core of tourism policy and practice. Fáilte Ireland will work in partnership with all relevant agencies and bodies, and will provide advice and support to the industry, in forming and implementing policies for sustainable tourism in Ireland.

10 Dublin Institute of Technology, (2007), Sustainable Tourism Indicators: *Towards the Mitigation of Negative Impact on Tourism Destinations*, Dublin. (due to be published in late 2007).

Environmental
Action Plan
2007-2009

FIVE KEY OBJECTIVES

There are five key objectives at the core of the Environmental Action Plan 2007-2009. These are informed by the challenges facing Irish tourism as detailed in this document - and by the report of the Tourism Policy Review Group, '*New Horizons for Irish Tourism: An Agenda for Action'* (in particular Actions 9, 10 & 11).

This section outlines the five objectives that will be implemented over the three year period of this plan.

1. To place environmental issues at the core of sustainable tourism policy at national, regional and local levels.

2. To advocate for the protection of key environmental and tourism assets.

3. To undertake research leading to a clearer understanding of the relationship between tourism and the environment.

4. To promote good environmental practice within the tourism sector and to advise on the development of ecotourism.

5. To establish a number of strategic partnerships in implementing this plan.

1 *To place environmental issues at the core of sustainable tourism policy at national, regional and local levels*

Summary

Fáilte Ireland will work to influence the formulation of national tourism policy so that it takes account of the principles of sustainable development.

Fáilte Ireland will provide information and advice to Planning Authorities when they are:

- preparing their Development Plans; and
- preparing Litter Management Plans and working to reduce litter.

Fáilte Ireland will also seek to integrate awareness of sustainability issues into tourism and hospitality training.

1.1 NATIONAL PLANS, STRATEGIES AND GUIDELINES

Fáilte Ireland will offer input to the formulation of national policy as it relates to tourism and the environment. It will also seek to influence the scope and content of national planning guidelines insofar as they relate to the development of sustainable tourism in Ireland. Furthermore, Fáilte Ireland will seek to integrate environmental objectives and standards into all of its own plans and programmes.

1.2 SUSTAINABLE TOURISM POLICY IN DEVELOPMENT PLANS

Fáilte Ireland will prepare a checklist and methodology to assist Local Authorities in integrating sustainable tourism principles and policies into their Development Plans. Fáilte Ireland will provide advice to Local Authorities on the sustainable tourism policy content of County and City Development Plans and of selected Local Area Plans. Fáilte Ireland will also input to the preparation by Local Authorities of Litter Management Plans.

1.3 LIAISE WITH GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES

Fáilte Ireland will liaise with other government departments and agencies to raise awareness of environmental issues that are important for the sustainable development of tourism in Ireland.

1.4 REVIEW OF TOURISM EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMMES

A review will be undertaken of tourism and hospitality related education and training courses (within Fáilte Ireland, DIT and the ITs) to determine how well these courses cover environmental and sustainability issues in tourism. The review will deliver recommendations on the improvement of the curricula and learning outcomes of the courses.

2 *To advocate for the protection of key environmental and tourism assets*

Summary
Fáilte Ireland will make a strong tourism case for the safeguarding of key environmental assets to those charged with the protection of Ireland's environment. Fáilte Ireland will also establish an environmental awareness and promotion programme which will emphasise the importance of Ireland's clean, green image for tourism.

2.1 PROVIDE SUPPORT TO RELEVANT ENVIRONMENTAL BODIES
Fáilte Ireland will provide data and research support from a tourism perspective to the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and to Local Authorities, to assist them in the discharge of their functions relating to the protection of the environment.

2.2 VALUE OF IRELAND'S CLEAN, GREEN IMAGE FOR TOURISM
Fáilte Ireland will undertake a study to evaluate the economic importance of Ireland's clean, green image for the tourism sector.

2.3 VALUE OF WATER QUALITY FOR TOURISM
Fáilte Ireland will undertake a study to evaluate the economic importance of water quality to tourism in Ireland.

2.4 REVIEW OF SCENIC LANDSCAPE DESIGNATIONS
Fáilte Ireland will undertake a review of scenic landscape designations currently used in Ireland (e.g. scenic landscapes, routes, views, and other areas of value to tourism). The purpose of this review will be to arrive at a standard methodology for identifying landscapes of high scenic amenity value in Ireland.

2.5 TOURISM IMPACT ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY
Fáilte Ireland will devise a methodology for carrying out tourism impact assessments of proposed developments in sensitive tourism areas.

2.6 REFERRAL OF PLANNING APPLICATIONS
Fáilte Ireland will provide advice on a limited number of planning applications referred to it by Planning Authorities each year. In making responses to referred applications, Fáilte Ireland will focus on:
- developments located within designated scenic landscapes;
- areas of high tourist amenity – such as tourist attractions (e.g. cultural heritage sites) and historic towns;
- areas where high water quality is important to tourism; and
- proposals for tourism amenities and facilities.

3 *To undertake research leading to a clearer understanding of the relationship between tourism and the environment*

Summary
Fáilte Ireland will identify research that needs to be undertaken to arrive at a better understanding of the relationship between tourism and the environment. It will put that research in place, in association with other authorities and agencies where appropriate.

3.1 REVIEW EXISTING RESEARCH INTO TOURISM AND THE ENVIRONMENT
A scoping study will be undertaken to examine the research that has already been carried out at European and national levels on tourism and the environment, and on ecotourism.

3.2 CO-ORDINATE RESEARCH WITH OTHER BODIES
Fáilte Ireland will establish working relationships with other State agencies and bodies in order to ensure coordination of research agendas. These bodies include:
- the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA);
- the Heritage Council;
- Comhar, the National Sustainable Development Council;
- the Marine Institute;
- the National and Regional Fisheries Boards;
- the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI).

3.3 RESEARCH TOPICS
Research will be undertaken into the following topics, and position papers will be published on each:
- the implications of climate change for tourism in Ireland;
- the impact of holiday homes and second home on environmental and social capital;
- the impact of landscape change on tourism;
- the environmental factors affecting angling tourism;
- the opportunities for voluntary carbon off-set schemes within the tourism industry.
- the attitudes of visitors to wind farms and other utility infrastructure in the Irish landscape.

Other topics may be added to this list, depending on the findings of 3.1 above. In addition, Fáilte Ireland will maintain a watching brief on environmental issues as they affect tourism and will take action accordingly.

3.4 VISITOR ATTITUDES SURVEY

Fáilte Ireland will use the annual Visitor Attitudes Survey and other research to investigate the attitudes of overseas visitors to:

- water quality (2007);
- change in the Irish landscape (2008); and
- quality of public places in Irish cities and towns (2009).

4 *To promote good environmental practice within the tourism sector and to advise on the development of ecotourism*

Summary

Fáilte Ireland will work to raise the standard of environmental practice across the tourism sector. Environmental practice covers such areas as:

- the management of water, waste and energy;
- reducing and controlling the level of litter;
- reducing CO_2 emissions;
- design principles for buildings and facilities;
- conservation of the built, cultural and natural heritage; and
- environmental standards in the development of tourism products.

4.1 REVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTAL GOOD PRACTICE WITHIN THE SECTOR

A review will be carried out to establish current levels of environmental good practice within the tourism sector and to make recommendations on further improvements. A series of case studies will be provided in the areas of:

- transport;
- accommodation;
- attractions;
- activities; and
- destination management.

Fáilte Ireland will work with the relevant industry bodies and state agencies to promote better environmental practice within the above sectors.

4.2 TOURIST ACTIVITIES

Fáilte Ireland will work with the relevant industry bodies to identify and promote good environmental practices in the following areas:

- festivals and events;
- golf;
- cruising;
- equestrian activities;
- walking;
- angling;
- heritage and culture; and
- health and wellness.

Any outdoor activities promoted by Fáilte Ireland will be encouraged to adopt the 'Leave no Trace' code of outdoor ethics.

4.3 SUPPORT FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF ECOTOURISM

Fáilte Ireland will undertake research into the potential of the ecotourism market for Ireland and will provide appropriate support for the development of ecotourism in Ireland. In particular, Fáilte Ireland will support the 'Greenbox' and other ecotourism initiatives in their efforts to become established, to identify and promote standards for ecotourism, and to establish ecotourism networks.

4.4 ENVIRONMENTAL ACCREDITATION

Fáilte Ireland will support the promotion of the EU Flower eco-label for tourism accommodation and, in association with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB), will investigate and promote appropriate all-Ireland environmental accreditation schemes for tourism operators and providers across all tourism sectors.

4.5 TOURIST SIGNAGE

Fáilte Ireland will provide advice to the National Roads Authority (NRA) on the provision of tourist signage along the national road network within the context of the NRA's national re-signage programme 2006-2010.

4.6 HISTORIC TOWNS

Fáilte Ireland will work with Local Authorities to devise and publish guidelines on tourism management in historic towns, including the provision of tourist signage.

4.7 'NOTICE NATURE'

Fáilte Ireland will participate as a partner in the 'Notice Nature' biodiversity awareness raising campaign which is promoted by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. In particular, Fáilte Ireland and Notice Nature will publish guidelines on tourism and biodiversity.

4.8 ADVISORY SERVICE

Fáilte Ireland will provide advice to the industry (possibly web-based) on environmental, conservation and planning issues.

4.9 PERFORMANCE PLUS

The Policy and Planning Unit will work closely with Fáilte Ireland's Performance Plus programme in promoting good environmental practice within the industry.

5 *To establish a number of strategic partnerships in implementing this plan*

Summary

Fáilte Ireland will set up a series of strategic liaisons with:
- development authorities;
- environmental authorities;
- other governmental departments and agencies;
- NGOs; and
- industry bodies.

This section lists these groups.

Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism: (Sustainable tourism policy is formulated by the Department of Arts, Sports and Tourism which is, therefore, a key partner in this regard).

Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government: (scenic landscapes; National Litter Monitoring Body; Notice Nature Campaign; signposting).

Department of Transport: (sustainable transport).

National Roads Authority: (tourist signposting).

Marine Institute: (marine tourism issues).

Heritage Council: (scenic landscapes, heritage issues).

Central and Regional Fisheries Boards: (angling tourism; wild fish stocks).

Comhar, the National Sustainable Development Partnership: (sustainable tourism issues).

Office of Public Works: (sustainable tourism practices at visitor attractions).

Irish Tourism Industry Confederation: (sustainable tourism and environmental issues).

IBEC (Environmental Unit): (environmental regulation issues).

Environmental Protection Agency: (Environmental issues; State of the environment).

Sustainable Energy Ireland: (renewable energy and energy efficiency issues).

Irish Hotels Federation: (environmental management issues).

Irish Hospitality Institute: (environmental management issues).

Greenbox: (eco-tourism issues).

Sustainable Water Network (SWAN): (water quality and tourism issues).

An Taisce: (tourism and planning issues).

Leave No Trace: (code of outdoor ethics).

Irish Coastal Network (I-CoNet): (tourism and coastal issues).

DESIGN | TACTICS