

Ireland's Environment

2004



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Foreword

This third EPA state of the environment report assesses and reports on the quality of our surface waters, air and natural resources and the impact of the main economic sectors on these valuable assets. We aim to show the public what has been achieved since the last state of the environment report in 2000, what needs to be done and what our future priorities are to protect these important assets.

There have been positive signals for the environment in recent years: a modest improvement in emissions of greenhouse gases and of some acidifying gases, and progress on the extent of rivers affected by eutrophication. Over a longer period we have seen a significant reduction in serious pollution of rivers and in urban air pollution by lead from petrol and smoke from coal. Irish people are becoming more aware of and concerned with environmental issues and more willing to act in environmentally friendly ways. Examples include the success of the plastic bag levy and the increased rates of recycling of municipal waste.

Despite the positive signals, much more progress is needed on issues such as eutrophication, waste, and greenhouse gas emissions - issues that were highlighted in the last state of the environment report. Further progress is needed too on the protection of natural resources and on ameliorating the impact of transport on the urban environment - which were also highlighted in the last report. What is now needed is to make the protection of the environment and the conservation of our natural resources central considerations in the plans, programmes and actions of all economic sectors. This is the process of integrating the environment into sectoral decision making and it is receiving increased support internationally.

There has been considerable investment through the National Development Plan into much needed environmental infrastructure and environmental research and such investment is beginning to pay dividends. In recent years too, we have seen the publication of the National Biodiversity Plan, National Climate Change Strategy and National Spatial Strategy. The challenge now is to ensure that the objectives and targets of these plans become part of day-to-day decision making. A continuation of the positive signals depends critically on the objectives of the various strategies and plans being realised in a timely manner.

The EPA through the implementation of its recently launched strategic framework action plan, intends to pursue with renewed vigour the work of establishing and maintaining high environmental standards in Ireland. The framework includes the establishment of the Office of Environmental Enforcement, which will provide coordination for the various agencies involved in the enforcement of some 200 environmental laws now in force. It is my intention that the Office will take all necessary measures to support better implementation of environmental legislation by the relevant public bodies.

We always welcome your views on our publications and it would be appreciated if you could provide us with feedback; a response form is included at the back of this publication. Finally, a report of this nature would not be possible without the information provided through the dedication and expertise of the many people involved both directly and indirectly. I should like to express my appreciation and thanks to all concerned.

Mary Kelly

Director General

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