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Biodiversity Loss: Learnings and recommendations from the Citizens' Assembly

Earth Institute, UCD, February 2nd 2023
Dr Aoibhinn Ní Shúilleabháin



What is a Citizens' Assembly?

- Deliberative democracy is a tool to provide more opportunities for members of the public to participate in decision-making and engage with complex policy problems.
- Becoming widely used, with over 600 examples identified by the OECD since the 1980s at local and national levels.
- Way of reinforcing democracy by representing and including non-policy makers in the policy process
- Delivers reflective, informed opinion on a particular issue.





An Tionól
Saoránach
The Citizens'
Assembly

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Who are the 'citizens' in this Assembly?

- Not citizens, but people living in Ireland
- 20,000 households sent letters through An Post using their Geodirectory database of 1.7m households;
- Over 2,300 responses from those willing to participate in the Assembly;
- Of these, 99 were chosen as representative of Irish society based on CSO population data
- Example breakdown: 50/50 gender split, 23 people from Munster, 4 full-time farmers, twelve 18-24 year olds, nineteen 65+ year-olds, 1 Ukranian etc.



Photograph: Citizens Assembly

Expert Advisory Group

- Prof. Tas Crowe, UCD
- Dr Mary Dobbs, Maynooth University
- Dr Clodagh Harris, UCC
- Prof. Jenny McElwaine, TCD
- Prof. Ian Montgomery, QUB
- Dr James Moran, ATU
- Dr Mícheál Ó Cinnéide



An Tionól
Saoránach





Illustration: Valero Doval/The Guardian

Biodiversity underpins planetary health and informs everything down to the taste of a grain, the strand of a cloth and a sip of water, supporting our most basic needs.



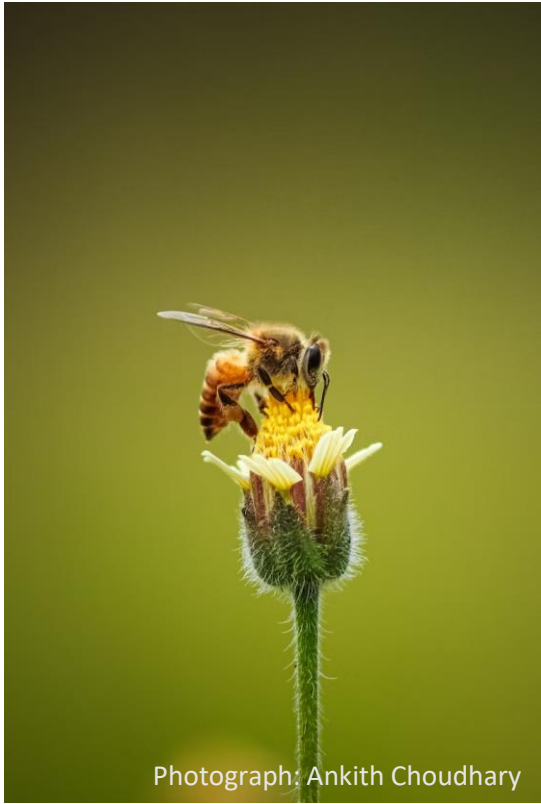
Photograph: Donal O'Leary



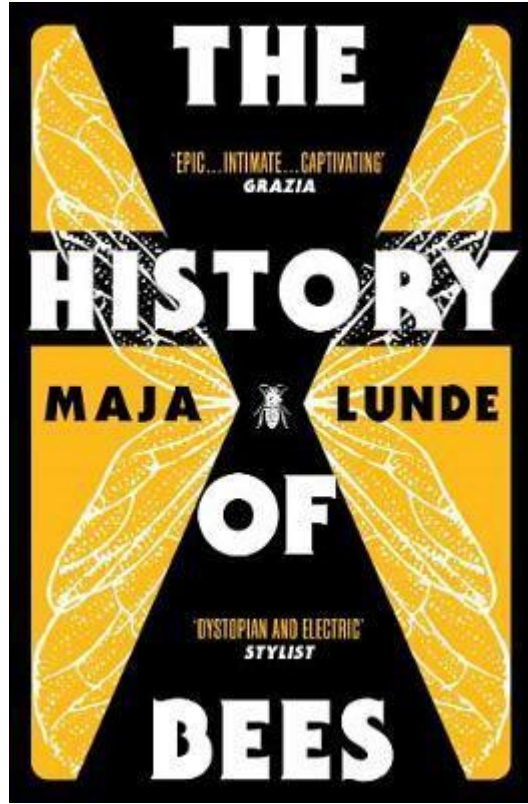
Photograph: Irish Linen Centre



Photograph: Carlos Garcia



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Photograph: Rifqi Ali Ridho



Habitat loss



Overexploitation



Pollution



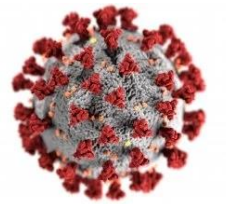
Invasive Species



Climate Change

Five main drivers of biodiversity loss

Societal implications of Biodiversity Loss and Climate change



Inter generational issues which get more serious over time.

Biodiversity in Ireland



- 85% protected habitats on land are in unfavourable condition; 46% with a declining trend
- 20% of species protected under the EU Habitats Directive deteriorating or in bad or inadequate state
- 20% breeding birds in long term decline (30% are stable/increased)
- Overwintering waterbirds declined by 40% (500,000) since 1990s
- 30% of semi-natural grasslands monitored have been lost in last 10-15 years

Biodiversity in Ireland

- Almost 50% of freshwater aquatic ecosystems in Ireland are in unsatisfactory ecological condition.
- Headwaters are the most vulnerable part of the river network.
- Declining status of marine waters is impacting species population, increasing vulnerability of species to disease, reducing feeding and breeding, leading to loss of ecosystem functioning and reducing provision of eco-systems services to society



Sectoral approach

- Agriculture
- Forestry
- Freshwater
- Peatlands
- Marine environment and coastlands
- Urban & man-made landscapes
- Protected sites

- Industry
- Energy
- Education
- NGOs





Some recommendations of
the Citizens' Assembly

Some recommendations already agreed on...

- The State must take prompt, decisive and urgent action to address biodiversity loss and restoration and must provide leadership in protecting Ireland's biodiversity for future generations.
- The Assembly believes that the State has comprehensively failed to adequately fund, implement, and enforce existing national legislation, national policies, EU biodiversity-related laws and directives related to biodiversity. This must change.
- Ireland needs to recognise its global responsibility, including through our local actions, in terms of our consumerism, resource usage and our international biodiversity responsibilities. The Government should advocate for a shift in emphasis in EU and international economic policy away from GDP expansion as a goal in itself and towards the goals of societal and ecological wellbeing.



Some recommendations for schools and individuals...

The public must be encouraged to live in a way which reduces their impact on biodiversity loss.

The State must develop public awareness and engagement campaigns on biodiversity and biodiversity loss, to educate people on the fundamental role of biodiversity in our lives and provide resources to inform people on what they can do in their own lives to support biodiversity.

Some recommendations for schools and individuals...

- Children and young people are integral to ensuring the environment is protected. There should be meaningful curriculum reform and teacher education to explicitly incorporate teaching and learning on biodiversity in early childhood, primary and post-primary curricula.
- School grounds and local public amenities need to be developed as a support to diverse and meaningful nature education. In line with this, basic biodiversity training for school personnel, including maintenance and grounds staff, should be rolled out on a national basis.

Photograph: Mike Brown, NPWS





Photograph: Codie Preston



Photograph: Citizens Assembly





Photograph: Art Ó Súilleabháin



Photograph: Art Ó Súilleabháin



Photograph: Krzysztof Niewolny



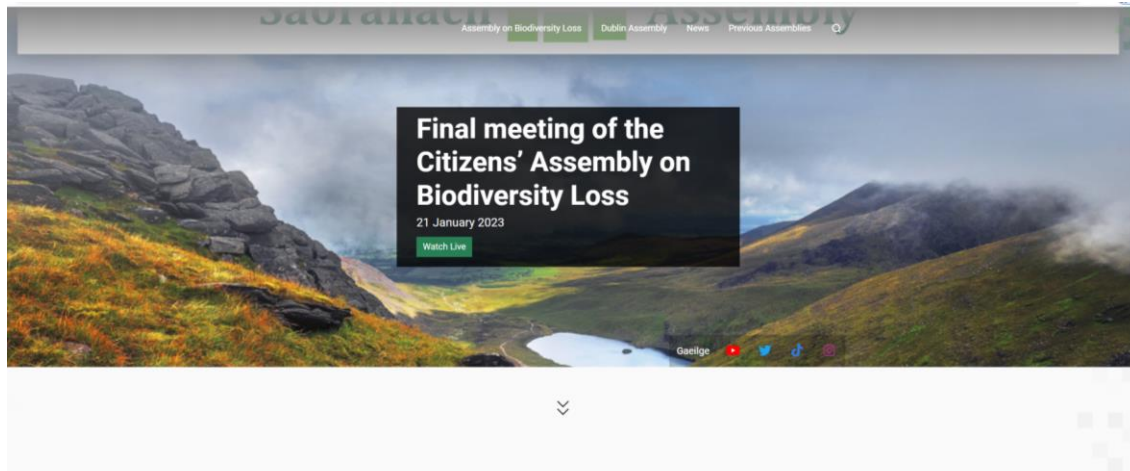
Photograph: Aaron Burden

How-to-guide

Develop a Pollinator Plan for your school




Watch back the presentations from the Citizens' Assembly




Citizens' Assembly on
Biodiversity Loss


Dublin Citizens' Assembly


Make a submission to the
Dublin Citizens' Assembly


Make a submission to the
Citizens' Assembly on
Biodiversity Loss

citizensassembly.ie



Learnings from the Citizens' Assembly

- Need to hear all of the opinions in order to allow for respectful discussion
- Listening is a skill that is not often highlighted
- Don't need to be an expert to make an informed opinion
- Being a 'good ancestor' is reason enough to want to initiate change
- Up to us to outline what we want policy makers to do
- Individual people are the real change-makers



Photograph: Carlos Garcia



Behaving and living ethically is foundational for radical social change.

Nobody owns nature, but it's up to each of us to make sure it's being cared for.



Go raibh maith agaibh agus beir bua.

