



Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Non-technical Summary

Agri-Food Strategy to 2030

602974-03-00

RSK



RSK GENERAL NOTES

Project No.: 602974-03-00

Title: Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Non-technical Summary
Agri-Food Strategy to 2030

Client: Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

Date: April 2021

Office: Dublin

Status: Final

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Date:	<u>28/04/2021</u>	Date:	<u>29/04/2021</u>

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1 WHAT IS THE ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT AND WHY HAS IT BEEN WRITTEN?

RSK Ireland Ltd (hereafter 'RSK') has been instructed by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) to carry out a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Agri-Food Strategy to 2030. The Agri-Food Strategy to 2030 is a voluntary industry led strategy facilitated by the DAFM.

SEA is a systematic process for evaluating the environmental consequences of proposed plans or programmes to ensure environmental issues are fully integrated and addressed at the earliest appropriate stage of decision making, with a view to promoting sustainable development. The process of SEA was introduced under European Directive 2001/42/EC12 on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment (SEA Directive), and came into force in 2001.

The requirements of the SEA Directive are transposed into Irish domestic law through the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (SI 435/2004 and SI 200/2011), and the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 (SI 436/2004 and SI 201/2011).

The Environmental Report describes the outcome of the SEA. This involves an evaluation of the likely environmental effects of implementation and non-implementation of the Agri-Food Strategy, including an assessment of realistic strategic alternative approaches. The Report also suggests measures to minimise potentially adverse environmental effects of implementing the programme, along with suggested environmental enhancement measures

The Environmental Report has been written to accompany the programme and has been issued to the statutory consultation bodies for viewing and comment by other interested organisations and members of the public for a period of eight weeks. This Non-technical Summary is a concise summary version of the Environmental Report.

2 WHAT IS THE AGRI-FOOD STRATEGY TO 2030

2.1 Background

The agri-food sector is a key aspect of Ireland's economy, community and culture, exporting to at least 180 countries around the world and contributing significantly to Ireland's global profile and reputation.

The Agri-Food Strategy to 2030 builds on its predecessor programmes; Food Harvest 2020 and most recently Food Wise 2025, in establishing a vision of how the sector is anticipated to develop over the period to 2030 for the benefit of its stakeholders and the wider Irish economy and environment. This is reflected in the terms of reference for the 2030 Stakeholder Committee, to outline the vision and key objectives, with associated actions, required to ensure the economic, environmental and social sustainability of the agri-food sector in the decade ahead. A key feature of each of these strategies has been the level of joint engagement by stakeholders and Government. These strategies are fully owned by all who took part in forming them: farming and fishery organisations, food industry, environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs), retailers and academics; as well as the DAFM and relevant State agencies.

The Committee has agreed to adopt a 'Food Systems' approach in the development of the Strategy. The Strategy defines a Sustainable Food System (SFS) based on the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) definition as "*a food system that delivers food security and nutrition for all in such a way that the economic, social and environmental bases to generate food and nutrition for future generations are not compromised*" (FOA, 2017). This means that:

- It is profitable throughout (economic sustainability)
- It has broad based benefits for society (social sustainability)
- It has a positive or neutral impact on the natural environment (environmental sustainability).

Considering the context and the opportunities and challenges likely to face the agri-food sector in the period to 2030, the Strategy has developed four main missions which will act as the anchor for the core of the Strategy:

1. A climate smart, environmentally sustainable agri-food sector.
2. Viable and resilient primary producers with enhanced well-being.
3. Food which is safe, nutritious and appealing: trusted and valued at home and abroad.
4. An innovative, competitive and resilient agri-food sector, driven by technology and talent.

Each of these sets out a mission statement and proposes a set of goals which are underpinned by a series of actions. The four missions and their related goals are shown in Figure 2.1.



Figure 2.1: Agri-Food Strategy Missions and Goals

Mission 1: A Climate Smart, Environmentally Sustainable Agri-food Sector

Mission 1 includes seven goals and a range of associated actions aimed at urgently tackling existing environmental problems. The following high-level targets have been set for Mission 1:

- A Climate-neutral food system by 2050, with verifiable progress achieved by 2030, encompassing emissions, biodiversity and water quality:
 - GHGs - biogenic methane reduction of a minimum of 10% by 2030;
 - Air quality – reduce ammonia emissions below 107,500 tonnes by 2030;
 - Water quality – agriculture will reduce nutrient losses to water by 50% by 2030;
 - Biodiversity – 10% of farmed area prioritised for biodiversity, spread across all farms throughout the country by 2030;
- Forestry: increase afforestation and double the sustainable production of biomass from forests by 2035;
- Organic farming: reach at least 7.5% of utilisable agricultural area by 2030;
- Seafood: Achieve 30% of marine protected areas by 2030;
- Halve per capita food waste by 2030;
- A strengthened Origin Green, with an emphasis on metrics and evidence.

Goals and associated actions are proposed to mitigate GHG emissions, adapt to climate change, restore and enhance biodiversity, improve water quality and aquatic ecosystems, ensure that the forestry and seafood sectors play their part, and all while developing Ireland's rapidly evolving bioeconomy.

Mission 2: Viable and Resilient Primary Producers with Enhanced Well-being

Mission 2 includes four goals and associated actions. The high-level targets for Mission 2 are:

- High ambition for primary producers, focusing on the premiumisation of output, increased integration of certain sectors, and diversification of activity and income streams:
 - Improved primary producer performance across a range of indicators, as measured by the National Farm Survey (NFS) and Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM);
 - Strong and functioning collaborative structures for primary producers;
 - Increased tillage, horticulture, organic and agro-forestry production;
- A more equitable distribution of value along the value chain, with recognition that higher ambition in sustainability has a cost:
 - Increase market transparency, including transposition of the Unfair Trading Practices (UTP) Directive and establishment of the office of the National Food Ombudsman (title tbc);
- Enhanced social sustainability, encompassing well-being (including health and safety), generational renewal and diversity:
 - Strong supports including mandatory health and safety training;
 - Improved primary producer performance across a range of indicators, as measured by the NFS.

Mission 2 focuses on the areas which offer the best tools for improving economic viability and resilience of primary producers, issues that are within their control but also policies, approaches and technologies that they and others in the agri-food sector can implement to improve their overall economic standing. Primary producers can bolster their financial and economic sustainability by focusing on efficiencies; embracing new, diversified systems of agriculture; meeting standards required for greater premiumisation that can offer higher market returns; and being rewarded for the delivery of a range of eco-system services.

Mission 3: Food which is Safe, Nutritious and Appealing, Trusted and Valued at Home and Abroad

Mission 3 has four goals, each with a number of associated actions. The high-level targets for Mission 3 are:

- Coherence of policies for food, health and nutrition, nationally, at the EU level and through international policy generally:
 - Co-ordinate national policies for food, health and nutrition;
 - Better labelling and reformulation for healthier diets;
- Enhancement of consumer trust through providing evidence of safe and ethical food production;
- Creation of value-add, through insight and innovation, supporting the food sector and continuing to develop market opportunities at home and abroad;
 - Sustainably develop Ireland's food and drink offering, with new ambition for value-add and new markets with a view to agri-food exports reaching €21 billion by 2030.

Mission 3 proposes improved policy coherence for food, nutrition and health through the establishment of a high-level implementation group co-chaired by the Department of Health and the DAFM. Mission 3 also addresses the changing societal expectations for the sector.

Mission 4: An Innovative, Competitive and Resilient Sector, driven by Technology and Talent

Mission 4 has seven goals, each with a range of actions, based around the high level targets:

- An innovation, knowledge and technology driven sector:
 - Implementation of the recommendations of the High-Level Innovation Team;
 - Private research and development (R&D) to reach 1% of turnover by 2025;
- Improvement of competitiveness and resilience along the food chain:
 - An enabling public policy including appropriate supports, ensuring access to finance and a focus on competitiveness issues specific to the agri-food sector;
- Attraction and nurturing of diverse talent:
 - Develop a strategy for the agri-food sector on education, skills and talent attraction and retention.

Mission 4 seeks to address the need for an effective innovation system, a strategic approach to R&D funding and an engaged and responsive knowledge exchange environment. Continuous improvements are needed, particularly to bring them into line with the latest thinking on effective innovation systems and to ensure maximum impact for publicly-funded research. Mission 4 also aims to prepare the sector for new labour and human capital dynamics, to provide an optimum mix of diverse, skilled, and appropriately trained talent.

3 WHAT IS THE CURRENT STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT IN IRELAND?

3.1 Current State of the Environment

Biodiversity and Flora and Fauna

Strengths and Opportunities

- Rich diversity of ecosystems and wildlife.
- Large area of land and sea of international and national importance to nature conservation value.
- High proportion of Europe's remaining peatlands.
- Over half of the Habitat Directive-listed species are in favourable condition and many are demonstrating stable or improving trends.
- Many assessed seabird species are increasing.
- Achieved Good Environmental Status (GES) for some elements of biological diversity, in particular for the majority of larger marine vertebrates
- Number of farmers and other primary producers participating in schemes conservation schemes.
- The west of Ireland and its upland areas are rich in high nature value farmland.

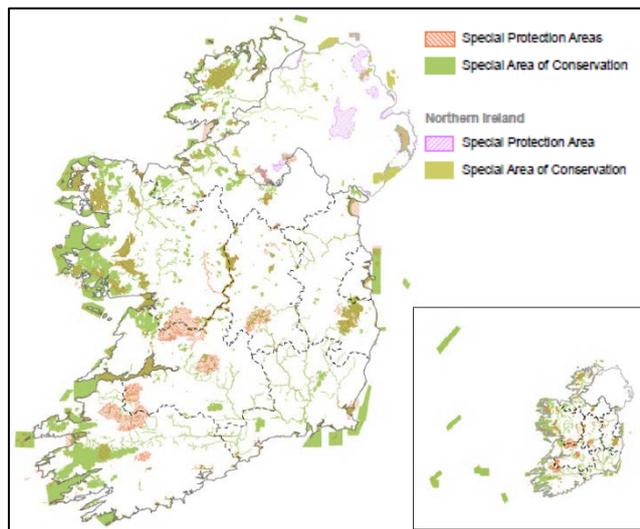


Figure 3.1: Natura 2000 Sites

Weaknesses and Threats

- Failing to designate a number of Sites of Community Importance as Special Areas of Conservation within the appropriate deadline as well as failing to establish site-specific conservation objectives and conservation measures.
- The number of EU protected habitats with unfavourable conservation status and ongoing declines due to unsustainable agriculture and fishing.
- Continuing declines in species and habitats within and outside of protected areas.
- Low percentage of Ireland's maritime area designated for protection.
- Limited effect of the common agricultural policy (CAP) direct payments on farmland biodiversity to date.
- Increasing ammonia concentrations and exceedance of critical levels and loads set to protect vegetation.
- Threats on terrestrial, coastal and marine habitats through man-made pressures.
- Potential impacts of climate change.
- Increasing problems of pests, diseases and invasive species.

Transboundary Considerations

- Northern Ireland has a large area of land of international and national nature conservation value.
- Number of habitats and species in unfavourable condition, and steady decline in biodiversity, including a decline in priority habitats and species.
- Threats from land-use change, particularly agriculture and development, pollution, invasive species and fisheries practices.

Population

Strengths and Opportunities

- The contribution of the agri-food sector to Ireland's economy, in terms of employment and in exports.
- The new *Programme for Government Our Shared Future* aims to address the economic and wellbeing challenges facing Ireland in the coming years.
- Significant strengths in research, technology, development and innovation.

Weaknesses and Threats

- Limited gender diversity in the agriculture, forestry and fishing sectors.
- Increasing number of people retiring from the workforce, leading to loss of farming knowledge and continuity.
- Risk to reputation of Ireland and farmers as a food producing nation with strong environmental credentials.
- Balance between supporting the viability of small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) producer businesses, with managing the potential environmental impact of agricultural intensification and unsustainable fishing.

Human Health

Strengths and Opportunities

- High number of people rate their own health as good or very good.
- Death rates in Ireland have been generally falling prior to the Covid pandemic.
- Areas of high biodiversity can encourage going outdoors for physical exercise with benefits for mental and physical health and wellbeing.

Weaknesses and Threats

- Mental health is a growing health, social and economic problem for Ireland.
- Although death rates are generally falling, farmers show the slowest reduction of any socio-economic group.
- Rise in fatal and non-fatal accidents within the agricultural sector within the past few years.
- Health impacts of poor air quality.
- High levels of obesity, particularly among the older population.
- Although the number of people achieving the minimum level of activity recommended by the National Guidelines is increasing, it is still low.

Soil and Land Use

Strengths and Opportunities

- One of the most geologically diverse regions in the world relative to its land area and has substantial mineral deposits.
- The soil is considered to be in good condition and is relatively rich in soil organic matter, especially wetter soils and blanket and basin peats.
- There has been a continuing trend of slow improvement in soil fertility.
- The EPA and Teagasc have developed an Irish Soil Information system to inform decision makers in terms of protecting the soil resource.

Weaknesses and Threats

- Decrease in total agricultural land use.
- Increase in artificial area due to increases in urban, commercial and industrial development, transport infrastructure, and recreational facilities.
- Decrease in wetland land cover.
- Ireland's extensive peatland exists in a degraded state due to land drainage, reclamation for agricultural purposes and peat extraction.
- Increased soil acidity on farms.
- Pressures on soils due to soil sealing, compaction and intensive land management.
- Limited specific legislation or policy mechanism to protect soils.

Water

Strengths and Opportunities

- Irish coastal waters maintain their status as some of the best in Europe.
- Just over half of surface water bodies are in good or high ecological status.
- High number of groundwater bodies were found to be in good chemical and quantitative status.
- The government is adopting a more collaborative approach to facilitate improvements in water quality.
- The Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management Programme has been created to provide direction in Ireland's long-term flood risk management and mitigation plan.

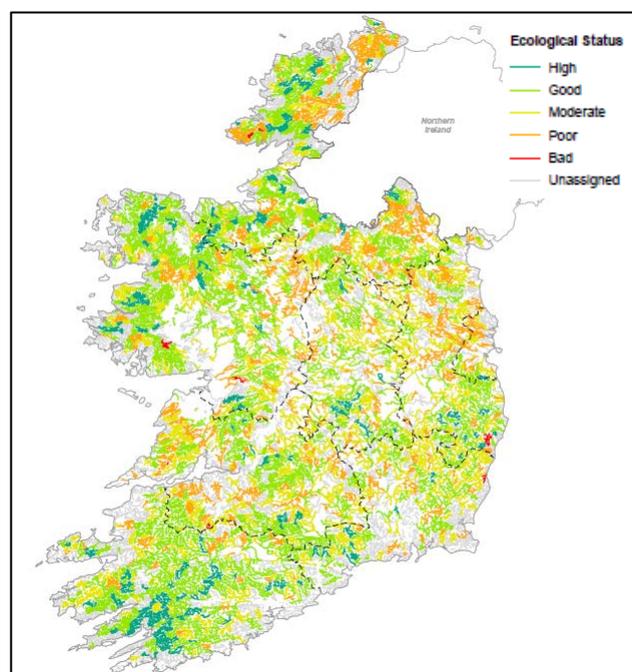


Figure 3.2: Water Quality – Ecological Status

Weaknesses and Threats

- Decline in high status water bodies.
- The number of seriously polluted bad status river water bodies has increased.
- Transitional water bodies are the worst performing type of water body.
- The main significant pressures impacting water quality include agriculture, wastewater discharges, physical impacts on habitats including excess fine sediment and pressures from forestry activities.
- Failure to meet the necessary pesticide standard in some drinking water supplies.
- Increased trends in nitrate and phosphate pollution, much of which is linked to agricultural activity.
- Physical modifications to, and drainage of, water bodies such as rivers and lakes.
- Risk of increased flooding due to climate change.

Transboundary Considerations

- Number of rivers, lakes and two sea loughs that straddle the Northern Ireland and Ireland border.
- Decrease in river and lake water quality in Northern Ireland.
- Increase in average monitored winter dissolved inorganic nitrogen in marine water bodies.

Air Quality

Strengths and Opportunities

- Air quality in Ireland is good compared to other EU member states and monitoring stations show that Ireland continues to meet the EU air quality standards for most atmospheric pollutants.
- There has been an overall reduction in emissions since 1990.
- Increased work on putting forward measures to reduce ammonia emissions, which contribute to particulate matter.

Weaknesses and Threats

- Localised air quality issues associated with nitrogen dioxide and particulates.
- Challenge in meeting more stringent World Health Organisation and European Economic Area air quality reference guidelines.
- Agricultural emissions of a number of pollutants have increased since 1990, in particular ammonia emissions, which contributes to particulates.
- Challenge of meeting the National Emission Ceilings Directive emission target.

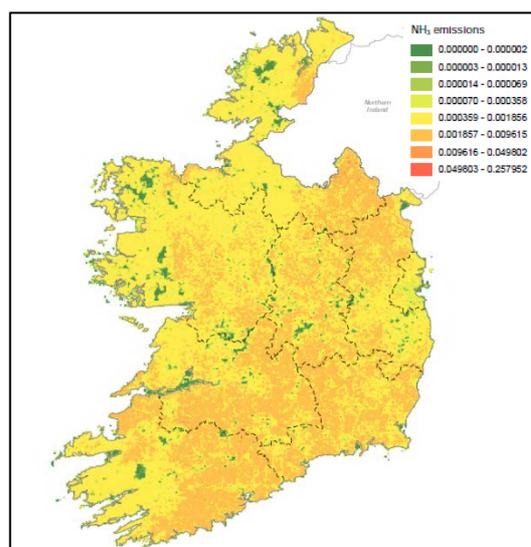


Figure 3.3: Total Ammonia Emissions

Transboundary Considerations

- As Ireland shares a land boundary with Northern Ireland there is potential for transboundary air quality impacts.
- Air quality in Northern Ireland is generally improving.
- Ammonia emissions have been increasing, mainly due to emissions from livestock.

Climate Change

Strengths and Opportunities

- Total national greenhouse gas emissions have decreased since 2005.

Weaknesses and Threats

- Susceptibility of agriculture to disruption due to climate change and extreme weather events.
- Increasing greenhouse gas emissions from the agricultural sector with emissions projected to rise.
- Challenge of meeting greenhouse gas emission reduction targets.
- Increase in mean temperature and annual national rainfall.

Material Assets

Strengths and Opportunities

- Significant natural resources such as water, carbon rich soils and high quality grassland, whilst natural resources are also available for renewable energy generation.
- Achievement of EU Recovery and Recycling targets.
- Reduction in landfills for the disposal of municipal waste.
- Increase in anaerobic digestion facilities and biofuels.

Weaknesses and Threats

- Recycling rate for municipal waste has slightly declined.
- Amount of food waste generated, particularly that which is not being segregated for separate collection.
- Increase in marine litter.
- National municipal landfills and waste-to-energy facilities are operating at capacity and Ireland has some significant waste infrastructure deficits.
- Challenge in achieving future more stringent EU recycling targets.
- Quantity of hazardous farm waste, including significant quantities of highly toxic pollutants.

Cultural Heritage

Strengths and Opportunities

- Two World Heritage sites.
- Rich heritage with a number of monuments recorded and under state care and protected structures registered.
- The organic environment of waterlogged bogs and peatland also help to preserve below ground artefacts.

Weaknesses and Threats

- On-going and gradual decline in archaeological monuments in the countryside and degradation of field monuments.
- Pressures from urban change, road building, construction of houses and other developments, access to uplands and wetlands, concentration and intensification of commercial farming, scrub encroachment and extensive afforestation on traditional rural landscapes, exploitation of peatlands and marginalisation of built heritage within national and EU environmental conservation measures.
- Vulnerability of built and archaeological heritage to impacts of climate change.

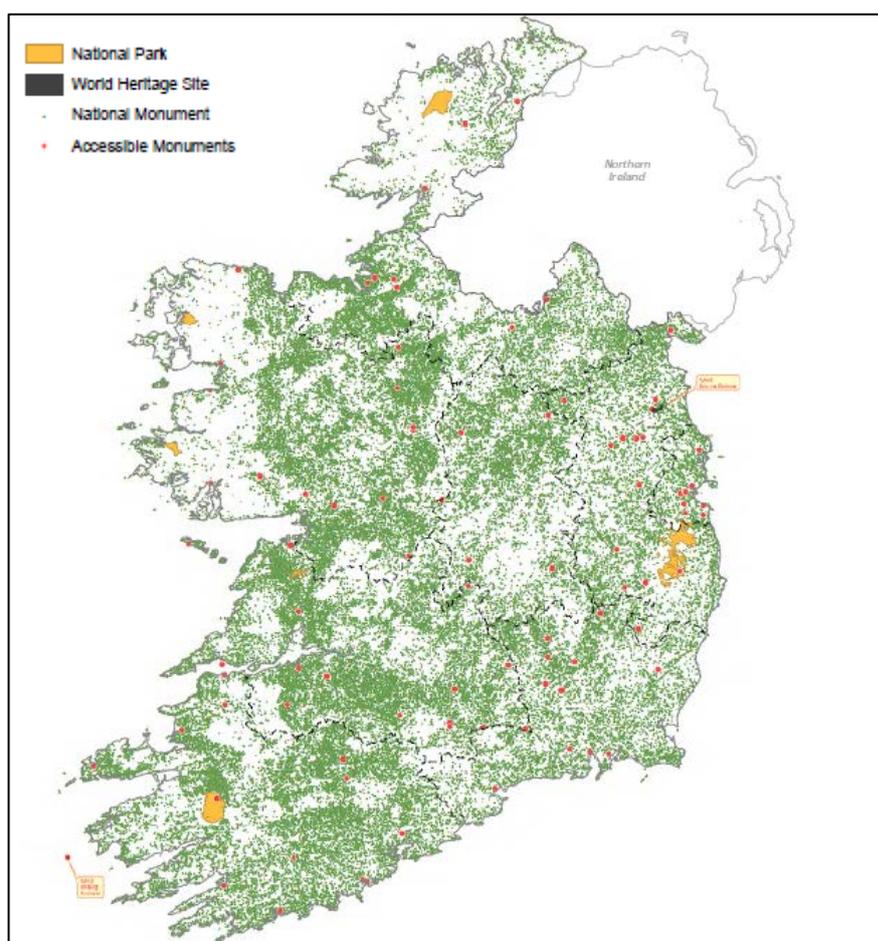


Figure 3.4: Designated Landscape and Cultural Heritage Sites

Landscape

Strengths and Opportunities

- Attractive, largely unspoilt and high quality rural landscapes, numerous protected area designations and major rural tourism attractions.
- Six areas designated as National Parks due to the national importance of the landscape.
- Landscapes are protected at the local level by designations such as 'Areas of High Amenity' and 'Protected Views' through development plans.
- Agricultural landscapes are hugely significant cultural reference points, and their multifunctional nature means they deliver a range of services.
- The National Landscape Strategy was published in 2015 ongoing to 2025 which will be used to ensure compliance with the European Landscape Convention.
- Draft Regional Seascape Character Assessment identified distinct seascape character types and regional seascape character areas.

Weaknesses and Threats

- Extensive new housing, major roads and other infrastructure is resulting in urbanisation and landscape fragmentation.
- Fragmented approach to landscape management.
- Delay in preparing 'State of Landscape Reports' and National Landscape Character map.

Transboundary Considerations

- Northern Ireland has eight areas designated as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty making up 20% of its total land, two of which are located on or in close proximity to the border.

Natural Capital

Strengths and Opportunities

- Number of studies being carried out to identify the value of natural assets.

Weaknesses and Threats

- Difficulty in accounting for non-market and non-use values for human health, well-being and society.
- The inter-relationships between the sustainability topics mean that negative impacts or the worsening of status or quality of a sustainability topic affects the other sustainability topics.

4 HOW HAS THE AGRI-FOOD STRATEGY TO 2030 BEEN ASSESSED?

The Agri-Food Strategy has been assessed against a number of SEA objectives designed to cover the broad range of environmental issues facing the strategy area:

- **Biodiversity and Flora and Fauna** – Contribute to the protection of biodiversity and help reverse the decline in nature
- **Population** – Reduce deprivation and improve social cohesion of the community
- **Human Health** – Improve health and quality of life
- **Soil and Land Use** – Protect and enhance soil quality
- **Water** – Protect, enhance and manage water resources and flood risk
- **Air Quality** – Reduce air pollution and ensure continued improvements to air quality
- **Climate Change** – Support national objectives to address climate change
- **Material Assets** – Conserve natural resources and reduce waste production
- **Cultural Heritage** – Protect, enhance and manage Ireland’s rich archaeological and cultural heritage
- **Landscape** – Protect, enhance and manage the character and quality of Ireland’s distinctive landscape and seascape
- **Natural Capital and Inter-relationships** - To support an agri-food sector that continues to deliver wider natural capital benefits including carbon sequestration, protection from flooding and access to the countryside.

These objectives are used within high level and detailed assessment matrices to ascertain the magnitude of likely effects, the sensitivity or value of the receiving environment (including people and wildlife) and the resultant significance of effects of the goals and actions under each mission of the Strategy.

Assessments of alternatives to the Strategy have been undertaken, along with an assessment of likely cumulative effects of the missions and their goals and actions within the Strategy itself and accounting for likely in-combination effects with other plans and programmes. Opportunities for improvement and measures to address possible impacts have also been identified.

5 WHAT ARE THE ALTERNATIVES?

Consideration of alternatives is a key feature of the SEA process as defined by the SEA Directive and the SEA Regulations. In practical terms, it refers to possible alternative mechanisms for delivering the goals of the Agri-Food Strategy, and the assessment of the impacts of each of these options against the SEA objectives.

Three strategic alternatives have been assessed against the SEA objectives:

- **Alternative 1: Base Case ‘Do Nothing’**

This alternative is representative of what would likely happen in the absence of a new strategy. The base case is assumed to comprise continuation of the output seen in recent years; including that the dairy herd continues to increase and the suckler herd continues to decrease slowly.
- **Alternative 2: Greater Emphasis on Reduced Output**

This alternative assumes that the focus of the strategy should give greater priority to the environmental strand of sustainability; even if this results in reduced output, with implications for the social and economic strands.
- **Alternative 3: Balanced Approach**

This alternative assumes an increased focus on all three strands of sustainability - environmental, economic and social. This involves taking elements of both improved environmental sustainability to deliver on the 2030 climate ambition and put the sector on a trajectory towards a climate neutral economy by 2050; in combination with measures to increase prosperity and value-add, with any increased output value in beef and dairy coming from within the existing herd. This alternative also takes a food systems approach that considers the connections of the food system with nutrition, health and the environment.

Alternative 1 performs least well when assessed against the SEA objectives. This alternative is a ‘Do Nothing’ scenario which means that the current Food Wise 2025 Strategy would continue, which would see agricultural practices continue on the current trajectory with dairy herds increasing and suckler herds decreasing slowly. This is predicted to result in strong adverse effects in terms of the environmental SEA objectives because it means that the current trends in declining biodiversity, water quality and increased air pollutants are likely to continue.

Alternative 2 places greater emphasis on the environmental strand of sustainability, even if this results in reduced output. The outcome of these actions would be beneficial for many of the environmental SEA objectives, with strong beneficial effects predicted for biodiversity, flora and fauna, water, air quality and climate. However, it is anticipated that there could be adverse effects on population and human health. Overall this alternative performs better in terms of the environmental SEA objectives than both Alternative 1 and 3. However, out of all the alternatives it performs least well in terms of population and human health.

Alternative 3 would take a more balanced approach which assumes an increased focus on all three strands of sustainability - environmental, economic and social. These three aspects of sustainability interlink strongly, meaning it is likely that beneficial effects will occur across the majority of the SEA objectives.

Alternative 3 represents the chosen strategic alternative, developed by the 2030 Stakeholder Committee. This is on the basis that Alternative 3 provides a balanced

approach which covers all three strands of sustainability - environmental, economic and social. Although Alternative 2 is predicted to have stronger beneficial effects on a number of the environmental SEA objectives when compared to Alternative 3, it performs worse in terms of the population and human health objectives. Through careful consideration of the three alternatives it has been determined that implementation of Alternative 3 would be the preferred option to replace the current Food Wise 2025 Strategy.

6 WHAT ARE THE LIKELY ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF THE AGRI-FOOD STRATEGY TO 2030

6.1 Mission 1: A Climate Smart, Environmentally Sustainable Agri-Food Sector

Mission 1 is assessed to have beneficial effects on a number of the environmental SEA objectives due to its focus on developing a climate neutral food system, reducing greenhouse gas and ammonia emissions, restoring and enhancing biodiversity, tackling water pollution, improving the sustainability of the seafood sector, developing a circular economy and focus on schemes such as Origin Green. A number of the actions within Mission 1 are predicted to have strong beneficial effects, particularly on biodiversity, flora and fauna, water, climate change and air quality.

The detailed assessment identified that there could be minor adverse effects on the landscape and the cultural heritage objectives from the action to scale up renewable energy schemes in Goal 1. Renewable energy developments would be subject to planning controls which would require significant adverse effects to be mitigated.

6.2 Mission 2: Viable and Resilient Primary Producers with Enhanced Well-Being

Mission 2 is assessed to have beneficial effects on the population objective as many of the actions are likely to improve the economic viability of primary producers. Actions relating to health and safety and mental health as well as promoting inclusion and combating isolation are also likely to result in beneficial effects on the human health objective.

The detailed assessment identified that there is potential for adverse effects from Goal 1 in Mission 2 on some of the environmental SEA objectives due to a proposed expansion of the tillage and horticultural sub-sectors and potential unintended growth from the promotion of Irish produce. These effects would be offset to some extent by the beneficial effects of the Strategy. Any adverse effects are likely to be minor and not significant.

6.3 Mission 3: Food that is Safe, Nutritious and Appealing, Trusted and Valued at Home and Abroad

Mission 3 is assessed to have beneficial effects on the population and human health objectives in particular. There is a focus on promoting healthy nutritious food and actions covering food safety and authenticity, animal health, anti-microbial resistance and biosecurity. A number of the actions are likely to have beneficial effects on the population objective as they also support measures to improve economic viability of manufacturers and primary producers.

The detailed assessment identified that there could be minor adverse effects on climate change and air quality from the actions focused on international markets. While the objective may be to deliver increased value from the same volume of exports, there is a

potential risk that this results in an increase in export volume and therefore transport emissions. These would be offset to some extent by actions to promote domestic markets and small food and local producers.

6.4 Mission 4: An Innovative, Competitive and Resilient Agri-Food Sector, Driven by Technology and Talent

Mission 4 is assessed to have mainly beneficial effects on the population objective. The focus on innovation, funding of research, sharing of knowledge and information and enhancing the use of technology would help improve efficiency, competitiveness and thereby economic viability. Some of the actions are also likely to have beneficial effects on the human health objectives and the environmental SEA objectives.

6.5 Overall Effects of the Agri-Food Strategy to 2030

Overall the Agri-Food Strategy is predicted to have beneficial effects on most of the SEA objectives.

6.6 Cumulative Effects with Other Plans and Programmes

In general the Strategy is likely to be well-aligned with the other Plans and Programmes assessed. The review of alignment with environmental protection objectives of these other Plans and Programmes also shows a high level of alignment and positive environmental synergy. A key reason for this is that Goal 1 of Mission 1 commits the sector to implement the Ag-Climatise roadmap. This therefore means that the Strategy is inherently aligned to the targets within Ag-Climatise which itself is aligned to EU and national level environmental policy on climate, air quality, water quality and biodiversity. Proposals for increases in afforestation and renewable energy (which have the potential for adverse environmental effects in certain contexts) are not likely to be cumulative because they are aligned to and not additional to the Ag-Climatise objectives.

6.7 Transboundary Effects

Ireland shares a land border with Northern Ireland and habitats on both side of the border are connected. No significant adverse transboundary effects have been predicted, as adverse effects are predicted to be at most minor.

On the whole, beneficial transboundary effects are predicted due to the measures contained in Mission 1 which cover reducing ammonia and methane emissions, achieving good water quality and health aquatic systems restoring and enhancing biodiversity, enhancing the environmental sustainability of the seafood sector and strengthening Origin Green. These could have beneficial transboundary effects on Northern Ireland.

Beneficial transboundary effects are also likely due to the actions in Goal 7 of Mission 4, which seeks to promote sustainable food systems as part of Ireland's overseas development assistance. This could have beneficial effects on the agricultural economies and health and wellbeing of African and other developing countries.

7 WHAT ARE THE KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MITIGATION OR ENHANCEMENTS?

The SEA team has engaged extensively through the Strategy drafting process with both the 2030 Committee and DAFM as the programme body. A number of environmental stakeholders have also participated fully in this process both as members of the 2030 Committee, the associated Environmental Analysis Steering Group and through consultation on the Scoping stage of the SEA. A range of inputs have been made to the Strategy drafting team through these processes and considered in the Strategy, particularly in the development of the measures in Mission 1; A climate smart, environmentally sustainable agri-food sector.

A number of mitigation measures have been proposed and many relate to implementing means of further monitoring the identified adverse or uncertain effects.

Article 10 of the SEA Directive requires the High Level Implementation Committee (HLIC), as the Managing Authority, to monitor significant environmental effects of implementing the Strategy. This must be done in such a way as to also identify unforeseen adverse effects and to take appropriate remedial action. Monitoring should commence as soon as the programme is adopted, with annual reporting carried out for the life of the programme.

It may be necessary to revise the monitoring programme periodically so that it takes account of new methods and increased understanding of the baseline environment.

It is important that any monitoring proposed by the SEA should aim to specifically monitor the impact of the Strategy rather than monitoring trends in the baseline environment that would have occurred regardless. In accordance with the Ireland SEA Regulations, monitoring should also focus on aspects of the Strategy where environmental impacts are predicted to be significant (or uncertain).

An Environmental Working Sub-Group should be established to oversee monitoring, review and reporting of environmental issues and report back to the HLIC.

8 WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT?

This Environmental Report (including the NTS) alongside the Natura Impact Statement are being presented for public and statutory consultation over the period 16 April to mid-day 15 June, at the same time as the draft Agri-Food Strategy to 2030 Consultation Document.

The Environmental Report can be viewed here:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/consultation/bd894-public-consultation-on-the-environmental-assessment-of-the-draft-agri-food-strategy-to-2030/>

The purpose of this stage is to give the public and the Consultation Bodies an opportunity to express their opinions on the findings of the Environmental Report, and to use it as a reference point in commenting on the Strategy. Once the Strategy has been adopted, an SEA Statement will be produced to provide information on how the Environmental Report and consultees' opinions were taken into account in deciding the final form of the Strategy.