

FIVE-YEAR PLAN OF ACTION SETS TARGETS TO TACKLE WASTE

A range of measures to tackle waste planning and management to move Ireland towards a circular economy under the new National Waste Policy 2020-2025, was recently announced by the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment Eamon Ryan TD.

The Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy forms part of the government's commitment in the Programme for Government to publish and start implementing a new National Waste Action Plan. This new five-year national waste policy, in giving direction to waste planning and management in Ireland over the coming years, will be followed later this year by an All of Government Circular Economy Strategy.

Under the new plan the government has set a number of targets to halve food waste by 2030, introduce a deposit-and-return scheme for plastic bottles and cans, and to ban certain single-use plastics from July 2021 and place a levy on disposable cups.

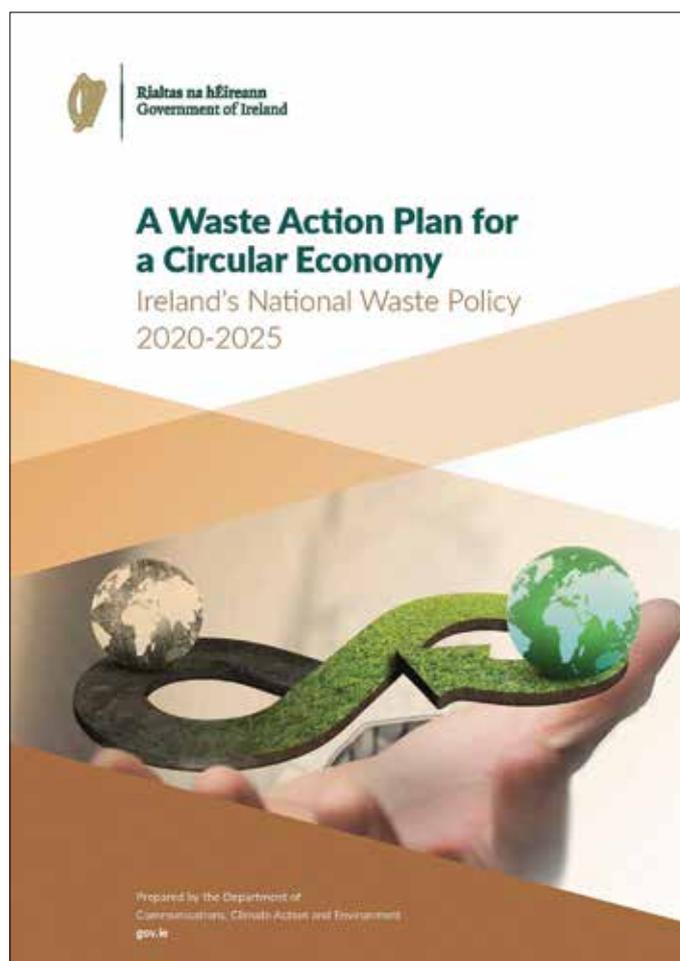
Other measures include applying green criteria and circular economy principles in all public procurement, a waste recovery levy to encourage recycling, and ensuring all packaging is reusable or recyclable by 2030.

CLIMATE TARGETS

On announcing the Waste Action Plan on 4 September, Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment Eamon Ryan said that a transition to a circular economy offers Ireland the possibility of a sustainable alternative future, adding that it was a fundamental step towards achieving climate targets.

"This action-focused plan will place Ireland at the vanguard of EU efforts. This new policy will require us to move beyond a position of merely managing waste, to one where we question our use of resources and materials, how to reconsider product design to reduce waste generation and extend the productive life of the goods and products that are used."

Minister Ryan added "We all know that our current model of production and consumption is unsustainable in terms of resource use, waste disposal, climate change and loss of biodiversity. What we need to do is rethink our relationship with our stuff – how we produce it, use it and dispose of it. This plan sets out how we will go about that in a way that benefits people and planet."



The Waste Action plan outlines a range of new measures to tackle waste planning and management in Ireland.

OVERARCHING OBJECTIVES

- To shift the focus away from waste disposal and treatment to ensure that materials and products remain in productive use for longer, thereby preventing waste and supporting re-use through a policy framework that discourages wasting resources and rewards circularity;
- To make producers who manufacture and sell disposable goods for profit environmentally accountable for the products they place on the market;
- To ensure that measures support sustainable economic models (e.g. by supporting the use of recycled over original materials);
- To harness the reach and influence of all sectors including

WASTE ACTION PLAN



The plan is a fundamental step towards achieving climate targets, according to Eamon Ryan TD, Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

the voluntary sector, R&D, producers/manufacturers, regulatory bodies, civic society;

- To support clear and robust institutional arrangements for the waste sector, including through a strengthened role for local authorities.

Some of the measures can be implemented immediately, while others will require legislative or institutional change.

The Minister recently signed three Regulations transposing EU Directives, which will form the legislative foundation for Circular Economy provisions, while a new Waste Management (Circular Economy) Bill will be introduced for national measures. The work of the cross-sectoral Waste Advisory Group which has assisted in developing this plan will move now towards supporting its implementation.

KEY TARGETS OF ACTION PLAN

Households and Businesses

- Recycling targets for waste collectors.
- Standardised bin colours across the State: green for recycling, brown for organic waste and black for residual.
- Environmental levies – for waste recovery and single use coffee cups to encourage recycling and reuse.
- Waste oversight body to manage consumer rights.
- Education and awareness campaign to improve waste segregation.

Food Waste

- Halve food waste by 2030
- Sustainable food waste management options for all homes and businesses
- Waste segregation infrastructure for apartment dwellers

Plastic, Packaging and Single Use Plastic (SUP)

- Deposit and return scheme for plastic bottles and aluminium cans
- Single Use Plastics ban, including cotton bud sticks, cutlery, plates, stirrers, chopsticks, straws, polystyrene containers and oxo-degradable plastic products from July 2021.
- Commitment to ban further products such as (but not limited to) Wet wipes (non-medical); SUP hotel toiletries; SUP sugar/sauce/mayonnaise etc. items.
- Reduce number of SUPs being placed on the market by 2026

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)

- Mandatory EPR for all packaging producers before 2024 EU deadline

FACTS AND FIGURES AT A GLANCE...

- At current rates of consumption Ireland will need three planet earths to meet resource needs by 2050.
- 200 million coffee cups are disposed of in Ireland every year; this equates to six every second.
- In 2016 Ireland produced 15 million tonnes of waste, equating to 3.2 tonnes for every man, woman and child in the State.
- Ireland wastes one million tonnes of food annually, costing the average household €700 every year.
- Between 1996 and 2012 it has been estimated that the amount of clothes purchased in the EU per person increased by 40%. However, more than 30% of clothes have not been worn for at least one year.
- In 2018 an EPA report found that approximately 70% of all waste in residual bins from the commercial sector could potentially be diverted to either recycling or brown bins.



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- Producers liable for eco modulation of fees
- All packaging reusable or recyclable by 2030

Construction and Demolition Waste

- Revision of the 2006 Best Practice Guidelines for C&D waste
- Streamline by-product notification and end-of-waste decision making processes
- Working group to develop national end-of-waste applications for priority waste streams
- Textiles
- Textile action group to explore options to improve future circularity in textiles
- Work with Irish designers and retailers to promote eco-design for clothing and textiles
- Consider global impacts of the international trade in used textiles

Treatment

- Review State support for development of recycling infrastructure
- Examine legislation and procedures for development of waste management infrastructure
- Standardise waste streams accepted at civic amenity sites

Enforcement

- Expanded role for WERLAs to address priority waste enforcement challenges
- Unauthorised sites action plan and anti-dumping toolkit
- Fixed penalty notices for breaches of waste law
- Government Leadership on Circular Economy
- High level All of Government Circular Economy Strategy
- Take the necessary steps to include green criteria and circular economy principles in all public procurement.
- Develop Circular Economy Sectoral Roadmaps
- Explore how Ireland's digital sector can accelerate transition to a circular economy.

This new circular economy will present opportunities in job creation and long-term sustainability. "Every sector, household, business and organisation across Ireland has a role to play in the transition to a circular economy.

"Through increased awareness, better-informed consumption decisions and buy-in to a shared responsibility, Ireland can become a leader in delivering environmental, social and economic benefits," noted the Minister.

WASTE PLAN WELCOMED BY ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS

Environmental groups – VOICE and the Conscious Cup Campaign – have welcomed the Government's new Waste Action Plan and its focus on waste prevention and the circular economy.

Mindy O'Brien, Co-ordinator of VOICE and member of the National Waste Advisory Group stated: "We applaud the collaborative approach taken by the Department to listen and discuss the views put forward by a wide group of stakeholders, and we look forward to further collaboration in the implementation of this action plan. We must ensure that many of the aspirational aspects of this plan come to fruition."

Many of the policy measures outlined in this action plan are designed to redefine how we look at resource use and waste, embracing a circular approach and investigating how to prevent waste at the beginning rather than building disposal systems to get rid of the waste at the product's end.

O'Brien continued: "We must design out waste and change current business models. The existing extract, consume and dispose consumption model has been revealed to be the cause of many of our environmental troubles, poisoning our oceans with plastics and harming developing countries living with the legacy of plastic mountains, contaminated water and polluted air.

"We cannot continue to consume as if the earth has unlimited natural resources. Some businesses have shown great leadership but the majority of businesses will only change their manufacturing and operating systems when faced with strong government policy."

The new waste action plan's many actions embrace sustainable production and consumption and the objectives set out in Sustainable Development Goal 12. Sorcha Kavanagh, Co-ordinator of the Conscious Cup Campaign and a member of the National Waste Advisory Group, welcomed the levy on single use cups.

The environmental campaign group has also welcomed the following actions and is urging their quick implementation:

- The establishment of a Deposit Refund Scheme for plastic bottles and cans to reduce the amount of litter found on streets, beaches and in the marine environment and to meet the mandatory 90% collection rate for plastic bottles as set out in the EU Single Use Plastic Directive;
- The imposition of a latte levy as an economic incentive to encourage the take up and use of reusable cups, thus reducing the 200+ million disposable cups used in Ireland each year;
- The future adoption of levies on 'to go' food containers to reduce the amount of unsustainable packaging used in this country and to pivot towards a new way of doing business, using more reusable and sustainable options;
- Extending the ban of single use plastic items to include disposable coffee cups, condiment sachets and wet wipes, which are more and more often found littered on beaches and rivers.

