



An Roinn Cultúir,
Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta
Department of Culture,
Heritage and the Gaeltacht

Achieving good outcomes for biodiversity - the role of ecological assessment

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Conservation Approaches to Benefit Biodiversity: Big Ideas for Big Challenges

Overview



- NPWS Ecological Assessment Unit
- Some context
- Good outcomes for biodiversity
- Ecological Assessment – towards better assessment
- Current NPWS initiatives



Poll



- Are you an ecologist, environmental professional, planner, other?
- Do you work in the private or public sector?





National Parks and Wildlife Service Ecological Assessment Unit

- Advising on the implications of proposed plans and projects for nature conservation
- Advising in relation to ecological assessment and its application
- Advising in relation to conservation management
- Developing guidance in relation to ecological assessment and related matters





Our Divisions and Regions



Northern Division

Cameron Clotworthy, Emmett Johnston

Southern Division

Brian Duffy, Jervis Good

Western Division

Susan Callaghan, Julie Fossitt

Eastern Division

Terry Doherty, Ciara Flynn

Head Office

Annette Lynch, Enda Mullen

Gerry Clabby, Kelly Muldoon



Some context

- NPWS role in relation to development proposals where nature conservation issues and concerns arise
- Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht receives statutory referrals in relation to a variety of consents (e.g. planning, forestry, foreshore)
- Minister is also consulted under the EC (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011 in relation to appropriate assessment for public authority projects outside the planning and related codes
- NPWS also receives a variety of other requests for consultation (e.g. pre-application consultation)
- In 2019 the Department received over 10,000 referrals under all headings

Good outcomes for biodiversity

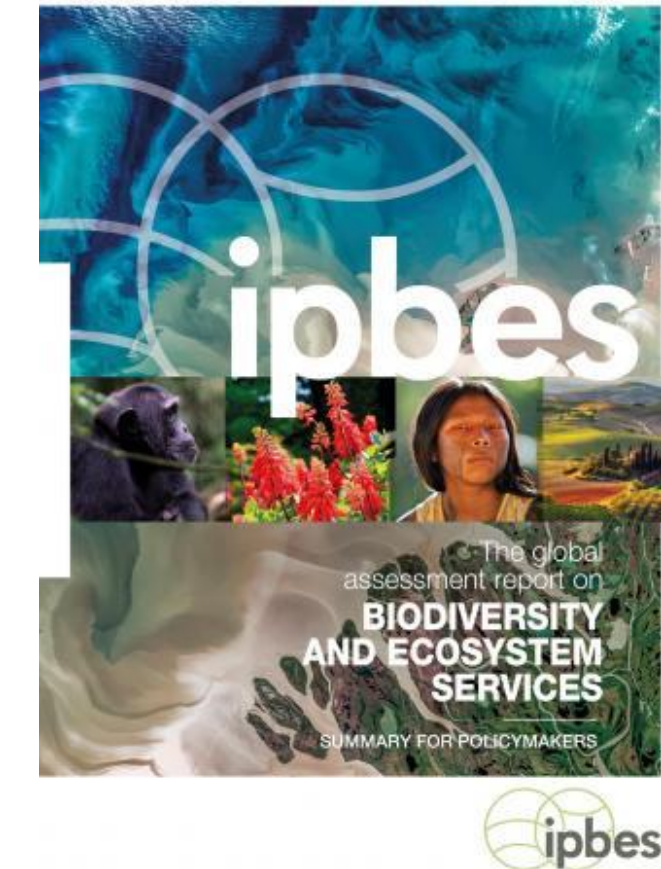


Biodiversity is protected, restored, enhanced

IPBES 2019, SOER 2020, EU Biodiversity Strategy 2011-2020, National Biodiversity Plan 2017-2021

Generate positive engagement with stakeholders

Increasing understanding and buy-in



Ecological Assessment



Part of good decision-making for biodiversity

- *in relation to development*
- *in underpinning conservation management*



Key role for professional ecologists



Towards better assessment

Understanding legislative, policy and administrative frameworks

- *Differences between Northern Ireland and Ireland*
- *Requirements of different types of assessment – EIA or AA*
- *Ensuring clients understand the context clearly*

Ensuring ecologists are involved early in project lifecycle

- *CIEEM Preliminary Ecological Appraisal may be useful here*

Scientifically rigorous and transparent approach is essential

- *cf CIEEM Guidelines for EcIA*

Towards better assessment



Focusing on potential impacts, significant effects

- *Desk studies - make use of NPWS data request facility*
- *Field survey – ensure timing and effort appropriate*
- *Report pathways which may give rise to potential impacts*
- *Assessment of potential impacts to predict effects and understand significance*
- *Lodge data with National Biodiversity Data Centre*



Mitigation Measures

- *Clarity in relation to intention, design, detail, implementation, timelines*
- *Ensuring client understands and is committed to delivery of mitigation measures*
- *For large projects - Environmental Management Plan, ECoW*

Monitoring

- *Clarity in relation to timing, detail, delivery, implementation*
- *Clarity in relation to remediation*



Some challenges for us



- Number of referrals received
- More focus on inputs to plans – Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, City/County Development Plans
- Number of large or complex development proposals received
- Consistency of response
- Proactive engagement with stakeholders
- Ongoing changes in legislative, policy and administrative frameworks



Current initiatives



Better engagement

- *National Appropriate Assessment Forum*
- *Engagement with key stakeholders (e.g. ABP, OPR, CIEEM, IPI, BWI)*

Inputs to plans and programmes. For example

- *National Marine Planning Framework*
- *National Broadband Plan*
- *More focus on city/county development plans*

Guidance

- *Guidance for public authorities in relation to Article 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive*
- *Guidance on the assessment of atmospheric N deposition (incl. ammonia)*

Conclusions



- Ecological assessment at the heart of good outcomes for biodiversity
- Continue to improve assessment
 - *Early involvement in project design*
 - *Mitigation and monitoring a key focus*
- NPWS working to improve capacity in relation to responses, engagement, guidance
- We need to work together (e.g EclA checklist)