



# Annual Report 2015

## CONTENTS

Introduction.....	pg 3
Patrons.....	pg 3
Directors.....	pg 3
Mission Statement.....	pg 3
Objectives.....	pg 3
2015 Overview.....	pg 4
Campaigns.....	pg 5
Food Waste.....	pg 5
Waste.....	pg 6
Water.....	pg 6
Environmental Pillar/ Irish Environmental Network.....	pg 7
Media and Press.....	pg 7

## **Introduction**

Established in 1997, VOICE is a registered charity supported by public membership, donations and bequests.

## **Patrons**

Darina Allen  
Pauline Bewick  
Don Conroy  
Christy Moore  
John Feehan  
Brendan Kennelly  
Sr. Mary Minehan

## **Directors**

Dr. Ruth McGrath (Chair)  
Brendan Bartley  
Gay Brabazon  
Gary Clare  
Ken Kilbride  
Michael O'Dwyer

## **Vision:**

Promoting the wise use of natural resources for a sustainable future.

## **Mission Statement**

VOICE promotes a respectful relationship with the Earth by encouraging a way of life in harmony with nature rather than in conflict with it.

## **Objectives**

VOICE strives to achieve this mission by:

- Informing the public on environmental policy/issues
- Empowering individuals and local communities to become environmentally active to protect Ireland's resources.
- Advocating on behalf of our members to influence policy and practice with government and other stakeholders.

## An Overview of 2015

VOICE's work on food waste continued successfully primarily through our Food Rescue events. Thus far, we have held 12 such events (one last year and eleven this year). Each event has been different according to the local champions and the resources devoted to it. We have had full meals, tastings, cooking demonstrations, composting demonstrations/information, school involvement, talks, screenings, vegetable seed planting and ugly food give-aways. The common theme was to educate about the enormous impact food waste has on the environment and on our society and to have a fun event around this public awareness. The size of the events ranged from 25-150 people attending, but the message was well received and we signed up many new supporters to receive our newsletters.

We reached all corners of the island, including: Dublin, Leitrim, Waterford, Carlow, Cork, Fingal, Wicklow, Sligo and Kerry. Some of the events were in conjunction with existing food festivals and others were stand-alone events.

We have also made valuable connections with existing local and national groups, including Tidy Towns, GIY groups, the Slow Food movement, Transition Town groups and the Irish Countrywomen Association (ICA).

### Staffing:

We have brought on board a new part-time bookkeeper (on contract), Azarah Minihan, to handle our accounts. She started out as a JobBridge intern, helping out with food rescue and other issues as they came up. We have other individuals helping as volunteers:

Niamh Madden: Newsletter  
 Lorna O'Driscoll: Food Rescue pack and project management  
 Liz Evers, who worked on our website  
 Jonathan Forsythe: Accounts  
 Eamonn Fox, Research on Anaerobic Digestion  
 Dave Brooks, Food Rescue

### Governance:

The Board has completed its work on its governance handbook and it has been accepted by the Governance Code office. Our Coordinator and Chair attended a governance workshop conducted by the Wheel at the Department of Agriculture. To protect our membership data, old membership forms and personal information was professionally shredded and our Microsoft Access data has been uploaded to the cloud to backup this information. In fact, all our documents have been uploaded onto the Microsoft 365 cloud-based server. We have also signed up for on-line banking with the Bank of Ireland. The Board has also approved the Fundraising Principles and we intend to adopt the ICTR principles.

### Funding:

Irish Environmental Network/Environmental Pillar:

VOICE received funding from the IEN in various forms:

Core funding	€14,087
Meetings attended in 2014	€2,100
Meetings attended in 2015	€2,000
Resource Efficiency working group (2014-5)	€1,849
Submissions 2014	€110
Total to date:	€20,146

#### Local Agenda 21:

VOICE received €6,370 for 2014-15 Food Rescue events and for 2015-16 events (partial payment). We are owed €1,060 from Waterford County Council for work done under the 2014/15 round.

#### Membership:

Our membership numbers continue to reduce slightly each year. However, we received €9,600 from our members both in membership and in donations. We received a €6,000 will bequest this year as well.

#### An Post Study:

We received €1,951 from the an Post study

We also attended a training session on legacy fundraising.

#### **Campaigns:**

##### Food Waste:

#### ***Education and Presentations:***

Our Coordinator has made presentations to two secondary school transition year students (Our Ladies in Rathfarnham and Howth students) on food waste and recycling.

Our Coordinator travelled to Ballymaloe where she made a presentation on food waste before the West Cork Slow Food Convivium.

Two national schools are using our food waste reduction challenge school packs in Sligo town and Corduff, Co. Fingal. Both these events were very successful. I have submitted an article to be printed in the INTO magazine, InTouch.

Our coordinator made a presentation before the ICA Portmarnock Guild.

#### ***Food Rescue:***

I have been working with Lorna O'Driscoll, who is the volunteer project manager for the Food Rescue pack and Azarah Minihan, who organised many of the events. We organised events in Clonakilty (stand-alone event), at the West Waterford Festival of Food, Ballon, Co. Carlow Food Rescue and Scarecrow Festival, Lough Rynn Castle, Co. Leitrim (stand-alone event), Dublin Slow Food (stand-alone event), Flavours of Fingal, Taste of Wicklow, Dunmore East Food Festival, Rush GIY Harvest Festival, Dingle Festival of Food and St. Mary's School in Corduff. Our website has many blogs on these various events.

#### ***Food Waste Reduction Network:***

We have met with IBEC, Business in the Community (BITC) and Dee Laffan about putting this together. There haven't been enough resources to pursue this effectively.

#### Waste:

***Regional Waste Management Plans:***

Our coordinator, Mindy O'Brien, sat on the government's advisory group to the Regional Waste Management Plans. She also drafted the Environmental Pillar's response to the regional waste management plans consultation document.

***Deposit Refund Scheme Pilot:***

VOICE is still pursuing this and has met with the Eastern Midland's Waste Management manager, Hugh Coughlin, and he is receptive to the idea of a pilot. VOICE needs to cost the price of implementation and identify a potential community. We need to identify potential funding sources as well.

***Waste Prevention Advisory Committee:***

Mindy O'Brien has been selected as the environmental representative to sit on this committee.

***Zero Waste Community Pilot:***

VOICE has developed a zero waste community pilot proposal, which was picked up by the Southern Waste Management Region. Our Coordinator is working with Pauline McDonogh to identify a potential community to work with. We have met with representatives from Kilkenny town, Cashel and Cobh. Cashel looks most promising and we are pursuing funding for this pilot. Mindy met with Minister Alan Kelly with the IEN and mentioned this project. The Department has indicated that it would provide €11,000 in 2016 for the pilot, subject to Minister's approval. We have met with the Green Enterprise fund administrator to see if we can get funding for this and received a positive reception.

***EEB:***

VOICE continues to be an active member of the waste working group within the EEB. We have not been active in the water working group. We have participated in an incineration webinar and a deposit refund scheme e-conference. Most communications are done through email, but our coordinator hopes to attend the waste working group meeting next year.

***Environmental Pillar Resource Efficiency Working Group:***

VOICE organised and set up the Resource Efficiency Working Group within the Pillar. We have held one meeting. Many of our members are not active and much of the policy work is done by VOICE. In addition to the waste management plans submission, we are drafting a position on anaerobic digestion.

Water:

***Irish Water Stakeholders Forum:***

VOICE has been a vocal participant in the Stakeholder's Forum, which has representatives from all sectors. We are there as a SWAN member. The forum seems to be fairly toothless and may just tick the public participation box. VOICE has attended two meetings. We met with the staff of Irish Water on source water protection with SWAN.

VOICE also submitted its views on Irish Water's 25-year Strategic Management Plan.

Our Coordinator was nominated by SWAN and the Environmental Pillar as the environmental representative to the Commission on Energy Regulation (CER) public participation forum. Mindy has been accepted as the environmental representative and has attended one meeting.

### ***Investigation into local authority monitoring and enforcement of water regulations:***

VOICE has reignited its water campaign by sending out an Access to Information on the Environment request to all local authorities. This request asks Local Authorities how well they are monitoring local discharge licenses and how well resourced will they be once many of their employees have moved over to Irish Water. We asked a series of around 20 questions. Responses have come in from all but four authorities. Azarah Minihan compiled the information and drafted the report. We have found that the treatment of section 4 licenses throughout the local authorities to be inconsistent and that many authorities feel that they do not have the adequate manpower or resources to effectively monitor and enforce such licenses. We are putting together the final touches to this report.

Our Coordinator went to the EPA Water Conference in Galway, where much of the focus was on the implementation of the Water Framework Directive and a bit on Irish Water. She attended the preliminary meeting on the Significant Water Management Issues (SWMI) before the draft report was released. She submitted comments on this draft.

She also attended several SWAN board meetings and plenary meetings as well as participated in the reviewing of the Fracking research commissioned by SWAN. The fracking study is underway and has taken much more time than originally anticipated. She has been elected as the Vice Chair of SWAN.

### **Conferences, government meetings:**

Mindy O'Brien attended the Water Conference in Galway, EPA environmental conference in Croke Park, UCD conference on Food Waste, , numerous Irish Water Stakeholders Forum meetings, two meetings of the Regional Waste Management Plan Advisory Council, the SMILE Exchange conference and the Public Water Forum.

### **Environmental Pillar:**

Mindy was elected as a steering committee member of the Pillar and as such has attended four meetings. She has also attended four plenary meetings, a resource efficiency working group meetings, media training and a working group convenor's meeting.

As a steering committee member, our Coordinator has attended numerous government-level meetings, including: EU Commission meeting and An Taoiseach's office meeting on the CSR Semester programme, Our Sustainable Future, the National Economic Dialogue, Department of Finance meeting, Sustainable Development Goals workshop (and made a presentation on sustainable consumption) and meetings with various political parties about their election manifestos.

Work within the Pillar has taken up more and more time as Mindy has to review a plethora of policy position papers and policies and press releases.

### **Irish Environmental Network:**

Our Coordinator attended and participated in two EPA meetings on issues of concern to the network. She has now been elected as a Director.

### **Social Media, Newsletters, Website and Messaging:**

We have posted 11 blogs, sent out 2 e-newsletters and sent out our Summer and Winter 2015 newsletters. We are active on Twitter and have increased our followers from 1,400 to nearly 1,800 and a little less so on Facebook, although we have 882 likes.

Our website has been updated and looks well.

**Press and Media:**

VOICE's Clonakilty food rescue event was featured in the Irish Times and our other food rescue events were written up in local papers. Our Coordinator was interviewed on Spin Radio and Near FM on Food Rescue. She was also featured in Duncan Stewart's EcoEye Programme on Waste. Lastly she was interviewed on Kildare Radio on Irish Water's First Fix Free programme responding to her letter to the editor in the Irish Times on the First Fix Free programme.