

National Planning Framework Submission

Background: We make this brief submission in the context of our having delivered *Public Engagement on Aquatic and Biodiversity* issues in communities throughout Ireland north and south over the past 28 years.

Regretfully, we don't have the capacity to respond to the many thoughtful questions which are posed in the context of each Section. However, we welcome the consultation, congratulate the Minister and the Department upon the initiative, and wish to note the following general points:

- 1) All too often day-to-day governance is comprised of 'fire-fighting', responding to media or public outcry at some (transient) failure, oversight, or shortcoming; whereas, the mark of an enlightened society is surely its ability to look ahead, anticipate the community's needs, and determine a course of action which will achieve objectives. This current exercise in itself is consistent with this ideal, and in encouraging public participation in the process it does so in the spirit of Aarhus ideals; we consider this effort highly commendable.
- 2) When considering a long-term planning framework, we may be tempted to think in terms of a 'nuts and bolts' approach which strives to anticipate the 'Infrastructural' needs alone, e.g., *transport, water and waste water, communications*, etc.

Our contention, and the core of our submission, would be to legislate for education of users, to incorporate 'mindful utilisation' of wide Infrastructure, as part and parcel of the implementation of that Infrastructure.

We quote from EPA Report 155, "Public Engagement in Integrated Catchment Management: StreamScapes Recommendations", which we were commissioned to produce in 2015; this refers to public utilisation of water / waste water systems, but we believe that the sentiments expressed hold relevance to wider 'Infrastructure' :

"A further component in the development of the StreamScapes ethos was a perception that there was a deficit in information and awareness in terms of the use of 'best-practice' principles in people's pursuit of livelihood, recreation and domestic management in terms of water, and concern about the resultant impact that this had upon local water quality, habitats, species and ecological processes...this led to deliberations that could inform how this problem could be addressed, producing the proposed neologism: 'Ultrastructure'.

The concept of 'Ultrastructure' is related to an idea posited by the French Jesuit and palaeontologist/geologist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, of '*noosphere*'⁶, the growing sense of mind or '*mindfulness*' which overlays and potentially influences human behaviours (and the far-reaching impacts which these behaviours have).

For StreamScapes, Ultrastructure sums up a state of mind, an attitude – conveying a sense of cultured awareness of the value and purpose of the *infrastructure* being used. It implies a sense of conscious stewardship. An example used in the StreamScapes awareness-raising programmes of the imposition of ‘ultrastructure’ on infrastructure is in the area of sewage treatment. Whether discharging to a septic tank or community-treatment plant, individuals have the capacity to limit the efficacy of these systems (and unleash a chain reaction of downstream environmental damage) by what they may (sometimes mindlessly) pour down sinks and toilets. Examples of harmful agents include toxins found in a wide range of common household products (such as paints, disused pharmaceuticals, cleaning agents, etc.). Provision of *ultrastructure* ensures that users are aware of ‘best practice’ in relation to their discharges and that this then translates into a minimisation of potential impacts. This constitutes an intrinsic foundation of StreamScapes development: to identify imaginative means of propagating awareness of the value of high-status aquatic and biodiversity assets, and to equip citizens with the necessary ‘best-practice’ principles to minimise their impacts upon these assets.”

Hence we submit that manifold means must be identified, whether through schools’ curriculum, ‘best-practice’ leaflets, etc., to ensure users’ enlightened utilisation of all Infrastructural provision in the coming years.

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