



Restructured National Biodiversity Data Centre to strengthen State's ability to confront biodiversity challenges

Chairperson and board announced

13 DECEMBER 2022

Minister of State for Heritage and Electoral Reform at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Malcolm Noonan TD, has today (13.12.22) announced the new governance and structures for the National Biodiversity Data Centre as a company limited by guarantee (NBDC CLG). Minister Noonan also announced the new Chairperson and board of the NBDC CLG.

Commenting, the Minister said: "The Programme for Government committed to supporting biodiversity data collection, and at the UN Biodiversity Conference COP15 in Montreal this week, we're hearing international calls for countries to ensure that biodiversity data is available and accessible to decision-makers, practitioners and the public. We also know from our own experience the enormous value that the citizen science initiatives the National Biodiversity Data Centre is so well known for can provide, both for nature and for people. This is why today's announcement of the establishment of the NBDC as a company limited by guarantee (CLG) is so significant, in that it will be empowered and resourced to better support Ireland's collective national effort to reverse biodiversity loss as we embark on a new era of restoration."

The new company is subject to oversight by the Heritage Council and replaces the previous structure of a contract for services, which lacked the necessary governance and flexibility to support Ireland to meet its biodiversity challenges.

"I am delighted that John McCarthy has accepted the role of inaugural Chairperson of the Board of Directors of the NBDC CLG," Minister Noonan added. "As former Secretary General of the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, his public service experience will be invaluable in establishing the company within the heritage infrastructure. I wish to thank him and the newly appointed board members, who will serve in a voluntary capacity. I also want to commend the determination of Martina Moloney and Virginia Teehan, Chairperson and CEO of the Heritage Council,

and Niall O'Donnchu, Director General of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, whose work has been central to the establishment of the NBDC CLG. It was a complex challenge which was delivered on time and in budget, due in large part to their diligence and commitment.”

Originally established in 2006 as a programme of the Heritage Council to collect and manage data on Ireland's biodiversity, the NBDC has grown in scope, including tracking invasive species, supporting pollinator programmes, compiling biodiversity data from multiple sources and making it freely available on-line, and engaging in citizen-science initiatives.

Having played a central role in this growth, the Heritage Council was well positioned to recognise the opportunities that a refocused NBDC could explore. It set in motion a lengthy and complex restructuring process culminating in today's announcement which will see the country's biodiversity needs better served by a more appropriate entity.

Inaugural Chairperson of the NBDC CLG Board of Directors John McCarthy said: “I look forward to working with my fellow directors and with all colleagues in the NBDC to tackle head on the challenges that await. This is an exciting time for the NBDC and I am honoured to be able to play my part. The restructuring will enable the acceleration of our biodiversity recovery and we will work with a range of partners to fulfil our objectives. I am also grateful that the NBDC CLG will maintain the considerable expertise from the previous NBDC structure, and as the Board, we will do our best to support them.”

Chairperson of the Heritage Council, Dr Martina Moloney added: “The incorporation of the National Biodiversity Data Centre as a company limited by guarantee (NBDC CLG) marks a very significant step change in how Ireland addresses biodiversity loss. Stemming biodiversity loss and recovering our biodiversity requires long-term planning, multi-annual resourcing and robust governance, which will be provided by the NBDC CLG.

“The challenge no longer lies only with our committed conservation community, but with every person, every community, and every sector in this State. Building on the Heritage Council's record on nature protection insofar as it relates to national heritage, we believe the NBDC CLG provides the necessary independence, foundations, structure and flexibility to satisfy the national appetite to restore our biodiversity.”

Commenting on the announcement, chief executive of the Heritage Council, Virginia Teehan said: “Despite the biodiversity challenge, there is now a sense of optimism that we in Ireland can rise to this challenge. Nature sustains us. We, in turn, need to sustain it.

“The NBDC CLG will be up and running on 1st January 2023. For the first time, this will allow us implement a long-term sustainable strategy to address biodiversity loss.”

Minister of State in the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine, Senator Pippa Hackett expressed her commitment to this development of the National Biodiversity Data Centre:

“This will allow my department build on its existing relationship with the Centre and it will allow it to work directly with my department to deliver biodiversity monitoring programmes on farmland, including for the Common Agriculture Policy”.

ENDS

Media Contact

CEO of the Heritage Council Virginia Teehan is available for interview. Please contact Pearse Ó Caoimh to arrange.

e. pocaoimh@heritagecouncil.ie

t. 085 859 0378

A video featuring Minister Noonan announcing the news available [here](#).

Notes to Editors

Background

The National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) was established in 2006 as a programme of the Heritage Council with the purpose of collecting and managing data on Ireland’s biodiversity. The NBDC is an important State resource, supporting ongoing monitoring and protection of the Island’s natural environment and its changes over time, providing data and information to Government, agencies, academics and the public.

2019 review

An independent evaluation into the current governance arrangements supporting the NBDC was commissioned by the Heritage Council in 2019. Following the review, a Taskforce was set up to advise on the optimal scope, structure, and future governance for any successor to the current arrangements.

It concluded that the establishment of a CLG would provide the necessary independence, flexibility, and accountability to resolve many of the governance risks associated with the present structure.

Establishment of CLG

In July 2022 the cabinet approved a proposal made by Minister Darragh O’Brien to establish a CLG to deliver the services of the NBDC programme, within the following legal framework:

- Two members and two directors to be nominated by the Minister for Housing, Local Government, and Heritage
- One member and five directors (two of which are required to be subject experts), including the Chairperson, to be nominated by the Heritage Council
- One member and two directors to be nominated by the Minister for Agriculture, Food, and the Marine
- One member and one director to be nominated by the Minister for Environment, Climate Change, and Communications.

The directors will be responsible for setting out the company's strategic plan, establishing and managing the company's system of internal control, directing its resources, and ensuring compliance with the various legal and regulatory requirements which will apply to the company.

The members represent the interests of the relevant body nominating them in the oversight of the company, similar to the role that shareholders have in commercial companies.

Full list of appointees below

The NBDC will continue to be based at its current headquarters on the campus of University of the South East in Waterford. The delivery of the NBDC programme is currently sub-contracted to Compass Informatics.

The new company will be led by Dr Liam Lysaght, CEO. The staff employed by Compass Informatics for the delivery of the programme will transition into the new Company.

Directors of NBDC CLG

John McCarthy, Chairperson (Heritage Council Nominee)

John McCarthy is a former Secretary General of the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (2014 – 2020) and has worked in a range of capacities across Government including the Department of Social Protection and the Department of Finance.

He currently holds a number of non-Executive positions, including serving as Chair of the Management Board of the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management and as a member of the Board of the Approved Housing Bodies Regulatory Authority.

Geraldine Tallon (Heritage Council Nominee)

Geraldine Tallon is a former Civil Servant, who worked in many different roles in the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, retiring as Secretary General of the Department in 2014.

Since her retirement, she has undertaken a number of voluntary roles, including chairing the Taskforce on the future of the National Biodiversity Data Centre.

Colette Byrne (Heritage Council Nominee)

Colette Byrne is a former Chief Executive with Kilkenny County Council, having also served as Chief Executive in Offaly County Council. She has worked across all areas of Local Government services with urban and rural authorities and has a particular interest in provision of amenities, regeneration and repurposing of old buildings.

She has held many national roles and worked on behalf of the Local Authority Sector on the transition of water services to Irish Water in 2014.

Professor Yvonne Buckley (Heritage Council Nominee)

Professor Yvonne Buckley is the Professor of Zoology at Trinity College Dublin, a Member of the Royal Irish Academy and Academia Europaea, an Irish Research Council Laureate and was awarded the British Ecological Society President's medal (2021) and BES award (2022). She has highly cited papers in ecology, zoology, botany and agricultural sciences.

She is an ecologist with expertise in environmental decision making, natural capital management and population ecology. She co-directs Nature+, the Trinity Centre for Biodiversity and Sustainable Nature-based Solutions, and leads a team of researchers and students seeking to understand the fundamental drivers of animal and plant population processes in a rapidly changing world.

Dr James Moran (Heritage Council Nominee)

Dr James Moran is a senior lecturer in Biology and Ecology in the Department of Natural Resources and the Environment at the Atlantic Technological University, Galway where he teaches on environment and agriculture related programmes. He leads the Agro-ecology and Rural Development (ARD) research group.

James has worked in the applied ecology and agri-environmental management area for over 20 years as an advisor, researcher and academic, and concentrates on sustainable agricultural systems with a particular focus on the Common Agriculture Policy and improving agri-environment policy and practice.

Ciara Carbery (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage Nominee)

Ciara Carbery is Director of Nature Conservation with the National Parks and Wildlife Service. A senior civil servant with extensive experience in policymaking, legislation and governance, Ciara holds primary and postgraduate degrees in Botany and Environmental Science from Trinity College Dublin.

Máire Ní Bhraonáin (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage Nominee)

Máire Ní Bhraonáin is CEO of the Acorn Project, a non-profit organisation delivering nature based learning and wellbeing programmes that empower communities to take action in ecological restoration through reconnection with their local wild spaces.

Máire is an educator, forest school practitioner, herbalist, wild food forager and forest therapy guide with a background in public engagement and sociology. She leads projects in community seed saving, forest school, nature connection and place-based learning programmes.

Dr Michéal Lehane (Department of the Environment, Climate Change, and Communications Nominee)

Micheál Lehane was appointed by Government as a Director with the Environmental Protection Agency in 2016 and is currently the Director for the EPA's Office of Radiation Protection and Environmental Monitoring. Prior to being appointed Director he served in a range of senior leadership roles across the EPA and also in environmental protection & regulation in the UK.

Micheál is also the Chair of the Irish National Accreditation Board. He is a graduate of University College Cork with a PhD in Geology, holds an MBA from the University of Limerick and is a Chartered Director.

Ted Massey (Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine Nominee)

Ted Massey joined the Department of Agriculture in 2001. Since then, he has worked in a diverse range of areas within the Department. His more recent work included involvement in the CAP reform negotiations as well as co-ordinating preparation of the environmental aspects of Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan.

Earlier this year he took up his current position as Senior Inspector responsible for the Department's Nitrates and Biodiversity Division.

Dr Colm Lordan (Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine Nominee)

Dr. Colm Lordan manages the Integrated Fisheries and Ecosystems Advice section in the Marine Institute in Galway, Ireland. He has also worked with the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) for over 25 years developing fisheries and marine ecosystem assessments and advice and was vice chair of their Advisory Committee (ACOM) between 2018 and 2021.

Colm works closely with several government departments and a range of stakeholders to communicate the advice and to ensure that the scientific advice, underpinning data and evidence address their needs.