# [***Citizens' Assembly chair tells Taoiseach enacting existing laws 'would go a great distance' to reduce biodiversity loss***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:680B-TFT1-DY4H-K2JH-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

Chair of Ireland's Citizens' Assembly on ***Biodiversity*** ***Loss*** says she told Taoiseach Leo Varadkar enacting laws we already have "would go a great distance to conserving ***biodiversity*** ***loss***".

Dr Aoibhinn Ní Shúilleabháin's comment followed the launch of a report outlining 159 recommendations to help Irish people "become good ancestors" as the world first CA on the issue came to a close.

Some 99 people from across society came up with the plan to protect and restore ***biodiversity*** after hearing from scientists, landowners, NGOs and farmers in seven meetings over 10 months.

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Their final report was unveiled at a special event at the Bank of Ireland on Dublin's College Green yesterday [thurs].

Dr Ní Shúilleabháin said she has already met the Taoiseach to present what the people want.

She told us: "We had challenging conversations and he did question some of the recommendations but I think I was able to give him a synopsis of the conversations we had.

"I let him know we heard from a variety of perspectives. We had a plethora of farming associations in there, we had turf cutters in, we had fishermen in. We heard from everybody and we heard from the scientists.

"It was about bringing that conversation into a meaningful place and I think that's what the Assembly does well.

"The Taoiseach did ask what is the most impactful thing we can do first and my response was, as you see in the top recommendations, if we enact the laws that we already have, we would go a great distance to conserving ***biodiversity*** ***loss***. As one main action to focus on I think it would be very positive to see that."

The state's need to take decisive and urgent action to address ***biodiversity*** ***loss*** and protect our lands for future generations is central to the recommendations.

Citizens' also hit out at official failings that have seen laws treated as optional, policies go unrealised and inadequate funding to enforce either.

They are proposing a series of changes to the Constitution to ensure people have the right to a clean, healthy and safe environment and that nature is protected so it can continue to provide necessities including food, clean freshwater and air.

These recommendations follow a growing international trend highlighting the necessity to protect nature in order to protect humans.

Other proposals include action in specific sectors like agriculture, freshwaters, marine and coastal environments, peatlands, forestry/woodlands/hedgerows, protected sites and species, invasive species and urban and built environments.

Assembly member Dan O'Dwyer says "we should all aspire to be good ancestors to the generations that come after us".

He added: "I was delighted to be part of the 100 citizens to represent Ireland and I hope they Government take on our recommendations."

His colleague, Anca Cerbu, says she was "shocked" when she learned the facts about ***biodiversity*** ***loss***. "We have to act," she commented.

On top of proposals for change, the Assembly acknowledged the role of farmers as custodians for nature and believe agriculture must be supported to conserve and restore ***biodiversity***.

Daniel Lynam from the Irish Cattle and Sheep Farmers Association was at the launch. He told us: "Farmers are very willing... but policy doesn't go far enough. The Government needs to step up and deliver payments."

Dr Elaine McGoff from An Taisce said it was "a hopeful day".

"We talk about this all the time and nobody seems to listen but it's really nice to have 99 people who informed themselves and came to the same views that we have.

"In terms of where this goes, that remains to be seen. The report itself acknowledged that the government break all of their own laws and policies.

"This is just a report and it is not even legally binding but they do have a clear mandate now for government to step up.

"It should, if the government is willing to listen to people, put them under increased pressure and it comes at a critical time as Europe is trying to push through the Nature Restoration Law.

"Ireland has had a very wishy-washy position on that, they are going over to Europe and saying the targets are too onerous and too ambitious. But now what we are hearing... is that Irish people are clearly saying 'we want you to champion this'.

"This is not the end of the discussion -this is the very beginning."

Social Democrat, Jennifer Whitmore, said: "The people have spoken and Government must urgently respond with action."

The report is now expected to go before an Oireachtas committee.

You can read the full report at [*https://citizensassembly.ie/report-of-the-citizens-assembly-on-****biodiversity****-****loss****-report-launches*](https://citizensassembly.ie/report-of-the-citizens-assembly-on-biodiversity-loss-report-launches)/

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