# [***Coillte deal alarms Citizens' Assembly on biodiversity loss***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:67CN-4G91-DYS1-04VK-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

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The final session of the Citizens' Assembly on ***biodiversity*** ***loss*** was dominated by the controversial Coillte deal with a UK pension fund, with members expressing concerns it will lead to a sell-off of State woodlands - and undermine ***biodiversity***.

The assembly, which met in Malahide, Co Dublin, on Saturday, is set to forward 100 additional recommendations in coming days which, if adopted by the Government and the Oireachtas, will have far-reaching implications for many sectors, notably forestry and agriculture.

After a long debate on forest ownership issues, including the role of the semi-State firm Coillte, agreement was reached on the recommendation that "State-owned woodlands should be recognised and managed as a strategic long-term national asset for the benefit of the common good".

A call for the State to fundamentally reassess the Constitution and forestry legislation with a view to "ensuring ***biodiversity*** and positive ecosystem services are core objectives for Coillte" was also adopted.

The assembly has concluded its deliberations, other than to vote online in the coming days on the recommendations it finalised this weekend. Its final report will be submitted to the Oireachtas in the coming weeks.

It is clear from Saturday's proceedings, however, there is strong backing for the vast majority of its latest recommendations a sense of urgency in framing many of the recommendations improve environmental protection and address ***biodiversity*** ***loss***.

**Strong backing**

There was strong backing for the recommendation that "the National Parks & Wildlife Service, as well as bodies prescribed in legislation with regard to ***biodiversity*** and planning, including An Taisce, should be properly funded to carry out their planning and development roles".

The same went for a call for "all penalties for any breach of pollution or environmental legislation/regulations should be increased to meaningful economic levels reflecting the damage caused, plus enforcement or restoration costs, with criminal sanction where necessary".

The assembly had strong support for a call to set up a new Oireachtas committee to oversee implementation and evaluation of measures to address Ireland's ***biodiversity*** crisis.

Assembly members expressed support for a move to ensure "biodiverse positive areas and projects should be considered as an additional tool within the overall promotion of Ireland's tourism industry".

The assembly supported "urgent increases in investment by Irish Water to build new, and improve existing, water treatment plants to prevent the unacceptable discharge of raw or partially-treated sewage into any fresh or marine waters".

What is the first national citizens' assembly on ***biodiversity*** ***loss*** in the world called in November for a referendum to amend the Constitution with a view to protecting ***biodiversity***". It also recommended a radical overhaul of the national approach to managing ***biodiversity*** ***loss*** among its initial tranche of 100 recommendations.

It reconvened to finalise its recommendations on agriculture, freshwaters, marine and coastal environments, peatlands, forestry/woodlands/ hedgerows, protected sites and species, invasive species, and urban and built environments.

The assembly, which has been deliberating since May under chair Dr Aoibhinn Ní Shúilleabháin with 99 randomly-selected members of the public, heard from more than 80 speakers and received 650 submissions.

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