



Reimagining Our Waterways

10-Year Plan



CHIEF EXECUTIVE FOREWORD

When I joined Waterways Ireland, I was immediately focused on stabilising the organisation which had suffered from inadequate funding post-economic crisis and a severely under-resourced Body. There were many vacancies and many, in a term I was not overly familiar with, acting-up roles. Stabilising the organisation became one of three Strategic Challenges:

- (i) Leadership & Organisation Capacity.
- (ii) Improved Governance.
- (iii) Long-term plan development.

Since then I have reported in Business Plans and Annual Accounts our progress on the journey. As I regularly state ‘we are making slow but steady progress’. We have built a reputation for project delivery which has created a small virtuous circle of increased capital funding allocation, staff recruitment, and improved governance. It has taken longer than I anticipated, and we are not where I want us to be. That is a prompt for our third Strategic Challenge – long-term plan development.

In my immediate analysis the other obvious gap was the absence of any long-term planning other than a 3-year Corporate Plan. This hit a discordant or incongruous note for me as our assets have long economic lifecycles and we did

not have a long-term directional pathway. Clearly there was a need for a strategic vision for the organisation.

We have now been presented with a significant milestone in our planning cycle as this is the first opportunity for the Body to integrate short (Business Plan 2023), medium (Corporate Plan 2023-2025), and long-term plans (10-Year Plan).

Today we want to look to the future. We want to consider our potential. What is it we can aspire to achieve? The external and internal environments we operate within are now very different from the time of our formation. The mindset of small, incremental change is past us. We are ambitious and aspire to bigger things led by a transformative culture.

Welcome to our 10-Year Plan – our directional pathway. It sets out our strategic Vision, our Purpose, and our Values.

Waterways Ireland’s Vision is to be recognised as having enabled the creation of inspirational inland navigations and waterways experiences, through

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conservation and sustainable development for the benefit of all. In reimagining our navigations, we will continue to create value over the life of the Plan – economic, social, and environmental well-being – for the public good.

Participation by all will be at the heart of policy and decision-making within our organisation ensuring we deliver services that are accessible and inclusive. Waterways Ireland is also committed to the provision of a safe workplace, through safe work practices for all our employees and a safe environment for waterways users. We will do this by adhering to legislation and industry best practice as well as striving to continuously improve.

Welcome to our 10-Year Plan – our directional pathway. It sets out our strategic Vision, our Purpose, and our Values.



AT THE CORE OF OUR 10-YEAR PLAN IS OUR CAREFULLY CONSIDERED SET OF SIX STRATEGIC PRIORITIES. THESE ARE:

- Organisation Development & Governance.
- Sustainable Funding Model.
- Asset Portfolio Management.
- Participation and Reputation.
- Sustainable Development.
- Climate Action, Environment and Heritage.

Each has a distinct Success Statement and a set of key outputs of what it is we wish to achieve. Underpinning the 10-Year Plan and our Strategic Priorities will be the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs). The UN SDGs will provide a blueprint for the sustainable management and reimagining of our waterways. We are committed to embedding the UN SDGs within our organisation and the alignment of our works to the Goals.

Earlier I mentioned we are at a significant milestone in our planning cycle with the integration of short, medium, and long-term plans. Each has a purpose and a level of detail consistent with its purpose. In simple words, the 10-Year Plan by its nature is a high-level directional pathway. The



medium and short-term plans are operational with more granular detail on key outputs and main activities.

Our draft 10-Year Plan has been revisited following a public consultation process. I am grateful for the feedback we received from our users, partners, stakeholders, and staff. We have reflected on the many suggestions. Some have pointed to a need for clarification – a good example being the absence of a Board or the potential to expand our remit. Others have pointed to the many potential opportunities within our scope. These include greater involvement of communities and especially volunteer groups on and along navigations; deeper collaboration with sectors of common interest; and increased value creation for the public good. Some have pointed to inclusion of more detail on our most precious resource – water. We have offered clarification and expansion of narrative on these points within the Plan whilst attempting to maintain a high level, directional pathway.

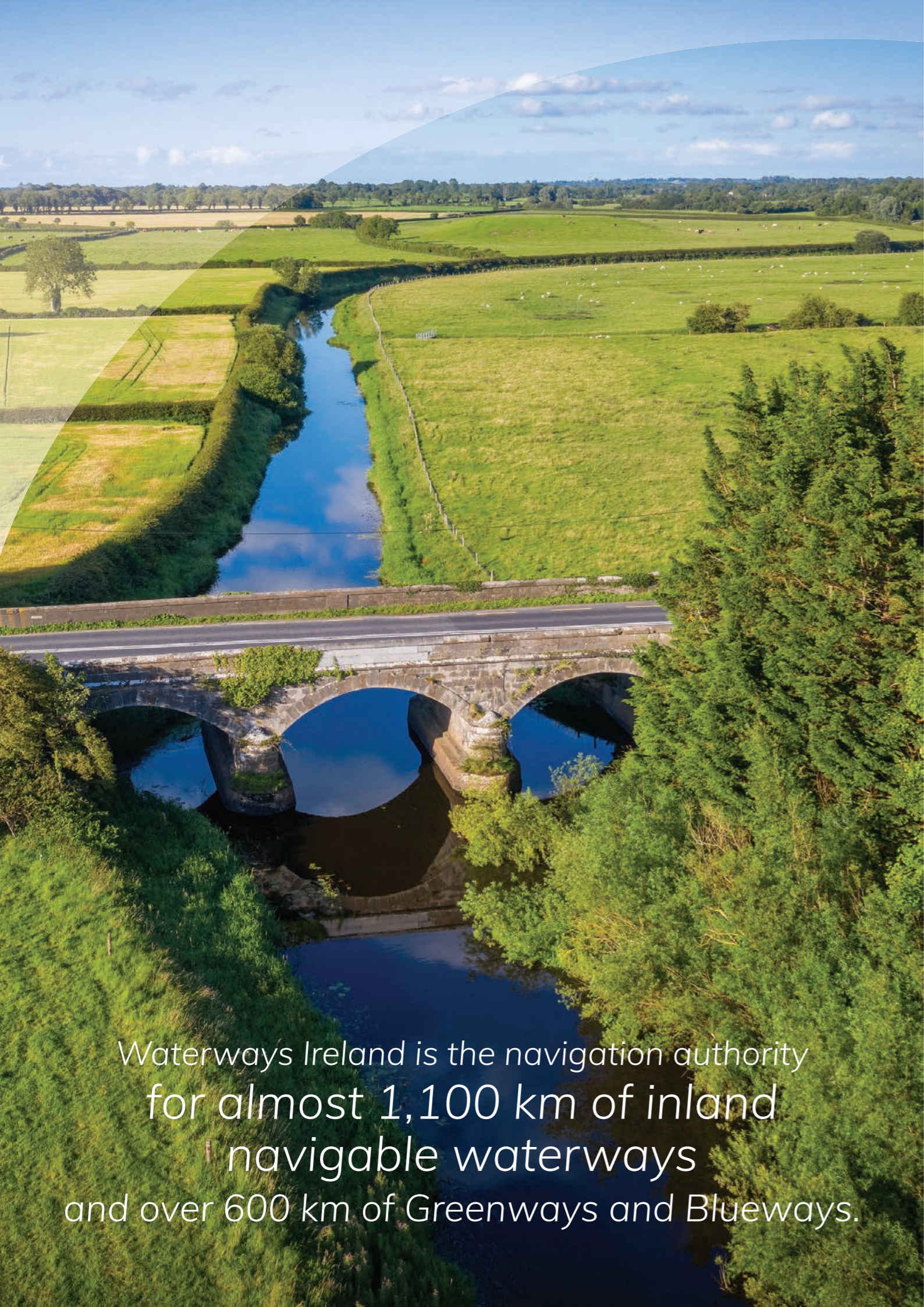
We believe that by working together, we can create a legacy of appreciation and stewardship for these vital resources. This Plan is not just about preserving the past; it is also about building a brighter future where our waterways continue to play an inspirational role in our lives.

Thank you for your ongoing support as we continue our custodianship, protecting and promoting Ireland’s inland waterways for generations to come.

John McDonagh

John McDonagh
Chief Executive Officer
Waterways Ireland





Waterways Ireland is the navigation authority for almost 1,100 km of inland navigable waterways and over 600 km of Greenways and Blueways.

ABOUT WATERWAYS IRELAND

WHO WE ARE

Waterways Ireland is a cross-border Body, the largest of six North/South Implementation Bodies created as part of the implementation of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement of 10 April 1998. The Body was formally established by the Agreement between the Government of Ireland and the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland establishing Implementation Bodies in Dublin on 8 March 1999. This Agreement was given domestic legal effect by means of the North/South Co-Operation (Implementation Bodies) (Northern Ireland) Order, 1999 and the British-Irish Agreement Act, 1999.

It is the cross-border navigational authority responsible for the management, maintenance, development, and restoration of almost 1,100 km of inland navigable waterways and over 600 km of Greenways and Blueways, principally for recreational purposes.

Waterways Ireland's Headquarters is in Enniskillen Co. Fermanagh, with regional offices in Dublin, Carrick-on-Shannon, Co. Leitrim, and Scarriff, Co. Clare.

The Body employs 350 permanent staff located at offices and sites close to the inland waterways who are assisted by a team of seasonally recruited staff reflecting the seasonality of the organisations remit.

WHAT WE DO

“... statutory function is to manage, maintain, develop and restore specified inland navigable waterways, principally for recreational purposes.”

Waterways Ireland is the navigation authority responsible for the following navigable inland waterways;

- Lower Bann Navigation
- Erne System
- Shannon-Erne Waterway
- Shannon Navigation
- Royal Canal
- Grand Canal
- Barrow Navigation
- Ulster Canal

In July 2007, it was agreed by the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) to include responsibility for the restoration of the Ulster Canal from Upper Lough Erne to Clones, and following restoration, its management, maintenance, and development, principally for recreational purposes, to Waterways Ireland's remit.

At an operational level, Waterways Ireland is responsible for a vast range of infrastructure assets including navigation channels, embankments, towpaths, adjoining lands, harbours, jetties, fishing stands, bridges, culverts, aqueducts, overflows, locks, sluices and lock houses along with buildings and archives. The current valuation of the rebuild costs of this infrastructure is estimated at €1 billion.

Waterways Ireland's work programmes are critical to providing a safe and high-quality recreational environment for customers, whilst preserving the industrial and environmental heritage of the waterways for future generations.

IRELAND'S WATERWAYS

- 1 LOWER BANN NAVIGATION
- 2 ERNE SYSTEM
- 3 SHANNON-ERNE WATERWAY
- 4 SHANNON NAVIGATION
- 5 ROYAL CANAL
- 6 GRAND CANAL
- 7 BARROW NAVIGATION
- 8 ULSTER CANAL



HISTORY OF THE ORGANISATION

KEY MILESTONES

- 2001** Official opening of the Limerick Navigation Project.
- 2007** Waterways Ireland remit extended to inc. restoration of the Ulster Canal.
- 2008** Works complete on Waterways Ireland new HQ in Enniskillen.
- 2011** The Royal Canal is officially opened.
- 2014** The 20th Anniversary of the opening of the Shannon-Erne Waterway.
- 2016** Official launch of Waterways Ireland 10-Year Heritage Plan.
- 2017** Official opening of Acres Lake floating boardwalk.
- 2018** Waterways Ireland host the World Canals Conference.



GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

As a cross-border Body, Waterways Ireland operates under the policy direction of the North South Ministerial Council and the two Governments and is accountable to the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Houses of the Oireachtas. At an administrative level, the Body reports to Sponsor Departments - the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) in Northern Ireland and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) in Ireland. Operational performance targets are agreed with both Sponsor Departments and are reported in quarterly Monitoring Meetings.

A Board for Waterways Ireland was not provided for at the time of the Body's formation in 1999. Instead, the functions of the Body are exercised by the CEO of the Body. In May 2021 the North South Ministerial Council agreed that 'officials will explore options for the establishment of a Board to oversee the work of Waterways Ireland and noted that an update will be provided to the Council at the next NSMC Inland Waterways meeting'. This matter remains within the remit of the NSMC and will be considered at a future NSMC meeting.

Funding is provided by grants from money voted by the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Houses of the Oireachtas. 15% of resource funding is provided by the Northern Ireland Assembly, and 85% by the Irish Government, this reflecting the current distribution of waterways in each jurisdiction. Capital infrastructure repair

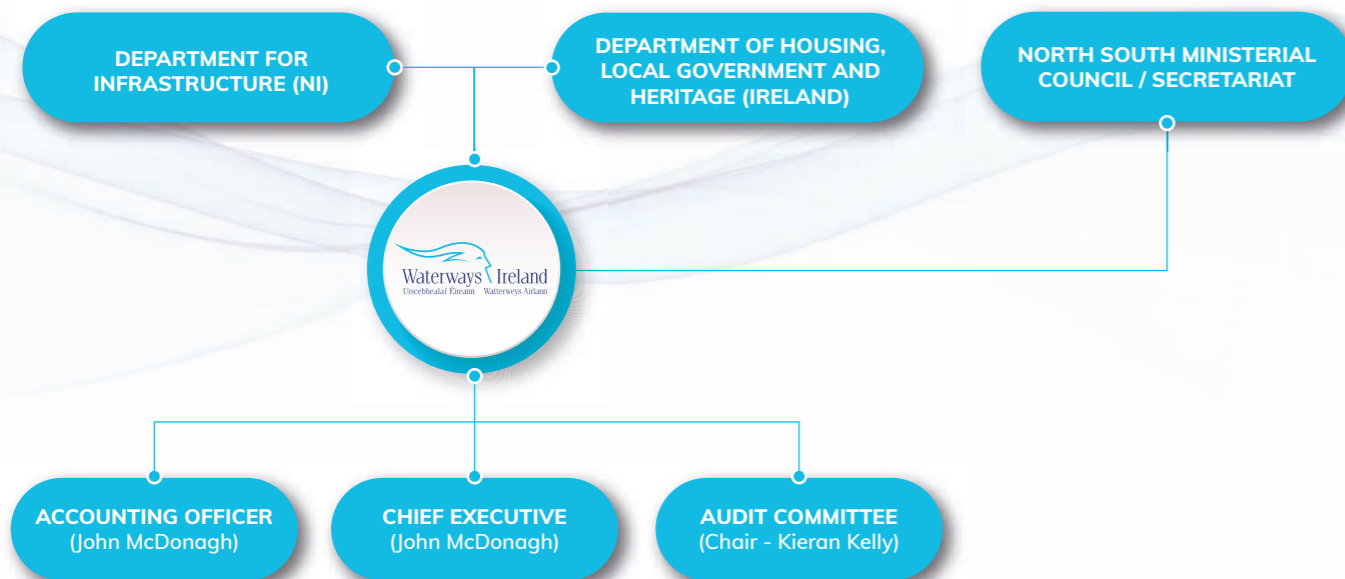
programmes are funded separately by the jurisdiction where the works are carried out.

Waterways Ireland's Annual Report and Accounts are audited externally by the Comptrollers and Auditor Generals who are Heads of the Northern Ireland Audit Office and the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General in Ireland. These external audits provide independent assurance to the North South Ministerial Council, the two Governments, and the public on the regularity and propriety of Waterways Ireland's accounts and our processes in relation to expenditure, revenue and assets.

Waterways Ireland also has an Audit & Risk Committee, consisting of three independent non-executive members one of whom is the Chair, whose remit is to advise the Chief Executive as Accounting Officer, on whether an appropriate system of internal control is in operation. The Internal Auditor has unfettered access to the Chief Executive and the Audit & Risk Committee Chair.

Risk Management is a key element of the effective accountability and corporate governance arrangements of the Body and is regularly reviewed by the Body's Sponsor Departments at Monitoring Committee Meetings and by the Body's Audit and Risk Committee at quarterly meetings. All risks are documented in a Risk Register and managed in a 2-level framework:

- Corporate/Strategic Risks
- Divisional/Regional Risks



we want to leave a legacy
a gift for future generations



bring the waterways to life
enriching people's lives

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

The outputs of the strategic review acted as a prism for the development of the future direction of the organisation, enabling the Purpose, Vision and Values to be defined.

PURPOSE



Our Purpose is to be the **custodian** of the inland navigations and **collaborate to reimagine**, maintain, develop and promote them to sustain communities, environment and heritage.

VISION



Creating **inspirational** inland navigations and waterways **experiences** through conservation and **sustainable** development for the **benefit of all**.

VALUES



PASSIONATE

We are **passionate, enthusiastic** and **dedicated** to the work and services we deliver. We listen to our stakeholder needs and **strive to exceed expectation**.

COLLABORATIVE

We **work collaboratively internally** and **externally** to achieve objectives, whilst **helping** and **supporting each other** for our collective goal.

ACCOUNTABLE

We **deliver the best and hold ourselves accountable** for the results. We are **responsible**, act with **respect** and operate in a **safe** and **sustainable** manner.

INNOVATIVE

We strive to **continuously improve** in the delivery of quality services and infrastructure. We aim to promote a **culture of quality, creativity, diversity and excellence**.



ensuring the island of Ireland
is a better place to live,
work and visit

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

During the development of Waterways Ireland's 10-Year Plan, several policies, plans, international benchmarks, and relevant reports and trends from both jurisdictions/UK government were considered. Collectively they point to a plethora of opportunities for the Body. Waterways Ireland can play a significant role in creating economic, social, and environmental wellbeing for the public good and a better place to live, work and visit.

<p>NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2040</p> <p>OPPORTUNITY</p>	<p>HEALTHY IRELAND FRAMEWORK 2019-2025</p> <p>OPPORTUNITY</p>	<p>NEW DECADE, NEW APPROACH</p> <p>OPPORTUNITY</p>	<p>SHARING THE VISION 2020-2030</p> <p>OPPORTUNITY</p>
<p>Of the 10 national strategic outcomes identified, Waterways Ireland can positively contribute to making progress on four. Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities, Enhanced Amenity and Heritage, Transition to a Low Carbon and Climate Resilient Society and Sustainable Management of Water, Waste, and other Environmental resources.</p>	<p>There are parallels between Waterways Ireland's work and the goals of the Healthy Ireland Framework. Alignment could act as a catalyst for enhanced physical and mental wellbeing.</p>	<p>Waterways Ireland's ongoing restoration of the Ulster Canal was supported by this initiative. Given one of the key themes is "Connectivity and infrastructure" additional support may be provided for future projects.</p>	<p>Specific elements of the policy which align with Waterways Ireland work include developing a community-based approach to mental health care. In this regard there is scope for us to work in tandem with third parties to develop integrated facilities and activities on and along the waterways to promote positive mental health in waterside communities.</p>
<p>UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS</p> <p>OPPORTUNITY</p>	<p>BIODIVERSITY</p> <p>OPPORTUNITY</p>	<p>POPULATION GROWTH</p> <p>OPPORTUNITY</p>	<p>CONNECTING WITH NATURE</p> <p>OPPORTUNITY</p>
<p>Waterways Ireland is committed to the achievement of the UNSDGs and will strive to increase its relevance and make a meaningful input to national and international priorities.</p>	<p>As part of Waterways Ireland's commitment to reversing biodiversity loss, it will introduce a Biodiversity/Habitats Strategy.</p>	<p>Anticipated increase in usage of Waterways Ireland's amenities and waterways.</p>	<p>Waterways Ireland is well-placed to deliver on the important outcomes of this research giving the environment in which it operates.</p>

SCALE OF AMBITION

- Waterways Ireland’s Vision is to be recognised as having enabled the creation of inspirational inland navigations and waterways experiences, through conservation and sustainable development for the benefit of all.
 - In reimagining our navigations, we will continue to create value over the life of the Plan – economic, social, and environmental well-being – for the public good.
 - Value is created from Macroeconomic interventions such as population, tourism, and economic growth or decline. Additionally, through implementation of our own targeted interventions Waterways Ireland will create value using our assets within our preferred sectors.
- By way of example, the Royal Canal Greenway attracted 640,000 visitors in its first year generating economic benefit of €17m to the local communities.
- To robustly measure and monitor value creation for the public good Waterways Ireland will commission an independent economic study to identify appropriate macro and targeted intervention data and methodologies. Waterways Ireland will publish baseline data and resultant fiscal targets in 2024. We are conscious, for example, that natural capital accounting is a relatively new measurement methodology. We believe incorporating natural capital accounting can support better decision-making particularly in our assessment of sustainable development.

hundreds of kilometres
of fascinating waterscape
unfold before your very eyes

MACRO INTERVENTIONS

- STAKEHOLDER INITIATIVES & SUPPORT
- LOCAL AUTHORITY / COUNCIL PLANS
- GOVERNMENTAL ACTIONS
- GLOBAL TOURISM TRENDS
- FORECAST DEMOGRAPHICS
- USAGE TRENDS
- CLIMATE CHANGE

MARKET SIZING

Project in 2024 to determine the market size over the next 10 years

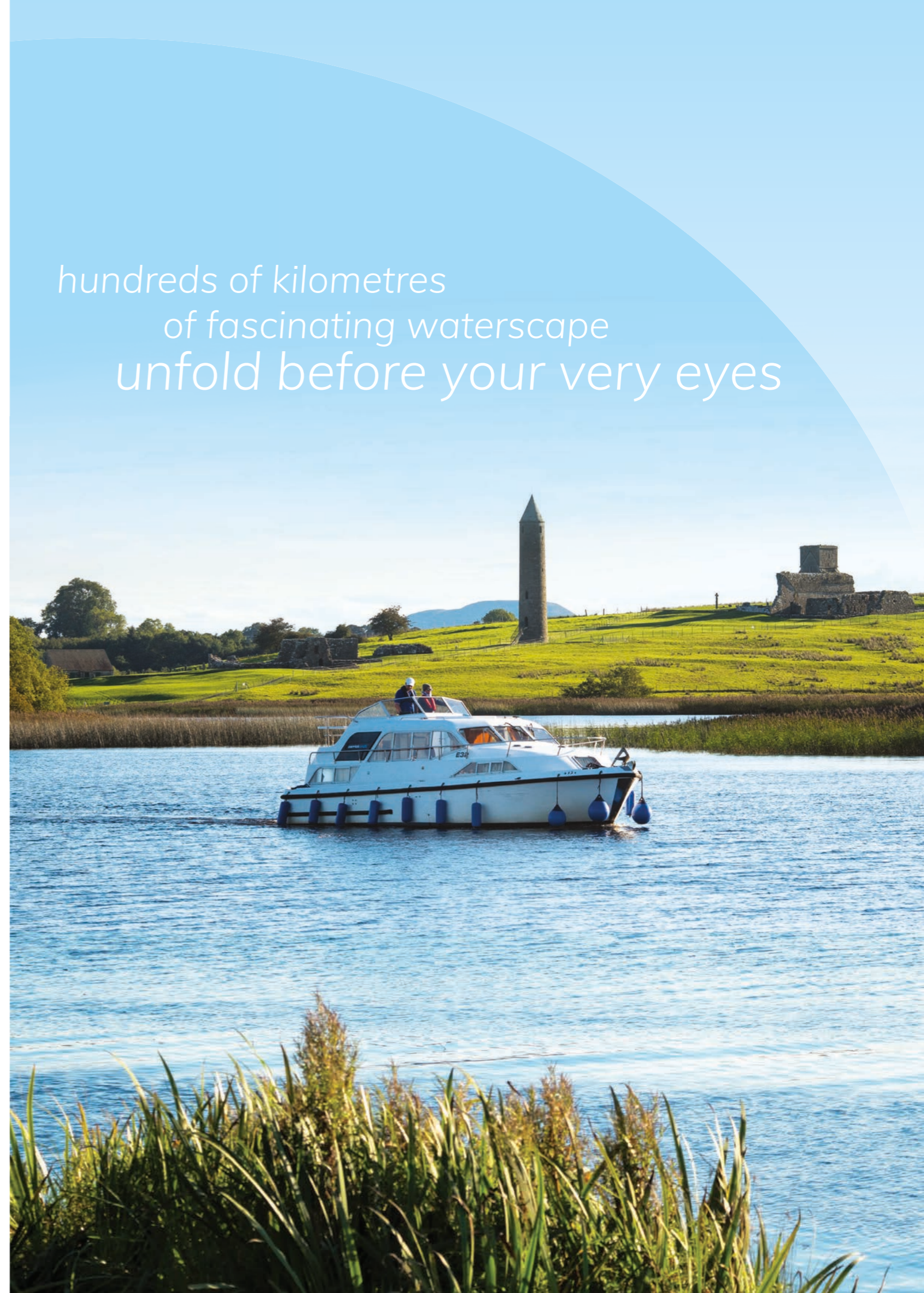
WATERWAYS IRELAND TARGETED INTERVENTIONS

- PARTICIPATION & REPUTATION
- ENVIRONMENT & HERITAGE
- SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
- INNOVATION
- NEW MARKETS
- ASSETS
- CLIMATE CHANGE

- SECTORS***
- Cruise Hire
 - Recreation
 - Tourism
 - Angling
 - Communities

- NATURAL CAPITAL***
- Carbon Sequestration
 - Air Quality
 - Well-being
 - Water Quality

* Examples



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Waterways Ireland’s Strategic Priorities are the long-term aspirational priorities for the organisation over the next 10 years.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) ensures rigorous and transparent planning in the public sector. It integrates environmental considerations into plans, enabling monitoring and review for sustainable development. Waterways Ireland is committed to adhering to SEA, and all environmental assessment legislation, throughout the implementation of this 10-Year Plan.



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1 ORGANISATION DEVELOPMENT AND GOVERNANCE

BACKGROUND

The Body has endured many years of under-resourcing with consequent gaps in capacity and capabilities as the external environment has changed immeasurably.

The environment in which the Body now operates has changed dramatically over the last 20 plus years. User expectations, Health & Safety and Environmental legislation, climate change, as well as technological advances necessitate a different structure and new approach to resource allocation. The Organisation Structure agreed for the Body in 2000 is no longer fit for purpose. Key people and organisational principles are prescribed from formation in 2000 resulting in inflexibility, limiting organisational and people developmental opportunities.

The Body acknowledges support received from the North South Ministerial Council and Sponsor Departments approving an inaugural Organisation Review commencing in 2023. Governance within Waterways Ireland is monitored and managed by our Sponsor Departments in structured quarterly Monitoring Meetings chaired on a rotational basis by each Sponsor Department Senior Official. Additionally, the Audit & Risk Committee, in conjunction with its Terms of Reference and Charter, meets at least quarterly with executives from Waterways Ireland, independent members, Sponsor Department Officials, and external audit staff all in attendance.

As previously outlined Waterways Ireland operates within a Governance Framework which is improving continuously across internal and external audit functions and processes; established and ongoing accountability and assurance processes with Sponsor Departments; and a maturing Risk Management Framework. Waterways Ireland will provide ongoing support to Departmental and Secretariat Officials in the exploration of options for formation of a Board.

SUCCESS STATEMENT

Waterways Ireland is a purposeful, values driven organisation with people first focus, appropriate governance systems, digitally enabled with capabilities and capacity, aligned to the ambition and challenges of the strategy. Measured and evidenced through Key Performance Indicators and external benchmarking.

KEY OUTPUTS

- 1**
An organisation structure with clarity on the key structures, functions and responsibilities of the leadership and wider management teams to deliver on our Purpose and Vision.
- 2**
A People Strategy which delivers on an ambitious vision for HR service delivery within Waterways Ireland.
- 3**
A Target Operating Model focusing on how everything links together including enablers, processes, and governance.
- 4**
A Project Management Office (PMO) with a remit to extend project management capabilities through a continuous improvement programme across the whole of the organisation.
- 5**
A Digital Transformation Strategy to improve the user experience, enhance service, and increase efficiency.
- 6**
Build on our Health & Safety Improvement Programme and secure ISO 45001.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2 SUSTAINABLE FUNDING MODEL

BACKGROUND

The Body operates within the parameters of a Financial Memorandum which prescribes the detailed financial arrangements, including those in relation to accounts, the accounting year, and currency, to be complied with by the Body. For example, in Ireland we operate a Jan-Dec financial year. In NI we operate an April-March financial year. The Financial Memorandum is in two parts - firstly a Management Statement which sets out the governance and accountability arrangements, and secondly the Financial Memorandum which sets out the financial relationship and specifically certain roles and responsibilities of the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) and the Finance Departments in relation to the Bodies. Within the Financial Memorandum are defined rules and regulations about the use of grants. In simple language there are prescriptions in place.

It is also important to highlight that multiyear budgeting is not an option within the annual disbursement framework.

As previously stated, funding is provided by grants from money voted by the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Houses of the Oireachtas. 15% of recurrent or resource funding is provided by the Northern Ireland Assembly, and 85% by the Irish Government, this reflecting the current distribution of waterways in each jurisdiction. Capital infrastructure repair programmes are funded separately by the jurisdiction where the works are carried out.

Following the economic crisis period and austerity measures Waterways Ireland experienced years of under-funding relative to its needs. This impacted human resources; maintenance of our assets; and created an investment deficit. In more recent years, with support from our Sponsor Departments, both current (resource) and capital funding have grown. This has enabled investment in people, plant, and equipment.

In Ireland pension costs are included in the allocation of current (resource) funding in any given year. This has been an ongoing issue for the Body, but it is important to highlight it is not unique to Waterways Ireland as a State Agency in Ireland. This is not an issue in Northern Ireland as pension costs are granted separately from the current (resource) allocation. As the workforce within Waterways Ireland continues to age the resource budget will decline unless our Sponsor Department in Ireland provides budget cover.

Similarly, provision for small liability claims in Ireland is included in current (resource) funding but if high value claims cannot be covered a funding request from our Sponsor Departments is sought.

To date these arrangements do not disadvantage Waterways Ireland as our Sponsor Department in Ireland provides budget cover.

Our analysis indicates we need to address four specific challenges:

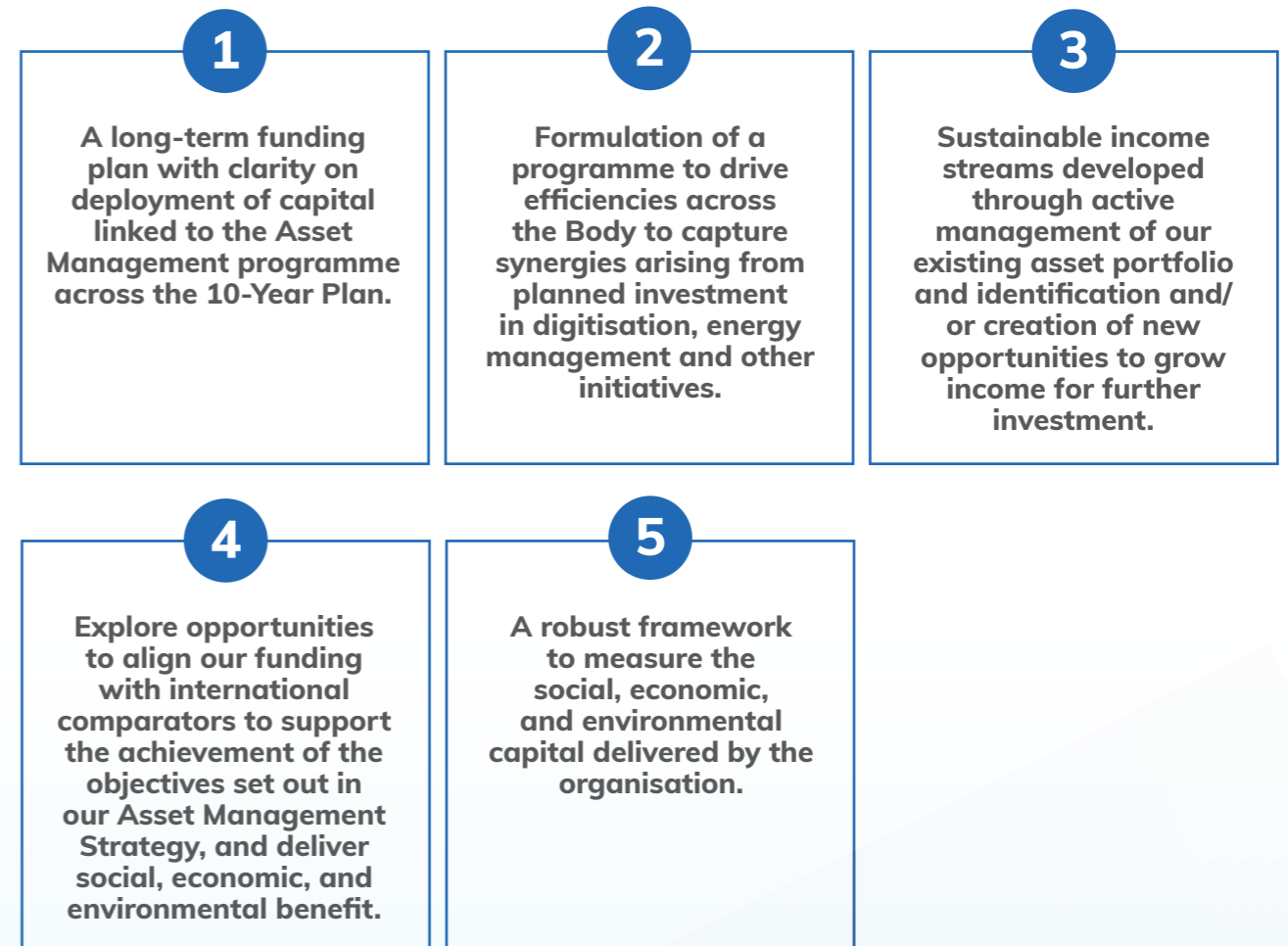
- (i) Rising pension costs in the future and the impact on current (resource) funding should our Sponsor Department in Ireland be unable to provide budget cover. We have captured this risk on our Risk Register.
- (ii) Proportionality of current and capital funding – capital funding drives projects and activities which leads to scaling-up or capacity issues if current (resource) funding is inadequate. The introduction of improved forward planning linked to the Asset Management conditionality outputs will identify potential bottlenecks. Within the capital management programme, a Project Management Office will monitor and report on performance.

- (iii) From an international perspective we lag significantly behind other navigation authorities in terms of total expenditure and number of employees per kilometre. We need to position our longer-term funding requirements closer to international comparators rather than rely on a 'do better' future year. This requires ongoing dialogue with Sponsor Departments in advocating and demonstrating value creation for the public good per €/£ of grants.
- (iv) Internationally, we also lag other navigation authorities in generating income to support our expenditure profile and needs. We need to develop alternative and new sources of income to improve the financial sustainability of the Body.

SUCCESS STATEMENT

Waterways Ireland is appropriately funded with both the investment and working capital required to effectively execute the strategy.

KEY OUTPUTS



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3 ASSET PORTFOLIO MANAGEMENT

BACKGROUND

In 2019, Waterways Ireland commissioned an Asset Management maturity assessment aligned to good practice sources*. An Asset Management Improvement Programme was subsequently developed to address gaps identified. Implementation has been ongoing since 2020, focusing on areas such as strategy and planning, asset management decision making, lifecycle delivery, asset information, and asset management capabilities including competencies and supporting technologies.

Asset Management is defined by ISO55000 as the “coordinated activity of an organisation to realise value from its assets”. The value of the inland waterways can only be truly assessed by the benefit which they add on an annual basis to the local and national economies, to the health agenda, to social cohesion, to the environment, to culture and heritage and future generational use. Waterways Ireland is committed to managing our assets sustainably, balancing environmental, social, heritage and economic requirements at a local and national level. We will do this by delivering a robust framework by which we manage our assets, enabling informed decision making and sustainable funding that balances requirements, across the whole asset lifecycle.

SUCCESS STATEMENT

Waterways Ireland has a portfolio of assets that are sustainably managed, maintained, enhanced, and restored to maximise the future-proof navigability, accessibility, and value of the network for users, local communities, and visitors.

KEY OUTPUTS



*including ISO55000 Series of Standards, Global Forum on Maintenance & Asset Management (GFMAM) and the Institute of Asset Management (IAM)

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4 PARTICIPATION & REPUTATION

BACKGROUND

Waterways Ireland's legislative framework states that “...In the discharge of its management and development function, principally for recreational purposes, the Body will engage in promotion, including marketing and development of the tourism and commercial potential of the inland waterways...” Our Vision is “Creating inspirational inland navigations and waterways experiences through conservation and sustainable development for the benefit of all”.

In reimagining the waterways, we seek to transform public perceptions of them – to cultivate an allure, a desirability, a magnetism. This re-evaluation will be delivered through enhanced engagement with the public, waterside communities, volunteers, and businesses and will be supported by investment in programmes including product development, public relations, digital communications, advertising, sponsorship, events, and education. Programmes must be delivered at a meaningful scale, and closer collaboration with tourism and recreation bodies and other stakeholders is essential. Participation is the key metric. Research conducted in 2020 found that 51% of adults claimed to have visited our waterways in the previous 12 months*. This compares to over 90% of adults who participate in outdoor recreation regularly* (including cruising, boating, angling, paddle-sports, walking, cycling, running, and volunteering) or the circa two thirds of the population who live in a county featuring one of our waterways**.

Participation will be catalysed by driving awareness and positive perception of the desirability of waterways experiences. This work will be supported by improving the reputation and awareness of the Waterways Ireland brand, which is under-developed. Research conducted in 2020* found that prompted brand awareness was 38% and there was limited understanding or positive perception of the body.

Waterways Ireland recognises that it needs to be more proactive in promoting the great work that it does, in managing its reputation, and in advocating - with other stakeholders - on broader issues which undermine its work for the public good, including climate change, water pollution, biodiversity loss, invasive species, and water level management. Waterways Ireland seeks to earn a reputation as proactive custodians of the waterways' environment and heritage, a sustainability exemplar, a champion of local communities, volunteers and businesses along the waterways and a desirable employer brand.

SUCCESS STATEMENT

Waterways Ireland has made the waterways more desirable, significantly increasing participation on and alongside the waterways and in all recreational, tourism and volunteering activity categories, by the public and local communities, in a sustainable and accessible manner. Waterways Ireland's profile and reputation has improved among the public and with stakeholders.

KEY OUTPUTS



* Waterways Ireland Foundational Research, 2020, Genesis ** Census data

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 5 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

BACKGROUND

Sustainable Development entails planning and delivering the right amenities and services in the right locations, to maximise the social, economic, and environmental well-being value of the waterways. A balance needs to be struck between sustainably developing the waterways for the good of local communities and attracting domestic and international visitors, with the accompanying economic and employment benefits. The number of recreational trips is many times the number of tourism trips, with two thirds of recreational trips within five miles of home*.

Waterways Ireland is firmly committed to the preservation and enhancement of our inland waterways' natural, cultural, and infrastructural assets for the benefit of current and future generations. Our approach to Sustainable Development is underpinned by a deep respect for the environment and a dedication to best practices. We understand that our actions today have far-reaching implications for the health of our waterways.

There is significant potential to grow participation, in a sustainable manner, in 'on-water' activities including cruising, boating, and angling. The ongoing development of Greenways and Blueways represent a huge opportunity to increase participation in walking, cycling, running, use of mobility aids and paddle sports. Most activities on and alongside the waterways have minimal impact on the natural environment, and strides are being made to reduce the impact of carbon-emitting activities.

A 2022 study by Bergou et al "found positive associations between visits to canals and rivers and mental wellbeing...when compared to being anywhere else."** As more counties feature an inland waterway than a coastline, Waterways Ireland is uniquely positioned to deliver these 'blue space' benefits, supplemented by stunning landscapes and a heritage teeming with tales of historical import, layers of myth and legend, built heritage spanning centuries and feats of engineering ingenuity.

The waterways span the most and least populous counties in Ireland and Northern Ireland*** and the most and least visited counties in Ireland****. Regionally, greater Dublin represents the most transformative opportunity to deliver for the public good: to reimagine how locals and visitors experience and traverse the city and surrounding areas; to transform the docklands into a giant urban playground for people of all ages, abilities, and interests; to showcase heritage assets including Sea Lock Gates dating from 1796; to make a climate positive impact through traffic reduction by hosting more journeys on our Greenways.

Our organisation is committed to being at the forefront of Sustainable Development practices. We believe that excellence is achieved through innovation, proactive measures, and continuous improvement. This means constantly seeking out and implementing the best available technologies, methodologies, and approaches that minimise our environmental footprint whilst also enhancing the user experience.

In its simplest infrastructural interpretation, Sustainable Development is everything including our 18 principal asset categories. Importantly, it also incorporates 'soft' projects such as interpretation (bringing a sense of place & identity), animation, DEDPs (Destination Experience Development Plans), feasibility studies, and much more. New initiatives such as infrastructure for environmentally friendly transport options such as EV charging, bicycle facilities, and drinking water fountains will further reduce environmental impact.

Waterways Ireland has established a reputation for simultaneously managing over one hundred projects across the network, including in 2023 the restoration of the Ulster Canal, remedial works at Carnroe Weir, Connaught Harbour marina development, the construction of the Barrow Blueway and extensions of the Royal Canal and Grand Canal Greenways.

Waterways Ireland has proposed an investment programme (Sustainable on Water Living) for increased mooring locations for houseboats, whilst avoiding over-concentration across the canals which would have a detrimental effect on recreational boat usage. Enhanced safety,

security, and service facilities will be integrated into the Sustainable on Water Living programme in future years.

Sustainable Development also includes a shift in mindset to appreciate that we have a unique, intangible asset – our core inherent competency working in and along our waterways. This competency will enable us, over time with the support and approval of our Sponsor Departments and the North South Ministerial Council, to extend our navigational network and to acquire new navigations across Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The sustainable development of our inland waterways is a collective responsibility, and we are committed to leading the way in this endeavour. We believe that our approach, which prioritises adherence to legislation, the adoption of best practices, alignment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and our aspiration to be an exemplar, will contribute to a future where our waterways are flourishing, communities are thriving, and our environment is protected.

SUCCESS STATEMENT

Waterways Ireland has engaged with all our stakeholders on the planning and delivery of a Sustainable Development Strategy that unlocks the social, economic, and environmental well-being value potential of the waterways, through transformative programmes which balance value creation for local communities with attracting domestic and international visitors and fulfilling our role as custodians of the waterways.

KEY OUTPUTS



Sources:

* CSO Household Travel Survey 2022, CSO National Travel Survey 2019

** Bergou N, Hammoud R, Smythe M, Gibbons J, Davidson N, Tognin S, et al. (2022) The mental health benefits of visiting canals and rivers: An ecological momentary assessment study. PLoS ONE 17(8): e0271306. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0271306>

*** Northern Ireland Census data 2021, Ireland Census data 2022

**** Number of Domestic overnight trips. Source: CSO Household Travel Survey 2022. NB, equivalent data in Northern Ireland is reported by Local Government District

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 6
CLIMATE ACTION, ENVIRONMENT & HERITAGE

BACKGROUND

Throughout this and our other planning documents, there are a multitude of references to the importance of our role of ‘custodianship’, within our purpose ‘to sustain communities, environment, and heritage’, and within our Vision ‘through conservation and sustainable development’.

Our starting point in 2023 has been a fully formed, post-public consultation Climate Action Plan. We plan to continue the integration and alignment of the UN Sustainable Development Goals across all our activities. In essence we will integrate our current practices into a Sustainability Model.

In early 2024 we will publish our Heritage & Biodiversity Plan 2030 and open a public consultation process to seek feedback for the Plan. This is Waterways Ireland’s second Heritage & Biodiversity Plan, proactively addressing how our organisation manages the natural, built, and cultural heritage of our waterways and develop appropriate strategies for their conservation, interpretation, and promotion. In line with this, as part of Waterways Ireland’s commitment to reversing biodiversity loss, Waterways Ireland will introduce a Biodiversity/Habitats Strategy that is integrated with our Asset Management and Project Management Systems. We will build on the successes, lessons learned, and invaluable partnerships developed since 2016 and strive to be an exemplar in heritage management.

We have also revisited first principles and considered how we should manage the most precious resource in our portfolio – water. A Water Management Strategy is finalised and will move to implementation in early 2024. It details Waterways Ireland’s objectives for improvements to water management in support of the overarching needs for water of sufficient quantity and quality. These needs can be summarised as:

- providing a quality water supply on our canals for all users,
- a sustainable and efficient water resource for canals,
- appropriate water management for other navigations, and
- a Water Framework Directive compliant management system.

The outcomes of this strategy are focused on providing a framework and processes to achieve these objectives. We strongly believe, despite our relatively small size, we can become exemplars within the Public Sector and build further on our accomplishments of recent years. Consequently, we will reflect a shift in emphasis in our financial and human resource allocation on policies supporting sustainability, climate action, biodiversity, and heritage over the duration of the 10-Year Plan.

SUCCESS STATEMENT

Waterways Ireland has fulfilled its duty to be custodians of our inland waterways for future generations by ensuring our activities protect and conserve the natural, built, and cultural heritage of the waterways. We strive to be an exemplar among public bodies in meeting, and where possible exceeding, targets relating to the environment, sustainability, climate action and biodiversity.

KEY OUTPUTS





IMPLEMENTATION

The 10-Year Plan forms the basis for the future development of Waterways Ireland. It sets the direction for more detailed plans that will be implemented by the organisation over the next ten years. Its success can only be achieved through collaboration with key stakeholders, adequate resourcing, and an increase in awareness and participation by the public and local communities along the waterways.

Waterways Ireland's ability to deliver this strategy is also dependent on the commitment and expertise of its staff working together. Over the lifetime of this plan, Waterways Ireland will need to adapt and change as the organisation grows, as user needs evolve, and as new processes and technologies are deployed. The contribution from staff and stakeholders is vital to the delivery of the strategic priorities and for achieving the Vision of "creating inspirational inland navigations and waterways experiences for the benefit of all".

The implementation of the 10-Year Plan will be overseen by Waterways Ireland's Senior Management Team under the direction of the Chief Executive. Effective management of the implementation plan will be required to ensure that both ongoing operational activities and major development projects deliver the required benefits, in the agreed timescales and within budget. Waterways Ireland also commits to undertake all necessary environmental and equality screening assessments for all policies and strategies outlined within the plan. In phase one, Waterways Ireland will establish a Project Management Office (PMO) to plan and monitor performance across capital and maintenance programmes and ultimately will monitor performance across strategic priorities and key objectives.



GOVERNANCE APPROACH

The 10-Year Plan sets out ambitious but achievable goals. Implementing this strategy will require a substantial change programme to deliver the strategic priorities over the next ten years. This programme will require clear governance and structures to ensure delivery.

Establish Strategic Oversight Group

This Oversight Group will be established to monitor, track and communicate progress of the Waterways Ireland 10-Year Plan. This group will be responsible for holding the PMO and Steering Groups to account for progress against the detailed implementation plan. Part of the role will be reviewing all inputs from the PMO, any new business cases, and inputs from the established steering groups.

This group will have a holistic view of all strategic programmes of work and ensure that Waterways Ireland remain on track for the delivery of our vision for 2032. This group will also be responsible for the ongoing communication of progress to a wider stakeholder group.

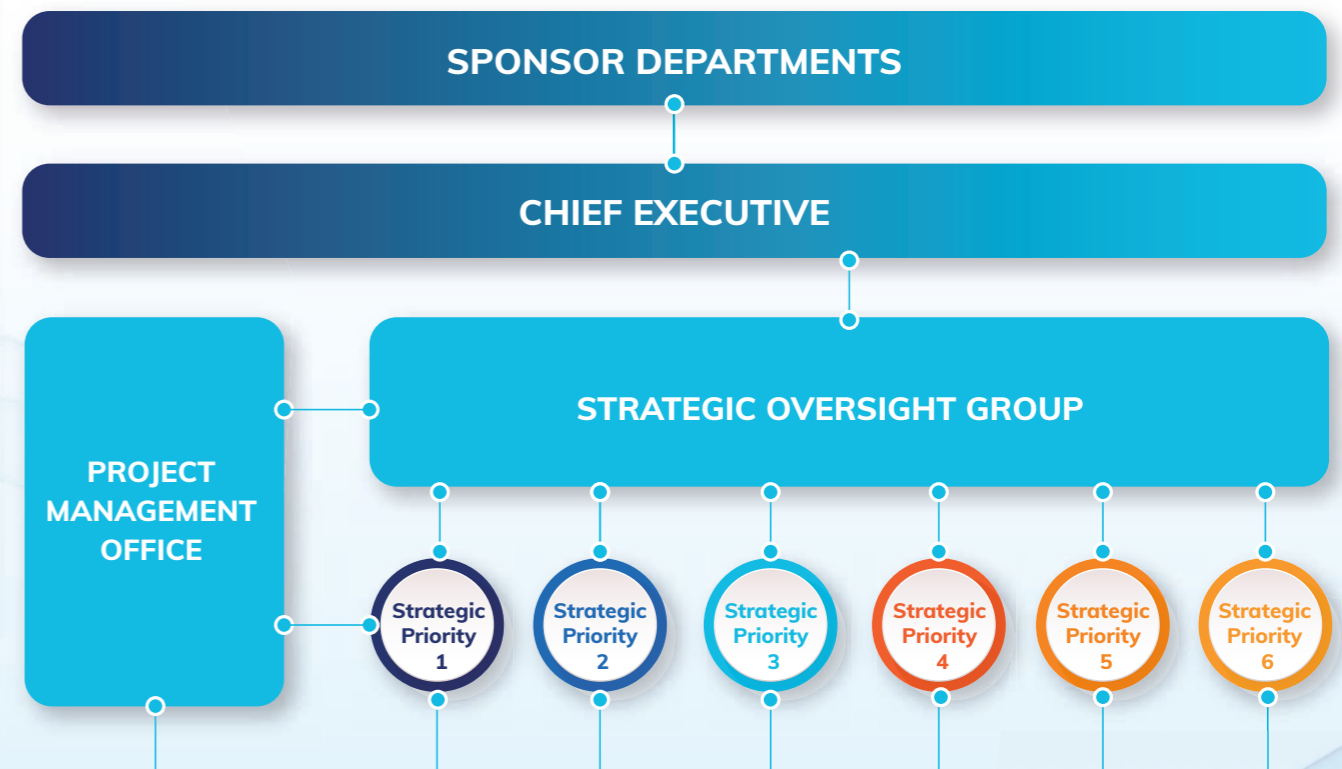
Establish Steering Groups

Projects will be aligned into programmes of work with corresponding Steering Groups. These Steering Groups will be responsible for ensuring the fulfilment of the strategic objectives.

Establish a Project Management Office (PMO)

A PMO will be established to help and ensure a disciplined and programmatic approach to managing a wide range of projects spanning all six strategic priority areas. A review will be conducted to ensure any existing programmes of work outside of the scope of this strategy are considered to ensure there is a holistic approach to prioritisation, resourcing and funding allocation. In introducing a PMO to the organisation it will ensure rigour and best practices are brought to the planning process which is required as part of programme and project commencement.

IMPLEMENTATION AND GOVERNANCE OF THE 10-YEAR LONG-TERM PLAN



STRATEGIC PRIORITY	KEY OUTPUTS	UN SDG ALIGNMENT*	BUILDING FOUNDATIONS								ACCELERATE GROWTH								SUSTAINABLE PERFORMANCE																							
			2023				2024				2025				2026				2027				2028				2029				2030				2031				2032			
			Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4				
SP4 Participation & Reputation	Implement a Marketing Strategy to deliver increased participation on and alongside the waterways in all activity categories and to improve the reputation and awareness of the Waterways Ireland brand.	SDG11	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Implementation of an Insights and Innovation Strategy to meet and exceed the needs and expectations of the public we serve, deliver best-in-class, future-proofed programmes and measure progress against key participation and perception metrics.	SDG9 SDG17					●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●				
	Formulation of a Corporate Affairs Strategy to deliver the Body's reputation and stakeholder management objectives.	SDG16 SDG17					●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●				
SP5 Sustainable Development	Formulation and delivery of a long-term coherent Sustainable Development Strategy, delivering the right amenities and services in the right places across the navigational network, transforming them for the longer term.	SDG 9 SDG 11 SDG 13									●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●				
	Formulation and delivery of a Sustainable Development Plan, informed and supported by Strategic Environmental Assessment, for Greater Dublin and for each navigation, recognising that each navigation has its uniqueness, to build a pipeline of future projects, with a focus on iconic / transformative projects which 'make a difference' at scale nationally and internationally.	SDG9 SDG11 SDG17									●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●				
	Explore the feasibility of extending the scope of our navigational network.	SDG9 SDG11									●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●				
SP6 Climate Action, Environment & Heritage	Develop and implement an integrated Environmental Management System.	SDG6 SDG12 SDG13 SDG15					●	●	●	●																																
	Implement the Water Management Strategy.	SDG6 SDG11					●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●				
	Develop and implement a sustainability roadmap to ensure alignment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.	SDG16 SDG17									●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●				
	Implement the Climate Action Plan.	SDG7 SDG12 SDG13 SDG15 SDG11	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●				
	Implement the Heritage & Biodiversity Plan 2030.	SDG11 SDG15 SDG17 SDG11									●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●				
DELIVERING VALUE			●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●				

* United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

CLOSURE

Documenting this Plan introduced several dilemmas.

How much detail should it contain? Our approach has been to pitch it at a high level, strategic, directional pathway. The Public Consultation feedback pointed to a need for more detail on specific priorities, outcomes, or activities. We have attempted to address that need. We also recognise we have created Corporate Plan 2023-25 and Business Plan 2023. Each of the latter documents expand, as you would expect, on the level of granularity.

How much detail do we have to share? A fully formed capital programme stretching over 10 years requires two major inputs – a Sustainable Development Plan for each navigation and an asset management improvement plan for each navigation. The former is a key output and

will, based on our Implementation Roadmap, not be completed until end 2025. The latter will be early 2024. In the absence of these the formulation of a long-term financial plan over the 10 years is not presently possible. That is a gap we acknowledge.

We also asked ourselves what is crucial in the execution of the Plan? In a nutshell there are two crucial components of success. Firstly, we need to undertake and deliver an organisation review which addresses the inherent, prescriptive limitations within our organisation structure. There is complexity as there are many stakeholders including, most importantly, the institutional bodies such as North South Ministerial Council and a plethora of government departments. We must also recognise the importance of engagement with staff Trade Unions in a process which

has not occurred within the Body as an ongoing organisational norm.

Secondly, we need support to reset the funding landscape and move beyond small incremental, annual gains in a 'seek to do better in a future year' mindset. As previously stated, following the economic crisis period and austerity measures, Waterways Ireland's funding did not meet the organisation's needs. The investment deficit had an impact on human resources and the maintenance of our assets. In more recent years our funding has grown however from a Risk Management perspective it is important Waterways Ireland explores potential future sustainable income streams to support both current (resource) and capital growth.

In conclusion, I would like to express my gratitude to a small group of advisors and counsellors who

helped us in our journey. My thanks to our three external mentors – Gary Joyce, Managing Partner, Genesis; Jerry Grant, Chair, Dublin Port Company; and Jonathan McKee, Director, Rivers Agency. Additionally, my thanks to Elaine Daly and her team in Grant Thornton. Within Waterways Ireland I would like to thank our staff for their efforts and commitment in the development of this inaugural 10-Year Plan. And a final thank you to our Sponsor Departments for their support throughout the process.

I hope you find our Plan informative and insightful.

Colin McDonagh





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