



Democracy and climate change

How can we achieve our climate targets while strengthening and reinvigorating democratic governance?

GrACE – Green Europe: Active Citizenship and the Environment seminar series, 14 November 2024

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DCU Centre for Climate and Society

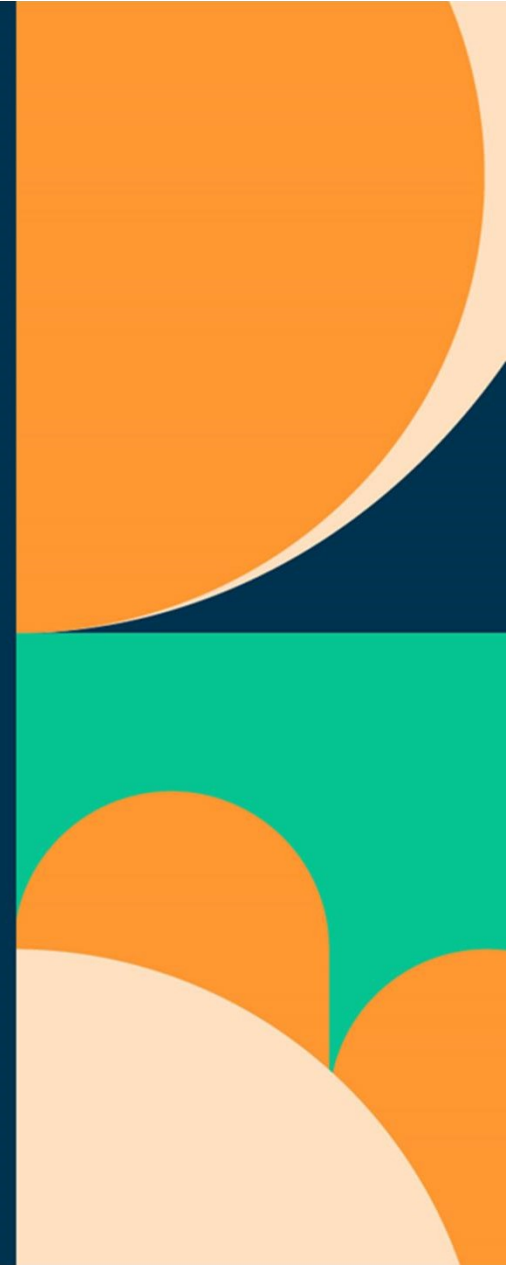
DCU Ollscoil Chathair
Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City University

Overview

- Why do democracies struggle to address climate change?
- How can democratic governance be better equipped to tackle climate change?
- A case study from Ireland: The Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss

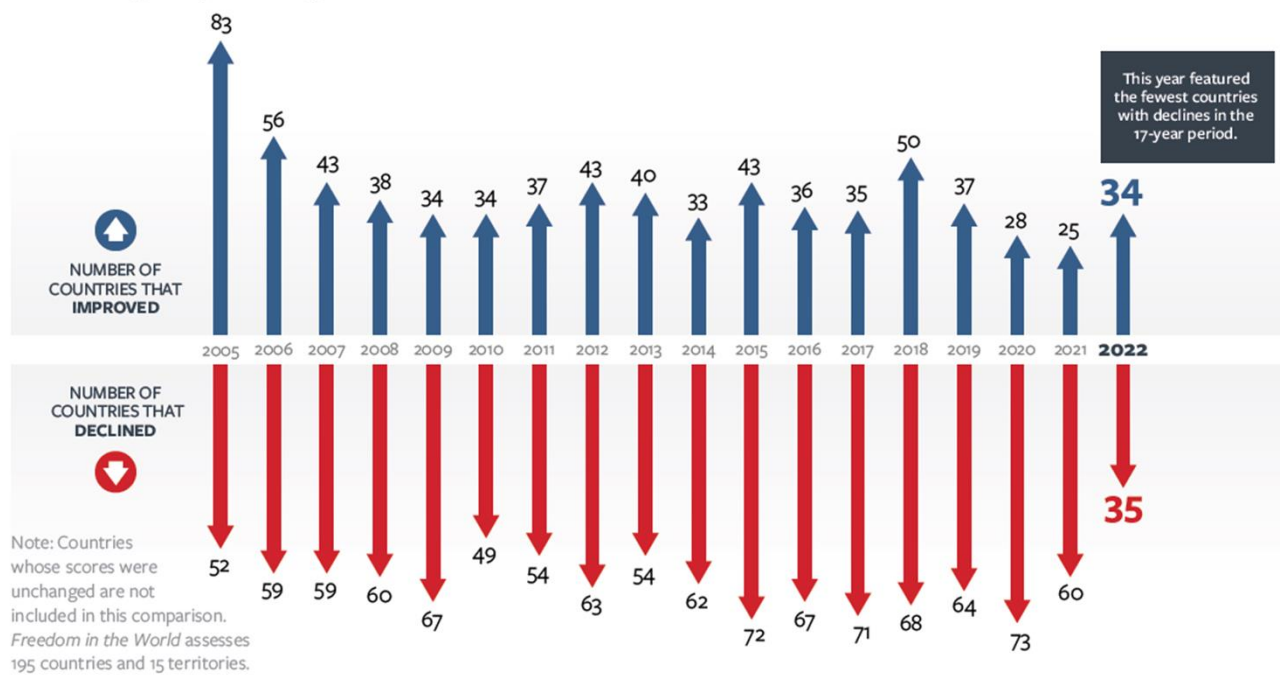


Why do democracies struggle to address climate change?



17 YEARS OF DEMOCRATIC DECLINE

Countries with aggregate score declines in *Freedom in the World* have outnumbered those with gains every year for the past 17 years. However, events in 2022 generated the smallest margin—and the smallest number of countries with declines—since the negative pattern began.



Marking 50 Y



Highlights from Freedom House's annual report on political rights and civil liberties

Why do democracies struggle to adequately address climate change?

Willis, Curato and Smith (2021) identify a number of reasons in the literature:

- Time horizons: Short term vs. long term
- Use of expert evidence in decision-making
- Power and the role of special interests
- Responsiveness to public opinion



Democracies come in many shapes and sizes

Factor	What the research suggests
No. of veto points	More veto points may impede climate action
Electoral rules	PR more conducive to climate action
Federal/unitary	Unclear
Patterns of governance	Neo-corporatist systems better at reaching agreement and implementing policies
Degree of consolidation	Consolidated democracies have better institutional capacities
Fossil fuel dependence	FF dependence increases transition costs
Economic inequality	High inequality makes collective action difficult

Source: Fiorino (2018)



Eco-authoritarianism

“A public policy model that concentrates authority in a few executive agencies manned by capable and uncorrupt elites seeking to improve environmental outcomes.”

“Public participation is limited to a narrow cadre of scientists and technocratic elites while others are expected to participate only in state led mobilisation for the purposes of implementation.”
(Gilley 2012)

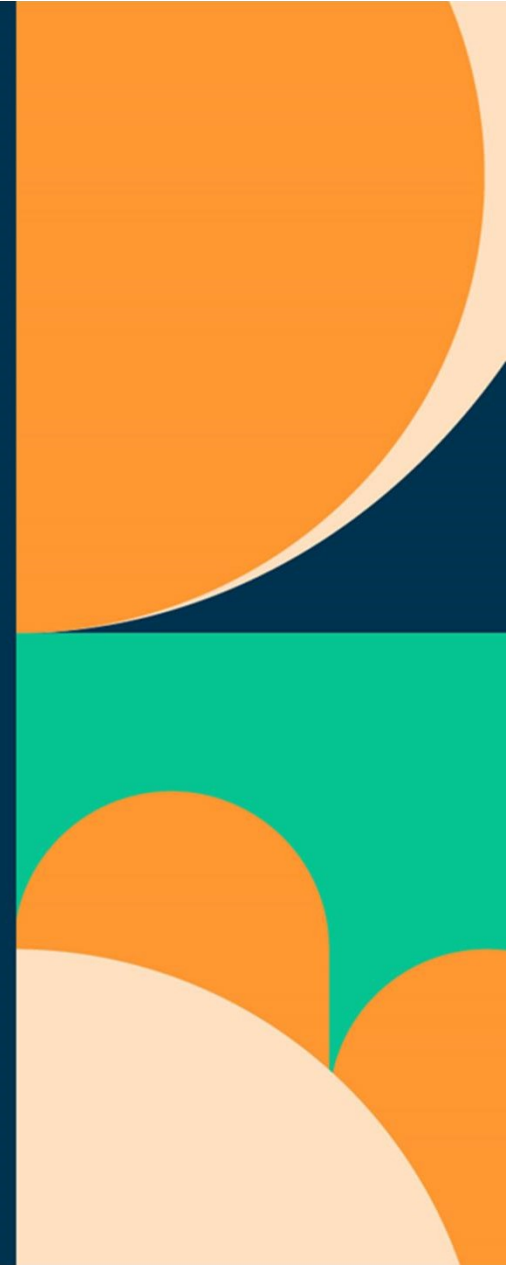


The case of China

- Eco authoritarianism perspective misses complexity of domestic politics in China
- Tensions between economic, energy, and climate priorities
- Limited implementation capacity at local level



**How can democratic
governance be better equipped
to tackle climate change?**



Modifications of democracy

- ***Less democracy***: delegation to experts
- ***More democracy***: deliberative democracy



The “time inconsistency” problem

- Governments have an incentive to renege on their commitments
- “Commitment devices” allow governments to credibly commit to policy stability
- e.g. independent central banks

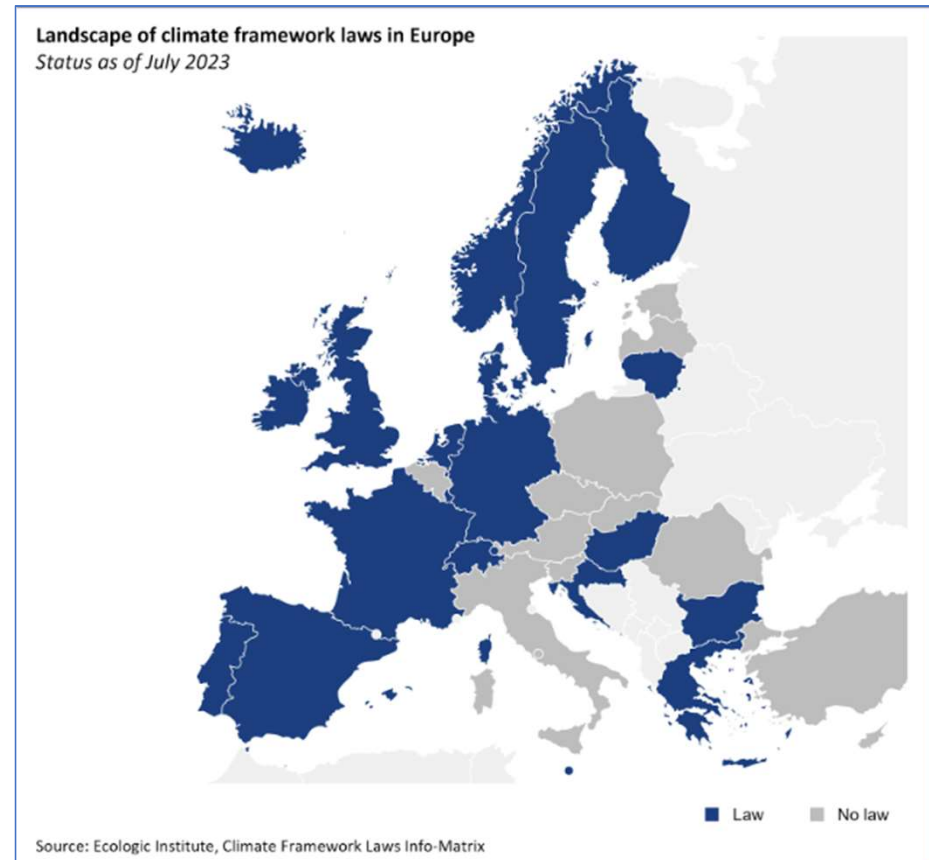


Put the experts in charge?



Framework climate laws

- Targets
- Planning and measures
- Progress monitoring
- Institutional arrangements
- Scientific advice
- Public participation
- Long-term guidance



Deliberative democracy

- Origins in Athenian democracy
- Contrast with representative and direct democracy
- Open, inclusive, public decision-making that includes affected citizens on equal terms
- Not simply the aggregation of individual preferences
- Collective decisions arrived at through reasoned debate



Deliberative democracy and climate change

- Deliberative democracy is well equipped to deal with:
 - Complexity
 - Long-term challenges
 - Value conflicts and trade-offs



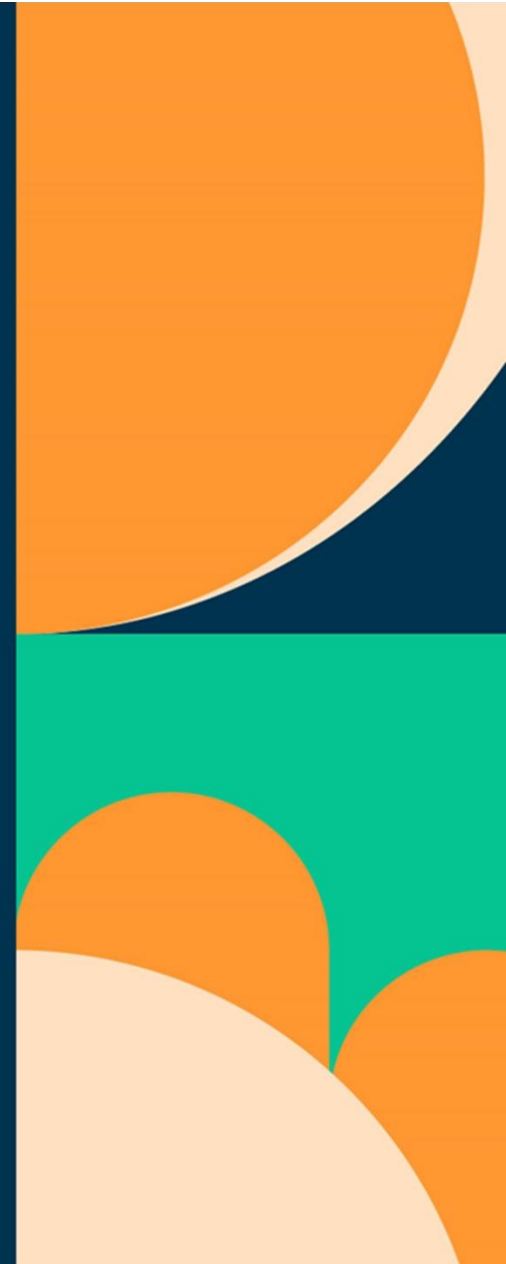
Growing experience of using citizens' assemblies for climate change



ILMASTOTOIMIA ARVIOIVA KANSALAISRAATI



A case study from Ireland: The Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss



The team

- An intergenerational design & implementation team:
 - Consortium of adults from DCU, UCC & terre des hommes
 - A Young Advisory Team of 9 children & young people aged 8-16

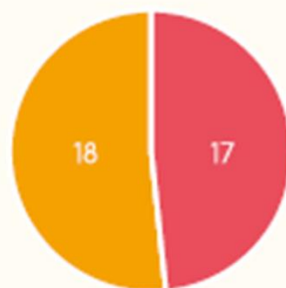


Participant recruitment

- A stratified random sample, but...
- 510 responses to a call for applications
- From which we selected 35 Assembly members

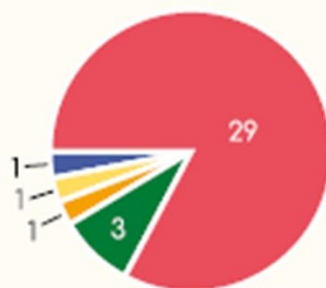


Gender



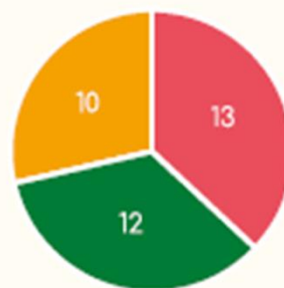
Male Female

Ethnicity



White Irish Any other White background
Black or Black Irish Asian or Asian Irish
Other including mixed background

Urban-rural



City
Town/village
Rural area

Geography



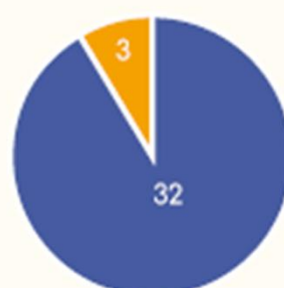
Dublin Connaught/Ulster
Munster Rest of Leinster

Age



7-8 years 9-10 years
11-12 years 13-14 years
15-17 years

Disability



Persons with a disability
Persons without a disability



Note: Not all
Assembly members
consented to having
their photos included
in this report.

The process of learning and deliberating



Ireland's Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss

Our Vision

An Ireland where we are connected to, and care for, the rights of nature (and each other) so that biodiversity is restored and protected and we live and grow up in healthy, clean and fair environments.

Our Key Messages

1. We must treat the Earth like a member of the family or a friend.
2. Future generations must live in a world where there isn't a biodiversity crisis and where children don't have to take action because of the incapability of past generations.
3. Every decision must take biodiversity into account.
4. Children and young people must be included in decisions being made about biodiversity.
5. Biodiversity protection must be a shared responsibility and a global, collaborative effort.
6. We must consume resources in a sustainable, moderate way that neither diminishes the environment/biodiversity or our rights, wellbeing and livelihoods.

Education
& Raising
Awareness

Governance

Energy
&
Transport

Waste
&
Consumption

Our
Calls
to Action

Restoring
&
Rewilding

Habitat
& Species
Protection

Over-
exploitation

58 Actions

under 7 themes

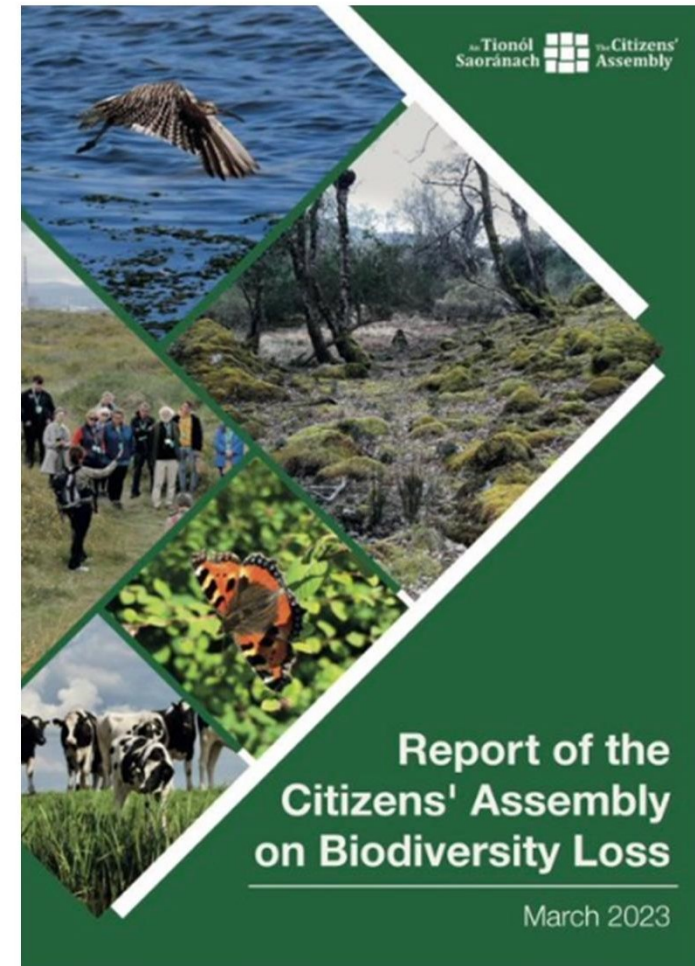
The story didn't end there...







20. The State is urged to take into account the recommendations from the Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss, an initiative featuring our next generation, and continue to engage with children and young people on the environment.





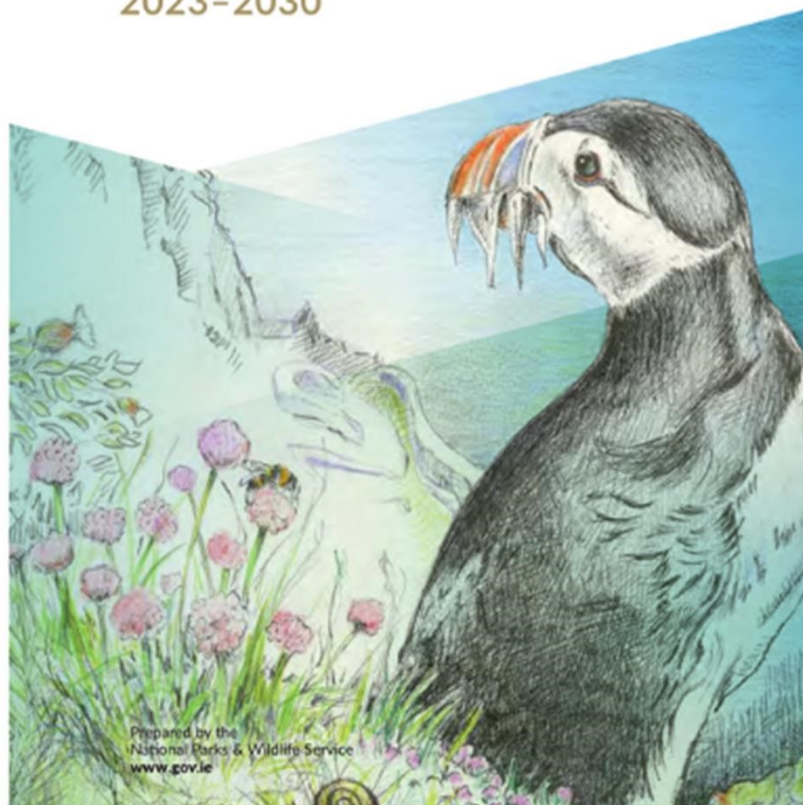
3. The Committee recommends that the calls to action as set out in the Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss should be examined and considered for implementation by the relevant government departments.
4. The Committee recommends that the calls to action set out in the Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss should be reflected in the National Biodiversity Action Plan and superseding plans and other relevant policies and decision-making processes.





Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030



Prepared by the
National Parks & Wildlife Service
www.gov.ie

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Children and Young People's Assembly nature walk.
Facilitated by RUA Productions. Credit: Eleanor (Assembly member)



Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss

Ireland's first Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss published its final report in April 2023, calling for biodiversity to be at the centre of decision-making and for children and young people to be included in how we respond to biodiversity loss.

The Assembly met over two weekends in October and aimed to ensure Ireland's youngest citizens have their say in how Ireland responds to the challenge of biodiversity loss. Over 500 children and young people aged 7-17 years from across Ireland applied to be part of the assembly, of which 35 were selected, representing a diverse cross-section of society.

ACTIONS FOR NATURE 2023-2030

Children and Young People's Assembly deliberations. Credit: RUA Productions.



Children and Young People's Assembly logo. Credit: RUA Productions. Illustration by Hazel Hurley



Youth Assembly Vision. Credit: Hazel Hurley

Theme 2: Governance: To put biodiversity and the rights of nature at the heart of the decisions that we make

Calls to Action of the Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss			
No	Call to Action	Government Response	Status
7	Every decision being made must consider biodiversity and the rights of nature.	Action 1C2 of the 4 th NBAP commits to explore the ways in which the rights of nature could be formally recognised. Relevant public bodies are bound by a Biodiversity Duty which requires them to report on how they have given due consideration to biodiversity in their programmes of work. Other legislation requires biodiversity to be taken into account through SEA, EIA and Habitat Regulations among others.	In progress
8	Involve children and young people in decision-making so that more children and young people are given the chance to	The 4 th NBAP provides for the establishment of a Children and Young People's Biodiversity Forum.	In progress



Key take aways

- Democracy can be strengthened by including voices of ordinary people
- Children and young people's participation brings new and different perspectives and ideas
- Importance of co-design with children and young people
- Follow-up and feedback creates sense of being heard



Thanks for your attention

- For more information about the Assembly visit:
www.cyp-biodiversity.ie
- Follow the story in this video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gZAZnJ10vVY>
- Contact:
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