

MANIFESTO 2007

it's time.

GREEN
PARTY
Comhaontas Glas



The Green Party in Government.....it's time

Since its foundation twenty five years ago the Green Party, and the green movement in general, has had an increasing influence on Irish politics.

Each increase for the Greens in the polls has been followed by half-hearted attempts by successive governments to court a Green vote. But the threats faced now are too urgent and it is clear that the Green Party needs to be in Government to bring about the necessary changes.

Of all the environmental threats faced by human-kind, global warming has always had the potential to be the most devastating. Scientists have been in agreement about this for many years but vital time has been wasted by a political establishment unwilling to face facts.

What is certain is that we have to act now if we want to minimise the impact. We must cut our emissions as part of a global effort to stop the planet passing a tipping point, beyond which climate change would become a catastrophic runaway phenomenon.

This requires a political will that the other political parties have sorely lacked. Ireland, under successive governments, has drifted lazily into a massive oil-dependency, blithely ignoring the many renewable energy alternatives all around us.

But the crisis requires more than just new energy sources. The haphazard sprawl of development that passes for planning in this country must end. Despite the warnings, we continue to build a country that is increasingly dependent on cars and roads.

Ireland needs proper decentralisation – of power and of development – not simply a dispersal of civil servants. Fianna Fáil and the PDs dutifully produced a National Spatial Strategy, followed by a completely unconnected plan to send whole Government departments to various ministers' constituencies.

Political change is required across all Government departments, whether it's providing better public transport services, improving building standards or ensuring that jobs, shops, schools and hospitals are provided close to where people live. Not only would these policies reduce carbon emissions and reduce our dependence on oil, they would produce a better quality of life for everyone.

Who do you trust to take the climate change challenge seriously – the party that said all along that this was happening or the parties that denied it? Who do you trust to stand up to the vested interests – parties that depend on donations from big business or a party that refuses to allow itself to be bought?

The policies outlined in this manifesto are informed by principles held dearly by our members and supporters - particularly the need to cherish all people regardless of gender, race, belief, wealth or ability. We do not treat equality as a separate issue. All of our policies strive to achieve an equality of opportunity for all people in all walks of life.

And that is why we say to you now - if you want Green - Vote Green.

Summary

In Government the Green Party / Comhaontas Glas will:

Energy

Seek an all-party approach to cut Ireland's carbon emissions by 3% annually.

Remove limits on the fixed price tariff for wind farms, biomass and anaerobic digester power plants.

Transport

Prioritise the Dublin Metro and Luas extensions, provide Luas-type lines in Cork and Galway and introduce commuter services on existing railway lines in Limerick and a line to Shannon.

Housing

Ensure the delivery of 10,000 social and affordable housing units a year until the housing waiting lists are cleared.

Child Care

Replace the Early Childcare Supplement with a higher Refundable Parenting Tax Credit available as a cash payment or used to reduce income tax bills.

Health

Provide an additional 400 acute beds and 400 step-down beds per annum over the term of Government.

Introduce medical cards for children under 6 within the first term of government.

Open 24-hour primary care centres - multi-disciplinary health clinics staffed by GPs, nurses, midwives, specialist practitioners.

Education

Invest €1 billion in additional current and capital funding for education for the first year of the next Government's term of office, to front-load educational priorities.

Provide 2,400 extra teachers at primary and secondary levels.

Examine the needs of education in Irish speaking areas, including the possibility of establishing a specific Education Board to deal with such matters.

Tax

Index-link tax credits and bands to protect workers from inflation and avoid taxation by stealth.

Structure corporate tax reliefs and capital allowances in such a way that Research and Development, employment-generating activities, socially responsible activities, and sustainable and environmentally-friendly activities are rewarded.

Reduce both VAT rates by 1%.

Social Welfare

Benchmark the lowest social welfare payment for a single person at 50% of average income.

Crime

Establish an Organised Crime Agency.

Provide for a systematic increase in Garda numbers – at least 15,000 are currently needed.

Road Safety

Reduce the blood alcohol limit to 50mg/100ml and support random breath testing and invest in enforcement so people who speed or drink drive know they will be caught.

Environmental Protection

Call upon the Environmental Protection Agency to draft, with public participation, a National Environmental Action Plan with short, medium and long-term targets to be approved by the Dáil and social partners.

Enact the provision in the Environmental Protection Act to subject local authorities' sewage treatment activities to an EPA licensing regime.

Waste

Set up a National Zero Waste Agency to achieve Zero Waste within 20-years and actively seek alternatives to the incineration of toxic and hazardous waste.

Increase spending on capital investment for sewage treatment infrastructure in key towns and villages under development pressure.

Planning

Require local authorities to have Masterplans to specify the forecasted transport, education, community service capacity requirements and to inform the Department of Education of new zoning decisions and changes to County Development Plans that have implications for future educational needs.

Agriculture

Lobby for changes in the World Trade Organisation to protect domestic agriculture from being undercut by imports that are not subject to the same quality, health and environmental standards.

Promote the clean green image of Ireland abroad creating a 'green Ireland' brand for food products and ensure Ireland becomes a GM-free zone and ban farming of cloned animals.

Set a target for 5% of national acreage to be organically converted by 2012.

Science & Technology

Graduate tax credits depending on the R&D being undertaken, for example a 50% credit, up to a value of €500,000 for original technology; a 25% credit up to a value of €250,000 for improving existing technology.

Tourism

Develop a tourism industry that places greater emphasis on activity holidays such as cycling, walking, angling, sailing, etc. – a policy that promotes the very essence of Irish country living.

Broadband

Set the mobile phone operators, cable companies and Eircom into direct competition to get cheaper, faster and more integrated broadband services.

Carers

Abolish means-testing of the carers' allowance.

Develop a National Strategy for Carers within 12 months.

Children

Amend the Constitution to include the specific rights of children and implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child into Irish legislation.

Establish the Register of Persons considered unsafe to work with children and ensure that the Gardaí Vetting Unit is extended and adequately resourced.

Introduce legislation prohibiting the advertising, marketing and promotion of 'junk' foods to children under 12.

Older People

Establish an Ombudsman for Older Persons and initiate a National Positive Ageing Strategy across Government Departments;

Pensions

Work towards increasing the basic State pension from 30% of average income to 60%.

Replace tax relief for private pensions with a tapered matching contributions scheme targeted at savers with lower incomes.

Disability

Ensure a rights-based approach to disability.

Introduce a Cost of Disability payment of approx. €40 per week.

Political Reform

Reduce the number of TDs from 166 to 130 and more than double Dáil sitting time.

Ban corporate, institutional or foreign-based donations.

Section 1: A Vibrant Green Economy

Energy

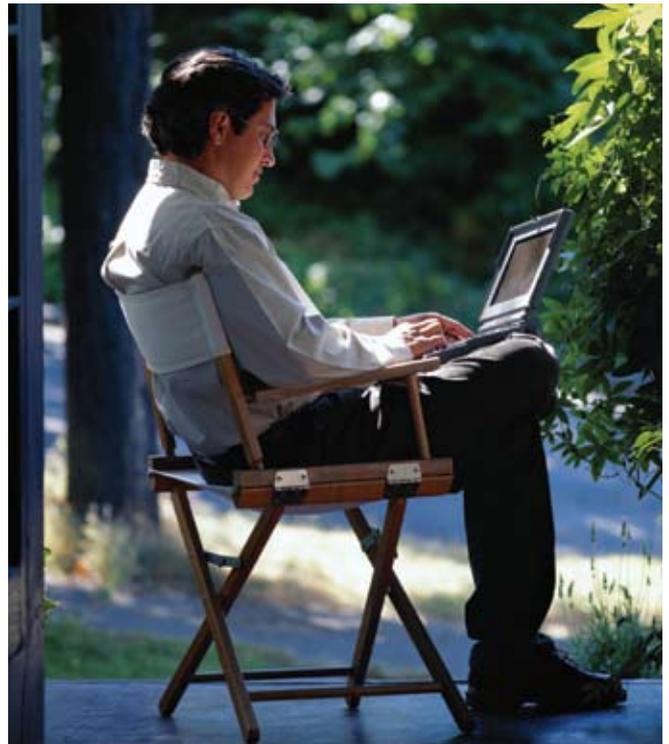
The Energy policy we adopt today will affect the quality of life that our children and grandchildren enjoy in years to come. We must take that long-term view into account as we balance the three basic requirements: a cheap, clean and secure energy supply. We now face significant increases in energy prices as a consequence of having failed to develop our renewable energy supplies and energy conservation measures. We are now dependent on imported fossil fuels for 90% of our energy needs and are wholly unprepared for the imminent peak in global oil production including our international climate change commitments.

The Green Party will:

- seek an all-party approach to cut Ireland's carbon emissions by 3% annually;
- put in place an annual budgetary process that will rectify any slippage in meeting these reductions;
- **change the Social Partnership process to include a third sustainability pillar putting energy targets at the centre of the national economic planning process;**
- introduce new national building standards to require that new housing has 60% lower heat energy demand than existing building standards, and that 30% of that demand is met from renewable sources (This has already been achieved by Green councillors on Fingal County Council);
- create a 'distributed' energy grid where power is generated locally and used locally by a large number of small scale centres;
- introduce new feed-in fixed price support mechanisms for offshore wind wave and tidal power supplies;
- encourage investment in a European off-shore electricity transmission grid connecting off-shore wind farms from the west of Ireland to the Baltic sea;
- remove limits on the fixed price tariff for wind farms, biomass and anaerobic digester power plants;
- require that current diesel users who enjoy excise exemptions (agricultural users and public transport) switch to plant oil or bio-diesel;
- require biofuels used in transport to comply with new environmental certification system looking at their impacts on biodiversity and the amount of carbon reduction they achieve.

Science and Technology

In a global economy where capital can move freely to low-cost countries outside Europe and the U.S., the best way for Ireland to retain employment is to establish an international reputation for Research and Development.



The Green Party will:

- replace the current amalgam of isolated, remote units of innovation with regional Science and Technology Parks, that bring together concentrated networks of innovation including universities, public bodies and industry;
- establish a Central Coordination Unit within Enterprise Ireland to absorb the City and County Enterprise Boards as well as coordinating the innovation activities of Technology Ireland, EI, the IDA and Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) placing the commercialisation of new technologies at the centre of policy;
- redirect funding away from start-up venture capital toward in-firm capability development, commercialisations, and academic research and innovation partnerships;
- graduate tax credits depending on the R&D being undertaken, for example a 50% credit, up to a value of €500,000 for original technology; a 25% credit up to a value of €250,000 for improving existing technology; and for engaging in R&D not of a sufficient scale to fully avail of these credits make them refundable to a value of €100,000;
- reform the mandates of Enterprise Ireland and the IDA to include support for firms likely to reduce fossil fuel imports into the country;
- amend the remit of Science Foundation Ireland to include sustainable energy research as a third category area where they could fund cutting edge academic research.

Promoting Enterprise

The Green Party recognises that Ireland's future economic success lies in the ability of our small to medium sized businesses to grow and compete on a national and international level. We need to move away from an over-reliance on foreign direct investment and increase the development of our home-grown enterprises.

The Green Party tax policy will promote enterprise. Specifically, reducing taxes on employment, including employers' PRSI, reducing VAT and replacing commercial rates with a new Site Value Tax (see Taxation and Social Policy).

In addition, the Green Party will:

- increase the VAT audit exemption limit;
- establish a specific Financial Advice Agency for SMEs.

Insurance

Although premiums have fallen in recent years, insurance costs remain volatile and wholly unpredictable, and the profits of the five largest insurance companies rose from €518 million in 2003 to €755 million in 2004.

The Green Party will:

- implement the outstanding Oireachtas recommendations for reform in the Irish insurance market, including actions to reduce the number of fatalities in the workplace, the level of awards in personal injury cases and the costs of legal actions;
- fully support and advance the work of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board.

Banks and Financial Services

Ireland has one of the highest interest rates in the Eurozone. We will implement the recommendations of the Competition Authority to ensure that customers are given accurate, reliable and understandable information on alternative banking products.

The Green Party will:

- reform legislation to make the Financial Regulator and the Competition Authority more accountable;
- grant greater powers to investigate, regulate prices, lift entry barriers and penalise malpractices;
- appoint a Registrar of Credit Unions as an independent officer with a view to increasing credit union penetration of the financial services market.

The Cost of Living and Consumer Rights

We will seek to bring down and maintain the rate of inflation to the euro zone average. We will reform the remit and constitution of the National Consumer Agency so that it is more representative of consumer and retail interests. Specifically, we will:

- reform the current funding mechanism, so that the Agency operates fully independently of government;
- accord the Agency similar status as the Ombudsman so that it can act freely and fairly as a watchdog and defender of consumer rights;
- empower the Agency to focus not just on the private sector but also State and State commercial enterprises;
- redistribute the appointments to the Agency's governing board so that it is more representative of consumers and retailers.

Agriculture

Irish agriculture is at a crossroads. With the CAP and GATT reforms the sector is facing severe job losses. It is important to enhance the flexibility and diversity of agriculture and to sustain the family farm. Above all, it is important to safeguard the land for future generations, and encourage young people into farming.

The Green Party will:

- lobby for changes in the World Trade Organisation to protect domestic agriculture from being undercut by imports that are not subject to the same quality, health and environmental standards;
- streamline the payment of money under grant schemes so that farmers do not have to pay all the costs up front before being refunded 40% by the Department of Agriculture at a later stage which often necessitates expensive bridging loans;
- research strategies to maximise the economic value of agricultural produce through value-added food products;
- promote the clean green image of Ireland abroad creating a 'green Ireland' brand for food products;
- ensure Ireland becomes a GM-free zone and ban farming of cloned animals;
- provide more direct sale from farmer to consumer through farmers' markets etc;
- require planning authorities to designate 'market spaces' within all towns;
- reduce the dependence on chemical inputs by the majority of farmers;
- support sustainable farming by favouring small farms;
- fund the Irish Seed Savers Association which is dedicated to the preservation of traditional varieties of fruit and vegetables.

Section 1: A Vibrant Green Economy (continued)

Food

The Green Party will:

- ensure that food products are clearly labelled with all products displaying country of origin and carbon ratings so that customers can compare for different foods;
- set up a single agency to take over the monitoring of food hygiene regulations to avoid conflicting stipulations being given to producers, as is so often the case;
- ensure that all food production regulations take account of small producers who should not be put out of business by unrealistic requirements;
- Promote and support a comprehensive national nutrition strategy encouraging healthy eating for all.

Organic Farming

The Green Party will:

- **set a target for 5% of national acreage to be organically converted by 2012;**
- provide a simpler, easy to use free advice service for farmers, helping them convert to organic, keeping them up to date on current trends;
- impose strict penalties on those who label their produce as organic when it is not.

Forestry

Woodlands and forests play an essential role in providing us with fresh air, clean water, fertile soil and climate stability. Trees help prevent soil erosion, drought and flooding yet only 4% of our land area is tree covered. From the functional and economic point of view, trees are one of the most important renewable and sustainable resources available to this country. Trees are also of great aesthetic value and contribute to the lives of all of us.

The Green Party will:

- increase the Forestry Premium by 40% with a new emphasis on native trees;
- introduce an afforestation programme designed to promote a sustainable 'Continuous Forest Cover' with the immediate introduction of a minimum of 30% broadleaf to be planted annually;
- review the 1988 Forestry Act restructuring Coillte so that it gives equal consideration to the social, recreational and environmental objectives necessary for a sustainable forestry programme;
- implement an immediate restructuring programme of existing plantations to address the problems that are now apparent after following a policy of planting non-native fast growing conifer monocultures;
- set up a research project to identify the range of broadleaf species with economic potential.

Rural Enterprise Development

The 2004 Fitzpatrick Report on rural enterprise stated that rural development policy should focus on support for indigenous enterprise rather than Foreign Direct Investment. The Green Party's programme envisages the development of appropriately scaled enterprises in close proximity to areas of agricultural production or in new rural enterprise zones located in towns.

The Green Party will:

- **establish a new Programme for Rural Enterprise Development to allow for the emergence of a strong alternative indigenous sector;**
- introduce a new Planning Code to support the development of alternative and indigenous enterprise in rural areas focussing on renewable energy and agri-enterprise;
- establish a single Rural Enterprise Agency to offer a more streamlined service, acting as a 'one-stop-shop' for advice on grant supports etc...;
- undertake an enterprise audit reviewing existing provision and all redundant agricultural buildings and manufacturing plants in rural areas – e.g. possible use of Carlow and Mallow sugar factories as bio-fuel plants.

Marine

We will mainstream environmental considerations into all policies impacting on the marine and freshwater environment.

The Green Party will:

- license particular fisheries in conjunction with the industry to favour small scale, less environmentally damaging vessels and fishing methods;
- ensure the introduction of technical conservation methods, (e.g. square mesh panels in fishing nets to allow escape of juveniles and small non-target species), and the phase-out of destructive gear (e.g. beam trawls, suction dredges, monofilament nets) in conjunction with Government assistance to help fishing communities;
- designate marine protected areas around the coast, with the involvement of all user groups to allow regeneration of stocks;
- demand an independent observer presence on a random basis on all fleets operating in Irish waters to monitor and measure cetacean by-catch;
- introduce a programme of instant electronic logging and tagging of all catches and landings made by fishing vessels in Irish waters so they can be traced from a shop-counter back to the trawler.
- target supports for sustainable shellfish aquaculture and low density, high value fish aquaculture processing;

- invest in an offshore multi-purpose towing vessel able to tow the largest international merchant vessels to ensure full protection of the coastal environment and ensure safety of fishermen;
- reform the Foreshore Act 1933 to bring it into line with land-based planning laws;
- introduce a system of Integrated Coastal Zone Management.

Tourism

The Green Party want to develop a tourism industry that places greater emphasis on activity holidays such as cycling, walking, angling, sailing, horse-riding – a policy that promotes the very essence of Irish country living.

The Green Party will:

- devise a new plan for farm-based rural tourism;
- promote the concept of Common Interest Zones within rural towns and village areas;
- launch a ‘Proud Cities’ Programme, involving projects such as major new parks, traffic-free areas and eco-communities to demonstrate the benefits of sustainable living.
- introduce an all-Ireland Walking Development Plan, that will map out infrastructural needs and routes, devised in consultation with farmers, landowners, local authorities, NGOs and other relevant interest groups;

- make the listing, mapping and signposting of existing rights of way mandatory;
- legislate to have traditional walking routes confirmed as public rights of way after a number of years without challenge by a landowner and give freedom to roam over areas of rough grazing (mostly in the uplands);
- create a number of new regional/national parks in areas of high amenity including a Liffey Valley national park.

Employment Rights

There are over 40 pieces of primary employment legislation that employers must deal with, irrespective of whether the company employs 1 or 1,000 staff.

The Green Party will:

- consolidate the existing body of employment law in order to reduce red tape and statutory requirements on employers;
- strengthen our redundancy and unfair dismissal laws to prevent job displacement and a ‘race to the bottom’ in wages and working conditions;
- support the EU Directive on manning conditions for ferry services to guard against the use of flags-of-convenience ships in Irish ports;
- make redundancy payments tax free;
- **introduce legislation to assist whistleblowers ensuring that employees who expose illegal activity are protected.**

Section 2: Taxation and Social Policy

The Irish taxation system is unfair and inefficient. Many of the wealthiest in society continue to pay minimal or no taxes while tax reliefs that could potentially stimulate valuable social and entrepreneurial activities have been misused by successive Governments.

The Green Party believes that, in addition to raising revenue, the taxation system should be used to encourage and reward activities with positive economic, social and environmental effects. As such, the burden of taxation should be shifted away from socially constructive activities, including labour, and onto socially, economically and environmentally damaging activities.

If the central elements of this strategy are implemented, the Green Party, in accordance with the decision of its Annual Convention in March 2006, commits itself to leaving rates of corporate and income tax unchanged for the foreseeable future.

Ireland spends a modest share of its wealth on social protection in comparison with most other EU countries. The Scandinavian countries continue to demonstrate that high levels of public social expenditure retain the support of taxpayers and employers and do not impede economic performance.

Combating tax avoidance

It is clear that the only beneficiaries of some tax reliefs are wealthy individuals, while the taxpayer, the economy, the environment and society bear the costs. The Green Party has repeatedly demanded that tax residency rules be revised to ensure that those who benefit from Irish society also contribute to Irish society.

The Green Party will:

- establish a system for regularly and rigorously assessing, auditing and reviewing tax expenditures including cost/benefit analysis for all tax reliefs;

Section 2: Taxation and Social Policy (continued)

- discontinue reliefs that are costly, unproductive and unjustifiable;
- review the terms of the cap on tax relief annually on the basis of its projected effects in the coming year;
- examine the viability of introducing rules to ensure that high-earners do not continue to avoid tax through residency loopholes.

Income Taxes

The Green Party will:

- index-link tax credits and bands to provide workers with protection from the effects of inflation and to avoid taxation by stealth;
- reduce employers' and employees' PRSI contributions and fund this with the revenue generated by levies on pollution;
- introduce refundable tax credits where possible so that those who do not use some or all of their tax credits receive the equivalent in a cash payment from the State;
- **increase the standard rate of Capital Gains Tax from 20% to 25% to reduce the inequity whereby those who benefit from capital gains pay less tax than many of those who work and pay tax on their earnings.**

Value Added Tax

Last year VAT, which disproportionately affects low earners, accounted for over 30% of total revenue. We will fund VAT reductions with revenue generated by levies on pollution.

The Green Party will:

- reduce both VAT rates by 1%;
- reduce the 21% VAT rate on activities with environmental benefits and on certain essential goods and services, e.g. where it affects the ill, elderly or those with a disability;
- ensure that reduced VAT rates are passed on to customers;
- give charities a refund on VAT paid on donations in order to support their positive contribution to Irish society.

Business and taxation

The Green Party believes that the Irish economy must develop its indigenous base and that tax reliefs for businesses should be structured so that the establishment of strong indigenous enterprise is rewarded.

Capital allowances cost the Exchequer €1.6bn in 2002 (the latest year for which a figure is available at time of writing) in tax foregone. In many cases, their value to society in economic, social and environmental terms is dubious.

The Green Party will:

- **structure corporate tax reliefs and capital allowances in such a way that Research and Development, employment-generating activities, socially responsible activities, and sustainable and environmentally-friendly activities are rewarded;**
- replace commercial rates with a Site Value Tax (see below);
- reintroduce the Bank Levy for 5-year period capped at €200m per annum since banks have benefited disproportionately from Ireland's economic development at the expense of individuals and indigenous enterprises – the two biggest banks currently make about €3 billion a year.

Encouraging efficient land-use

At present, a decision to rezone land can generate large sums of money for the landowner. At the same time, local authorities and, increasingly, local businesses and the ordinary taxpayer are left to bear the expense of creating and maintaining the services and infrastructure that give the site its value. The Green Party will change this.

The Green Party will:

- replace commercial rates with an annual Site Value Tax on all land, except primary homes, agricultural land and State property that is used for non-administrative purposes, based on the value that a particular piece of land would have if there were no buildings or improvements on it;
- **establish a Windfall Tax on development land, as recommended by the Kenny Report,** to ensure that part of windfall gains made by owners of development land as a result of rezoning and service provision by local government will be returned to the community on the sale of a site.

Reducing carbon emissions

Under the Kyoto Protocol, the taxpayer will pay over €500m for carbon credits between 2008 and 2012, largely due the Government's failure to take measures to reduce carbon emissions.

The Green Party will:

- introduce a carbon levy - on the basis of current emissions levels, a €20 per tonne levy would raise at least €510m in revenue and reduce Ireland's financial liability under the Kyoto Protocol;
- use this revenue to reduce PRSI contributions of employees and employers, to reduce VAT and to increase social welfare provision to counteract "fuel poverty";
- investigate introducing personal carbon allowances to replace the carbon levv:

- replace Vehicle Registration Tax and motor tax with an Environmental Charge, based on emissions standards, fuel efficiency, size and weight, and an Environmental Levy on fuel;
- **provide support, including tax relief for the development of Ireland's renewable energy industries to develop Ireland as a Centre of Excellence for Renewable Energy technologies**

Social Inclusion

Social exclusion has a broader meaning than just poverty as it points to exclusion of people from activities, goods and services considered normal to the society in which they live. Their exclusion can be, but is not always, related to their level of income.

The Green Party will

- provide more resources for the Office for Social Inclusion;
- ensure that public policies for social inclusion are integrated into the wider policy framework;
- provide additional resources for reformed poverty impact assessment procedures;
- commission further data collection on levels and risk of poverty and the development of indicators to measure relative and consistent poverty trends
- establish social inclusion units in all local authorities.

Welfare Reform

Ireland is exceptional within the EU for the high proportion of social spending that is means-tested - just over a quarter. An integrated taxation and social welfare system would permit transparent access to information regarding income levels and would therefore eliminate the high reliance on means-testing.

In 2004 there were 119,159 "qualified" adults, i.e. without a social welfare payment depending on another adult who is receiving a social welfare payment, and 95% of these were women. **The Social Welfare system continues to be based on the male breadwinner model which denies women full independence.**

The Green Party will:

- combine the tax and social welfare systems fully to allow for more efficient data and money transfer mechanisms;
- abolish means-testing of the carers' allowance and work towards abolishing it for other primary payments such as unemployment assistance;
- review means-testing as a method of assessment for secondary benefits, working towards replacing it with a needs based assessment procedure based on the integrated revenue/social welfare system;

- pay qualified adult payments at 100% of the full adult rate and pay this directly to the qualified adult;
- abolish the limitation rule which reduces the total payment to households where both adults have eligibility for social assistance in their own right by 15%;
- implement a regular review process of rates of entitlements;
- index-link all entitlements on an annual basis as per consumer price index increases.

Fighting Poverty

While Ireland is now the second richest country in the world per head of population the EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2006 reported that 6.8% of the population and 9.9% of children are living in consistent poverty. A significant minority of poor individuals are in households where the household head is in work.

There are many types of work in the social economy that the market economy fails to recognise. Women in particular are affected by this reality - six out of every ten carers of disabled and elderly relatives are women.

The Green Party will:

- develop a new increased payment for carers which combines the carers' allowance and benefit and is therefore available to all;
- introduce an additional refundable tax credit for carers;
- benchmark the lowest social welfare payment for a single person at 50% of per person average household income;
- make personal tax credits refundable to people over 18 and under 65 who have a track record of an average of 8 hours paid employment per week and are not claiming an income maintenance payment;
- undertake a feasibility study into the gradual phasing in of other credits currently available to tax payers that are not refundable;
- advance the work which has been carried out to amalgamate Child Dependent Allowances and Family Income Support;
- replace Rent Supplement with a Housing Benefit which would act as a direct payment to the house seekers, allowing them to negotiate rents themselves thereby dampening housing market inflation.

Access To Entitlements

The Green Party will

- undertake a review of all social welfare payments with a view to standardising payments and reducing differences which currently exist between means-tested and non means-tested rates of entitlements;

Section 2: Taxation and Social Policy (continued)

- introduce a tapered withdrawal system for all payments whereby they are linked by percentage to increases in income limits;
- make child benefit a universal entitlement for all, not just EU citizens.

Extended Social Insurance Benefits

The Green Party will

- lower the contribution levels needed to access benefits;
- allow retrospective credits for all women who have lost out on cover due to civil service marriage bar;

- introduce reforms recognising carers for the purpose of social insurance contributions;
- recognise spouses of self-employed/farmers for social insurance contributions;
- reform the two year rule, which means that a person with no social insurance record for more than two years must have 26 paid contributions before credits can be rewarded, by enabling a re-entry for women wishing to re-enter the labour market.

Section 3: Transport and Communications

The Green Party in Government will fundamentally change transport planning in Ireland in order to reduce deaths from traffic accidents and air pollution, cut damaging emissions, lessen our reliance on fossil fuels, provide greater accessibility, mobility and choice for all and tackle the congestion which is seriously affecting the economic and social well-being of our country.

We will set three targets to measure our progress:

- **halve the number of road deaths within our first full term in office;**
- **reverse the recent 6% per annum increases in oil consumption to an annual average 2% reduction to meet the climate change challenge and to match the annual reduction in world oil supplies following a peak in global oil production;**
- **As a long term target we want to halve average commuting distances which have almost trebled over the last twenty five years due to bad planning.**

The Green Party will work within the spending parameters of Transport 21 but will shift the spending priorities within the budget to promote public transport, walking and cycling modes and more balance regional development.

We will progress the main public transport projects designated in the Transport 21 plan including the Dublin Metro, the Western Rail Corridor, the Spencer Dock to Heuston rail interconnector and the Luas extensions to City West, Cherrywood and the Point Depot.

However, we then want to go further and in the following additional projects:

Rail Services

The Green Party will:

- connect the two existing lines in Dublin City centre via College Green and immediately provide extensions to Finglas and Rathfarnham;
- introduce a new East-West Luas line from Lucan to the Poolbeg peninsula;
- design the metro extension south from Cherrywood to follow a direct route to Bray rather than diverting to the west of the N11 as is being proposed;
- fast-track the rail interconnector between Spencer Dock and Heuston Station and the electrification of the Kildare and Maynooth Lines;
- extend the Metro north to Donabate and south from St Stephens Green to connect at Beechwood from where Luas and Metro trams would then share Luas Line B to Bray;
- extend the proposed orbital Metro eastwards from Ballymun to Baldoyle to serve this rapidly developing northern fringe area of the city;
- conduct a feasibility study and cost benefit analysis for the widening of the rail line north of Connolly Station to allow for more commuter, Dart and intercity rail services and examine the continued use of level crossings on busy rail lines;
- proceed with the immediate construction of the Navan rail line;
- upgrade the South East Rail Line between Dublin and Rosslare;
- build a light rail line running from Mahon to Ballincollig via Cork City Centre;
- promote a Galway Luas from Barna to the City centre and from there to Oranmore;

Section 3: Transport and Communications (continued)

- reopen the Western Rail Corridor between Sligo and Tralee on a phased basis, beginning with connections to Shannon and Tuam;
- provide new commuter rail services on the existing lines into Limerick with new stations;
- introduce high-speed direct services from Dublin to Shannon to increase the catchment area of Shannon Airport;
- introduce a rail freight subsidy on a per tonne basis for materials that are transferred from existing road freight onto rail freight.

Bus Services

The Green Party will:

- ensure the bus regulator carries out a full review of all existing bus services in cities and sets a new 'route and service level' structure for all operators;
- publish a new Passenger's Charter to guarantee standards;
- make major investment in new quality bus corridors to ensure that the turn-around time of buses improves thus radically increasing capacity from the existing fleet;
- introduce fast and frequent long distance commuting bus services in the regions around the main cities providing key sections of bus lane on all the congested points en route to the city centres;
- provide a simple one, two and three euro charging system for city bus services;
- ensure all public buses and State vehicles run on bio-fuels;
- provide park and ride facilities outside all cities and larger towns.

Walking

The Green Party will:

- introduce new 30kph speed limit areas for traffic in most city centre locations and improve the green time given to pedestrians at traffic crossings;
- introduce a national Safe Route to School programme within the lifetime of the next Government;
- extend special pedestrian promenades along the seafront in Galway and Dublin, the Shannon in Limerick and city centre in Cork;
- allow the pedestrian become the dominant mode in city centres by extending pedestrian areas and providing access-only streets and traffic calming measures;
- introduce a Central Pedestrianisation Fund that Local Authorities could draw from to pedestrianise portions of county towns.

Cycling

The Green Party will:

- introduce a new national cycle network to promote both local and long distance recreational cycling and providing safe commuting routes in urban centres;

- Provide funding for Cycle Safe programmes in all primary and secondary schools;
- Investigate the introduction of same liability protection for more vulnerable road users as exists in other European countries;
- set requirements for the carrying of bicycles on new modes of public transport.

Roads

The Green Party will:

- respect existing road contracts but, where there is concern about potential damage to communities, environment or heritage, will investigate how this can be minimised within the scope of the contract or through renegotiation;
- upgrade and maintain existing road stock, where necessary providing bypasses;
- give greater priority to road freight vehicles on the M50 and other National Primary Routes ;
- NRA to set a new roads investment policy with priority given to road safety, environmental and urban planning measures.
- use road tolling to manage traffic rather than increase revenue, so tolls could be nil at off-peak times;

Road Safety

The Green Party will:

- **reduce the blood alcohol limit to 50mg/100ml and support random breath testing;**
- invest adequately in enforcement so people who speed or drink drive know they will be caught;
- introduce fixed and mobile speed cameras;
- introduce road safety skills and initial driver training lessons onto school curriculum
- implement a new three-stage process of driver training

Institutional Reform

To have an efficient transportation system planning, regional development and transportation have to be closely integrated.

The Green Party will:

- create a new National Transport and Land Use Authority with a strategic planning, regulatory, procurement and a design role;
- allow the Public Transport Regulator within the National Transport Authority to ensure greater integration between all transport services including integrated ticketing and timetabling;
- amend Compulsory Purchase Order regulations to ensure that land acquired for new transport projects is assessed on its existing use value rather than hope value;

Section 3: Transport and Communications (continued)

- provide cost benefit analysis and publish prior to any contract being signed on new projects;
- ensure that the cost benefit analysis for all infrastructure projects includes measures of the climate change and social costs resulting from the development.

Rural Transport

The Green Party will:

- ensure that rural public transport schemes are co-ordinated by the National Transport Authority, liaising closely with local county councils, communities and providers;
- provide for the development of an Integrated Rural Transport Network combining rural bus services and frequent city and inter-town train services;
- expand and properly fund Rural Transport Initiatives (RTI)
- incorporate existing school bus programmes into a wider network of rural bus services;
- encourage the clustering of residential development near existing villages.

Accessibility

The Green Party will:

- introduce 100% wheelchair accessible taxi fleets in our cities;
- ensure that low floor and accessible buses become the norm;
- abolish the student travel card, which represents a form of double taxation on students, and replace it with a free student ID card which will entitle students to the same level of discounts.

Air Travel

The Green Party will:

- develop new routes from Cork, Shannon and Belfast and provide proper public transport links to these airports, rather than construct a second terminal in Dublin;
- phase out the subsidy to internal flights;
- support proposals from the French government to put an EU-wide tax on aviation fuel.

Sea Transport

Shipping plays a vital role in connecting Ireland with the world. It is a very energy-efficient form of transportation. As they are a vital strategic asset and are currently well run, Ireland's ports should not be privatised. Our proposed Public Transport Regulator will ensure that timetabling of ferry and rail services is efficient and rational.

Communications

The Green Party will:

- carry out a feasibility study into the State re-taking control of Eircom, divesting any commercial operation, and maintaining the fixed-line network as an open access infrastructure to all operators;
- set the mobile phone operators, cable companies and Eircom into direct competition to get cheaper, faster and more integrated broadband services;
- review the Government's rollout of metropolitan area networks to resolve the issues of the delivery of 'back-haul' connections and the 'last mile' connection to the consumer;
- consolidate post offices into local community internet/broadband facilities;
- introduce a proper policing and monitoring system for the operation of mobile phone masts;
- establish a new unified broadcasting regulator and the similar reconstitution of the RTE Authority to ensure its future independence;
- develop an all-island digital 'free to air' broadcasting service carrying RTE 1 & 2, TG4, TV3 and the Northern Ireland BBC/ITV public service main channels.

Section 4: Housing and Development

Increasing prices are a major problem for young homebuyers and those who need to move to larger homes. The increasing number of those on housing lists and of those in receipt of the rental supplement shows that the property boom is not delivering for the needs of ordinary people. Practices such as land speculation and the hoarding of zoned land have distorted the housing market and impeded the provision of affordable housing.

The Green Party will:

- enshrine in law the principle of housing as a right, as has been done in France;
- set up a Housing Authority, under the auspices of the Department of the Environment, whose objective will be to shape and influence the development of housing policy through research, market analysis and information and advice;
- **ensure that local authorities will compulsorily purchase development land prior to rezoning, at agricultural or existing use value plus 25%, for the purpose of providing social or affordable housing** or for sale at full market value to private developers;
- review existing stamp duty rates and abolish stamp duty for older persons who are 'downsizing' and extend relief for first-time buyers who wish to purchase the same property;
- shift the tax burden from labour to 'smart' taxes on the site value of land excluding agricultural land and primary homes (see "Taxation and Social Policy");
- give pre-emption rights to local authorities to purchase property at point of sale and make more active use of existing compulsory purchase powers;
- empower local authorities to designate 'brown field' sites in need of redevelopment;

Social and Affordable Housing and Homelessness

Ireland is producing markedly less social housing today than in the past. In 2002 social housing accounted for only 10% of total housing output.

The Green Party will

- **ensure the delivery of 10,000 social and affordable housing units a year**, until the housing waiting lists are cleared, by insisting on up to one third social and affordable housing provision within new developments;
- limit developers from using land or financial transfer to opt out of building social housing units within new residential schemes;
- integrate local authority housing for people with disabilities into as many housing schemes as possible;

- reduce from 50% to 25% the contribution made by home owners in local authority estates undergoing regeneration if they wish to avail of the upgrade to the exterior of their house, in particular when this leads to greater energy efficiency;
- meet the demands and timescales of the Make Room campaign in addressing for once and for all the scourge of homelessness in Irish society.

Management Companies and Taking Estates in Charge

The Green Party will

- guarantee that local authorities will not allow the creation of management companies as part of the planning permission conditions for traditional estates;
- create a regulatory body to oversee the use of management companies;
- ensure that management agents are strictly policed by the National Property Services Regulatory Authority;
- introduce new procedures for taking estates into charge by local authorities, including penalties on developers if they fail to bring the estate up to the necessary standard within the prescribed time.

Private Rented Sector

The Green Party wants to see renting in the private sector come to be regarded as a legitimate and sensible housing choice .

The Green Party will:

- give tenants security of tenure of one month for every five month's occupation;
- encourage institutional investors such as pension funds, trade Unions, credit unions, etc. to become involved in the sector;
- require landlords to register with our proposed Housing Authority with their properties having to reach minimum standards before a licence will be issued to rent a dwelling;
- shorten the period over which landlords can claim tax back on renovating their properties from 8 to 4 years;
- limit rent increases to a 5% increase above inflation;
- target all new tax incentives on not-for-profit housing and allow the not-for-profit sector to compete with the private sector for tenants.

Section 4: Housing and Development (continued)

Joined-up Thinking in Urban Planning

The Government continues to set the agenda for a developer-led approach to planning that ignores the social, economic and environmental consequences of rising private transport dependence and energy consumption. The current urban planning framework is disjointed.

The Green Party will:

- require local authorities to have Masterplans to specify the forecasted transport, education, community service capacity requirements and to inform the Department of Education of new zoning decisions and changes to County Development Plans that have implications for future educational needs;
- amend the Planning Act to guarantee the provision of educational facilities within new growth areas by requiring developers to either supply the necessary land, pay development contributions to finance schools or build the necessary schools as a condition of planning permission;
- create a Strategic Planning Unit within the Department of Education to coordinate the development of new and existing schools and place a statutory obligation on the Department to review its school building programme each time a local authority rezones land or gives planning permission to a residential development;
- **require local authorities to zone specific areas within their Development Plans in locations that will gain from *Transport 21* investments** to establish a clear link between additional private gains, such as higher house prices, and to give local authorities an additional income stream to fund supporting infrastructure and services;
- require businesses to take responsibility for their own transport problems with Mobility Management Plans becoming a key requirement for planning approval in all urban areas;
- amend the Planning and Development Act 2000 to allow County Development Plans lay down standards on energy efficiency and the use of renewables;
- revise the Open Space Standards so that all green spaces provide social and ecological benefits, e.g. events, meetings and play;
- make it an explicit element of the planning framework that environmental consequences must be factored into decision-making, e.g. Development Plans, zoning decisions;
- provide urban micro-forests in all large open spaces within new residential areas and ensure that landscaping plans enhance biodiversity;
- give local authorities licencing powers over sex shops and lap dancing clubs .

Planning for People

This Government has put limits on public participation in the planning system that did not exist before. This has resulted in distrust of the planning system.

The Green Party will:

- **establish a new National Planning Advisory Agency, as a counter balance to the Strategic Infrastructure Bill, to inform the public about large planning applications in their local area and provide technical services on national and local planning policy to the public;**
- **remove the €20 Planning Participation Fee and all administrative rules that act as a barrier to open participation in the Irish planning system;**
- ensure the focus of residential planning is to create long-term sustainable communities;
- produce new Residential Guidelines based on good urban design principles
- allow appeal to An Bord Pleanála of proposed developments by State or local authorities.

Landscape Planning

The Green Party will implement the terms of the European Landscape Convention, ratified by Ireland in March 2007, by developing the following policies and legislation in cooperation with the Heritage Council and other stakeholders in the professional and NGO spheres.

- A National Landscape Policy and a Landscape Ireland Act
- A Policy and Act on Urban Parks and Green Spaces
- Create parks and landscape services in all local authorities on a phased basis
- Integrate landscape management into the NDP 2007-2013.

Rural Planning

The Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines are fraught with difficulties and show that the Government does not take seriously either the problem of rural transport or the impact of development in areas without sufficient local water or waste water treatment services.

The Green Party will:

- encourage local authorities to buy or to Compulsorily Purchase land-banks around villages and provide serviced sites at cost to residents so that shops, schools, etc., are located within walking distance;
- promote rural planning policies that give preference to those who make an economic contribution to the rural community in which they wish to live;

- amend the planning provisions in relation to Occupancy Agreements to require that deed or mortgage evidence is provided on an annual basis to stop speculation in the sale of housing to non-rural buyers so that rural people have the opportunity to build and live in the rural areas where they work ;
- **increase spending on capital investment for sewage treatment infrastructure in key towns and villages under development pressure;**
- introduce a new septic tank servicing subsidy for rural home owners to reduce water pollution and kick-start better monitoring of tanks;
- provide new guidelines on site suitability assessments for all development in rural areas which will propose limitations on development in close proximity to watercourses, in areas with regionally important aquifers, EU designated areas SACs/SPAs, Natural Heritage Areas and in areas of high visual amenity;
- increase the budget for the CLAR Programme, which went towards bridging the investment deficit in rural areas, to include additional activities.

Section 5: Justice, Equality and Law Reform

Crime Prevention

The Green Party will focus on both the causes of crime as well as dealing with the consequences of crime.

While recognising that there is no one solution, there is considerable evidence, not least in terms of the socio-economic profile of criminals, which suggests that social exclusion is a key factor in crime rates.

Low family income, inadequate housing, low educational achievement, and access to social and recreational facilities are areas that must be tackled by Government in order to redress the marginalisation experienced by too many communities in Ireland. These issues are dealt with in other sections of this manifesto.

Tackling Anti Social Behaviour

Anti-social behaviour results in the destruction of community facilities, the undermining of law and order and the generation of a degree of fear in householders, especially the elderly.

However the Green Party does not believe that Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBO's) address the real issues behind such behaviour and we will repeal the sections of the Criminal Justice Act that provide for the introduction of ASBOs for both adults and children.

Effective methods of dealing with anti social behaviour are already in place but due to a lack of Government investment resources have not been made available to make them work.

The Green Party will fully implement and resource the following alternatives to ASBOs:

- The Garda Juvenile Diversion Programme: almost 90% of children admitted to the programme do not come to the notice of the Gardaí again before their 18th birthday.

- Promote the 64 Garda Youth Diversion Projects;
- Resource conferencing which brings together the child, parent(s), Gardaí, educational and social services.
- Encourage Community sanctions for young offenders and Parental sanctions, e.g. pay compensation, undergo treatment for alcohol, substance abuse;
- Properly resource community policing.

Tackling Organised Crime and Trafficking

In the past five years Ireland has seen a phenomenal rise in organised gang-related crime which has resulted in a dramatic increase in gun related murders.

The Green Party will:

- **establish an Organised Crime Agency similar to that in the UK;**
- bring into law the EU Council decision on combating trafficking in human beings which obliged all member states to legislate to criminalise human trafficking;
- adopt and implement a comprehensive strategy to combat trafficking in women and girls.

Garda Reform

An Garda Síochána has proudly served the people of Ireland for almost a century. However in recent years it has experienced a number of extremely damaging incidents including the corrupt and dishonest policing in County Donegal, the shooting of John Carthy at Abbeylara, and the handling of 'Reclaim the Streets' demonstration in 2004.

Section 5: Justice, Equality and Law Reform (continued)

In order for An Garda Síochána to regain its position as a respected and trusted protector of the peace the Green Party will:

- **provide for a systematic increase in Garda numbers on an annual basis until numbers are in line with population growth – we believe that at least 15,000 are currently needed;**
- increase civilian staffing to free members from excessive desk work;
- provide continued professional training and education including multi-cultural relations and anti-homophobia training;
- **implement new discipline regulations, new promotion regulations and a whistleblowers' charter and act on the findings of Justice Morris;**
- ensure that the recommendations made by Justice Barr arising from the Abbeylara incident are implemented;
- draw up a charter for placing human rights at the centre of policing in Ireland.

Supporting the Victims of Crime

Victims of crime more than often find themselves having to deal with an adversarial criminal justice system, while simultaneously attempting to deal with the trauma of the crime itself. We believe that the victims of crime in Ireland must be afforded access to the support services that will in some way ease the difficulties of engaging with the system.

It is estimated that up to one in five women experience domestic violence. The criminal and civil justice systems consistently fail to recognise the complexities of domestic violence and address the safety of the victim or hold offenders accountable. Every year the Women's Aid National Freephone Helpline receives over 8,000 calls but statistics for 2005 recorded 10,504 missed calls.

The Green Party will:

- implement guidelines to require the judiciary to provide explanations for sentences;
- afford victims of crime the same access to legal representation and court access as the accused, and ensure that costs are automatically awarded to victims;
- increase funding to Women's Aid to ensure that phone calls do not go unanswered;
- provide multi-annual funding for the National Domestic Violence Intervention Agency;
- take a proactive approach to tackling the root causes of domestic violence and to invest in preventative measures;
- open additional sexual assault treatment units outside Dublin as recommended by a national review in 2006 with facilities to store forensic evidence safely;

- increase funding for support services for men and their children who are experiencing domestic violence such as provided by Amen in Navan;
- restore funding to allow for the re-establishment of the Missing Persons Helpline and the advertising of its service.

Access to Justice

Access to all the traditional professions is difficult for those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds due to barriers of cost, connections and opportunity. At present, obtaining free legal aid in civil cases remains difficult and subject to severe restrictions regarding means testing.

The Green Party will:

- review the cut-off levels currently used when means-testing free legal aid for civil cases;
- increase funding for FLAC and existing community law centres;
- examine the expansion of community law centres;
- address barriers to access to the legal professions specifically among disadvantaged, minority communities.

Reform of the Penal System

The Green Party believes that the Irish penal system is in dire need of reform at the most fundamental level. The recurring problems of recidivism, overcrowding and psychiatric issues need immediate addressing:

The Green Party will:

- re-open the Curragh Prison to deal with overcrowding;
- **establish a Working Group on Penal Reform to develop alternatives to custody;**
- abolish plans to relocate Mountjoy to Thornton Hall and instead review options to refurbish and extend the present buildings;
- legislate to place the Inspector of Prisons on a fully independent and statutory footing;
- introduce an Ombudsman for Prisons;
- ratify the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture (OPCAT) to ensure national monitoring of places of detention is effective and independent;
- double the resources of the Probation and Welfare Service to allow for greater numbers to receive community based sanction programmes, also to ensure supervision and support of young offenders on re-entry into the community;
- develop an after-prison support system, i.e. supports for accommodation, education, employment.

Marriage and Partnership Rights

The Green Party fully recognises the vital role marriage plays in our society. We agree that the special position of marriage should be maintained within our Constitution. We also believe that giving recognition to other forms of family life which provide support to society does not in any way lessen the importance of marriage.

The Green Party will:

- establish 'Family Centres' to assist in pre-marriage courses, marriage counselling, mediation and arbitration;
- seek legislation that would remove all gender specific terms from current legislation and regulations governing the granting of marriages to allow same-sex couples enjoy the rights and responsibilities of civil marriage;
- **recommend the creation of a new category of 'civil partnership', an institution that could be created and dissolved with more ease than marriage. This would be available to both heterosexual and same-sex couples;**
- increase protections for unregistered cohabiting couples.

Traveller Community

The Green Party will:

- recognise Travellers as a minority ethnic group;
- establish action plans on a statutory basis to tackle Traveller accommodation and help integrate local housing strategies and Traveller programmes;
- review outcomes of current investment in Traveller Education in consultation with Traveller groups, creating benchmarks for Traveller education against the general standards;
- ensure that Travellers have greater access to counselling and to Mental Health services to help tackle the extremely high rate of suicide amongst young men in the community;
- develop a strategy for Travellers and work including promotion of "affirmative actions" among employers;
- consider sanctions against local authorities that fail to deliver and implement Traveller Accommodation Programmes.

Disability

At present, people with disabilities, 1 in 12 of the population, have had their right to be full citizens compromised, whether it be access to employment (where up to 80% are unable to get jobs), public transport or housing.

The Green Party will:

- ensure that at least half of the National Disability Strategy will be implemented by 2010;
- introduce a Cost of Disability payment of approx. €40 per week;
- **ensure a rights-based approach to disability issues;**
- support all-encompassing legislation on disability, eg. 'Americans with Disabilities Act';
- give official recognition to Irish Sign Language;
- address the shortfall in places for people with intellectual disabilities in need of respite and day-care services;
- provide more funding to initiatives which provide financial incentives to employers to recruit disabled people for over 20 hours a week, e.g. FAS Wage Subsidy Scheme, Workplace Equipment Adaptation Grant (WEAG);
- increase access by disabled people to the workforce by allowing them to earn over €120 per week without losing the Disability Allowance;
- ensure that all State and local authority buildings are made accessible within 5 years;
- promote Early Intervention Services for all children with special needs;
- fund Pre School Support Workers for children with complex needs to allow them attend Pre School;
- increase funding for services for physically disabled persons over 18 years;
- provide Medical cards for all children with disabilities up to 18 years.

Section 6: Environment

Coordination between environmental, planning and health agencies

The Environmental Protection Agency currently operates in a vacuum and has failed to make the necessary connections with other bodies responsible for planning and human health.

The EPA has explicitly said human health considerations are the responsibility of the Department of Health. However, the Health Service Executive does not take responsibility for assessing health impacts of major pollution-risk projects and An Bord Pleanála is still precluded from considering health in relation to projects requiring EPA approval.

The Green Party will:

- require that the EPA report on all planning applications where pollution control is an issue prior to the relevant planning authority making a decision;
- ensure that a review is conducted on the lack of cooperation between the EPA and An Bord Pleanála and identify any resource needs;
- amend the EPA Act to clarify that the EPA as the license issuing body should be held accountable for human health effects of environmental decisions;
- **call upon the EPA to draft, with public participation, a National Environmental Action Plan with short, medium and long-term targets to be approved by the Dáil and the social partners;**
- place much greater emphasis on coordinating the activities of the EPA and the Environment and Heritage Service, Northern Ireland and of local authorities on both sides of the border;
- give the EPA Advisory Committee much greater powers to set priorities and strategy of the Agency and the power to approve and to reject all EPA strategy statements, reports;
- ensure that the majority of Advisory Committee members are drawn from specialist fields, environmental, legal and medical organisations.

Licensing, appeal and enforcement functions

Under the current Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC) licensing system no 'independent' form of redress or appeal is available. Also the Office of Environmental Enforcement (OEE), which was set up as an office within the EPA, raises questions about how separate the processes of license allocation and license monitoring and enforcement are in practice.

The average fine imposed by courts where the EPA successfully prosecuted offenders in 2005 was only €2559.

The Green Party will:

- establish an appeal function for the terms of waste and IPPC licenses and incorporate this into the remit of An Bord Pleanála;
- completely separate the EPA / OEE to ensure that environmental monitoring and enforcement are conducted in a more effective and impartial fashion;
- improve coordination between the OEE and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions to ensure more polluters are indicted ;
- **amend legislation so that environmental fines are based on company turnover and reflect any financial gain made by not fulfilling environmental obligations;**
- **enact the provision in the Environmental Protection Act to subject local authorities' sewage treatment activities to an EPA licensing regime;**
- introduce annual 'local authority environmental performance' audits;
- provide real-time information on-line on air and water quality.

Environmental Rights and Justice

Ireland has signed but not ratified the Aarhus Convention. This UN convention grants strong rights in areas of access to environmental information, rights to participate in environmental decision-making and access to justice on environmental issues. In this regard, an issue that most be urgently addressed is that of financial cost for those who wish take legal action to protect their local environment.

The Green Party will:

- **transpose the European Directives on access to information on the environment and on participation in environmental decision-making;**
- reform the judicial review procedure to ensure that judges have a range of measures - legal aid or other instruments - by which to financially protect those who pursue judicial review cases with clear public interest motivations;
- appoint more judges to deal with environmental cases;
- produce legislation to deal with the established practices which have insulated expert agency decisions from legal scrutiny ;
- establish a study group within the Constitutional Review Group to examine the feasibility of introducing a constitutional right to a clean, healthy environment at local, regional and national levels.

Reducing Waste

The latest figures show that we are now European leaders in waste generation, landfill and waste exporting. The Government's main waste campaign 'Race Against Waste' is targeted against householders despite the fact that household waste made up only 2% of the total waste generated in 2004.

The Green Party will:

- **set up a National Zero Waste Agency to achieve Zero Waste within 20-years;**
- establish a Zero Waste fund and brand, financed by waste levies, and made available to businesses that directly contribute to achieving agreed Zero waste targets;
- ensure that reuse will become a key component of product engineering and design;
- establish new waste collection service systems that will prohibit flat rate charges and introduce volume or weight-related charges nationally;
- establish a strict code of "Green Purchasing" within government departments, local authorities and all public agencies;
- provide tax relief to companies who switch over to Clean Production systems;
- require local authorities to publish an annual inventory of waste generation and recycling submitting annual progress reports to the National Waste Agency.

Leading the Way in Waste Management

The Green Party believe that the Zero Waste model will work to put Ireland in the forefront of Waste Management technology.

- set high environmental and waste elimination standards with inbuilt flexibility in the early years but, becoming progressively tighter over time;
- introduce market and incentive supports to promote waste enterprises so that companies can turn waste into profit instead of paying for costly exporting;
- develop environmental, waste production and management regulations in harmony with other countries, or ahead of them, maximising export potential and competitiveness in industries and services dedicated to pollution control and environmental management.

Establishing Integrated Waste Infrastructure

The Government is hell bent on promoting incineration and landfill as the solution to our waste management crisis.

The Green Party will:

- continue to oppose incineration of municipal waste **and actively seek alternatives to the incineration of toxic and hazardous waste;**
- ensure the full and timely implementation of all EU waste management targets;
- **introduce new waste separation laws to prohibit the disposal of mixed wet and dry waste;**
- introduce "cleanfill" sites that only accept inert and sterile waste;
- phase out existing landfills, those remaining will be restricted to residual dry waste that cannot be recycled;
- roll out a large network of recycling collection centres across the country;
- provide free composters to all households and offer financial supports for start-up commercial composting facilities, in suitable sites.
- promote Anaerobic Waste Digestors to turn biodegradable food and waste into energy;
- ensure that nutrient management planning will have an important role in determining the level of individual farm waste available to supply digesters across the country;
- require alkaline hydrolysis for all slaughtering waste;

Supporting the recycled goods market

Ireland processes a mere 26% of all recyclable goods collected here.

The Green Party will:

- establish a Market Development Unit within the National Zero Waste Agency to promote recycling by initiating a national 'Buy Recycled' campaign;
- increase municipal recycling waste targets from the current 35% to 50% by 2013;
- introduce new production materials regulations ensuring a higher proportion of products are made from recyclable/reusable material;
- promote the use of returnable containers through a deposit refund system and a levy on non-returnable containers/packaging;
- introduce a requirement for recycling and reuse plans for demolition and construction projects;
- set up a National Recycling Taskforce targeting each sector of business/industry and to establish agreements with key industries.
- amend the Planning & Development Act 2000 to provide that buildings demolition and dismantling methods ensure a maximum reuse capability of waste materials;
- change the legislation so that all public works contracts contain an obligation for the re-use of construction waste materials;

Section 6: Environment (continued)

- require all firms to take back the packaging on request from consumers, segregate the packaging waste and comprehensively engage in re-use, return and/or recycling of same;
- remove the present system whereby certain companies with high waste volumes can opt out of this requirement by voluntary participation in a compliance system under the Repak 'green dot' scheme;

Promoting Community Participation

The Green Party will:

- **revoke sections of the 2001 Waste Management (Amendment) Act and the Protection of the Environment Act 2003 so that decisions on waste are taken by democratically elected representatives rather than City and County Managers.**
- provide financial assistance from local authorities and Government for small-scale not-for-profit and community-based re-use, repair and recycling enterprises;
- introduce 'smart purchasing' education campaigns and new eco-labelling so that individuals can make more informed choices;
- provide for a "one-stop shop" in each local authority to deal with the scourges of illegal dumping, litter and graffiti.

Water

The Green Party will deliver a sustainable water policy based on a commitment to restoring and maintaining water quality and the associated ecosystems, notably wetlands.

The Green Party will:

- introduce a radical new programme of water monitoring and enforcement and for nutrient management planning on a river catchment basis;
- encourage the use of reed beds to treat sewage;
- set up an independent study into the total fluoride intake of the Irish population, as called for by the Oireachtas Health Committee, and if the study shows excess levels we will stop the current fluoridation of drinking water;
- ensure that the role of wetlands in the water cycle and the functioning of aquatic systems is recognised in current water management strategies;
- ban the use of phosphates and replace with safe alternatives.



Noise Pollution

All of us have experienced problems with neighbourhood noise at some point in our lives yet noise has not received the same attention as other forms of pollution. The Green Party, which produced a Noise Bill in the final term of the 29th Dáil, will continue to push for the passing of this Bill which will provide for an effective "one-stop shop" for noise complaints.

Animal Welfare

The Green Party asserts the rights of animals to humane treatment and living conditions, and the responsibility of the human being to care for his/her fellow species.

The Green Party will:

- set up an Animal Welfare Agency to investigate animal cruelty and exploitation;
- provide increased support for animal welfare organisations and sanctuaries,
- ban systems that fail to meet the welfare needs of animals, e.g. fur farming;
- promote substitutes for all products where production or testing of these products involves cruelty to animals and seek a public enquiry into animal experimentation.
- continue its campaign for a prohibition of the animal fur products trade;
- promote a national network of local abattoirs and value-added meat processing in Ireland to minimise live animal transportation,
- seek to phase out live exports over time;
- ban blood sports with heavy penalties for organisers of, and participants in, illegal blood sports,
- introduce an annual audit of Irish zoos and circuses by an independent expert group.

Section 7: Health

Primary or community health has the capacity to meet up to 90 per cent of health needs, but our current system discriminates in favour of hospital care. Hospital care is free to all, but the majority have to pay for primary care. This approach is both costly and wasteful and, in the longer term, unsustainable. Access to appropriate healthcare is a basic human right.

General Practitioner care

The Irish Medical Organisation (IMO) estimates that 250,000 people cannot afford general practitioner visits: they may defer them, or, alternatively, attend a hospital casualty unit.

The Green Party will:

- expand the medical card system as outlined below;
- address the current shortage of GPs in socially-deprived areas by building or converting premises into primary health centres incorporating minor injury units, leased to GPs and other medical practitioners at reduced rates;
- require GPs to provide an agreed level of out of hours cover as part of their GMS contracts;
- reform the GP co-operative system, so that each GP need cover only a realistic area.

Human Resources

If primary health is to become central to our healthcare system, a significant increase will be needed in the number of various primary care practitioners. The costs involved will be saved many times over, as better health requires less hospitalisation and fewer pharmaceuticals.

The Green Party will

- implement the Fottrell Report recommendations on undergraduate places in medicine;
- increase the number of places for GP training;
- abolish the compulsory retirement age of 65 for GMS contract-holders;
- introduce financial incentives for midwives wishing to establish their own practices.

Hospitals and Accident & Emergency Units

We are undergoing a major crisis in the Irish health services, with the Minister for Health labelling the conditions in A & E as a 'national emergency'.

A number of issues have to be addressed, including:

- Our two-tier health system which discriminates between insured and uninsured patients;
- The lack of community supports for patients no longer in need of acute care in hospital;
- The need for reform in the running of our hospitals;

- The necessity for a partnership approach between hospital staff and hospital management, with greater flexibility and innovative work practices being agreed.

The Green Party will:

- reopen immediately any available public long-stay facilities;
- review bed capacity (currently 27% below the EU15 average) with a view to expanding acute bed capacity in a planned manner;
- provide an additional 400 acute beds and 400 step-down beds per annum over the term of Government;
- increase community-based beds and community support structures in line with the 2001 Health Strategy;
- expand long-stay and community facilities for the aging population;
- establish acute medical units (AMUs) in all acute general hospitals;
- open local 24-hour primary care centres consisting of community-based multi-disciplinary health clinics staffed by GPs, nurses, midwives, specialist practitioners and others, as proposed in the Government's abandoned Primary Health Care Strategy;
- fully implement the guidelines for the control of MRSA with the additional staffing necessary to tackle this;
- introduce measures to curb the prescribing of antibiotic in general practice and hospitals.

Health Service

The Green Party believes that implementing aspects of the Hanly Report is the best way to achieve reform in medical staffing and recognises the genuine fears felt by many who see increasing numbers of services leaving their locality with little hope of their replacement.

If the appropriate sections of the Hanly Report are fully and correctly implemented, it will ensure Ireland's compliance with the European Working Hours Directive, relieve pressure on junior doctors and result in safer and more effective hospital care.

The Green Party will:

- subsume the National Treatment Purchase Fund into the Health Service Executive and make it subject to the controls of the Department of Health;
- phase in Social Health Insurance over a period of 10 years;
- **introduce a Patient Safety Bill and a Whistleblowers' Bill;**

Section 7: Health (continued)

- ensure that the HSE is as fully accountable to members of the Oireachtas as Ministers are through parliamentary questions;
- establish governing boards to administer each hospital network;
- provide funding for transport to and from regional hospitals;
- explore the possibility of cross-border co-operation in acute patient care;
- lift the cap on public health employment to allow increased staffing;
- ensure Health Care Assistants are given mandatory training and are under nurse supervision;
- increase the number of consultants by 1,500 in line with the Hanly recommendations;
- appoint a Chief Dental Officer and address the dental personnel shortfall by increasing the domestic supply of dentists;
- address fully the problems in the Dental Treatment Services Scheme which is now under serious threat;
- ensure that there is equity in the availability, access and performance of cancer services throughout the country;
- implement the key recommendations within the 2006 National Cancer Strategy without delay;
- prioritise the development of hospice services under the recently agreed Social Partnership Agreement and the National Cancer Strategy;
- commit to helping voluntary organisations dealing with conditions such as autism, Down Syndrome, cystic fibrosis etc.;
- require the HSE to facilitate training and support for the recruitment of additional basic grade Allied Health Professions including, Speech and Language Therapists, Physiotherapists and Occupational Therapists into direct frontline patient care.

Health Funding

In order to encourage acceptance of the “social solidarity” model of healthcare, rather than the free market model, the Green Party believes that the purchaser-provider system of health funding should be considered, as is the case in the UK, Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium. This will improve efficiency and allow for freedom of choice.

The Green Party is not opposed to private hospitals per se. They can have a vital role to play in the provision of elective care and straightforward procedures, and could provide such facilities to the public sector on a not-for-profit basis. Private development could also be contracted to build capacity for the public sector.

The Green Party will:

- increase current and capital expenditure on health needs in a planned and phased manner in the context of the Hanly Report;
- review the 2001 Health Strategy in light of recent population growth and undertake comprehensive planning of health spending for the next ten years;
- scrap immediately the decision to subsidise building of private hospitals on public land;
- withdraw tax reliefs from private hospitals and reallocate them to public healthcare provision;
- oppose the Minister's scheme to convert the VHI to a Publicly Limited Company;
- implement an advisory charter of patients' rights.

Medical Cards

Traditionally, medical cards have been available to 35-38% of the population. At present, however, less than 26% of the population are in receipt. Ultimately, the Green Party supports the introduction of a system of Universal Health Insurance, to ensure universal health coverage for all in accordance with their needs. In the short to medium term, it is more practical to return to the historic level for granting medical cards.

The Green Party will:

- **introduce medical cards for children under 6 within the first term of government, extend to under-18s in the following term, with free primary health care for all by 2017;**
- index-link medical card guidelines to average earnings.

Voluntary Insurance

Risk equalisation ensures that health insurance companies may not demand a higher premium from older customers than they do from younger customers. To compensate, insurers with lower-risk membership (BUPA, Vivas) must transfer funds to insurers with a higher-risk membership (VHI). The Green Party supports risk equalisation which is both equitable and ensures an efficient market.



Health Promotion

More resources should be made available for preventative measures that would make for a healthier population and produce savings in the long term.

The Green Party will

- significantly increase the budget for health promotion and support public immunisation programmes;
- initiate a comprehensive health promotion and cancer prevention plan which would incorporate nationwide screening for certain cancers, where appropriate;
- support the extension of health screening programmes to all parts of the country;
- require energy-dense foods, such as crisps, to carry a health warning and ban their marketing in schools and third-level colleges;
- ban fast food advertising on television directed at children;
- implement the recommendations of the Task Force on Alcohol;
- support specific measures to deal with the increasing problem of allergies.

Regulation of Health Care

The Green Party will:

- introduce controls on the use of inducements offered by drug corporations to doctors and others;
- require voluntary organisations in receipt of support from pharmaceutical companies to declare their sources;
- make certain therapies such as acupuncture, Chinese medicine and osteopathy reimbursable under the General Medical Services Scheme in certain, appropriate circumstances;
- support cost-effective, drug-free treatments, such as counselling and cognitive behavioural treatment for depression;
- introduce measures to regulate alternative practitioners.

Maternity care

The Green Party will

- follow the European model of community midwifery, maternity aides, local birth centres and maternity units in order to ensure high-quality maternity care and minimise risks;
- enact public information campaigns encouraging expectant mothers to breastfeed.

Mental health care

General Practitioners are currently the backbone of primary mental health services but in deprived areas GP services are often unavailable. Our proposed primary health care centres will have multi-disciplinary teams including psychiatrists, therapists and social workers.

The Green Party will

- ensure a minimum of 12% of the health budget will go to mental health (currently 6.6%);
- develop community mental health teams as alternatives to psychiatric inpatient care;
- fund a significant increase in postgraduate training places for clinical psychologists;
- implement the recommendations of the Task Force on Suicide's report on suicide;
- run a Government media campaign to remove the stigma of mental illness in Ireland;
- oppose moving the Central Mental Hospital to the proposed new site in North County Dublin.

Care and Carers

There are about 150,000 people in Ireland providing unpaid care to friends or family members with disability. While caring can be rewarding, carers can also suffer physically, psychologically and financially from their duties.

The Green Party will

- develop a National Strategy for Carers within 12 months, giving particular attention to the specific needs of older carers, and a National Carers Register to identify needs;
- develop legally enforceable levels and standards of care provision for all caring contexts;
- introduce an independent inspectorate for public, private and community care facilities;
- introduce various measures outlined under "Taxation and Social Policy" to improve the financial security of carers.

Drugs

The Green Party will:

- make available additional funds for the development of local drug services, particularly outside the Dublin region in recognition of the increased drug use in such communities;
- make available an immediate budget to resource the recommendations of the Rehabilitation Working Group;
- fully implement and resource the National Drugs Strategy;
- provide additional detox and drug-free residential places;
- commit to working in full partnership with local communities on tackling the drugs crisis.

Section 8: Education, Arts and Sport

Funding

Irish schools have become dependent on charity following years of neglect by successive governments. If people want to donate money to schools, it should be purely voluntary.

The Green Party will:

- **invest €1 billion in additional current and capital funding for education for the first year of the next Government's term of office, to front-load educational priorities;**
- draw up a 10-Year Priority Funding Plan;
- increase investment in the school building and refurbishment programme by €269m over 2007 figures;
- ensure that all new school buildings will be multi-use facilities;

Primary Education

Class size is absolutely key to the quality of education. Investment at this level will save on many problems further down the line.

The Green Party will:

- **introduce a guaranteed statutory maximum class size of 25 over the term of Government;**
- ensure an average class size of 20, prioritising under-9s by providing 1,200 extra teachers;
- review all existing pilot schemes and plan a general rollout of the successful projects such as Early Start, Breaking the Cycle, Home School, Community Liaison;
- provide €28 million annual funding for the National Education Welfare Board so that it can roll out the necessary staff under the National Education Welfare Act;
- establish an Integrated Resources Mobile Unit, i.e. Speech Therapist, Social Worker, Education Psychologist and Public Health Nurse .

Teacher training supports

The Green Party will:

- provide additional supports and training for teachers, especially in relation to discipline;
- introduce incentives encouraging experienced teachers to remain in teaching to reduce turnover figures.

Second Level

A good Leaving Certificate and progression to college has been assumed to be the standard route to success but we wish to provide more alternatives in order to ease pressure on students and tackle drop-out rates.

The Green Party will:

- **provide an additional 1,200 teachers to reduce class sizes;**
- promote a new alternative route to the Leaving Certificate and LC Applied, including promoting skill-based training currently available in Further Education Colleges;
- split the Leaving Certificate with 5th year and 6th year exams and review Transition Year;
- request the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment to assess the inclusion of a Computer Studies subject and a single Science subject at senior level.

Physical Education

The Green Party will:

- provide increased investment in physical education at primary and second level;
- increase grants for equipment and training;
- implement the National Taskforce on Obesity's recommendation of a minimum requirement of two hours PE per week;
- introduce a comprehensive physical education programme for second level;
- introduce PE as a compulsory subject for Junior Cert and optional for Leaving Cert.

Students and Parents as Partners in Education

The Green Party will:

- review the Education Act 1998 to strengthen the role of parents as equal partners in their child's education;
- ensure that all second level schools have student councils with representatives on boards of management and at all VEC levels;
- reform Boards of Management to ensure equal opportunity and access to the decision-making process for parent/student representatives;
- support increased access to information for parents on their schools and children but ensure that league tables cannot be collated as part of any Whole School Evaluation;
- implement the recommendations of the Task Force on Student Behaviour.

Third Level and Post-Leaving Cert

Everyone has a right to access post-secondary education in some form. Financial considerations should not be an impediment to accessing appropriate third-level education.

The Green Party will:

- maintain free fees which are important in making third level education accessible to all;
- rationalise the student financial supports maze and introduce baseline funding for under-represented groups;
- implement the recommendations of the McIver Report on Further Education;
- provide a €110 million of support loans and grants for part-time and full-time students.

Equality

Education is a lifelong process. We believe in the rights-based approach to education for all.

The Green Party will:

- introduce legislation to ensure access to lifelong education as a fundamental right, regardless of age, gender, ability or creed and equality-proof all curricula;
- promote and fund lifelong learning and re-establish the National Adult Learning Council;
- amend the Education for Persons with Special Needs Act 2004;
- ensure state support for existing Applied Behaviour Analysis schools for children with autism with continuance of education for autistic students over 18;
- implement the recommendations made by Barnardos in its 'Making the Grade' campaign.

Schools and the Community

The Green Party will:

- support measures to reduce the education costs to parents by identifying solutions to textbook, uniform and ancillary costs, particularly in areas of disadvantage;
- work to ensure that parents have greater choice of school type in each community;
- make the school bus system safer and more efficient;
- draw up a list of policies and guidelines as proposed by the Commercial Free Education Campaign.

Arts, Culture and Heritage

We recognise that arts, culture and heritage are of fundamental importance to society, particularly where quality of life is recognised as central to physical and mental health.

The Green Party will:

- examine tax breaks and encourage other opportunities to ensure that those working in the arts make a decent living;

- promote an appreciation of and engagement in the arts/culture at all educational levels;
- expand the Arts Council to ensure greater representation from relevant groups;
- encourage greater partnership between local authorities, central government, relevant local community groups and the Arts Council with a view to funding arts locally;
- **reinstate Dúchas and reunite the heritage functions of the OPW and Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government;**
- control access to sensitive sites from mass tourism.

An Ghaeilge

We believe that the Irish language is central to the cultural and social ecology of our country and would encourage its use as a priority in a future Green government.

The Green Party will:

- **reconstitute the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Irish Language;**
- place greater emphasis on local activities involving Irish, granting wider powers to local authorities and Údarás na Gaeltachta;
- require local authorities to prioritise the promotion and development of Irish when considering future development schemes;
- establish a fund to market language tourism to the Gaeltacht;
- request that the Higher Education Authority make available a training course in Irish translation that will be readily acknowledged across the EU;
- examine the needs of education in Irish speaking areas, including the possibility of establishing a specific Education Board to deal with such matters;
- introduce on a phased basis 'immersion education' in an all-Irish college as part of the mainstream teacher training process at primary level;
- set out the realistic boundaries for Gaeltacht areas with measures to help non-Gaeltacht areas to become Gaeltacht areas in future, with a proper strategy to support a healthy development of Gaeltacht communities and a separate recognition for Breacghaeltachtaí.

Sport

The Green Party will:

- increase the funding, role, and powers of the Irish Sports Council in its promotion of sport and physical activity including a closer coordinating role with local authorities in the planning process;
- ensure that the Irish Sports Council has comprehensive funding mechanisms and planning;

Section 8: Education, Arts and Sport (continued)

- amend the lotteries legislation to ensure the ring-fencing of sports funding;
- increase the funding to sport from the lottery;
- abolish grants towards the horseracing and greyhound industries re-focusing funding on local sporting facilities;
- Increased funding for, and the construction of a 50-metre pool close to, the National Coaching and Training Centre;
- carry out a nationwide audit of sports facilities and sports requirements ;
- ensure accessibility as a key component in the provision of sports and recreational facilities;
- pilot the establishment of a Model Sports School;
- ban the sponsorship of sporting events by alcohol manufacturers or promoters.

Section 9: Children

Growing Up

In line with our focus on primary healthcare, it is our policy to extend accessibility and awareness of health services, promote health education and give far greater priority to community healthcare.

The Green Party will:

- increase funding to community groups, schools, and other appropriate family support structures to facilitate ongoing information, education and training for all parents;
- boost preventative medicine and early detection; by increasing medical checks in schools;
- develop a national sexual health strategy and update present sex education programmes;
- **establish the Register of Persons considered unsafe to work with children and ensure that the Gardaí Vetting Unit is adequately resourced.**

Awareness of Mental Health

With Irish youth suicide rates the fifth highest in the EU, child and adolescent mental health services are grossly under-resourced. The issue of child abuse has also been well documented. The 'Stay Safe' programmes must be fully implemented in our schools.

The Green Party will:

- **fully support and resource the newly launched National Office for Suicide Prevention;**
- encourage school-based preventive mental health interventions in liaison with parents;
- increase children's mental health staff numbers and provide inpatient psychiatric treatment units for young people;



Healthy Exercise (see Education / Sport)

Proper exercise is essential for the physical and mental development of the growing child. However, opportunities for play and exercise are diminishing, both in and out of school.

National Children's Hospital

We believe that proper consultation with international experts did not take place in relation to the location of the new National Children's Hospital at the Mater Hospital site. We will ensure that this decision is reviewed in the interests of the best possible outcome for parents and children.

Section 9: Children (continued)

Childcare

Our policy is about providing resources directly to parents to help them make the best choice for their children.

The Green Party will:

- **replace the Early Childcare Supplement with a Refundable Parenting Tax Credit available as a cash payment or used to reduce income tax bills** - €1800 per year per child until the child enters pre-school and then €1200 per year until the age of 12;
- increase Paternity Benefit to 2 weeks with a statutory right to 6 months (in addition to Maternity Benefit), to be taken in the child's first year, and to be available to either parent;
- make Child Benefit universal and index-link to maintain value of increases;
- initiate free and universal pre-school education of 3.5 hours, five days a week for all children in the year before they go to school;
- replace the Childcare Programme 2006-2010 with a capital, staffing and quality control grant programme that is solely aimed at supporting community-based childcare providers and child-minders and the development of additional preschool facilities;
- **give a tax-free allowance of €5000 per child per registered child-minder up to 3 children.**

Tackling Social Disadvantage

Nearly one in seven (148,000) Irish children live in 'consistent' poverty. The damaging effects of such disadvantage on a child's health, chances of completing education and future opportunities are obvious.

The Green Party will:

- amalgamate Child Dependent Allowances and Family Income Support;
- increase the 'back to school' clothing and footwear payments;
- provide a once-off grant to one-parent families when a child enters secondary school;
- provide free books for pupils in families on social welfare payments or FIS.

Listening to Children and Young People

The Green Party will:

- **amend the Constitution to include the specific rights of children and implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child into Irish legislation;**
- fully implement the Youth Work Act 2001 and National Youth Work Development Plan 2003-07;
- work to give a voice to children in family court cases or where the child is the defendant.

Section 10: Older People

Older persons make significant contributions to society: as citizens, as workers (paid and unpaid), as family members and as members of the wider community. However older persons have become increasingly marginalised and are not benefiting from the economic development that they helped to create.

Older persons and the State

The Green Party will

- **establish an Ombudsman for Older Persons;**
- create a Cabinet Committee on Ageing and Older Persons, to meet at least four times a year, its role to include age-proofing legislation;
- **initiate a National Positive Ageing Strategy across Government Departments;**
- ensure that all State bodies be required to proactively inform older persons of their entitlements, and of services and supports for which they are eligible;

- require that the needs of older people and Irish emigrants abroad be addressed in all future national agreements, national/local development plans and spatial strategies.
- establish the Office of Public Guardianship as advocated by the Law Reform Commission to allow for greater protection of the Older Person.

Service provision

The Green Party supports the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of age in the provision of goods or services.

The Green Party will:

- press for older people to be represented on the board of the National Consumer Agency;
- require local authorities and Government departments to introduce Age Equality Plans;
- insist that insurance providers publish evidence to justify any higher charges for older people.

Section 10: Older People (continued)

Transport and Communications

The Green Party will:

- ensure that older persons are represented on transport users groups;
- ensure that in advertising codes ageism is treated as seriously as racism and sexism, and that predatory advertising which seeks to mislead older persons is prohibited;
- provide additional resources to fund programming on ageing and older people's issues.

Housing

The Green Party will:

- establish a Housing Advice Service, a one-stop shop for independent housing advice, as has existed for older people in the UK since 1985;
- promote sheltered accommodation as a good alternative to long-term institutional care;
- abolish stamp duty for older persons who are moving to smaller accommodation.

Employment

The Green Party believes that age should not determine the availability of opportunities in the workplace.

The Green Party will:

- give workers choice at the retirement age of 65 to accept a full pension, to work part time and receive a part pension, or continue to work full time with a special tax relief until 70;
- ensure that the right to flexible working practices is enshrined in law;
- provide assistance through FÁS for older people who wish to return to work.

Finance and Income

Out of the workforce of two million, an estimated 900,000 people do not have a private or occupational pension to boost their incomes in retirement.

The Green Party will:

- work towards increasing the basic State pension from 30% of average income to 60%;
- have every citizen entitled to a full State pension in their own right;
- replace tax relief for private pensions with a tapered matching contributions scheme targeted at savers with lower incomes;
- introduce an opt-in top up pension scheme based on contributions from workers, employers and the State.

Section 11: Political Reform

Public respect for the practice of politics has reached an all-time low, particularly amongst the young. If faith in our democratic systems is to be renewed, then significant changes need to be made to those structures.

Dáil Éireann

There is concern about TDs being over-loaded with constituency matters at the expense of national issues. Our proposal for a mixed electoral system would allow for a balance between local and national concerns among deputies.

The Green Party will:

- **reduce the number of TDs from 166 to 130;**
- more than double Dáil sitting time with sittings running 45 weeks per year Monday afternoons to Friday lunchtimes from 9.30am to 7pm;
- link TDs' expenses to participation in Oireachtas votes, save for Ministers engaged on State business;
- **seek to change the electoral system so that a proportion of the seats are elected by a top-up procedure e.g. in a Dáil of 130 seats, 100 elected as per PR – STV with 30 seats filled from national party lists;**

- reverse the Fianna Fáil / Labour deal which excused the Taoiseach from answering questions in the Dáil on Thursdays;
- give the Ceann Comhairle power to oblige members of the Government to give full and adequate information to the Dáil;
- empower all Oireachtas Committees to compel witnesses to come before them;
- allocate Committee Chairs to all parties proportionally;
- remove the power for the Taoiseach to call an early election.

Regional and Local Government

Many of the functions of national government can be provided more efficiently at a regional level.

The Green Party will:

- **set up elected Regional Authorities and integrate with existing regional bodies;**
- replace the existing city and county councils in Dublin with district and town councils;

Section 11: Political Reform (continued)

- reduce the number of Government Ministers from 15 to 12 and reduce proportionally the Ministers of State, as the new regional structures will lead to savings at national level;
- revive the proposal for directly elected Mayors and transfer decision-making powers from City and County Managers back to elected public representatives;
- establish a Local Government Ombudsman to ensure that local councils do not overstep their powers;
- stop any further relocation of staff under the current decentralisation programme until a genuine plan for decentralised decision-making is put in place.

Bunreacht na hÉireann / The Constitution

The Green Party will:

- **introduce a Citizens' Initiative to bring about Constitutional referendums with a requirement for 50,000 signatures;**
- seek a change so that referendums require either a two-thirds majority or a simple majority with at least a 50% turnout to be passed;
- allow anyone over 18 to be a candidate for any elected office in the State.

Ethics

Action is badly needed to restore public confidence in a political system that is widely seen to be operating on the basis of "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours".

The Green Party will:

- **ensure adequate state funding of political parties, based on electoral results and ban corporate, institutional or foreign-based donations;**
- abolish the current 2% limit for funding political parties, which acts against new and smaller parties and could be seen as supporting the status quo;
- restore and extend Freedom of Information legislation;
- reform the libel laws and establish a Press Council;
- set up a joint Oireachtas committee to oversee appointments to public bodies;
- provide for an acceptable "buffer period" before civil servants /local government officials take up employment in related areas of the private sector;
- establish a national register of lobbyists, as supported by the Public Relations Institute of Ireland, detailing the company, clients and interests being represented.

Improving Participation

Average turnout at elections has shown a downward trend for decades.

The Green Party will:

- encourage greater involvement by women in electoral politics by providing more support for community groups where there is a much better record of involvement by women;
- overhaul the archaic voter registration system, possibly linking it to PPS Numbers;
- extend postal voting to all voters who wish to avail of it;
- allow homeless people and Travellers to register at an address convenient to them;
- establish a five-year electoral cycle with a set annual voting day;
- introduce a None of the Above option on ballot papers;
- ensure that electronic voting must have a paper trail where each vote can be clearly traced from the machine to the count result.

Volunteering

Ireland has a long tradition of volunteering. This tradition cannot be taken for granted especially in an age in which there are many competing demands on people's time.

The Green Party will:

- formalise a national policy on volunteering that would recognise that volunteers are found in wide-ranging spheres of activity, volunteering is an essential element of civil society and volunteers should not replace paid workers;
- establish volunteer centres in each county as policy drivers and support structures;
- implement the Volunteering Code of Good Practice drafted by Volunteer Centres Ireland;
- introduce measures whereby the State indemnifies organisations' public liability insurance which has become a major problem for community and voluntary organisations.

Section 12: Northern Ireland

The Green Party has long recognized the central role that consensus and consent would play in underpinning a political settlement in Northern Ireland and between the Governments of London and Dublin. The Good Friday and St. Andrews Agreements provide such a framework and have opened the way to an historic settlement.

We have good reason to believe that a new era of accountable, stable, devolved government for Northern Ireland is about to begin. One symbol of that change is the election to the Assembly of the first Green Party MLA, Brian Wilson.

The Green Party, north and south, will:

- work to maximize the areas of co-operation between the two parts of Ireland through the North-South bodies and East-West proposals;
- promote the harmonization of policies and state practices across a wider range of areas including environmental protection, human rights, policing and economic development;
- seek to bring Northern Ireland's corporation tax rate in line with that in the Republic;
- provide a political home for a new generation of voters and activists in Northern Ireland – nationalist, unionist and non-aligned;
- build upon all that connects the peoples of these islands.

Section 13: International Affairs

Independent Foreign Policy and Neutrality

Successive Irish governments have taken a minimalist approach to neutrality, interpreting it simply as non-membership of military alliances. **The Green Party has always advocated a positive approach to neutrality. It gives us the opportunity to take a completely independent line on foreign policy, playing a constructive role in world events focussed on human rights concerns.**

The Green Party will

- **remain committed to protecting Irish neutrality from any further moves towards a EU Common Defence Policy or any strengthening of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy;**
- **seek a referendum to define neutrality in the Constitution;**
- continue to argue that Ireland's best interests, along with those of all smaller states, lie in strengthening the truly pan-European Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) as well as the United Nations rather than in supporting NATO-led initiatives such as the so-called Partnership for Peace;
- ensure that Irish troops only take part in peace missions that have a United Nations mandate or an OSCE mandate;
- maintain the Defence Forces' proud reputation in peacekeeping in many of the world's trouble-spots where they have been readily accepted as honest brokers thanks to our record of neutrality;
- **end the use of Shannon Airport by US military forces involved in the war in Iraq;**
- insist that any aircraft suspected of involvement in illegal movements of prisoners must be searched.

The United Nations

Despite its many shortcomings, the UN is the only body capable of bringing genuine peace and justice to the world. Ireland has been an enthusiastic and very active member since joining in 1955 and the Green Party is committed to ensuring that our peacekeeping efforts are channeled primarily through the UN.

The Green Party will

- ensure that the Irish Government campaigns with other small states to abolish the vetoes and permanent seats on the UN Security Council held by China, the USA, Russia, the UK and France and open all seats on the Security Council to election;
- will see that Ireland strongly advocates the commitment of far greater resources globally to peacekeeping;
- oppose draconian restrictions on basic freedoms in the name of the "war on terror";
- insist that terrorism can only be effectively tackled by dealing with root causes;
- commit resources to create emergency response units that can be rapidly deployed in humanitarian disasters (now more frequent as a result of global warming).

Europe

The Green Party/Comhaontas Glas is a pro-European party. We are proud and active members of the European Greens and have forged greater links with our European sister parties.

Section 13: International Affairs (continued)

Our aim is to create an ecologically sustainable, socially just and peaceful Union. European Union policy and practice must prioritise the rights of the vulnerable over the interests of multinational companies.

The Green Party will

- ensure that the EU Constitution will not be put to a referendum in a form that has already been rejected by referendums in other member states;
- continue to call for the establishment of a new European Convention to agree a simplified text for the EU Constitution;
- campaign for amendments to the EU Constitution that would increase democracy and transparency, provide for the social protection of EU citizens and ensure the greatest level of environmental protection and ecological sustainability;
- continue to press for greater democratisation of the Union, in co-operation with Green Parties in other EU states, through increasing the powers of the European Parliament;
- promote a sense of active EU citizenship by continuing to facilitate debate on European issues and, in doing so, challenge the cosy consensus among other parties;
- **ensure that Ireland is brought into compliance with EU Directives, especially in the areas of social and environmental legislation;**
- **press for the EU's competition, state aid and public procurement policies to be adapted to include social and ecological factors;**
- welcome further enlargement of the EU provided that the democratic systems and human rights standards of applicant states comply with the standards expected of existing member states.

Aid and Trade

The Irish people have consistently shown great commitment to development aid by voluntarily contributing large sums out of their own pockets over the years. It is important that government policy reflects this and that our aid program is supported by a positive policy towards fair trade.

The Green Party will

- **ensure that, within five years, Ireland will deliver on the commitment that our overseas development aid should reach 0.7% of GNP and will publish a plan of year-by-year increases to achieve this;**
- seek that aid, as well as addressing basic human needs, should assist in developing democratic structures;
- **include aid measures to combat the effects of climate change, which are likely to hit developing countries hardest;**

- oppose the dumping of produce from rich countries onto developing countries' markets;
- support the idea of a "Marshall" Plan for Africa to combat poverty and HIV/Aids and seek complete debt cancellation for those countries that need it;
- seek reform of the World Trade Organisation, International Monetary Fund and World Bank to make them more accountable, transparent and democratic and ensure proper representation for poorer countries in the system;
- continue to support Fair Trade goods, including in Government purchasing policy;
- adopt an integrated approach to development across all Government departments and reinforce the strategic engagement with major stakeholders in Ireland.

Weapons and the Arms Trade

The world's governments spend nearly one trillion dollars annually on their military yet the growing involvement of Irish companies in exporting military equipment has been largely ignored and must be addressed.

The Green Party will

- **strengthen Irish legislation on exports of military equipment to ensure that Irish companies are not exporting illegally;**
- seek an annual report to be brought before the Dáil on licensing and exporting of arms and dual-use equipment;
- regulate arms-brokering activities in this country;
- resist pressure to increase spending on arms towards the EU average and ensure that any increase in Ireland's spending on arms will only come about as a result of greater involvement in peacekeeping or for improved safety of our Defence Forces personnel;
- ensure that Ireland continues its positive role in seeking nuclear disarmament;
- support the campaign for a global treaty on the trade of arms that will be binding for all nations;
- campaign to strengthen the EU Code of Conduct for Arms Exports and declare it to be binding;
- support the maintenance of the EU's arms embargo on China;

Other issues

Iraq: The Green Party opposed the US invasion of Iraq from the start. We recognise that the opportunity to create a democratic Iraq supersedes any interest foreign powers have in the region, and calls on the UN, with assistance from the Irish government, to use its full resources to bring about democracy and peace in Iraq.

Section 13: International Affairs (continued)

Israel and Palestine: The Green Party has consistently supported an independent state for the Palestinian people alongside the state of Israel. The so-called security wall built by the Israeli government must be removed and Palestinian groups must recognise the right of the State of Israel to exist if they wish to be included in the peace process. The Green Party supports those who advocate a two state solution.

China and Tibet: China continues to largely ignore pressure to improve its human rights record and end its occupation of Tibet. The persecution of opponents of the government and members of the Falun Dafa / Falun Gong movement, and the continued exploitation and enforced assimilation of Tibet must be opposed and raised at every opportunity with the Chinese authorities.

Defence

Ireland's defence forces have served this State well and with honour. We will ensure that our defence forces will be fully equipped to carry out their duties and will have fair terms of employment and promotion, and proper housing and work conditions.

The Green Party will:

- update the 2000 White Paper and ensure that our defence forces are developing in accordance with the five main roles set out in it;
- promote coast-guard type developments of the Naval Services and the Air Corps, with emphasis on fishery protection, search and rescue, policing duties e.g. drug interdiction;
- urgently address the issue of long-term sea patrols in the Naval Service, ensuring that a maximum of 180 days at sea over two years with the following two years at base is established in line with the 2000 White Paper;
- increase the retirement age of Army officers to 60 and ensure equal opportunity for men and women;
- **conduct a review of conditions, pay and morale within all branches of the Defence Forces, particularly with regard to current shorter term contracts.**

Migration and Ethnic Diversity

Migration is one of the most pressing political challenges for the international community today. **Our immigration policy will focus on introducing a fair system to regulate entry to the country that will also respect the rights and entitlements of immigrants.**

The Green Party will:

- introduce an Immigration System based on best practice elsewhere with a points system, i.e. skilled people receive higher points with less skilled being chosen as part of a lottery-based Green card system;
- **fund national awareness campaigns about the role of immigration in Irish society and the rewards and challenges that arise from greater ethnic diversity;**
- ensure adequate resources for the teaching of English to non-native speakers of English;
- fund services offered by ethnic-led non-governmental organisations working with the immigrant community;
- amend the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 2001 pertaining to marriage (i.e. provide for long-term residency while waiting for citizenship);
- issue all forms of permission to work to the employee rather than the employer;
- introduce a visibly independent appeal process for immigration decisions;
- ensure advice and assistance are provided in appropriate languages at ports of entry and that legal aid is provided for immigration cases;
- remove restrictive legislation surrounding work permit holders so that they can be reunited with their families after three months;
- underpin the right to work in Ireland with the principle of 'permanence' and introduce legislation entitling any person legally resident in Ireland for three years or more to apply for permanent residency;
- take appropriate action to ensure that children seeking asylum are taken out of the adult application process as called for by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child;
- ensure that leave to remain is granted to 'aged-out' minors without delay;
- ensure that families will not be divided by deportation unless the deportee poses a serious danger to public safety.

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