



## SEA screening for the National Tourism Policy Framework

### Section 1: Details of the Plan / Programme

Title:	<b>National Tourism Policy Framework 2025 – 2030</b>
Maker:	<b>Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport &amp; Media</b>
Type of plan:	<b>High-level national policy framework</b>
Date:	<b>29 October 2024</b>

### Section 2: Key Information about the Plan / Programme

#### **Background and Context of the Plan / Programme:**

The current programme for government (*Our Shared Future*) contains a commitment to develop a sustainable tourism policy document. The *National Tourism Policy Framework 2025-2030* is a response to this commitment and is a strategic national level document which follows a previous policy document (*People, Place and Policy - Growing Tourism to 2025*).

#### **Purpose of the Plan / Programme:**

The tourism sector faced significant challenges in recent years, but it has nonetheless played a key part in Ireland's economic recovery. The *National Tourism Policy Framework 2025-2030* aims to provide the foundations to ensure this strong performance continues in the years ahead, and also that tourism is founded on sustainable principles and plays its part in achieving national climate targets. It presents government priorities for tourism up to 2030 and provides insight on the strategic vision for the sector for the tourism agencies (Fáilte Ireland & Tourism Ireland), public bodies, and industry stakeholders.

#### **Geographical Area Covered by the Plan / Programme:**

This a national plan covering all parts of Ireland. It also aligns with shared-island initiatives and objectives on tourism.

#### **Content of the Plan / Programme:**

The *National Tourism Policy Framework 2025-2030* articulates a vision for a prospering nationwide tourism sector that embraces action on climate and environment issues to the long-term benefit of visitors and local communities. The policy is grounded in three strategic objectives:

1. Transition to a sustainable tourism model, rooted in authentic, verified climate and environmental actions.



2. Support and promote tourism to be a thriving economic sector offering innovative, world-class experiences.
3. Ensure tourism extends a welcome to all, provides rewarding careers, and strengthens communities and culture.

These three strategic objectives are further divided into focus areas reflecting key issues that require attention in order to achieve progress towards the objectives. They are presented along with policy proposals which aim to support and facilitate action across the focus areas. The key targets expressed in the policy document are:

#### Environmental Pillar

- Tourism must play its part in achieving national climate and biodiversity targets. Due to the cross-cutting nature of the tourism sector, achieving emissions reductions and environmental protection measures will require action across many areas, such as transport and energy. To enable focused emissions reduction actions and monitoring of progress, Fáilte Ireland will establish a baseline figure for tourism associated emissions. Subsequent shorter term Tourism Action Plans to give effect to the policy objectives outlined in this Framework will contain tourism specific emission reduction and biodiversity targets.
- Measures will be put in place to ensure that the average carbon emissions associated with each visitor bed night is reduced by 60% by 2030. In this regard the Tourism Action Plans developed on foot of this Policy Framework will include specific targets for the number of tourism businesses which will have undertaken environmental audits and emission reduction measures.

#### Economic Pillar

- Targeting growth in overseas visitor numbers alone can no longer be considered a sustainable objective. Accordingly, the focus will be on growing the revenue associated with these overseas visitors. While annual figures may fluctuate depending on economic and other factors, the overall aim will be to achieve an average annual 5.6% year- on- year growth in the revenue generated by overseas visitors in the period to 2030.
- Having more Irish people holidaying at home would deliver significant economic and environmental benefits. Future Action Plans will include specific targets around displacing outbound holidays with domestic ones. In terms of domestic tourism, the longer-term target will be to achieve an average annual increase of 5.6% in tourism revenue in the period to 2030.



### Social Pillar

- A key consideration in all future policy decisions is to ensure that a sufficient number of people have year-round, quality jobs in the tourism sector and that these jobs are located throughout the country.
- To ensure that employment in this sector benefits all areas of the country, employment growth will be supported in the less-developed tourism regions.
- To ensure that employment in this sector includes both seasonal and year-round opportunities, the Department and its agencies will promote the extension of the tourism seasons to support the delivery of this objective.

### **Section 3: Potential for Significant Environment Effects**

*The characteristics of the plan having regard, in particular, to: the degree to which the plan sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size, operating conditions or by allocating resources.*

The Environmental Protection Agency provides an interpretation that a framework for development consent arises “when the plan/programme would lead to, or give guidance for, the consent of development projects. This may be observed as the demarcation of areas zoned for specific types of development, measures which identify circumstances under which development will be encouraged or allowed, criteria which may be applied to decisions on development consent or forward programmes which identify certain types of development to be pursued in a particular sector.”<sup>1</sup>

The *National Tourism Policy Framework 2025-2030* is an overarching policy, with objectives and priorities set out for the development of Ireland’s tourism sector in the period up to 2030. The policy is intended to set a strategic context for Ireland’s tourism sector and to provide a high level framework for the co-ordination of national, regional and local authority activities. The policy does not itself propose the location, nature, size or operating conditions of tourist developments, visitor attractions or support infrastructure, nor does it allocate specific resources to them.

The design of future tourism capital programmes, which is a matter for Fáilte Ireland, will reflect the priorities articulated in the *National Tourism Policy Framework 2025-2030*.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/assessment/strategic-environmental-assessment/synthesis-report-on-developing-a-strategic-environmental-assessment-sea-methodologies-for-plans-and-programmes-in-ireland.php>



This policy, if adopted, will not set a framework of consented projects for future development, i.e. projects listed in both Annex I and Annex II of the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive.

*The characteristics of the plan having regard, in particular, to: the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy.*

The *National Tourism Policy Framework 2025-2030* is positioned within a strategic hierarchy which commences with the National Planning Framework (NPF) and associated National Development Plan. The policy is consistent with these initiatives and it will, in turn, guide lower-level actions and influence stakeholders, particularly the tourism agencies and Local Authorities in their work on the development of Irish tourism.

Tourism is referenced prominently in the NPF and it notes that good natural heritage areas and landscapes are important for the industry and to underpin the long-term development of tourism. The *National Tourism Policy Framework 2025-2030* has been prepared with regard to the aims of the National Planning Framework, including rural development and environmental protection – see tourism-relevant National Policy Objectives highlighted in Annexe 1.

While stand-alone, tourism-specific plans or policies are not required to be prepared by legislation, the development of a national tourism policy is identified as one of the ‘sectoral strategies’ within the National Development Plan. In addition, the *National Tourism Policy Framework 2025-2030* is prepared with regard to supporting the achievement of the objectives of other relevant policies, such as the Climate Action Plan, the Biodiversity Action Plan and the National Sustainable Mobility Policy.

The actions to be taken to implement the strategic objectives of the *National Tourism Policy Framework 2025-2030* will be detailed in Tourism Action Plans that will follow this policy. In addition, future corporate plans and business plans produced by Ireland’s tourism agencies will reflect the policy priorities that are set out in the *National Tourism Policy Framework 2025-2030*.

Local authorities play a key role in the delivery of services and infrastructure which are of critical importance to the tourism sector and are also required to produce their own tourism policy statements. Local Authorities are identified in the *National Tourism Policy Framework 2025-2030* as ‘critical partners’ in ensuring the policy objectives are achieved.



*The characteristics of the plan having regard, in particular, to: Environmental problems relevant to the plan.*

The Environmental Protection Agency<sup>2</sup> reports that... Ireland's environment is of good quality, and citizens have a generally clean and safe environment to live in. In common with countries across Europe, key high-level environment and health issues include climate change, antimicrobial resistance, chemical pollution and air quality. In addition, there are a number of national issues that require action, such as health impacts associated with localised air pollution due to solid fuel burning, ongoing reductions in the quality of our rivers and lakes due to a range of pressures including waste water treatment and agriculture and drinking water contamination. Some of the key challenges facing Ireland are: on-site waste water treatment systems (such as septic tanks) and urban waste water discharges impacting on water quality and amenities; urban air quality in cities and towns; nuisance and amenity impact from noise; and radon in homes.

It is recognised that tourism can contribute to anthropogenic pressure on the environment – particularly when visitor numbers are not managed with regard to carrying capacity. However, with appropriate planning and infrastructure, environmental impacts from tourism activity can be kept at a sustainable level.

The *National Tourism Policy Framework 2025-2030* emphasises the need to protect and enhance Ireland's environment. It recognises the importance of a clean, safe environment for local communities and also recognises its value as a foundational asset for the sector. It articulates support for the important environmental protection measures underway by other bodies and agencies across Ireland.

*The characteristics of the plan having regard, in particular, to: the relevance of the plan for the implementation of European Union legislation on the environment*

The *National Tourism Policy Framework 2025-2030* is not expected to directly affect the implementation of European Union legislation on the environment.

Through setting a framework for reduced emissions from the tourism sector, the *National Tourism Policy Framework 2025-2030* will contribute to national achievement of statutory EU targets.

The policy states that future programmes of support for capital investment in the sector will continue to be structured to comply with all European and national environmental regulations.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring--assessment/assessment/irelands-environment/environment--wellbeing/>



## **b) characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected:**

### The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects

The probability that the *National Tourism Policy Framework 2025-2030* will result in significant environmental effects is low. The policy is a high level national plan which sets out a roadmap for the social, economic and environmental sustainability of the sector in the coming years. It does not set a framework for development nor does it propose the location, nature, size or operating conditions of tourist developments, visitor attractions or support infrastructure.

The policy also states that future programmes of support for capital investment in the sector, which is a matter for Fáilte Ireland, will continue to be structured to comply with all European and national environmental regulations.

### The cumulative nature of the effects

It is not expected that an overall significant environmental impact will arise from this policy - either through a cumulative effect from implementation of the policy proposals or through interaction with other plans and programmes.

### The transboundary nature of the effects.

The *National Tourism Policy Framework 2025-2030* references the shared-island context for tourism. As it is not expected that an overall significant environmental effect will arise from this policy, it is further expected that there will not be any significant transboundary effects.

### The risks to human health or the environment

As it is not expected that any overall significant environmental effects will arise from this policy, it is not expected that there will not be any significant risks to human health or the environment.

### The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects

Environmental effects are not expected to be significant in terms of magnitude or spatial extent.

The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to: a) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage, and b) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values,

The *National Tourism Policy Framework 2025-2030* recognises the value of cultural heritage and high environmental quality to the tourism sector. It is not expected that there will be any significant effects in this regard.



intensive land-use,

No significant effects are expected from this policy with regard to intensive land-use.

The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, European Union or international protection status.

The *National Tourism Policy Framework 2025-2030* recognises the value of landscapes as an intrinsic part of Ireland's tourism product. As no overall significant environmental effect are expected to arise from this policy, it is also not expected that there will be significant effects on areas or landscapes, including those which have a recognised national, European Union or international protection status.

#### Section 4: Summary and Conclusion

This SEA Screening Report has examined the *National Tourism Policy Framework 2025-2030* with a view to determining whether it is likely to have significant effects on the environment. The criteria set out on Schedule 1 of SI No. 435 of 2004 were used to structure this exercise.

The determination is based on the following:

- The *National Tourism Policy Framework 2025-2030* will not set a framework of consented projects for future development
- The policy is consistent with the National Planning Framework, National Development Plan and key national environmental policies.
- The policy is cognisant of environmental issues and supportive of environmental protection measures underway across the country.
- The policy is not expected to directly affect the implementation of European Union legislation on the environment.
- The probability that the policy will result in significant environmental effects is low.

Having regard to the screening exercise set out above, it is determined that the *National Tourism Policy Framework 2025-2030* does not give rise to a requirement to carry out an environmental assessment under S.I. 435 of 2004 – European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 as amended by S.I. No. 200 of 2011.



## Section 5: Statutory Consultation

This SEA Screening Report was sent to the designated environmental authorities for their consideration, along with a copy of the draft National Tourism Policy Framework 2025-2030. The observations received through this consultation are presented in Annex 2, along with the subsequent response by D/TCAGSM.

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## **Annexe 1: Tourism-relevant policy objectives from the National Planning Framework**

The National Planning Framework contains several references to tourism, and emphasises linkages to sustainable development for rural areas, and for the agriculture and marine sectors. The following policy objectives have specific relevance for the development of the tourism policy:

**National Policy Objective 23** Protect and promote the sense of place and culture and the quality, character and distinctiveness of the Irish rural landscape including island communities that make Ireland's rural areas authentic and attractive as places to live, work and visit. Any successor policy documents relating to national policy for rural areas and the islands will ensure continued alignment and consistency with the National Policy Objectives of this Framework.

**National Policy Objective 35** Continue to facilitate tourism development and in particular, the Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways; and a Blueways and Peatways Strategy, which prioritises projects on the basis of their environmental sustainability, achieving maximum impact and connectivity at national and regional level while ensuring their development is compliant with the National Biodiversity Action Plan, the national climate change objective and requirements for environmental assessments.

**National Policy Objective 61** In co-operation with relevant Departments in Northern Ireland, enhanced sustainable transport connectivity between Ireland and Northern Ireland, to include cross-border road and rail, electric vehicle infrastructure, cycling and walking routes, as well as blueways, greenways and peatways.

**National Policy Objective 64** Support the coordination and promotion of all-island tourism initiatives through continued co-operation between the relevant tourism agencies and Tourism Ireland, pursue the further development of sport, and invest in the diverse heritage, arts and cultural and linguistic traditions of the island.

**National Policy Objective 87** Conserve and enhance the rich qualities of natural, cultural and built heritage of Ireland in a manner appropriate to their cultural and environmental significance.



## **Annexe 2: Observations raised by statutory consultees**

### **Received from: *Environmental Protection Agency***

Comment:	“We note your initial conclusion that SEA is not required for the Policy Framework.”
Response:	Comment noted. No change to policy text proposed in response.

Comment:	“In considering the Policy Framework, you should take into account the need to align with national commitments on climate change mitigation and adaptation and nature protection, as well as incorporating any relevant recommendations in sectoral, regional and local climate adaptation plans.”
Response:	Comment noted. No change to policy text proposed in response.

Comment:	“You should also ensure that the Policy Framework aligns with other key relevant high-level plans and programmes such as the National Planning Framework, and the Draft Revision to the National Planning Framework, currently undergoing SEA, and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies.”
Response:	Comment noted. No change to policy text proposed in response.

Comment:	“We note that the Policy Framework, in Section 2.2.1 refers to lower-level Tourism Action Plans to be established to give effect to the policy. The requirements of the SEA Directive should be considered, where relevant and appropriate, for these action plans.”
Response:	Comment noted. No change to policy text proposed in response.

Comment:	“There is also merit in recognising that the First Revision of the National Planning Framework is currently underway, and any additional or amended tourism-related objectives should be considered in finalising and in implementing the Policy Framework.”
Response:	Comment noted. Text on National Planning Framework added in policy.

Comment:	“With regards the policy proposals set out under each pillar of the Policy Framework (Environmental, Economic, and Social), there is merit in codifying these proposals to make it easier to inform lower-level tourism action plans and help coordinate how these objectives are being implemented, in a coordinated manner.” [Clarified by EPA to mean adding numbering to the policy proposals.]
Response:	Policy proposals are now numbered.

Comment:	“The EPA will be publishing the next iteration of our State of the Environment Report was published on 3rd October 2024. This report should be considered and integrated as appropriate, in implementing the Policy Framework and any related lower tier action plans over its lifetime.”
Response:	EPA State of the Environment Report is referenced within the policy.



Comment:	“Where changes to the Policy Framework are made prior to finalisation, or where modifications to the Policy Framework are proposed following its adoption, these should be screened for potential for likely significant effects in accordance with the criteria set out in Schedule 1 (S.I. No. 435 of 2004, as amended) of the SEA Regulations, as appropriate.”
Response:	Comment noted. No change to policy text proposed in response.

Comment:	“As soon as practicable after making your determination as to whether SEA is required or not, you should make a copy of your decision, including, if appropriate, the reasons for not requiring an environmental assessment, available for public inspection in your offices and on your website. You should also send a copy of your determination to the relevant environmental authorities consulted.”
Response:	Comment noted. These steps will be implemented.

**Received from: Geological Survey of Ireland**

Comment:	“...we recommend using our various data sets when conducting the EIAR, SEA, planning and scoping processes for developments, plans, and policies.”
Response:	Comment noted. No change to policy text proposed in response.

Comment:	“We would encourage geology to be a significant part of any tourism initiative that may be introduced by and are happy to assist with this process.”
Response:	Comment noted. To be explored within tourism action plans.

Comment:	“We encourage you to use any other data sets referenced above for use in your National Tourism Framework and associated SEA and AA environmental assessments.”
Response:	Comment noted. No change to policy text proposed in response.

**Received from: Department of Housing, Heritage & Local Government**

Comment:	“The Department recommends inclusion of a section on biodiversity and tourism.”
Response:	Biodiversity has been highlighted more clearly in the policy.

Comment:	“The Department advises that Actions 3A2 and 3A7 of Ireland’s National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023 – 2030 (NBAP), which specifically relate to this policy, are referenced in Section 1.7.” [Section 1.7 is ‘Alignment with Existing Government Policies’]
Response:	Text added to specifically reference Action 3A7. Action 3A2 is not considered directly relevant for tourism policy... “DTCAGSM will incorporate biodiversity and ecosystem services, particularly cultural services, in placemaking efforts and investment in Cultural Regional Infrastructure into its capital project appraisal processes”.



Comment:	“The Department recommends the inclusion here of a statement that tourism must play its part in achieving national biodiversity targets.”
Response:	A statement in this regard is added into Section 1.7.

Comment:	“Similar to the baseline metrics which will be established for the Irish tourism industry’s carbon footprint, the Department recommends that scientific research is necessary to establish key tourism related impacts on biodiversity.”
Response:	Comment noted. To be explored within tourism action plans

Comment:	“The Department recommends rewording of this section to include the term ‘natural capital’.” [Refers to mission statement as articulated in the policy]
Response:	Comment noted. No change to policy text proposed.

Comment:	“Guidance should be targeted to key tourism-related impacts which should be established through scientific research.” [Refers to guidance for tourism enterprises on nature-positive measures]
Response:	Comment noted. D/TCAGSM does not have a research funding programme, but will engage with the EPA to explore the possibility of including this topic in future calls for proposals under the national environmental research programme. No change to policy text proposed in response.

Comment:	“Planting wildflower meadows is not recommended by the Department.”
Response:	Text amended from “planting wildflower meadows” to “allowing wildflower meadows to develop”.

Comment:	“In relation to Section 3.6.1 ‘To ensure Ireland has the appropriate facilities in place to benefit from more active holidaymakers, local authorities and other relevant agencies will continue to progress development of infrastructure such as greenways, blueways and walking trails’, the Department recommends that a message is included here to ensure that this infrastructure is sustainable.”
Response:	Additional wording added to explicitly make this point.

Comment:	“The Department would welcome engagement with tourism bodies.”
Response:	Section 3.7 “Engagement with Agencies Protecting Ireland’s Heritage” is intended to allow for such engagement. Section is renamed as “Engaging to Protect Ireland’s Natural Capital & Heritage” to clarify this point, and section text is also amended.

Comment:	“The Department reiterates the need for research by the tourism sector to establish key negative impacts of tourism to biodiversity.”
Response:	Comment noted. D/TCAGSM does not have a research funding programme, but will engage with the EPA to explore the possibility of including this topic in future calls for proposals under the national environmental research programme. No change to policy text proposed in response.