



Zero Waste Alliance Ireland is funded by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications through the Irish Environmental Network, and is a member of



Ireland's Food System: Is It Wasteful?

March 2025
Presentation by Orla Coutin Fitzsimons
www.zwai.ie



Contents

- About ZWAI
- Introduction to Food Waste
- Causes of Food Waste
- Environmental, Economic and Social Impact
- Strategies for Reducing Food Waste
- Policy Recommendations
- Case Studies and Success Stories
- Q & A



A scenic view of a rugged coastline. The foreground shows a grassy slope leading down to a cliff edge. The cliff face is composed of dark, layered rock formations. The sea is a deep blue, with white foam from waves crashing against the base of the cliffs. In the distance, more rocky islands and a bay are visible under a clear sky.

About Us

Zero Waste Alliance Ireland (ZWAI)

- Founded in 1999, established in **2004**
- Registered **environmental charity and NGO** focused on zero waste principles
- **Not-for-profit** policy-oriented organisation
- Member of the **Irish Environmental Network (IEN)** and the **Environmental Pillar of Social Partnership**
- Members of the **EEB** and the **Waste Working Group**
- Currently **65 members** and growing steadily!
- Our work involves **lobbying government and preparing policy submissions** to the Irish government and the European Commission, we also provide educational content and attend festivals and events.



Introduction to Food Waste

- **Definition:** Refers to edible food that is discarded or left uneaten at various stages of the food supply chain.
- **Global Figures:** Approximately one-third of all food produced globally is lost or wasted, amounting to about 1.3 billion tonnes annually.
- **Irish Figures:** EPA estimates that Ireland generated 750,000 tonnes of food waste in 2022.
- This equates to 146 kg of food waste per person and **is higher than the EU average** of 130kg of food waste per capita
- The irony of this is that one billion people in the world are suffering and dying from hunger.





**Clearly, we have
a problem with
food waste.**

Causes of Food Waste



Production Level:

Losses due to pests, diseases, and adverse weather conditions.
Inefficient harvesting techniques leading to uncollected produce.



Post-Harvest Handling and Storage:

Inadequate storage facilities causing spoilage.
Poor transportation infrastructure leading to damage.



Processing and Packaging:

Strict aesthetic standards resulting in rejection of 'imperfect' produce.
Overproduction and mismanagement during processing.



Distribution and Retail:

Surplus stock leading to unsold goods.
Labelling issues which might cause premature disposal.



Consumer Level:

Over-purchasing and improper meal planning.
Lack of awareness regarding food storage and shelf life.



Impacts of Food Waste



Environmental Impact

1. Greenhouse Gas Emissions: Food waste contributes to 3.3 billion tonnes of CO₂-equivalent emissions annually

2. Resource Wastage:

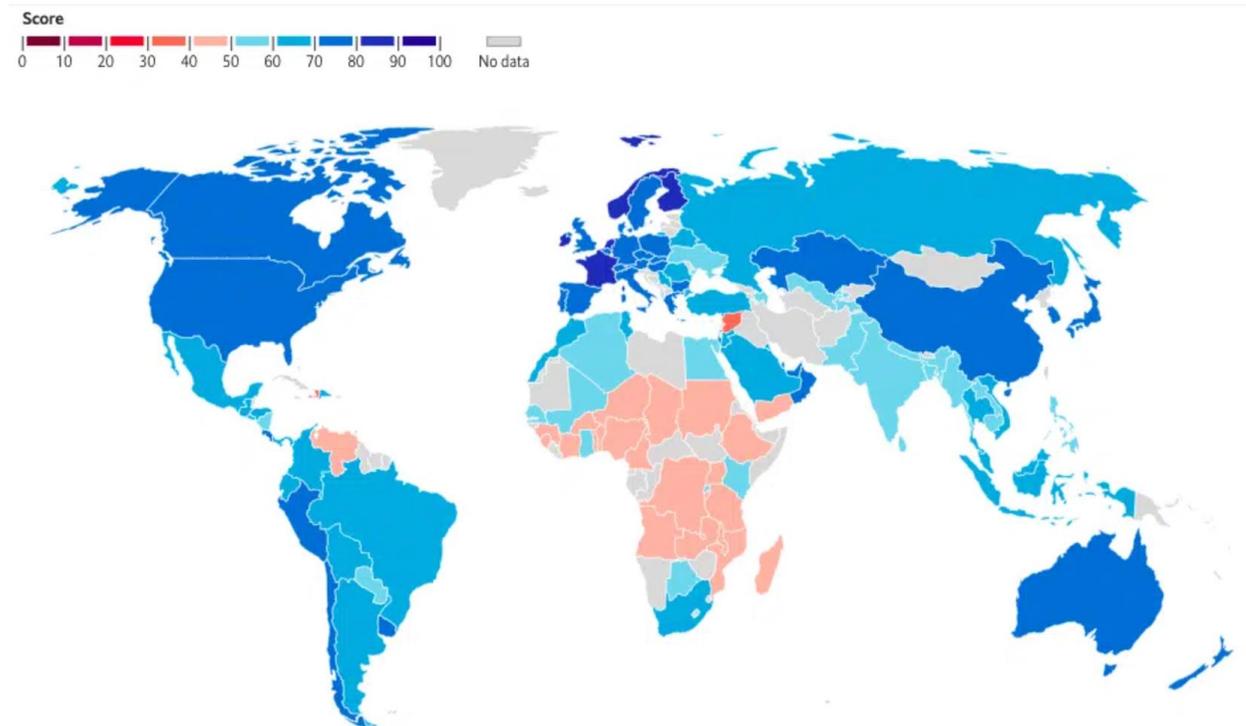
- **Water:** Significant volumes used in food production are wasted.
- **Land:** Deforestation and habitat loss occur to cultivate food that is ultimately discarded.

3. Biodiversity Loss: Unsustainable agricultural practices, such as monoculture farming, driven by demand for food contribute to species extinction.



Economic and Social Impacts

- **Economic Costs:** Global food waste results in losses of approximately €865.82 billion annually.
- **Food Security:** Reducing food waste could enhance food availability, addressing hunger and malnutrition for the one billion people facing food insecurity worldwide.
- **Ethical Considerations:** Wasting food exacerbates inequalities, especially when many lack access to adequate nutrition.



Global Food Security Index 2022. Image: The Economist

Clearly, we have a problem with food waste. So what are some solutions?



Strategies for Reducing Food Waste

Prevention:

Stronger Policies: stronger government policies can enforce better practices, set standards, and hold companies accountable.

Source Reduction: Implementing better inventory management and demand forecasting within industries.

Consumer Education: Raising awareness about meal planning and proper food storage.

Less Intensive Agriculture: less meat, more vegetarian diet (as ZWAI recommended in *Feedback to the European Commission on Food Waste Reduction Targets*)

Recovery:

Food Rescue: Donating surplus edible food to charities and food banks.

Animal Feed: Redirecting suitable food waste to livestock, reducing the need for commercial feed.

Recycling:

Industrial Uses: Converting waste into biofuels or energy through anaerobic digestion.

Composting: Transforming organic waste into nutrient-rich soil amendments. Mandatory composting bins for every household now implemented.

Policy Recommendations



Regulatory Measures:

Setting and enforcing stronger national targets for food waste reduction through policy.

Enforcing standardised date labelling to minimise consumer confusion.



Incentives:

Providing tax benefits to businesses that donate surplus food.

Supporting infrastructure development for food redistribution networks.



Public Awareness Campaigns:

Launching initiatives similar to the UK's "Love Food, Hate Waste" to educate the public. "Stop Food Waste" in Ireland could be stronger



Research and Innovation:

Investing in technologies that extend shelf life and improve supply chain efficiency.

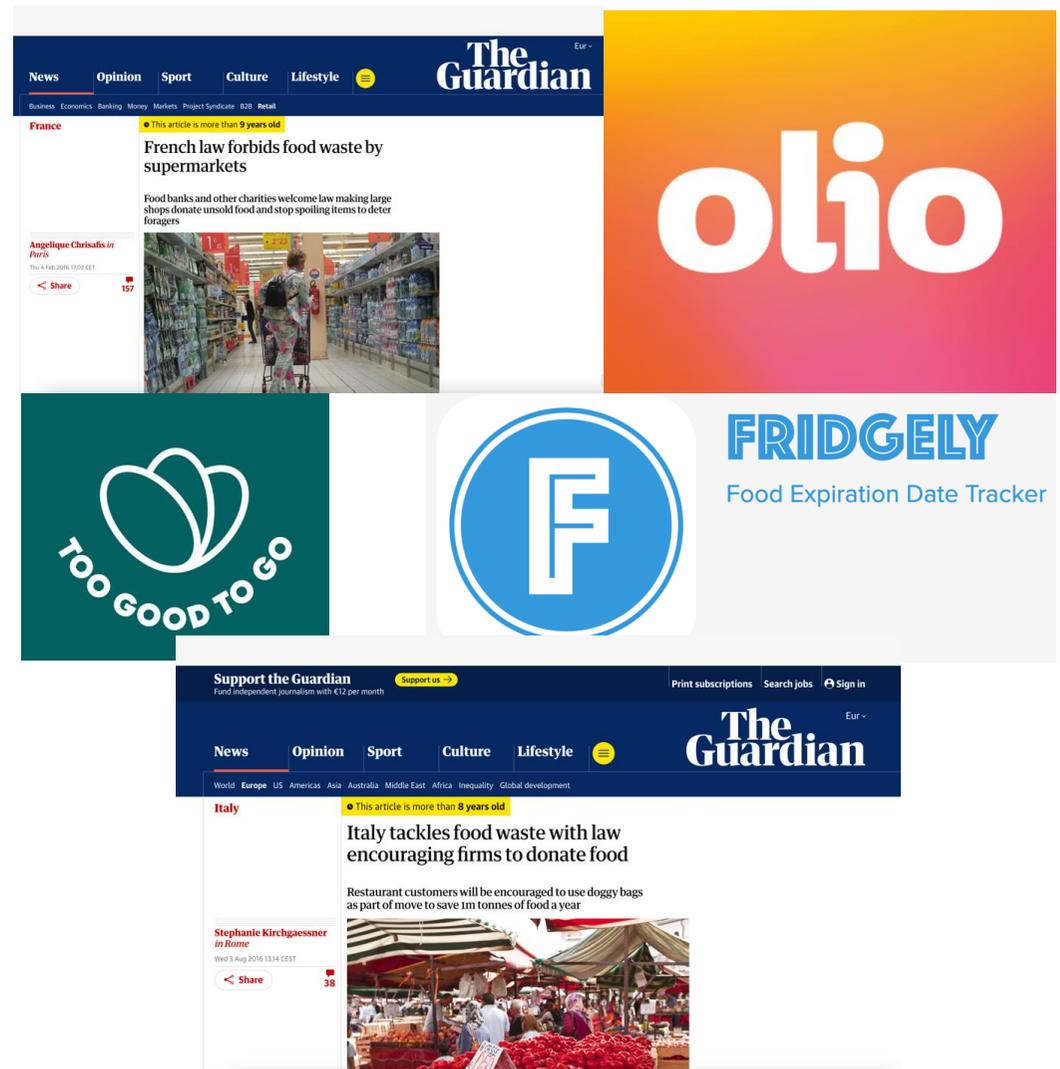


Case Studies & Success Stories

France: Legislation mandates supermarkets to donate unsold food, leading to significant waste reduction since 2016.

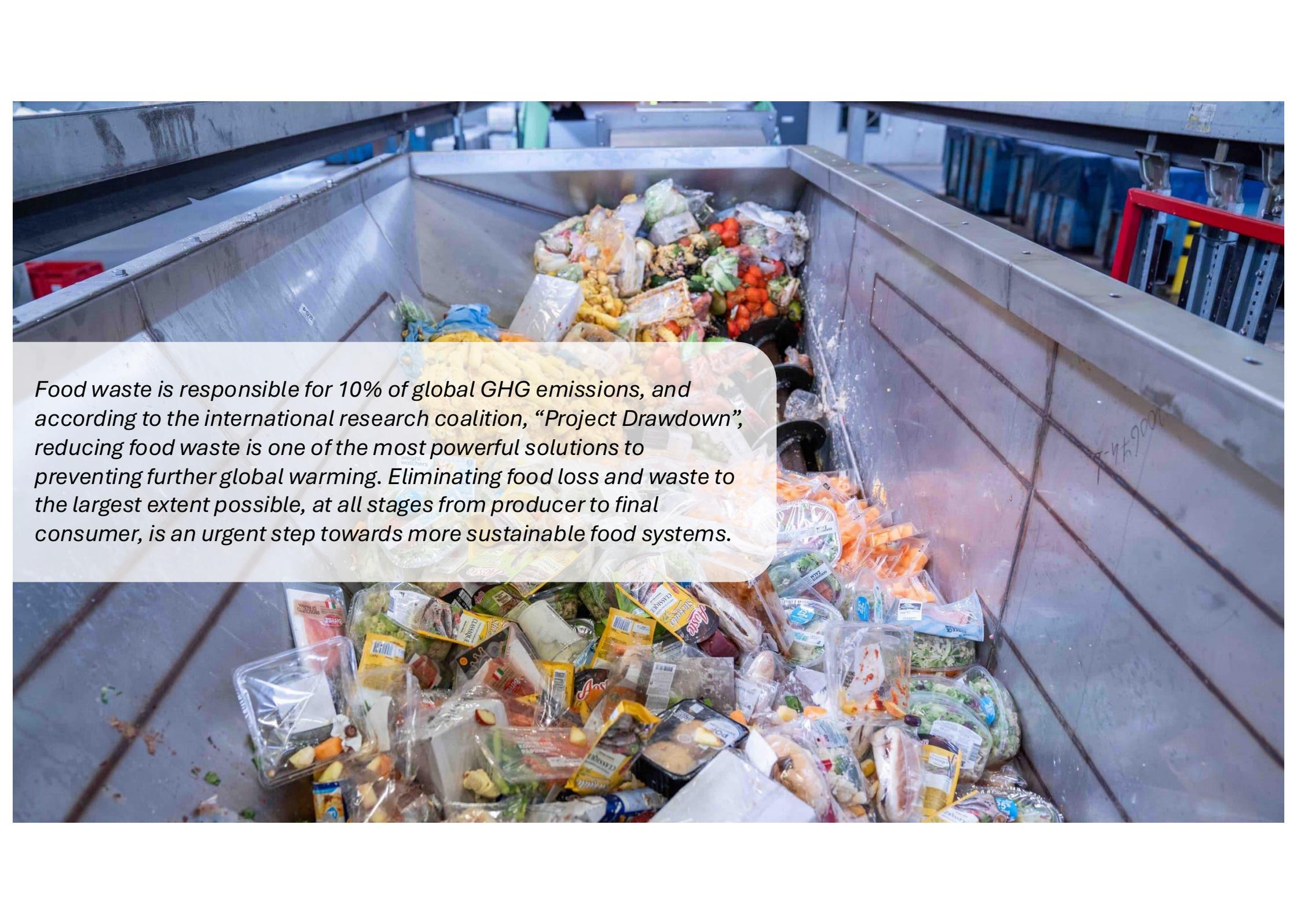
Italy: Brought in a similar law 6 months after France

Ireland: Local initiatives have successfully implemented community composting programs, and the apps “Too Good to Go”, “Olio”, and “Fridgely” are now available here (mostly in Dublin though).



**So what could
the future hold
for food waste in
Ireland?**



A large, industrial metal bin is filled with a variety of food waste. The waste includes fresh produce like carrots, broccoli, and tomatoes, as well as packaged items such as bread, cheese, and other food products. The bin is situated in a facility, likely a food processing plant or a waste management center, with other bins and equipment visible in the background.

Food waste is responsible for 10% of global GHG emissions, and according to the international research coalition, “Project Drawdown”, reducing food waste is one of the most powerful solutions to preventing further global warming. Eliminating food loss and waste to the largest extent possible, at all stages from producer to final consumer, is an urgent step towards more sustainable food systems.



***Ireland, it's our turn to act. We can start by
educating ourselves and others!***

Any questions?

***Thanks for listening. Find out more at www.zwai.ie.
Follow us below and join us as a member!***

admin@zwai.ie



LinkedIn





Appendix I

Re: Zero Waste Alliance Ireland Message received from Deirdre Murray

Orla Coutin Fitzsimons <admin@zwai.ie>

8 January 2025 at 13:57

To: Deirdre_Murray@dfheris.gov.ie

Cc: Jack O'Sullivan <jackosullivan2006@gmail.com>

Hi Deirdre,

Thanks for reaching out, it's lovely to meet you! My name is Orla and I'm the coordinator and administrative secretary for ZWAI.

This is certainly something we would be interested in. We have done a number of presentations in the past and are hoping to do more educational content in the future, so this would tie in nicely for us! Can you let us know a bit more information regarding location, or would you like it to take place over Zoom? Is it just one presentation you are hoping for?

Looking forward to hearing from you,

Orla

On Wed, 8 Jan 2025 at 10:49, Zero Waste Alliance Ireland <wordpress@zwai.ie> wrote:

From: Deirdre Murray <Deirdre_Murray@dfheris.gov.ie>

Message Body:

Hi,

My name is Deirdre Murray. I look after learning & development in the Department of Further & Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. I host on line presentations on important topics that take place on a Friday from 11.30 to 12.30 for our staff. I was wondering would you have someone to present on the topic of Zero Waste. These talks usually run for about 30-40 minutes with time for Q&A after. I see that Jack O'Sullivan has done a presentation on Food Waste that looks interesting. We would be interested in hearing about any topic in relation to Climate/Sustainability.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,

Deirdre Murray
087 406 7226

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This e-mail was sent from a contact form on Zero Waste Alliance Ireland (<https://www.zwai.ie>)

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Appendix II

Tea & Talks today

Murray, Deirdre <Deirdre_Murray@dfheris.gov.ie>

14 March 2025 at 15:53

To: Orla Coutin Fitzsimons <admin@zwai.ie>, "jackosullivan2006@gmail.com" <jackosullivan2006@gmail.com>

Dear Orla & Jack,

Thanks so much for your session this morning. I could have stayed on all day on such an important topic. So many relevant points touched on. I think soon we will all be on board as a necessity.

Have a lovely weekend.

Kind regards,

Deirdre Murray

Learning & Development

An Roinn Breisoideachais agus Ardoideachais, Taighde, Nuálaíocht agus Eolaíocht

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