



ZERO WASTE ALLIANCE IRELAND

Towards Sustainable Resource Management

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2024 ANNUAL REPORT

28 April 2025

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Advocating Sustainable Resource Management and the Circular Economy

Annual Report 2024 – Activities and Observations

CONTENTS

	Page
1. Introduction – a challenging twenty-sixth anniversary year ..	1
1.1 Rising levels of materials extraction globally	1
1.2 Greater quantities of waste being generated; minimal recycling ..	2
1.3 Construction and demolition waste	2
1.4 The problem of packaging waste; levies on incineration and landfilling	4
1.5 Ireland's Deposit Return System (DRS) – finally in place	4
1.6 Will Ireland meet its recycling targets ?	6
1.7 Overview of our work in 2024	7
2. Our Mission, Guiding Principles and Ethical Values	7
2.1 Basic principles	7
2.2 Mission and objectives	8
2.3 Our values and ethical principles	10
3. Governance	12
4. Membership	14
5. Staff – administrator and membership secretary	14
6 Outreach and collaboration with other organisations with similar aims and objectives	15
7. Submissions	20
8. Presentations and lectures	21
9. Research and pilot-scale projects	23
9.1 Testing and validation of the food waste composter	23

Cont'd.

CONTENTS, cont'd

	Page
9.2 Pilot scale project for the recovery of dissolved phosphorus and nitrogen from domestic wastewater	23
10. Publicity, media and outreach to our own members and members of the public	24
10.1 Social media and website	24
10.2 Blogs	24
10.3 Print media and radio	24
11. Finances	25
12. Final notes	26

PHOTOGRAPHS

Waste from a dismantled building awaiting collection and extraction of secondary raw materials, Dergachyv community, Ruska Lozova, Ukraine ..	3
The process of finding bricks, Dergachyv community, Ruska Lozova, Ukraine	3
ZWAI Directors and Órla Coutin Fitzsimons, membership secretary/researcher, as featured on the Institute of Sustainability Studies website, 2024 ..	15
Craig Tobin-Dower reading "Black Friday Tree", his poem which criticised over-consumption	16
Jack O'Sullivan reading his poems: "Bog; For Aisling Muller", "Trees" and "Sea Tangle"	17
Zero Waste Alliance Ireland stand at the Coldplay Music of the Spheres World Tour concert in Croke Park, Dublin	18
Illustrated article in the Westmeath Topic, 22 August 2024, featuring Zero Waste Alliance Ireland and some of the members who represented us at the ZWAI stand in Croke Park, Dublin	19



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Annual Report 2024 – Activities and Observations

1. INTRODUCTION – A CHALLENGING TWENTY-SIXTH ANNIVERSARY YEAR

This year we reached the 26th anniversary of our existence, from the day when anti-landfill and anti-incineration groups from around Ireland met in the Hodson Bay Hotel, Athlone, on Sunday 9 May 1999. That meeting led to the launching of a national coalition of local environmental groups, with the aim of finding and recommending environmentally sustainable and practical solutions to the growing domestic, municipal, industrial and agricultural waste management crisis in Ireland.¹

During a period of a year more than a quarter century since our initial meeting, the increasing quantities of materials being extracted from our planet to serve industrial and commercial processes, and the consequential problem of waste generation, have continued almost unabated, despite the efforts of environmental organisations, governments, international agencies, the European Commission and some responsible industries.

1.1 Rising Levels of Materials Extraction Globally

In 50 years, global society's use of materials has nearly quadrupled, outpacing population growth by a significant margin. In 1972, when the Club of Rome's first report "*Limits to Growth*" was published, the world consumed 28.6 billion tonnes annually. By 2000, this had increased to 54.9 billion tonnes; by 2019, it surpassed 100 billion tonnes annually, and the latest information is that material extraction had risen to 106.6 billion tonnes in 2024, following an annual average

¹ Zero Waste Ireland Draft Policy, September 2002; 16 pp.

growth rate of 2.3%.² Our use of natural resources to make more ‘stuff’ is not predicted to slow down, and looks set to increase from 100 billion to between 170 and 184 billion tonnes by 2050.

The composition of the world’s materials used has also changed significantly over the last five decades. In 1970, biomass was the largest category of material use at 41% but its share decreased to 33% in 2000 and 26% in 2020. By the year 2020, non-metallic minerals became the largest category of materials used and processed, at 48% (from 31% in 1970), indicating a widespread transition from biomass-based agrarian metabolism to a mineral-based industrial metabolism.

1.2 Greater Quantities of Waste Being Generated; Minimal Recycling

Rising waste levels accompanied this rapid acceleration of materials extraction and consumption, with the result that more than 90% of all materials extracted are discarded or wasted. By 2020, the quantity of waste generated globally per annum reached 19.9 billion tonnes; and during the most recent few years, the world has gone from 9.1% circular in 2018 to 8.6% in 2020, i.e., reuse and recycling rates have actually decreased. Approximately 20% of all the materials extracted eventually become solid waste. Around 30% (6.1 billion tonnes) of this waste was recycled in 2020, resulting in a circularity rate of only around 7%.³

The speed at which human societies are exploiting natural resources, and generating emissions and waste, is increasing faster than the economic benefits gained, resulting in a disproportionate acceleration of environmental impacts such as climate change, resource depletion and reduced ecosystem health.⁴ Environmental impacts occur at all stages of the supply chain, and they have been intensifying in proportion with the growing global demand for materials.⁵

1.3 Construction and Demolition Waste

One of the areas in which Zero Waste Alliance Ireland has taken a particular interest is construction and demolition waste (CDW), and we know that the

² Global Resources Outlook 2024, UNEP (181 pp) 2024; 2.3.1 Global trends in material extraction, page 26.

³ Global Resources Outlook 2024, United Nations Environment Programme; Chapter 2, Drivers, pressures, and natural resource use trends, Section 2.3.5 Waste and Emissions, Page 36.

⁴ Global Material Flows and Resource Productivity Assessment Report for the UNEP International Resource Panel; United Nations Environment Programme, 2016; Chapter 2, Global trends in resource extraction, page 40.

⁵ Global Resources Outlook 2024, UNEP; Chapter 2, Drivers, pressures, and natural resource use trends, Section 2.3.1 Global trends in material extraction Page 26.

construction sector generates worldwide an estimated two billion tonnes of CDW annually, accounting for approximately one-third of all global waste. Only a small fraction is recycled or reused, with the majority being sent to landfills or incinerated. This linear and unsustainable approach to waste management depletes natural resources and contributes to GHG emissions through the production of new materials, landfill gases and uncontrolled incineration.⁶

But there are ways to reduce CDW, as described in a recent report showing how the Belgian city of Leuven has initiated a programme of “urban mining”, salvaging recoverable materials from properties scheduled for demolition, and reusing or recycling items such as bricks, stone, roof tiles, steel beams, wooden panels and flooring, plus carpentry items such as doors and window frames.⁷ And in one of our blog posts in 2024, we described an example of how demolition waste resulting from destruction caused by Russia’s war on Ukraine’s civilian buildings was being reused in Ruska Lozova, Kharkiv region – including materials, doors, windows, roofing tiles, sanitary ware (bathtubs, toilets, taps, etc.), wall and floor coverings, boards, furniture, domestic appliances and other materials and items.⁸



Waste from a dismantled building awaiting collection and extraction of secondary raw materials, Dergachyv community, Ruska Lozova, Ukraine. Photo: Rubryka.com



The process of finding bricks, Dergachyv community, Ruska Lozova, Ukraine. Photo: Rubryka.com

<https://www.zwai.ie/2024/05/positive-zero-waste-news-from-ukraine-cc-yard-in-ruska-lozova-kharkiv/>

⁶ Global Status Report for Buildings and Construction 2024/25, Chapter 2 Global Buildings and Construction Status, Section 2.5 Extended Producer Responsibility in the construction sector, page 32. United Nations Environment Programme 2025, Paris.
<https://wedocs.unep.org/20.500.11822/47214>.

⁷ "Urban Mining" saving materials from buildings, deconstruction instead of demolition; The Guardian, 19-Mar-2025.

⁸ <https://www.zwai.ie/2024/05/positive-zero-waste-news-from-ukraine-cc-yard-in-ruska-lozova-kharkiv/>

1.4 The Problem of Packaging Waste; Levies on Incineration and Landfilling

Another area of particular interest to Zero Waste Alliance Ireland is packaging waste, and especially the operation of the EU Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive which set legally binding targets for municipal waste and packaging waste management to be achieved by 2025, 2030 and 2035.⁹ These directives introduced an “*early warning*” mechanism to track progress towards the targets, and to inform Member States where additional efforts will be required. The results show that a significant proportion of Member States (including Ireland) are unlikely to reach these targets.

In Ireland, more than 1 million tonnes of packaging waste were generated in 2019, and 1.2 million tonnes in 2022 (the latest year for which data is available), corresponding to 228 kg/capita which is significantly above the EU average of 177 kg/capita. An unsustainably high proportion of packaging waste was being incinerated, possibly because of the absence of any incineration levy or tax. However, in 2023, the Government finally introduced an incineration levy of €10 per tonne, encompassing incineration, co-incineration, and waste export.¹⁰ This legislation, the subject of many requests by ZWAI, was finally introduced to address the rising amounts of incineration of materials such as paper, cardboard, plastic, and vehicle tires, all of which are potentially recyclable.

In addition, the landfill levy (imposed on all waste being landfilled) was increased in 2023 from €75 per tonne to €80 per tonne, reflecting a stronger push to reduce landfilling.¹¹ It is too early yet to determine accurately the effects of these levies.

1.5 Ireland’s Deposit Return System (DRS) – Finally in Place

Zero Waste Alliance Ireland has for many years been promoting a Deposit Return System (DRS) for aluminium beverage cans and PET bottles, especially as most European countries had DRSs in operation, some as early as the 1980s and 1990s (Sweden in 1984, Iceland in 1989, Finland in 1996, Norway in 1999, and Germany in 2003, based on legislation enacted in 1991).¹²

In Europe, a key driver was the requirement in the EU’s Single-Use Plastics Directive (SUPD)¹³ for Member States to achieve a target of 90% separate

⁹ Directive 94/62/EC of 20 December 1994 on Packaging and Packaging Waste

¹⁰ Circular Economy (Waste Recovery Levy) Regulations 2023; SI No. 406 of 2023.

¹¹ Waste Management (Landfill Levy)(Amendment) Regulations 2023; SI No. 398 of 2023.

¹² An Overview of Deposit Return Systems for Single-Use Beverage Containers. Reloop, October 2022. www.reloopplatform.org

¹³ Directive (EU) 2019/904 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 June 2019 on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment

collection for plastic drinks bottles by 2029. Most European countries with DRS have achieved return rates above 90% (with Germany showing the best results at 98%), thereby diverting significant quantities of drinks containers from disposal by landfilling or incineration, and keeping the materials circulating in the economy.

In 2020 and 2021, we made two submissions to the relevant Government departments on a future DRS for Ireland, in which we recommended that:

- i) a hybrid approach should be adopted, allowing local communities to establish and operate Deposit and Return Schemes for community benefit;
- ii) the acceptable beverage container material should not be restricted to aluminium and PET; glass should be included, as it is relatively easy to check the cleanliness of returned bottles; and the collected bottles may be re-used, i.e. washed and re-filled;
- iii) the collected packaging should be recycled and resold within Ireland, promoting a local or national circular economy; that the collected material should be genuinely recycled within Ireland, and not exported to Asian countries, or fragmented for incorporation into Refuse Derived Fuel; and,
- iv) a single All-Ireland approach and policy is needed to ensure an efficient system of collection, processing and fraud prevention. Labelling must be similar North and South, while RVMs in both parts of the country should be programmed to recognise containers from either jurisdiction.¹⁴

It will be obvious that the recommendations by ourselves and other environmental NGOs were not taken into account; and, even though the DRS which was established is reasonably good, it falls far short of the best systems operating in other EU Member States.

In 2022, the Government finally announced a DRS for beverage cans and bottles, including a requirement that supermarkets and shops would have to register with a newly established company “*return.ie*”, operated by the bottling and canning companies.¹⁵ Ireland’s DRS did not actually come into operation until 01 February 2024, following the coming into force of the necessary legislation.¹⁶

The current DRS in Ireland requires that a deposit (of 15c or 25c) is charged when drink products are supplied in certain single-use containers (cans and

¹⁴ Submission to the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications on the Proposed Introduction of a Deposit and Return Scheme (DRS) for Beverage Containers, 12 November 2020; and <https://www.zwai.ie/resources/2021/deposit-return-scheme/>

¹⁵ New Deposit Return Scheme aims to incentivise recycling of plastic and aluminium waste, Irish Times, Monday 28-Nov-2022.

¹⁶ Separate Collection (Deposit Return Scheme) Regulations 2021 (S.I. No. 599 of 2021) (the “DRS Regulations”).

plastic bottles), and the deposit is later refunded to a person who returns the empty container for recycling/reuse. The refundable deposit is charged by the suppliers at each stage of the supply chain in the State: manufacturer or importer, wholesalers, retailers, etc. Under the scheme, the deposit is added to the price of the goods by the person who first supplies the drink product in the State (i.e., the manufacturer or the importer), and by any subsequent supplier (e.g., a wholesaler, distributor, retailer). When the empty container is returned under the scheme, the deposit will be refunded.¹⁷

Ireland became the 16th European country to introduce a Deposit Return System (DRS) for single-use beverage packaging; and, just over a year later, the one-billionth packaging container was returned at one of Lidl Ireland's supermarkets, in Kilcarbery, Dublin, on Tuesday, 04 February 2025.¹⁸

1.6 Will Ireland Meet Its Recycling Targets ?

Ireland faces a widening gap to meet ambitious new EU recycling targets from 2025 onwards, and the EPA stated that *“to address Ireland’s rising waste volumes and falling recycling rates, we need to transform existing business models into circular ones that promote waste reduction, reuse and recycling. Circularity roadmaps are needed for key economic sectors, including the construction, manufacturing and food processing sectors, supported by clear policy, legislation, and national targets”*.¹⁹

In 2022, the latest year for which the Environmental Protection Agency has published statistics on waste, Ireland generated 15.7 million tonnes of waste, equivalent to 8kg per person every day. Ireland’s annual waste generation has grown by over 20 per cent in the last decade, and the country is now almost certain to miss EU municipal and packaging recycling targets for 2025.

Other data highlighted by the EPA includes the depressing information that Ireland’s municipal recycling rate has remained stagnant at 41% with no significant change in 10 years; many construction activities are highly waste intensive, accounting for half of all waste generated; and Ireland has a waste infrastructure gap with over 1.2 million tonnes of municipal waste exported to other countries in 2022.²⁰

¹⁷ Deposit Return Scheme; Part 10 Chapter 4; Revenue Commissioners, April 2025. <https://www.revenue.ie/en/tax-professionals/tdm/value-added-tax/part10-special-schemes/deposit-return-scheme/deposit-return-scheme.pdf>

¹⁸ First year of Ireland’s deposit return scheme. Recycling Magazine, 10 April 2025.

¹⁹ EPA News Release, December 2021.

²⁰ EPA Press Release, 16 December 2024; and the EPA Circular Economy Programme and Waste Statistics Highlight Report 2022; published 12 December 2024 (34 pp).

1.7 Overview of Our Work in 2024

It is against this background of extractivism, inefficient use of raw materials, failure to reuse or recycle useful materials, and massive discarding of unwanted materials and objects, that Zero Waste Alliance Ireland perceives its work to be essential on many fronts – raising public awareness, engaging in educational programmes, lobbying government agencies, and advocating the philosophy and practice of “zero waste” whenever and wherever possible.

During 2024, our work continued with a wide range of activities including events and meetings in person and conducted remotely via electronic communication and conferencing; making detailed submissions and observations in response to public consultations (section 7 below), and delivering lectures and presentations (section 8 below). We also increased our membership (section 4 below), we maintained an active presence on social media (section 10 below), and we continued work on a number of practical projects (section 9 below).

Maintaining a close watch on Irish and European policy developments and legislation in the areas of waste, recycling and the circular economy has convinced us that our work in the promotion of the zero waste approach all levels is becoming increasingly necessary; and this gives us some of the energy we need to continue our efforts.

2. OUR MISSION, OBJECTIVES, GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND ETHICAL VALUES

From the time when Zero Waste Alliance Ireland became an environmental NGO, we have operated under the guidance of a set of principles, beliefs, and values which help us to achieve our objectives; and in 2024 we decided to reexamine these and to make them available in our annual report.

2.1 Basic Principles

At Zero Waste Alliance Ireland, we have held the belief since our existence began, that human communities and societies should behave like natural ones – living comfortably within the natural flow of energy from the sun and plants, producing no wastes which cannot be recycled back into the earth’s systems, and guided by new economic values which are in harmony with personal and ecological values. In nature, the waste products of every living organism serve as raw materials to be transformed by other living creatures or benefit the planet in other ways.

It is one of our key principles that instead of organising systems that efficiently dispose of or recycle our waste, we need to design systems of production that have little or no waste to begin with.

There are no technical barriers to achieving a “zero waste society”, only our habits, our greed as a society, and the current economic structures and policies which have led to the present environmental, social and economic difficulties. “Zero Waste” is a realistic whole-system approach to addressing the problem of society’s unsustainable resource flows – it encompasses waste elimination at source through product design and producer responsibility, together with waste reduction strategies further down the supply chain, such as cleaner production, product re-design, repairing, dismantling, recycling, re-use and composting.

2.2 Mission and Objectives

We consider that it is our mission to raise public awareness of this approach to the achievement of Zero Waste, and to ensure that government agencies, local authorities and other organisations will develop and implement environmentally sustainable resources and waste management policies, especially resource efficiency, waste reduction and elimination, the promotion of re-use, repair and recycling, and the development and implementation of the Circular Economy.

Our principal objectives are:

- i) Stimulating public interest and raising public awareness of the challenges contained in the United Nations Sustainability Goals, the EU Circular Economy, the European Green Deal; and encouraging the implementation of the objectives contained in these over-arching policies and programmes, so that the targets set by these policies will be achieved, especially in Ireland;
- ii) Developing and recommending new appropriate legislation and regulations to hasten the end of the present wasting of finite resources; and to eliminate all forms of air, soil, surface water and groundwater pollution, by promoting sustainable waste management practices;
- iii) Raising public awareness about the long-term damage to human and animal health and to the environment, and the adverse economic and social consequences of landfilling and incineration, both of which result in the loss and destruction of potentially recyclable or re-usable materials;
- iv) Raising awareness of the importance of the country’s soils as a valuable and finite ecologically necessary resource which should not be damaged or contaminated by inappropriate uses, including application of biocides and other toxicants which harm soil microflora and microfauna, leading to wildlife mortalities and the decline or local extinction of populations of sensitive and vulnerable species of insects, wild birds and other wildlife;





- v) Sharing information, ideas and contacts; and distributing information to individuals and community groups on resource recycling, on sustainable waste management, on sustainable living practices, and on reusable products and materials;
- iv) Stimulate an informed debate in all types of media, including social media, about sustainable waste management and sustainable living practices;
- v) Researching and recommending environmentally sustainable and practical solutions for domestic, commercial, municipal, industrial and agricultural wastes in Ireland, especially in the key areas of energy and water conservation, wastewater treatment, rainwater harvesting, grey water reuse, and recovery of dissolved phosphorus and nitrogen from all types of wastewater;
- vi) Raising public and governmental awareness of the many connections between the multiple crises resulting from the increasing exploitation of the Earth's finite resources, exceeding the boundaries of the Earth's capacity to support all forms of living organisms, widespread over-consumption, materials shortage, ecological damage, biodiversity loss, reduction in planetary health, and adverse effects on human health and well-being;
- vii) Providing thoroughly researched and evidence-based reports on the above issues, and making these available for informed public discussion;
- viii) Demonstrating that a paradigm shift is needed to transform of society, by way of a just transition, away from the mindset of "extraction, use and discard" to a circular way of thinking, embodying equality for all;
- ix) Lobbying Government and local authorities to implement environmentally sustainable waste management practices, including clean production, elimination of toxic substances from products, and the promotion of re-use, recycling, segregation of discarded materials at source, and other beneficial practices;
- x) Lobbying Government to follow the best international practice and EU recommendations by introducing fiscal and economic measures designed to penalise the manufacturers of products which cannot be re-used, recycled or composted at the end of their useful lives, and to financially support companies making products which can be re-used, recycled or are made from recycled materials; and,
- xi) Maintaining contact and exchanging information with similar national NGOs and networks in other countries, and with international zero waste organisations.

It will be clear that ZWAI is primarily concerned with the very serious issue of discarded substances, materials and goods, whether from domestic, commercial or industrial sources, how these become “waste”, and how such “waste” may be prevented by re-design along ecological principles. These same ecological principles can be applied to the many ways in which we obtain and use energy, how we abstract and use water as a resource, and to other material uses.

As an environmental NGO, and a not-for-profit company with charitable status since 2004 (section 3 below), ZWAI also campaigns for the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, including (but not limited to) Goal 12, Responsible Consumption and Production; Goal 6, Clean Water and Sanitation (having particular regard to the need to avoid wasting water, and to wasting nutrients contained in our wastewater); and Goal 15, to protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, to halt and reverse land degradation and to halt biodiversity loss.

2.3 Our Values and Ethical Principles

The values and ethical principles which guide and inform us in all our work include:

-  Zero Waste Alliance Ireland will, as an environmental NGO, maintain in all its activities, the utmost respect for human life and the lives of all other sentient beings, as well as reverence for the diversity of life on Earth;
-  Zero Waste Alliance Ireland will strive to embrace as far as possible, in all its activities, a high degree of care and consideration for the protection of natural systems on which human and planetary health depend;
-  Zero Waste Alliance Ireland acknowledges and respects diverse sources of information, knowledge and wisdom, including science-based and indigenous traditional knowledge, while sharing these for the benefit of society and for the benefit of all life on Earth;
-  Zero Waste Alliance Ireland will, as far as possible within its own sphere of influence, assist in challenging attempts by governments, industries, or other agencies at spreading disinformation that may undermine human and planetary health, damage biodiversity, or may adversely affect or impede genuine attempts by human societies and organisations to address planetary-wide crises such as climate change, biodiversity loss, damage to the world's oceans, deforestation, soil loss and other critical issues;

- ♥ Zero Waste Alliance Ireland will, in promoting the concept and practice of zero waste, advocate careful and responsible use of raw materials taken from non-living and living sources, and will also advocate reuse, exchange, repairing, recycling, nature-based solutions to environmental problems, and other environmental and climate-benefitting activities consistent with promotion of the circular economy;
- ♥ Within its own organisation, Zero Waste Alliance Ireland is committed to maintaining and promoting a harmonious and collegial environment whereby members treat each other with dignity and respect; and will encourage members to recognise the importance of this mutually supportive environment, not only for the achievement of the organisation's objectives, but also for improving performance, raising everyone's morale, reducing stress and making Zero Waste Alliance Ireland welcoming and attractive to new members;
- ♥ Zero Waste Alliance Ireland undertakes to respect the rights, dignity and personal worth of everyone, regardless of gender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race or membership of the Traveller community, or any other ethnic or marginalised community or group, within Ireland and outside Ireland, and will encourage inclusivity and diversity;
- ♥ Zero Waste Alliance Ireland, in all of its communications with other organisations and persons, will act with due regard for the sovereignty, independence and beliefs of other organisations and persons, and will strive to never make racist, sexist, sectarian or defamatory remarks or signs, will avoid language and behaviour that could be misinterpreted by others, and will not act dishonestly or with intent to defraud or deceive any other person or organisation; and,
- ♥ Zero Waste Alliance Ireland will endeavour to be transparent in its interactions with other organisations and persons, will comply with the relevant transparency codes and guidelines, and will not attempt to hide information which should be made available to ensure the necessary degree of transparency.

We haven't numbered these values and principles; for the reason that all are of equal importance to us.

3. GOVERNANCE

Zero Waste Alliance Ireland (ZWAI) is a not-for-profit company, limited by guarantee, and registered as such with the Companies registration office (CRO) since 2004; CRO registration number **394205**. Our Memorandum and Articles of Association, or Constitution, were first drawn up in 2004, and the most recent change was in 2021, approved by the CRO. Our annual financial statements and any changes in our directorships are also reported to the CRO.

Zero Waste Alliance Ireland is also a registered charity and our Charities Regulator registration number (RCN) is **20057244**. We comply with the Governance Code issued by the Charities Regulator under section 14(1)(i) of the Charities Act 2009, to encourage and facilitate better administration and management of charitable organisations; and, in order to comply with the Charities Regulator's requirements, ZWAI produces an annual report of our activities, a regularly updated risk assessment, a strategic plan for the following two years, and a comprehensive code of conduct which is reviewed regularly.

ZWAI has also signed up to the **EU Transparency Register**, a publicly accessible database maintained by the European Commission, designed to show what varieties of interests are being represented at EU level, by whom and on whose behalf. The Register shows the resources devoted to such activities (including financial support, donations, sponsorship, etc.); it has a public website, a code of conduct governing how representatives should interact with the EU institutions, and a complaints mechanism to enable anyone to trigger an administrative inquiry into alleged cases of non-observance of the code of conduct by registered interest representatives.

The Transparency Register number of Zero Waste Alliance Ireland is: **417362640092-95** (registration date: 26/10/2020). All our details are publicly available on:

<https://ec.europa.eu/transparencyregister/public/homePage.do?redir=false&locale=en>

Zero Waste Alliance Ireland is managed and guided by a team of seven directors, all of whom comply with the Companies Registration Office qualifications for appointment of directors under the Companies Act 1963, as amended. Officers are elected (or re-elected) at each year's Annual General Meeting – in 2024 our AGM was held on Monday 14 October, and was held online as permitted under the *Companies Act 2014*, as temporarily amended by the *Companies (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Covid-19) Act 2020*, which permitted the holding of virtual meetings, including AGMs, and was extended to 31 December 2024.

The Company's Officers, elected at the 2014, AGM are:

Chairman	..	..	..	..	..	Jack Coffey
Vice Chairman	..	..	..	..	..	Jack O'Sullivan
Hon. Treasurer	..	..	..	..	..	Claire Keating
Hon. Vice Treasurer	..	..	..	..	..	Ollan Herr
Hon. Company Secretary	..	..	..	..	..	Craig Tobin Dower

Other Directors and staff members are:

Director	..	..	..	..	..	Luke Fagan
Director (provisional appointment)	..	..	..	..	..	Sara Borkent *
Existing staff member responsible for administration, coordination, social media, and graphic design	..	..	..	..	..	Orla Coutin Fitzsimons
New social media assistant	..	..	..	..	..	Mimi Coutin Fitzsimons

* Sara Borkent's provisional appointment as a Director was subsequently confirmed in early 2025.

The Company's accounts are audited by CMF Accountants, Quayside Business Park, Mill Street, Dundalk, County Louth, who were re-appointed at the 2024 AGM.

Board meetings, generally attended by all of the Company's Directors, are regularly held online as "virtual meetings", throughout each year, with the exception of one in-person Board meeting annually. During 2024, seven Board meetings were held online (not including the AGM) and the one in-person meeting was held on Saturday 06 July 2024, at Fitzgerald's Woodlands House Hotel, Adare, County Limerick.

At all Board meetings, the attending Directors are asked by the Chair to declare any conflicts of interest before the meeting begins.

As a registered charitable organisation, financially supported by the State, through the Environment Fund, managed by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC), and distributed to NGOs by the Irish Environmental Network (IEN), ZWAI is very conscious of the legitimate need for accountability, transparency and good governance. As a registered charity, the Directors of ZWAI act also as Trustees of the Charity; which requires careful adherence to the principle that the Directors do not receive remuneration of any type for their voluntary work as Trustees or Directors.

4. MEMBERSHIP

During 2024, we increased our membership to 52, from introductions made by our current members, by using social media and researching potential new members who can provide useful links, experience or knowledge, by making initial contact with them, and then inviting them to join ZWAI if we are satisfied that these potential members will make useful contributions to our work.

It is not our intention to greatly expand the membership of ZWAI in the near future, as we feel it is most appropriate and effective for us to work as a relatively small organisation, in which every member will have an active role.

Other important membership tasks undertaken during 2024 included keeping more frequently in touch with existing members, and providing members with occasional relevant news items. These meetings are organised by our part-time administrator who also has the role of membership secretary.

5. STAFF – ADMINISTRATOR AND MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

In our 2021 Annual Report, we reported the appointment of Myrtille Coutin Fitzsimons as our part-time Administrator and Membership Secretary. Myrtille stepped down from the role in August 2021, and her sister, Órla Coutin Fitzsimons, was appointed as her replacement. Órla has continued in this role with dedication throughout 2022, 2023, and 2024.

During 2024, Órla was instrumental in maintaining and updating the ZWAI website, managing the Facebook page, maintaining communication with members, attracting and recruiting new members, and providing critical support for the production of submissions and presentations made by ZWAI during the year.

In previous years, most of our submissions were prepared by only one or two members. However, beginning in 2022, we introduced a new system whereby Órla, as Administrator, would invite members to form voluntary teams to collaboratively draft submissions in response to public consultations from Irish Government departments or the European Commission. Typically working in teams of three or four members (occasionally five in 2024), who would meet online by Zoom to discuss the planned submission, this collaborative approach has proven highly successful and we believe it has significantly enhanced the quality of our submissions.

In addition to her administrative work, Órla produced several newsletters and blog posts, which were uploaded to the website to further increase member engagement and public visibility.

To better balance the workload, Myrtille Coutin Fitzsimons rejoined ZWAI in 2024 as a part-time Social Media Assistant, working five hours per week, to relieve Órla of some of her responsibilities, particularly in the area of social media management.

6. OUTREACH AND COLLABORATION WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS WITH SIMILAR AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

ZWAI has continued to keep in touch with the **European Environmental Bureau**, and other organisations with similar aims and objectives. ZWAI is a member of the **EEB Waste Working Group** and the **EEB Built Environment Task Force**, and we supported a number of initiatives being taken by these groups.

ZWAI is a member of the **Irish Green Building Council (IGBC)**, and the IGBC is a corporate member of ZWAI. The primary reason for this mutual membership was our shared interest and concern about the quantities of construction and demolition waste which are not recycled in Ireland (see our observation on C&D waste in our Introduction to the Annual Report, section 1, above). The mutual membership also proved valuable in that ZWAI was able to provide an input to submissions made by the IGBC, and the IGBC provided contributions to submissions made by ZWAI.



ZWAI Directors and Órla Coutin Fitzsimons, membership secretary/researcher, as featured on the Institute of Sustainability Studies website, 2024.

We also have mutual membership with the **Institute of Sustainability Studies**; and, in August 2024, Zero Waste Alliance Ireland was featured in the Institute's

Business Spotlight, giving us some very welcome publicity. The Spotlight feature, written by Bronagh Loughlin, Communications & Content Leader at the Institute of Sustainability Studies, described in detail our origin, aims, previous activities and current work, and included our advice for businesses about to embark on their sustainability journey.²¹

In 2024, we joined forces with **All Together in Dignity Ireland**, the Irish branch of the **International Movement ATD Fourth World**, founded in 1957 by Joseph Wresinski, to overcome poverty. This international organisation is a movement of solidarity among and in collaboration with the most disadvantaged and excluded families around the world, with more than sixty years' experience of tackling inequality and promoting social justice. ATD has a vision of a world without poverty, a society where each person is respected. Poverty is an affront to human dignity, and people in poverty have unique knowledge and experience that can lower the barriers separating people and communities.



Craig Tobin-Dower reading “Black Friday Tree”, his poem which criticised over-consumption. He says that *“This poem was written about Black Friday, which has become a sort of consumer holiday that we’ve all grown to love. It seems to be up there now with the like of Christmas and Halloween. I was lucky enough to be working in retail on the sacred day so this poem originated during my break and the interactions that happened on Black Friday”*.

²¹ <https://instituteofsustainabilitystudies.com/insights/sustainable-business-spotlights/business-spotlights-zero-waste-alliance-ireland/>



Jack O'Sullivan reading his poems “Bog; For Aisling Muller”, “Trees” and “Sea tangle”, celebrating the wonders of these unique environments.

We participated in the ATD **Creative Pathways Project**, in which two of our members, Jack O'Sullivan (founder and Board member of ZWAI) and Craig Tobin-Dower (Board member of ZWAI) were interviewed in Trinity College Dublin on 07 March, where they read their poems on the environment and sustainability (photographs above). This collective project included a diverse range of voices to represent the Sustainable Development Goals in a more holistic sense.

For us, this was an energising experience, collaborating with artists and writers to promote human dignity, and to help marginalised people. The poems read by Craig and Jack were subsequently published by ATD , along with photographs, in the beautifully produced “*Creative Pathways to Participation*” book, which told the story of the project, emphasising the “*importance of creative outlets for finding voice, self-expression, self-recognition, and sharing insights on issues of social justice, equality and inclusion*”.²²

In 2024, we also worked with **Friends of the Earth Ireland**, for whom we contributed to the FoEI compendium on the status of environmental commitments made in Ireland’s 2020 **Programme for Government (PfG)**. In July 2024, Friends of the Earth commissioned three academic experts to independently assess the Irish Government’s performance on environmental and climate-related issues on which commitments had been made in the PfG, and Zero Waste

²² <https://www.atdireland.ie/wp/creative-pathways-to-participation/>

Alliance Ireland was one of the environmental NGOs invited to participate in this important project.

In August 2024, we promoted zero waste principles directly to the public at **Electric Picnic**, one of Ireland's largest music festivals, engaging festival-goers on sustainable living practices.

Later in the same month, we collaborated with **Global Citizen**, a New York based not-for-profit corporation, in their **Global Poverty Project**, as we were invited to attend and were given an allocated space at Coldplay's Music of the Spheres World Tour concerts in Croke Park, Dublin, on 29 and 30 August and 01 and 02 September. This was also an incredible and very energising experience for us, as we were given an opportunity to show our mission and purpose to some of the 80,000 concert-goers and Coldplay fans who visited our stand in the Croke Park stadium's grounds.

In order to attract concert fans to our stand, Órla developed a game which required players to throw a potentially recyclable or a non-recyclable object into one of three baskets labelled "*general bin*", "*recycling bin*" and "*battery bin*", to test how much each player knew about the different types of waste. We also provided a frame with our name and logo, so that people could take "selfies" of themselves inside this frame. Our stand also exhibited a QR code which we encouraged people to use with their mobile phones, as it would bring them directly to our website.



The Zero Waste Alliance Ireland stand at the Coldplay Music of the Spheres World Tour concert in Croke Park, Dublin.

Partnering with Global Citizen, this collaboration allowed us to bring our message to thousands of attendees, providing a major platform to advocate for zero waste and sustainability on a national scale.

One immediate result of this collaboration and invitation was that Zero Waste Alliance Ireland's attendance at the Coldplay concerts was featured in an illustrated article in the widely circulated midland weekly newspaper **Westmeath Topic** on 22 August 2024 (see photograph below). The article included an interview with ZWAI founder and Board member Jack O'Sullivan, information about our aims, objectives and activities, and a link to the ZWAI website.

Our advocacy and collaboration activities also extended to EU-level engagement. On 18 September, our Vice Chairperson, Jack Coffey, met with officials from the **European Commission** to discuss our submission to the public consultation on the Nitrates Directive, submitted in March. The discussion focused on Ireland's ongoing environmental challenges, particularly nitrogen pollution and its broader impacts, with specific attention given to Ireland's nitrates derogation. We stressed the urgent need for significant improvements in water quality, given the likelihood that Ireland will seek an extension of the current derogation in 2025 or 2026.

TOPIC • 22 August, 2024

NEWS 11

Coldplay's choice: Environmentalists "excited" to feature at Croke Park gigs

Members of a locally-founded organisation are 'excited and delighted' to be the only environmentalists, and one of only two social enterprises, invited to take a stall at the four sold-out Coldplay concerts in Croke Park from August 29 to September 2.

Personally chosen by the global megastars to share their eco-passion with the capacity crowd of over 80,000 at the Irish leg of Music Of The Spheres World Tour, Zero Waste Alliance Ireland are still in shock.

Founded 25 years ago in Athlone by a small group including Ballymanus-based Jack O'Sullivan, Zero Waste Alliance Ireland lobbies for zero waste and a circular economy. They have recently grown from a board of six to having 30 people involved.

ACTIVITIES

Castlepollard-based Jack, who is still a director, says the group has fun, games and interesting activities planned to engage concert goers and to teach them about circular economy principles and waste reduction. There will be no flyers handed out due to their concerted parties can take a picture of the QR code



Coldplay in action during their "Music of the Spheres" tour.

displayed and that will lead to the organisation's website.

"The main thing is people will be rushing in, they won't want to be standing around with us too much but if we give them something to think about, when they are seated waiting for the music to start, they might look up the website and find it interesting," Jack said. "We might get a few followers on our social media or a few members but if we get even 1% of those attending the concerts, that would still be quite a few people."

COLDPLAY'S CHOICE

The small group were in shock when Global Citizen,

an action platform dedicated to achieving the end of extreme poverty, nominated them to showcase their work at the Irish concerts, and over the moon when they were chosen by the band themselves. They are delighted with the opportunity to get the word out about their cause and possibly recruit new members.

"Two months ago, we were contacted by Global Citizen whose main focus is poverty, equity and the planet. They work with Coldplay as they are massive front runners in those areas," fellow ZWAI director Craig Tokin Dower explained. "In each major city they play in, Coldplay asks Global Citizen to engage a



Some of the members of Zero Waste Alliance Ireland: (l-r) Ollan Herr, Craig Dower, Luke Fagan, Jack O'Sullivan (Ballymanus), Claire Keating, Jack Coffey and Orla Coutin-Fitzsimons

list of 10-15 organisations in the environmental sector and another 15 in the socially-focused sector. Our name was put in for Ireland. The band gets a small briefing on each group and chooses who they'd like to be there. They chose us from the environmental category and Neurodiversity Ireland from the social category."

OPPORTUNITY

"The group don't know if they will get to meet the band yet but either way,

Craig said the scale of this opportunity is 'crazy'.

"We will be representing Zero Waste Alliance Ireland at a Coldplay concert, you can't get a bigger band. For them to allow us to push the principles of zero waste and the circular economy and for them to be pushing it too, is a huge opportunity. This isn't a niche indie band who are environmentally focused, this is a band on a par with Taylor Swift and probably one of the

biggest bands of the 21st century. In terms of opportunities, this is huge."

"We're excited and delighted and hope people will come up to us and say hello," Jack added, saying the members of Zero Waste Alliance will use public transport to travel to the concerts where possible, which is harder than it seems.

"I'm lucky, I can get the train from Mullingar to Drumcondra and it is only

a short walk from Croke Park but there is a fly in the ointment. I can get a train up but can't get it home because the last train from Dublin is before 9pm. I'll be driving to Maynooth, leaving the car there and then getting the train to Drumcondra. Where I am living in Ballymanus, 8km outside Castlepollard, I can't get a bus into Mullingar to catch the train to Dublin unless it is a Thursday."

Link to website: ZWAI.ie

Illustrated article in the **Westmeath Topic**, 22 August 2024, featuring Zero Waste Alliance Ireland and some of the members who represented us at the ZWAI stand alongside the Coldplay Music of the Spheres World Tour concert in Croke Park, Dublin.

Our final international activity for 2024 was attendance at the 29th annual **United Nations Climate Change Conference**, known as **COP29**, in Baku, Azerbaijan, from November 11 to 22. We were invited by the Irish Environmental Network to attend this key event; and the cost of travel, accommodation and attendance would be reimbursed by IEN. Board members Jack Coffey and Craig Tobin-Dower attended the conference, and were able to meet delegates from other NGOs, and they attended the launch of the **2024 Civil Society Equity Review**. Most significantly, they met with delegates from Climate Action Network Europe (CAN Europe), and discussed the possibility of ZWAI becoming a member of CAN Europe.

7. SUBMISSIONS

ZWAI has earned itself a good reputation by making very professional and well-argued submissions on a range of waste-related topics to the European Commission, Irish Government departments, state agencies and other public organisations; and this essential work continues every year.

In 2024 we made 7 submissions and 3 presentations or lectures (see section 5 below); and all of these submissions were very detailed and thoroughly researched. The seven submissions are listed in date order in our additional report entitled *“Submissions and presentations by Zero Waste Alliance Ireland, January to December 2024”*, with a summary of the principal issues and recommendations made in each of them.

A list of these submissions, with only their titles, dates when they were delivered, and links to the documents on our website, is as follows:

- Submission by ZWAI to the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications in response to the Department’s public consultation on proposed amendments to the Access to Information on the Environment (AIE) Regulations 2007-2018 (January 2024);²³
- Response to the first Public Consultation by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications on Ireland’s draft National Energy and Climate Plan (March 2024);²⁴
- Submission by ZWAI to the European Commission in response to the Commission’s public consultation on the evaluation of the Nitrates Directive

²³ <https://www.zwai.ie/resources/2024/submission-to-the-decc-on-the-proposed-amendments-to-the-access-to-information-on-the-environment-aie-regulations-2007-2018/>

²⁴ <https://www.zwai.ie/resources/2024/submission-by-zwai-to-decc-on-irelands-national-energy-climate-plan-necp/>

(91 / 676 / EEC) on Protection of Waters against Pollution caused by Nitrates from Agricultural Sources (March 2024);²⁵

- Response to the second Public Consultation by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications on Ireland's updated draft National Energy and Climate Plan (June 2024);²⁶
- Submission by ZWAI to the European Commission in response to the Commission's public consultation on proposed ecodesign and ecolabelling requirements for computers (July 2024);²⁷
- Submission by ZWAI and the Waterford Environmental Forum to the Department of Transport in response to the Department's Public Consultation: *"Moving Together – A Strategic Approach to Improving the Efficiency of the Transport System in Ireland"* (August 2024);²⁸ and,
- Submission by ZWAI to the Irish Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in response to the Department's Public Consultation on Draft Proposed Additional Measures for Ireland's Fifth Nitrates Action Programme (December 2024).²⁹

8. PRESENTATIONS AND LECTURES

- i) On 19 January 2024, our administrator, researcher and membership secretary, delivered a presentation on *"The Zero Waste Approach"* to transition year students at CBS Mitchelstown secondary school. The presentation was well received, and was a beginning to what we hope will be further talks to schools and colleges.
- ii) On 07 March 2024, Jack O'Sullivan (Board member) delivered a PowerPoint presentation on *"Climate in the Community – Communities in the Hurricane of Climate Change"*, to staff and postgraduates in the Athlone Campus of the Technological University of the Shannon, as part of the University's Green Week 2024.

²⁵ <https://www.zwai.ie/resources/2024/submission-by-zwai-to-the-eu-public-consultation-on-the-evaluation-of-the-nitrates-directive/>

²⁶ <https://www.zwai.ie/resources/2024/draft-update-of-irelands-national-energy-and-climateplan-necp-submission-by-zwai-to-decc/>

²⁷ <https://www.zwai.ie/resources/2024/ecodesign-and-ecolabelling-requirements-for-computers-zwai-submission-to-eu-commission-ecodesign-and-ecolabelling-requirements-for-computers/>

²⁸ <https://www.zwai.ie/resources/2024/moving-together-a-strategic-approach-to-improving-irelands-transport-system/>

²⁹ <https://www.zwai.ie/resources/2024/proposed-additional-measures-for-irelands-fifth-nitrates-action-programme-nap/>

Jack O'Sullivan's talk began by asking what individuals and communities can do to avert or mitigate climate change, when there is a deliberate policy by multinationals and governments to place responsibility on individuals, so as to avoid shining the light on their own irresponsible behaviour. Answering this question required recognising that our simplistic understanding of the world in which we live is no longer fit for purpose; we need to address the power dynamics in the current world order; we need to ask hard questions about development, prosperity and massive accumulation of wealth by a few people; critically evaluate the structure of economic models in the globalised economy; examine the nature and the roles of the global institutions that dominate and perpetuate the status quo; and examine the intrinsic nature of our political systems.

Climate chaos, environmental degradation and perverse inequality have been defined and described as separate multiple crises, often in competition with each other; but in fact they are different aspects of what we should understand as a metacrisis. These crises are interconnected not only in their social and economic realities, but more fundamentally in their source, and they share the same deep root: extractivism based on extrinsic principles (externalities).

He pointed to the deep-rooted structural inequities in the way the global economy works; unravelling them will be met with stiff resistance, as it is impossible to reconcile free-market ideology with sustainable resource management and care for the Earth. Letting common resources be exploited by an unregulated free market prevents these finite resources from contributing to long-term economic development and wellbeing for everyone.

He said that avoiding massive climate chaos and making the transition to sustainability will require a new political philosophy for human progress placing collective welfare over individual rights, abandoning unimpeded consumption, and reinterpreting the definition of prosperity in an era of environmental constraints. Although the lessons need to be applied differently in each continent and every country, there are three basic or foundational objectives:

1. Protecting common and public goods;
2. Defining a path towards moderate prosperity; and,
3. Helping societies to prosper within challenging and multiple resource and environmental constraints.

And he suggested that we must open our minds to shift our thinking from a silo to a systems view, open our hearts to shift our relationships with each other and with the planet from toxic to transformative, and become

willing to shift our actions from “ego” to “eco”. This transformation can be achieved through work that reconnects people to each other, and connects people to nature – work which is also known as Deep Ecology Work, Active Hope, and Despair and Empowerment Work.

- iii) On 16 November 2024, Jack O’Sullivan (Board member) gave a PowerPoint presentation and talk on “*Food Waste: Problems & Solutions*” at the Green Gather Food Event in Westmeath County Library, Mullingar, organised by the Westmeath Climate Action Network (WECAN) and the Mullingar Climate Action Network (MCAN). Jack O’Sullivan and Alison Hough (ZWAI members) also members of WECAN.

Jack O’Sullivan’s talk was followed by a wide-ranging discussion on the nature of Ireland’s food system; why it fails to provide an adequate diet for many people, intensive food production has adverse effects on oil and climate, and creates very large quantities of food waste.³⁰

9. RESEARCH AND PILOT-SCALE PROJECTS

9.1 Testing and Validation of the Food Waste Composter

One of our most valuable assets is a medium-size composter which utilises thermophilic bacteria to transform discarded food items into a usable compost; we now have good understanding of how best to operate the composter, despite a number of inherent design problems which have initially restricted its use. For example, we constructed an insulated cover for the composter so that it can be used outdoors at festivals and other events.

During 2024, we continued testing the food “waste” composter to ensure that it was working satisfactorily before being demonstrated as a pilot-scale project to show how discarded food materials can be converted into a safe and usable compost.

9.2 Pilot Scale Project for the Recovery of Dissolved Phosphorus and Nitrogen from Domestic Wastewater

One of our members (Ollan Herr) has been developing a system for separation of human urine, recovery of dissolved phosphorus and nitrogen, reuse of these nutrients, and removal of pharmaceutical residues from domestic wastewater.

³⁰ The lecture in Mullingar on 16 November 2024, on the topic of food waste, led to ZWAI being invited by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, to give a similar talk by Órla Coutin Fitzsimons to staff members of the Department, on the same topic, in March 2025.

He has already installed a domestic-scale system in his own home, and a commercial-scale system in the Re-Discovery Centre in Ballymun, Dublin.

Our discussions with Cloughjordan Ecovillage and with Sonairte for the potential development of a joint phosphorous recovery project in 2023 and 2024 were not successful; but in 2024 we began discussions with a small number of community groups which expressed interest in hosting the process. Other work on this project included automation and refinement of the struvite production process (addition of magnesium salt as a solution, instead of a solid).

10. PUBLICITY, MEDIA AND OUTREACH TO OUR OWN MEMBERS AND MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

10.1 Social Media and Website

Our social media outreach has generally been very good, based on work by Órla Coutin on the website and Facebook page; and by Jack O'Sullivan on our Linked-In page and Twitter account (started in 2020).

During 2024, we kept the website, Facebook and Twitter pages active, managed the Linked-In page, and we also kept an active watch for news items and reports to which ZWAI might publicly respond.

Our work in 2024 included further development of the website, and uploading copies of all submissions and presentations made during the year.

10.2 Blogs

At ZWAI, we view blogs and regular website activity as an important tool for expressing our values, highlighting key issues, and sharing updates in a more informal and accessible format compared to our formal submissions. Throughout 2024, we produced a total of 21 blog posts, covering a wide range of topics relevant to our mission and values. We are proud of the quality and diversity of these blogs, which help to broaden our outreach and engage more effectively with both our members and the wider public.

10.3 Print Media and Radio

During the year, ZWAI was also the subject of two features in local newspapers circulating in the midlands (one of these is described in section 5 above). On two occasions, Jack O'Sullivan participated in the Friday Panel discussion on the Midlands Today Show with Will Faulkner, on Midlands 103 FM Radio, broadcast live from the studio in Tullamore, County Offaly.

11. FINANCES

Zero Waste Alliance Ireland continues to rely primarily on the funding provided by the Irish Environmental Network; and in 2024, we also secured additional funding through the Benevity platform, made up of small, anonymous donations from individual supporters. All sources of income, including grants and donations, are fully recorded and disclosed in our annual financial accounts, ensuring transparency and accountability in our financial reporting.

Our income during the financial year to 30 November amounted to **€ 17,015**

Expenditure included:							€
Wages and salaries	..	..	..	..	..	..	20,289
Employer's PRSI contributions	..	..	..	..	..	..	1,779
Advertising costs	..	..	..	..	..	..	739
Computer costs	..	..	..	..	..	..	120
Consultancy fees	..	..	..	..	..	..	200
Accountancy fees	..	..	..	..	..	..	1,353
Bank charges	..	..	..	..	..	..	335
General expenses	..	..	..	..	..	..	9,130
Subscriptions (EEB)	..	..	..	..	..	..	246
Depreciation of tangible assets	..	..	..	..	..	..	1,883

Additional funding of € 4,707.93 was received from IEN to cover the travel, accommodation and other costs of two delegates attending COP29 in Baku; and this amount covered exactly the expenses incurred, leaving neither a credit nor a debit in the ZWAI accounts.

The above financial information is provided by our accountants, CMF, Quayside Business Park, Mill Street, Dundalk, County Louth.

12. FINAL NOTES

On the whole, 2024 has been a very successful and satisfying year for ZWAI – we expanded our work and outreach, delivered a significant number of lectures, talks and submissions, participated in some great events which we were enabled to attend, raised public awareness of our work and mission at these events, and delivered the “zero waste” message widely via social media and other media.

In fact, we surprised ourselves by the amount of work we accomplished with only a small number of part-time staff, and therefore most of the credit must go to our voluntary Board of Directors, and to other volunteer members who contributed their time and expertise to preparing submissions and attending events.

Without our members, Zero Waste Alliance Ireland would cease to exist, confirming that we are a members-based organisation.

Orla Coutin Fitzsimons

Jack O’Sullivan

Zero Waste Alliance Ireland

27 April 2025