

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE NETWORK IRELAND LTD

TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT)

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2024

The trustees present their annual report and financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2024.

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the accounting policies set out in note to the financial statements and comply with the charity's [governing document], the Companies Act 2006 and "Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102)" (effective 1 January 2019).

Objectives and activities

EJNI'S growing network in Northern Ireland and across the island of Ireland is working together with partners across the EU to respond to environmental and social injustice. EJNI defines 'environmental justice' as the prevention of unfairly distributed environmental harms and the establishment of procedures to ensure that concerned citizens and public interest groups can access the justice system at reasonable cost; be provided with a fair platform for the treatment of environmental issues; and obtain adequate and effective remedies for breaches of environmental law.

- EJNI will contribute to the ongoing transformation of the Northern Ireland conflict through:
- empowering citizens to address root causes of environmental injustice – namely the de-prioritization of environmental protection and social justice during the conflict
- contributing to peace-building efforts by providing a platform for collaboration between diverse stakeholders but also between groups and individuals from all communities in Northern Ireland
- promoting cross-border cooperation on the island of Ireland through the development of cooperative solutions to shared environmental challenges.
- EJNI's core mission and operations are underpinned by the principles and values of participation, human rights and equality. Public participation is one of the central tenets of the UNECE Convention on Access to Environmental Justice. The right to a healthy environment is increasingly recognised as the basis for a wide range of legal interventions centred on environmental justice claims. Finally, equality, diversity & inclusivity considerations have informed the development of the organisation since its establishment.
- EJNI's activities are designed to encourage the development of a non-sectarian political culture which is inclusive, transparent, responsive and accountable. It will do this through supporting and equipping communities with the knowledge they need to create a vibrant, pluralist and activist civil society, responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable and able to hold the government to account for environmental and connected social justice failures. EJNI's work will help provide a platform for voices from community activist groups which have been marginalised groups in the context of public policy-making in relation to the environment and social justice in Northern Ireland. Through joint-working between communities, NGOs, lawyers and academics to produce evidence-based resources, events and advocacy activities, EJNI will help cultivate the independence of the community and voluntary sectors. EJNI's work has already, and will continue to develop projects that promote increased participation of women in processes which will help influence political decision-making and also greater inclusivity in political decision-making and policy work.

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EJNI's work will fulfil three central charitable purposes:

i. to promote, for the benefit of the public, access to environmental justice by supporting communities, individuals and organisations that are engaged in challenging environmental injustice on the island of Ireland and providing a platform for collaboration between these groups;

ii. to promote, for the benefit of the public, the advancement of education about environmental justice concerns on the island of Ireland and how these relate to global environmental, economic and societal debates; and

iii. to carry out or assist in the carrying out of research into environmental justice and to publish or otherwise disseminate the results of such research on the island of Ireland and across the world for the benefit of the public.

EJNI will achieve its goal of enhancing environmental justice on the island of Ireland through addressing the root causes of environmental injustice through three central areas of activity:

- Research: the creation and dissemination of evidence-based, multi-media resources to help enhance knowledge about environmental and social justice issues which impact citizens on the island of Ireland and beyond
- Advocacy: empowering and campaigning support activities relating to environmental injustices
- Action: the provision of a unique platform for collaborative, strategic interventions to help address the root causes of environmental and social injustice.

In terms of timescale, EJNI has a range of short-, medium- and long-term goals. In the short term, the goal of the organisation is to continue to develop its network, profile, administrative and working practices and acquire additional core funding to support a growing team of staff in line with the scale of our operations – which have increased again during 2024. In the medium term, EJNI will focus on the development of its 4 core projects: Rights, Justice and Nature; Environmental Democracy; Climate Governance, the All-island Strategic Legal Exchange and Linking the Irish Environment. In the long term, EJNI will continue to develop new project streams within a broader strategy for addressing environmental injustice and the connected social injustice on the island of Ireland. This strategy will be developed in partnership with EJNI's network of partners from the island of Ireland but also in consultation with other environmental justice networks and bodies from other jurisdictions (in particular from post-conflict societies).

Public benefit

The trustees have paid due regard to guidance issued by the Charity Commission in deciding what activities the charity should undertake.

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Achievements and performance

Significant activities and achievements against objectives

EJNI has had significant successes across all three of our central objectives:

One of the central goals of EJNI's work is to enhance knowledge and raise awareness of environmental justice issues. To fulfil this goal and to document the work and impact of the organisation: (i) EJNI's accessible, certified green website acts as a repository for all of our collaborative work – all of which is open access; (ii) rigorous proofing of outputs for accessibility and readability occurs; (iii) dedicated project pages on our include descriptions of the project and all outputs associated with it, instructions on how to get involved with advocacy and links to other resources; (iv) different multimedia formats are used to reflect project findings & to maximise interest and accessibility; and (v) novel techniques to communicate research findings are adopted. Evaluation and peer-review is critical in collaborative, transdisciplinary work when stakeholders from very diverse backgrounds are working together on a project. EJNI has developed a systematic peer-review process whereby outputs for each project comply with production guidelines and pass through an independent review and quality assurance process. Each project is also screened for accessibility and equality issues at design stage, ensuring that we are constantly engaged in strengthening human rights and equality through how we do our work, and in turn supporting inclusive, non-sectarian and participatory politics in all of EJNI's activities. Dissemination of our work is delivered via (i) email updates about outputs to our extensive network of associates who in turn disseminate the work to their own networks; (ii) our online presence, e.g. our twitter and other social media accounts and website; and (iii) press releases to local and national media. The work of EJNI is making a difference to a number of beneficiary groups in Northern Ireland, the border counties and across the island of Ireland (the impact of our projects is also registering across the EU and our outputs are used by international audiences). Benefits have been generated for: (i) collaborating project partners through highlighting their work to a wider audience; (ii) environmental NGOs & activists (particularly small community groups) through networking/engagement/co-production opportunities and through our provision of advocacy tools; (iii) politicians & policy makers benefit from the production of evidence-based research (notably our impact on discussions around the NI Protocol through our 'Linking the Irish Environment' Report which was launched in June 2023; and (iv) local communities & the wider public – through education and raising awareness of environmental injustices, environmental and access to justice rights of communities and individuals, and by giving agency to environmental concerns, EJNI's work is helping shift perceptions of the consequences of weak environmental governance & the need for effective accountability mechanisms. This is demonstrated in the web metrics for both EJNI's website and the Manual of Environmental Justice. Important wider impacts include enhancing public support for higher environmental ambition. We have coordinated significant collaborative efforts with other network bodies both on the island of Ireland and with EU partners, (e.g. Northern Ireland Environment Link and Irish Environmental Network, EEB, CAN-E) – with our Linking the Irish Environment Report prompting co-signed letters to the UK and Irish Governments and directly informing the development of the first all-island environmental civic form. Our work is also having significant international impact, featuring in the UN's Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee's progress report on state aid. All of these outputs and details of our events are hosted on our website, www.ejni.net.

Financial review

EJNI continues to receive Core Funding from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust with our latest grant of £207,000 running from October 2023 for three years. ECF continues to be our primary project funder and we have significantly expanded the scope of our ECF-funded projects in 2024, with our new project 'the all-island strategic legal exchange' (AISLE) attracting significant interest from stakeholders north and south of the border. Our main project with ECF has been renewed for 2024/25. We were also commissioned by IEN and NIEL to undertake follow on work on the Linking the Irish Environment Project. Our plan for 2025 is to diversify our funding streams.

Reserves policy

Reserves are needed to bridge the timing gap between spending and receiving of income and to cover unplanned temporary shortfalls in income should they arise, Holding adequate reserves safeguards the provision of our services in the event of unexpected significant financial pressures, The trustees consider that the ideal level of reserves would be between three month of core expenditure which would come to approximately £15,000.

Unrestricted reserves freely available to spend, excluding fixed assets, restricted reserves and designated reserves amounted to £18,953 which is above target, the trustees believe that this represents an appropriate level of reserves.

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Major risks

Difficulty securing collaborative project funding has not to date been an issue, with all of our current collaborative projects (designed to address existing knowledge/support deficits) attracting funding or in-kind support. **Unprecedented levels of political uncertainty** in Northern Ireland and the controversial nature of some of the issues which will be raised during projects (e.g. the extent & nature of cross-border collaboration on the environment) can render building trust between stakeholders & ensuring active participation difficult. We have employed mechanisms used to build trust in collaborative projects, such as building on existing relationships, use of intermediaries & guarantors & building trust through the project itself to offset this risk. Stakeholders are always consulted about anonymity & confidentiality requirements at the outset of each EJNI project and where relevant a full ethical approval process is completed via the academic institutions associated with each project. **Difficulties developing a common 'language'** that cross-disciplinary groups & non-academic stakeholders can engage with and dealing with disagreements between collaborative working partners are addressed in EJNI projects through our use of accessible language and the early identification of themes which draw together commonalities raised by participants. This is essential when projects deal with contentious issues, especially those which may have political ramifications in Northern Ireland. **Duplication of efforts** in an already busy and underfunded environmental sector are avoided by EJNI through careful scoping and mapping studies at the outset of each core activity or collaborative project. These efforts have typically led to new cooperative relationships with organisations or individuals engaged in complementary work. **Legal interventions** may have knock-on effects on the development of the wider network, EJNI undertakes a thorough risk assessment before engaging in any formal interventions, which are also always based on peer-reviewed, evidence-based research. **Plagiarism/passing off of our work** is an additional risk. EJNI operates an open access approach to the dissemination of our work to encourage its widespread use and impact. This leaves us vulnerable to plagiarism. EJNI incorporates clear messaging into all of our outputs to protect our intellectual property.

Plans for future periods

The two intersecting areas of activity which EJNI is engaged in relate to core operations and collaborative projects. (i) Core Operations are undertaken by the EJNI staff (all of whom are part-time) which comprise a Director (Dr Ciara Brennan), and Deputy Director (Caitlin McIlhennon), Research Assistant (Shea Anderson) and an IT Coordinator (Phillip Lock). (ii) Collaborative Projects are run by a semi-autonomous team of paid individuals (where required) and volunteers from the EJNI network and partner organisations, nested within the larger EJNI circles of accountability (the Steering Group and Board). Approval of projects is the responsibility of the Steering Group and the Director will provide oversight and coordination of the collaborative projects within EJNI's broader strategy. Some projects require external funding (e.g. to fund buy-out/secondment for project leads, research assistance, dissemination, project-specific events etc.) and securing this funding is the responsibility of the project team who will be supported by EJNI staff. Other projects do not require funding and are cooperative efforts between individuals working for a range of partner organisations on a project of common strategic interest. This model ensures buy in and/or in-kind support from a wide range of organisations at the cutting edge of environmental justice issues. The priorities for this year are to complete and develop the projects which have commenced and to acquire funding to support the development of those projects which are at an early stage of development or which we have not yet acquired funding and continued funding for Linking the Irish Environment. A further priority is to ensure funding is acquired for an administrative assistant given the rapid increase in organisational activities and income and the associated increased administrative burden associated with this growth.

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Structure, governance and management

The Environmental Justice Network Ireland was launched in June 2019 to create a collaborative platform for partnership working between academics, lawyers and civil society. EJNI's core goal is to address the root causes of social and environmental justice deficits on the island of Ireland. EJNI is delivering this goal through an innovative, transdisciplinary model of collaboration which draws together diverse stakeholders and decision-makers who usually operate in almost completely separate spheres to enhance knowledge exchange and facilitate more effective and strategic research, advocacy and action. EJNI now has an extensive network from across the island of Ireland and beyond who work together to deliver unique, cutting-edge collaborative environmental justice projects. EJNI is an independent, non-profit network, existing and acting in the public interest. The organisation currently has a Board of Trustees which provides oversight and makes core decisions. Co-ordination of its projects is led by a management team comprising a Director and Deputy Director, advised by a Steering Group, made up of voluntary representatives from academia, civil society and legal sectors drawn from its wider network of partners and collaborators. EJNI's primary activities centre on three key areas: (i) Research: the creation and dissemination of evidence-based, multi-media resources to help enhance knowledge about environmental and social justice issues which impact citizens on the island of Ireland and beyond; (ii) Advocacy: empowering and campaigning support activities relating to environmental injustices; (iii) Action: the provision of a unique platform for collaborative, strategic interventions to help address the root causes of environmental and social injustice

The trustees, who are also the directors for the purpose of company law, and who served during the year and up to the date of signature of the financial statements were:

Ms C Bailey (Appointed 10 January 2024)

Ms V Cirefice

Ms B McNeill

Mr S Wood

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Organisational structure

EJNI is driven and overseen by a Board of Trustees and supported by a Steering Group that sits within a transdisciplinary, cooperative 'community of practice'. The aim is a highly structured system of distributed decision making, producing high quality outputs efficiently and democratically through a cooperative model based on (i) core operations and (ii) collaborative projects (as described below). The Board of Trustees is responsible for overall performance, governance and policy. It is currently comprised of 4 individuals. Trustees will be elected and appointed by the Interim Board and Company Secretary with consideration of advice from Steering Group members. The appointed board will be representative and reflect the ethos of the organisation. In December 2024, the board is comprised of: Simon Wood, Bróna McNeill, Clare Bailey and V'Cenza Cirefice. Dr Ciara Brennan (Director, EJNI) is company secretary. The Steering Group is comprised of members of the network and EJNI staff, with a maximum of 15 participants. It meets regularly and is representative of the diverse different types of stakeholders EJNI works with.

Staff and Remuneration

During 2024 EJNI's core activities continued to be funded by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (grant for core funding ran from Oct 2021- September 2023, and was renewed in June 2023 for a further 3 years) to support a small team of part-time staff to deliver its core operations and support and coordinate its collaborative projects (detailed below). EJNI staff and steering group members may hold multiple roles within the organisation (with the exception of board members, who cannot be salaried employees), e.g. staff members may also be involved in collaborative projects as consultants.

Director: Ciara Brennan

Deputy Director: Caitlin McIlhennon

Research Assistant: Shea Anderson

IT and web support: Phillip Lock

Remuneration for these staff members in their core roles was agreed by the board on the basis of academic paycales for lecturer and research assistant (in light of the qualifications and the previous roles of the staff members) and with consideration of NJC paycales. For project consultancy work, daily rates are negotiated with funders on a project-by-project basis.

Relationships with related parties

Bróna McNeill (Trustee and member of the steering group) is sister to Ciara Brennan (Director). Phillip Lock (IT and web support) is husband to Ciara Brennan.

The trustees' report was approved by the Board of Trustees.

Mr S Wood
Trustee

8 May 2025