

Annual Report 2020



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Introduction

As we reflect on 2020, it is impossible not to mention Covid-19, which has been the dominant story of the year. And while the work of many environmental charities has been negatively affected, the work of Feasta has continued relatively unscathed. Our trustee board has always conducted our meetings online and this continued seamlessly in 2020. Also, most of our key face to face events moved successfully online (such as Food for Thought in September).

In addition, I was delighted to see the creation of regular online members meetings which helped us connect with all our international members. Indeed, one of the strengths of Feasta has been its international dimension and in 2020 I was very happy to see the growth in the North American branch of Feasta. We have two trustees and a third 'tryout trustee' on the board from this region,.

As you read through this report, you will see the breadth of Feasta's work, the key submissions that have been made and the important alliances established. Amongst the many highlights was the continuation of our podcast series in partnership with the EHFF which led to the creation of ten new podcasts in 2020. This has expanded our reach and increased our communication with members world wide.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Feasta Board and our two staff Morag and Caroline, who on a very part-time basis do so much to keep Feasta going well and achieving so much.

John Sharry, Chair of Feasta

Staff and management



Graham Barnes



Michele Brady



Mark Garavan



Willi Kiefel



Brent Ranalli



Mike Sandler



John Sharry

Feasta's dedicated and multi-skilled Board of Trustees continued to oversee Feasta's activities in 2020. Our trustees as of January 2020 were Graham Barnes, Michele Brady (Treasurer), John Sharry, Mark Garavan (Chair), Willi Kiefel, Mike Sandler and Brent Ranalli. Mike and Brent are both based in the U.S.A. while the other trustees are resident in Ireland.

The trustees held monthly online meetings throughout 2020 which included reports and feedback from Morag Friel and Caroline Whyte, Feasta's long-term staff, as well as regular reports from Feasta North America.

In November, Mark Garavan stepped down as chairperson of the Board of Trustees and was succeeded by John Sharry.

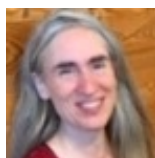


Alison MacIntyre

We are very pleased to welcome Dr Alison Macintyre as a new 'tryout trustee'. She has been attending Board meetings on a trial basis and should be able to formally join the Board in July 2021. Alison is currently based in the Vancouver area of Canada and is originally from Australia. She describes herself as a 'multipassionate pracademic', with an active interdisciplinary research background that includes behavioural economics, environmental issues, cooperation, social capital, institutions, and nationalism. She is currently a researcher with the Centre for Behavioural Economics, Society, and Technology at Queensland University of Technology; teaches organisational behaviour; consults on organisational design in virtual remote teams; works on engagement processes with provincial government; and has a coaching practice to support individuals recalibrating their lives in these times of change.



Morag Friel



Caroline Whyte

Morag Friel continued in her work as Feasta administrator, despite having had to deal with serious health issues in the course of the year. Caroline Whyte continued to work on policy research and to help with Feasta's communication, including editing the Feasta blog and podcasts. Caroline also undertook some fundraising research for Feasta in the second half of 2020 (see page 35).

Feasta is compliant with the Irish Charity Regulator's Code of Governance. Our Annual General Meeting was held online on October 25 2020.

Theory of Change

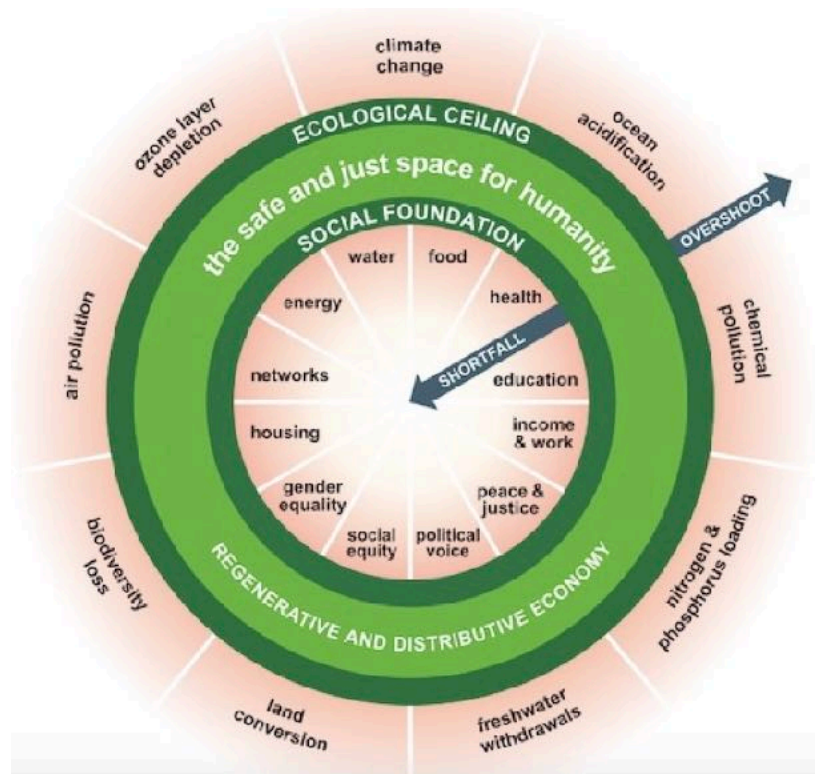
Theories of Change map the preconditions that are needed in order to reach a desired outcome. Our first Feasta Theory of Change was published in early 2019 and we have updated it annually since then.

Our 2021 Theory of Change, which you can see on the next page of this Report, incorporates the [Doughnut model](#), developed by Oxford economist Kate Raworth (see right). The pale green inside of the doughnut represents the 'safe and just space for humanity', as Raworth describes it. The dark green outer edge represents ecological limits (ecological ceiling), while the dark green inner edge represents the social foundation necessary for human survival (adequate food, housing, healthcare etc).

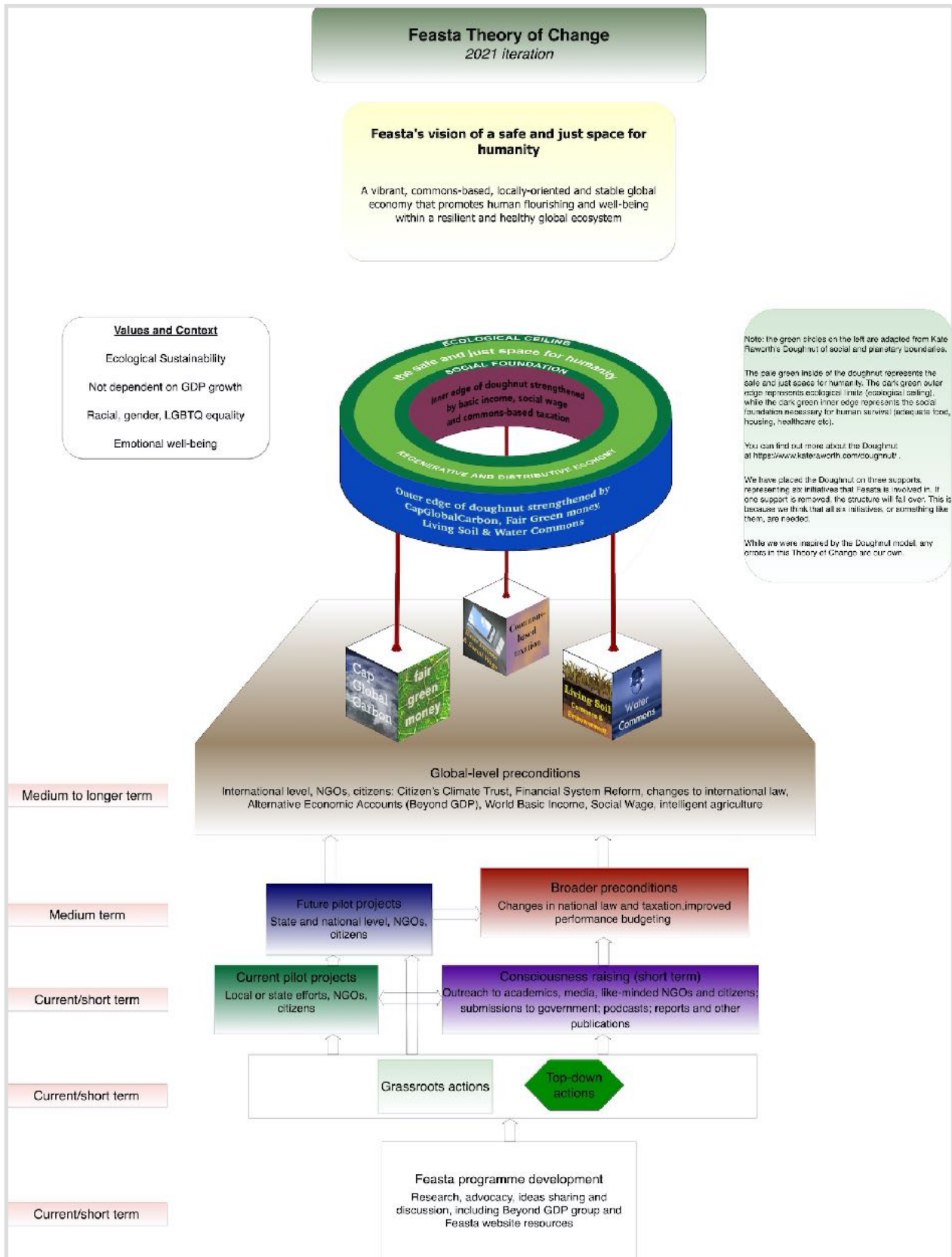
The Doughnut - which is our desired outcome - is depicted in our Theory of Change as resting on three supports which include six initiatives that Feasta is involved in (two to each support). If you take one support away, the whole model will fall over. This is because we believe that all six initiatives, or something like them, are necessary.

The different preconditions - pilots, broader and global - in the layers below these supports act as 'nutrients' in the 'ground' which the supports are resting on.

You can see a more detailed version of our Theory of Change on the Feasta website [here](#), which teases out the interconnectedness between some of the initiatives we are promoting.



Kate Raworth's *Doughnut of social and planetary boundaries*, which is incorporated into our [2020 Theory of Change](#) (shown in outline view on the following page). Reprinted with permission.



Outline view of Feasta's 2020 Theory of Change. A more detailed version can be seen on the [Feasta website](#).

Events

(i) Feasta-led or partnered

BEYOND GDP: Governance and Budgeting for Well-being

This [webinar](#) on June 5, jointly organised by Feasta and the Cork Environmental Forum, explored ways to transition to Well-being Governance and Budgeting in Ireland and elsewhere.

In Ireland, the government formation talks in the early months of 2020 included discussions on how best to approach budgeting that will “focus on quality of life rather than economic growth”. The Irish political parties joined the growing chorus of those who believe that a new direction is needed – *“Our overriding focus is to improve the wellbeing of the Irish people and society.....To assess the performance of*



a new Government, we must look beyond economic indicators. We will create new, credible, quality-of-life measures of individual and societal wellbeing and progress.”

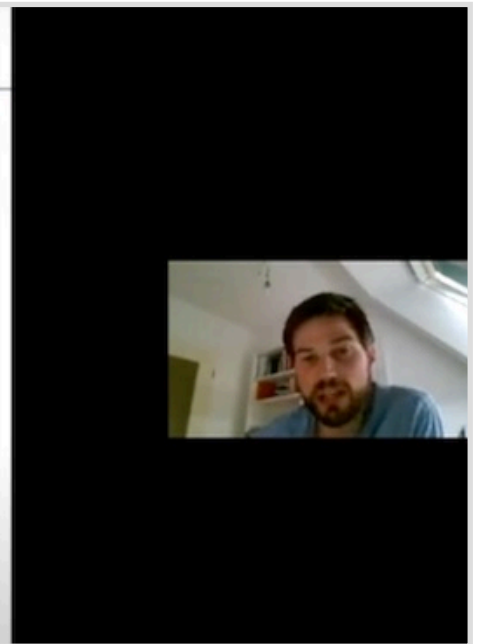
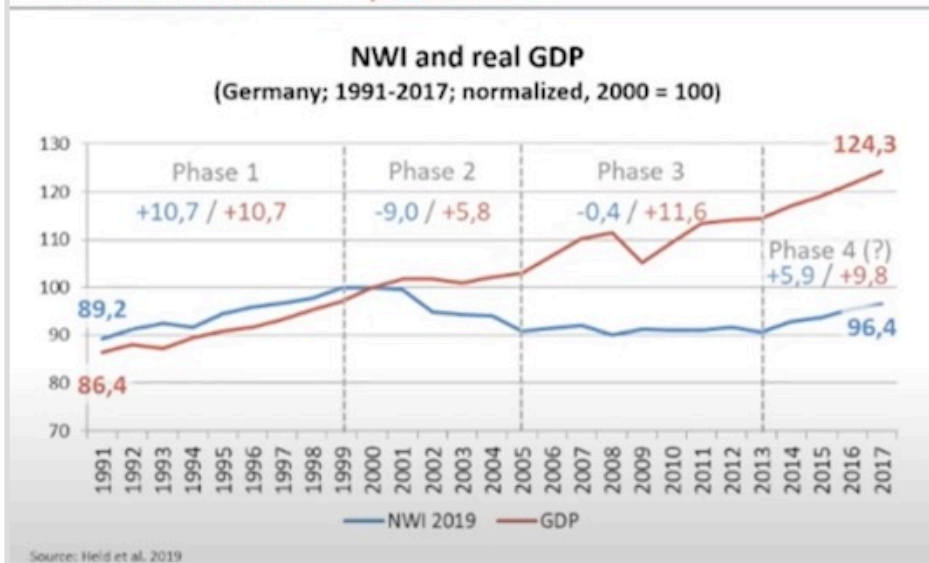
This event was intended to support that process and drew from experiences in Germany and Wales as well as updates on work in Ireland.

Caroline Whyte gave a short introduction during which she ran through some of the reasons for moving beyond GDP. Professor Emeritus John Sweeney then introduced the speakers and moderated the discussion, with some behind-the-scenes help from Seán Ó Conláin and CEF’s James O’Donovan, who fielded the many questions that came in via the webinar’s chat facility.

The event speakers included:

Dr Benjamin Held, Institute for Interdisciplinary Research, FEST, who spoke on the development of a composite indicator based on the Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare approach. This index has been adopted and implanted by a number of German Federal States, but not yet in Ireland, although a team within Feasta are working to promote it (see p 28). Dr Held presented the outcomes of this work in Germany.

3. Welfare development in Germany: main results of NWI compared to GDP



Dr Benjamin Held describes the difference between GDP and FEST's 'National Welfare Index' in Germany from 1991 to 2017, during the June 5 'Beyond GDP' webinar.

Glyn Jones, Chief Statistician, Welsh Government, who spoke about the progress in establishing and implementing Governance for Wellbeing in Wales. He described the seven well-being goals that were set by the Welsh Well-being of Future Generations Act as a shared vision for the public bodies of Wales, and also the established National Indicators, as well as plans to develop national milestones to measure progress.

Sinead Bracken, Health Statistician, Central Statistics Office, Ireland, presented on the process that led to the development of the Irish Wellbeing Report, and that is used to select the Wellbeing Indicators and the broad range of indicators that the CSO maintains in the Environmental Indicators Ireland Annual Report.

Topics that were explored included:

- The factors that supported the establishment of Well Being Based Government
- The process used to select the Well Being Indicators
- How successfully the Well Being Indicators have been incorporated into Government Budget Decisions?
- What have been the most striking findings so far from the existing well-being measurement programmes, with regard to the relationship between well-being, consumption levels and resource use.

The event finished with some wrap-up commentary by the CEF's James O'Donovan. Approximately 120 people attended.

Food for Thought/ Lón Intinne

This [online discussion](#) was held on September 11 in collaboration with AFRI and Irish Seed Savers. It was a follow-up to the Food for Thought/Lón Intinne events that had been held in Castlebar, Co. Mayo in 2018 and 2019, but was very much focussed on the radically different circumstances of 2020.

Dr Clare O'Grady Walshe was interviewed by Afri co-host Ruairí McKiernan and spoke about

food sovereignty with particular emphasis on the absolute importance of seeds. A follow-up discussion was led by Feasta's Mark Garavan, and there were also contributions from Fergal Anderson, farmer and founder member of Talamh Beo, and Jennifer McConnell of Irish Seed Savers. Much-appreciated live music was provided by Tommy Hayes and Matthew Noone.

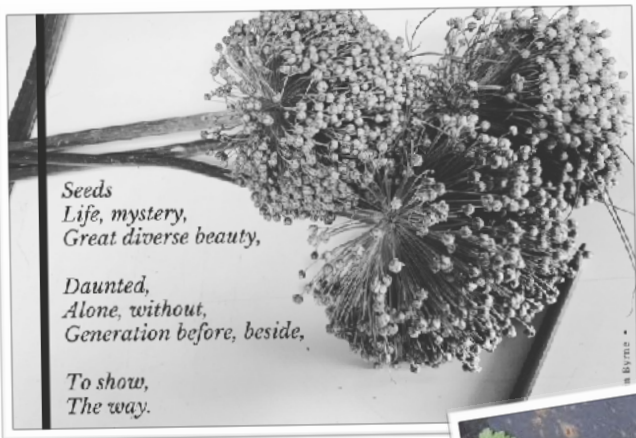
The event also explored the relationship between our emotional and cultural response to COVID-19, the present and historical phenomenon of enforced absence brought about by environmental degradation, colonialism and racism, and our universal need for basic sustenance, in particular food.

It was highly participative in the tradition of our previous 'physical' Food for Thought/Lón Intinne events. Indeed, we feel we were able – to some extent – to get beyond the standard two-dimensional structure of online discussions. In this spirit, we asked participants to send an image or short piece of text in advance which was incorporated into a short video by Roger Whelan, and discussed with the help of Feasta co-hosts Seán Ó Conláin and Caroline Whyte. Approximately ninety people attended.



Screenshot from the video of the Food for Thought event





*Some images from our Food
for Thought event*

(ii) Events with participation of Feasta members

Sept 25: Caroline Whyte gave a short talk and participated in a panel discussion at a meeting of the **Irish Green Party's Just Transition group**. She spoke about how improvements in financial policy at the national level could help to deliver a Green New Deal for Ireland.

Oct 28: Caroline Whyte gave a [presentation](#) and participated in a **panel discussion on economics and the environment** (that also included economist John Fitzgerald.) This was organised by the UCC Economics and Environmental Societies. Caroline gave an overview of the reasons why a much broader economic perspective is needed than traditional macroeconomic theory, and ended with a run-through of Feasta's suggestions for economic reforms. The presentations were followed by a lively question and answer session.

Nov 21: **Basic Income Ireland Annual Forum**. This event's theme was '[Piloting UBI in Ireland](#)'. Feasta's Anne Ryan was one of the organisers and gave an overview at the beginning of the event of what basic income is (and is not).

Nov 25: Feidhlim Harty, who represents Feasta on the Irish Circular Economy Waste Advisory Group, spoke on "The Hidden Cost of Carbon: How taxpayer funding of fossil fuels leads to proliferation of plastic waste" at the webinar "**Our Plastic Lives**", which was co-hosted by the Green Foundation Ireland and the Community Resources Network Ireland. You can read the report of the event [here](#).

Nov 27: Caroline Whyte, Seán Ó Conláin, Willi Kiefel and Theresa O'Donohue all participated in a [presentation and discussion about Feasta's 2020 Theory of Change](#) during a Virtual Cuppa organised by the [Irish Doughnut Economics Network](#) (IDEN). IDEN is a network of people who are exploring economist Kate Raworth's Doughnut Economics model of planetary and social boundaries.

Dec 15: Feasta Chair John Sharry was on the panel of an **online discussion '[Hopeful chats about climate change](#)**', which was organised by [Friends of the Earth Ireland](#) and Little Island Books to discuss engaging young people on the topic of climate change.



Communications

Websites

2020 was an exciting but also somewhat challenging year for the Feasta websites. We had a surge in website visits in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, probably as a result of increased public awareness of the need to reform our economic system in order to better prioritise essentials such as health and biodiversity preservation, and increasing interest in Universal Basic Income as a way to help support those who lost their livelihoods during the pandemic.

It was noteworthy that in addition to more recent publications, some of our archived work from the past, in particular a [2012 study](#) by the [Risk-Resilience Network](#) on the possible economic effects of a pandemic, had a high number of visits.

Later in 2020 we were confronted with a series of technical problems on the main Feasta website, which affected visitor numbers and culminated in our needing to move all eight of our active websites over to a new website host in November.

Despite these glitches, we were able to keep up a brisk pace of publication of new commentary, reports and presentations throughout 2020, with a total of thirty-nine articles by twelve authors published in the course of the year, as well as [podcasts](#), videos of our events, and a new [video discussion series](#).

By the end of the year, our website visit numbers had recovered from the effects of the technical problems and it seemed likely that 2021 would be a much improved year for website visits.

We were very sad to lose one of our regular contributors to the Feasta blog, Patrick Noble, in November 2020. Patrick died peacefully at his home on an organic farm in northern Wales after a long illness.



Enough is Plenty

In 2020, Anne Ryan contributed four posts to her blog series '[Enough is Plenty](#)', which explore the notion of 'enough' - a notion that has become still more important in the context of the pandemic.

In "[The two faces of January: looking back, while thinking about the new](#)", Anne argued that "Enough and the related actions of coping, critiquing and creating are about embracing possibility, which is different from prediction."

Anne wrote in her article "[Coping](#)" that "in this time of ecological and social crises, it is essential to be the best human beings we can be, to carve out conviviality and convivial spaces in the midst of the struggle to create something better. Even in desperate times, there is a lot of potential for this."

In "[Eros, erotic energy and enough](#)" Anne suggested that "with a better understanding of eros, we could all demand a social-ecological contract

End of the Oilocene

Tim Clarke added two more articles to his "[End of the Oilocene](#)" series. In "[The Gathering Storm](#)", he argued that Ireland is in a particularly precarious financial situation because of the relationship between the money supply and the output of the energy economy.

that supports human capacities for vitality, healing and health, care, creativity, innovation, diversity and contribution."

In "[The art of critique](#)", Anne considered some aspects of a critique that is congruent with the philosophy and practice of Enough, and that put care at the centre of all our decision-making.



In "[All change!](#)", Tim commented that "We need think-tanks of open-minded people in every sector who are ready to view everything through a new lens and think outside the box as we head into the increasingly stormy and uncharted waters of global energy and resource depletion and economic contraction".



Lockdowns, mental health and the limits to growth

Brian Davey's article [“Mental Health, Isolation and Lockdowns”](#) was a reflection from his past experience about the impact that self isolation is likely to have on the mental health of many people.

In [“Coronavirus, degrowth and self isolation”](#), Brian argued that the crisis triggered by the pandemic is trying to teach us frightening truths about the ecological consequences of land use changes that have emerged as threats to our health.

In [“Bringing disaster preparedness into resilience politics”](#) Brian argued that we should not give up the campaigning against further ecological overshoot, but we now need to combine this fight with steps in communities to prepare for the disasters that are now baked in, and he went on to make

some concrete suggestions about what can be done.

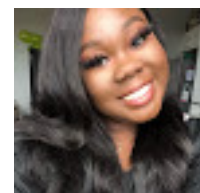
In [“Herd Immunity, Deathmaking and the Limits to Growth”](#), Brian Davey described how the meaning of concepts such as 'herd immunity' tends to become degraded, and warns against complacency about the future.

We also featured a prescient article from Brian's 2014 book *Credo*, [“Resilience and Collective Psychology – fast collapse or slow disintegration”](#), in which Brian explored the possibility of a “cross contagion” of cascading collapse between some combination of a public health crisis, and difficulties in the financial economy, the energy sector and supply networks.



Forward with Feasta: a blog series by Nadia Hansen

This five-part series was written over the summer of 2020 by Feasta intern Nadia Hansen. Nadia, who was finishing up a degree in Human Rights & Social Justice at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada, and who is the daughter of Ghanaian immigrants to Canada, focussed particularly on issues of race and justice and how these need to be taken into account in any analysis concerning sustainability. She was also the guest interviewer for our August podcast, 'Multiculturalism and Resilience' (see p 18).



Nadia Hansen

"Asylum-seeking and racial justice in Ireland"

Nadia Henson described the situation of asylum seekers in Ireland, linking it to the COVID-19 crisis and to institutionalised racism.

"Reflecting on child welfare, immigration, and educational justice during COVID-19"

Nadia commented on the vulnerability of children in the Direct Provision system for asylum seekers in Ireland.

"Safety in reopening schools during COVID-19"

Nadia emphasized the importance of using an intersectional lens whilst devising solutions to the easing of lockdowns.

"Yes, COVID-19 has no colour or age, but the stats say otherwise"

Nadia commented on the enormous difference in the experience of lockdown between those who are privileged enough to work from home, and those living in low income households with jobs that make them more vulnerable to infection. The latter are more likely to be people of colour.

"Hybridity & Culture in the Age of Social Justice"

"We are all human beings sharing one Earth. We all belong here. I am tired of the colonial influences that try to say otherwise," wrote Nadia in the final post of her series.



Slow time

Welsh organic farmer Patrick Noble drew from the writings of Fernand Braudel, Francis Pryor, Susan Oosthuizen and Adam Smith in his article [“Only slow time can answer rapid decline”](#), arguing that “We live firstly in families, and only expediently under hierarchies”.

In [“Reclaiming capital,”](#) Patrick made a case for capitalism, with a twist - he takes 'capital' as meaning 'spiritual, pleasurable and human assets, combined with that which maintains all those things'.

Patrick's article [“Being, nothingness, cumquats and Walter Scott”](#) criticised most work done today as not only being futile, but also destructive: “We scurry to destroy ourselves. Those many millions engaged in destruction can instead be engaged in useful production.”

In his article [“Here's why I'm so at odds with most of my 'green' friends”](#), Patrick Noble questioned claims by many permaculturalists, organic farmers, and grassland polemicists that they can draw down carbon forever, arguing that they can do so only to an optimum point of balance and that balance will be a very high achievement.

[The introduction to Patrick's book “Walking Home”](#), by Laurence Woodward, who is a director and founder of Beyond GM and Whole Health Agriculture, was republished on the Feasta site. Laurence found the book “uplifting, optimistic and readable. Ultimately, it makes you feel that the right kind of change is possible and that the convivial society and economy would be a good place to live in.”

Agrarian Justice

Brent Renalli contributed [an article about a paper](#) he recently published in the *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*, entitled "Thomas Paine's 'Neglected' Pamphlet: Agrarian Justice". He argued that "The U.S., and other countries too, could enjoy the immense society-wide benefit of a Basic Income if they are willing to set aside the sour grapes argument — which has been in play since Paine's own time—of not providing a social safety net to out-groups."



Thomas Paine, whose ideas have resonance for many now.

Reorienting the economy towards well-being

In her article ["Fossil fuels, food and a just, sustainable response to COVID-19"](#), Caroline Whyte argued that a just response to COVID-19 will need to take into account the limitations of renewable energy and the resulting need to shorten supply chains and cut down on freight transportation wherever possible.

["Economics and the environment"](#) is a transcript of a presentation given by Caroline Whyte to the UCC Economics and Environmental Societies on October 28 (see p11). It includes an overview of the reasons why a much broader economic per-

spective is needed than traditional macro-economic theory, and ends with a run-through of Feasta's suggestions for economic reforms.

In her article ["Aggregate green growth is a mirage: we need to take a more scientific approach to societal well-being,"](#) Caroline Whyte responded to an October 2020 Fine Gael publication on well-being. She argued that there are plenty of measures that could be taken to help Ireland's economy to become more vibrant, fair and stable while weaning it off its reliance on GDP growth.

Lessons from 2020

Mike Sandler argued that it is useful to view the pandemic as a test run for climate change and other global crises of the 21st century in his article [“Pandemic reveals need for economic system transformation”](#).

Mike wrote an article during the period in March-April 2020 when oil prices were extremely low, entitled [“Negative oil prices and a fuel price surcharge”](#), in which he suggested a means to ensure that low oil prices do not sabotage the energy transition, and to return the “rents” from oil production back to the people.

“The COVID-19 pandemic is a test. Are we learning anything?” Mike asked in his article [“Lessons of 2020”](#). “The pandemic is a call for reflection, and stay-at-home orders provide the official sanction to take a break from our usual routine, and pause a moment to think about what this all means.”

Increasing awareness

In [“Small is Beautiful?”](#), “Seán Ó Conláin reflected on some of the adjustments, good and bad, that we are all having to make. “For those fortunate enough not to be directly impacted [by COVID-19], the slower pace of life, absence of traffic and noise, and the changes in human behaviour have all led to greater awareness – of breathing oxygen, of hearing the birds sing, seeing the stars, of our place in nature and in the cosmos”.

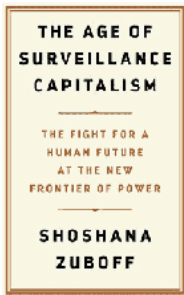


Mike’s article [“Reopening Blues”](#), from August 2020, asked if we will be able to achieve systemic solutions to the pandemic “instead of half measures or symbolic but meaningless “show” achievements that do not help people in tangible ways”.

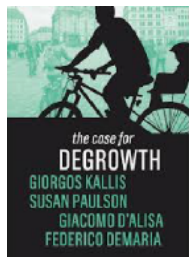
[“Policy suggestions for Janet Yellen”](#) is a compilation of links to earlier articles that have been ‘recycled’ by Mike in response to the appointment of Yellen as Treasury Secretary in the US.



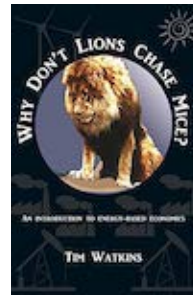
Book reviews



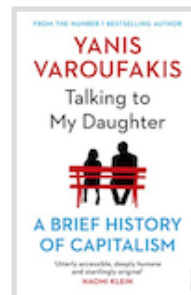
Brian Davey wrote a [two-part review](#) of Shoshana Zuboff's book *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*. He commented that it is "a huge book packed full of detail and insight...nevertheless it is an incomplete picture because it lacks a description of the bio-physical dimensions of surveillance capitalism and how these additional dimensions are intertwined with the limits to economic growth."



Brian also [reviewed](#) *The Case for Degrowth* by Giorgos Kallis, and commented that it is "a well written book, but...its thesis may be being overtaken by events on the ground".



In his [review of Tim Watkins' book](#) *Why Don't Lions Chase Mice*, Brian commented that "when Watkins calls for a "brown new deal" he is not in any way denying climate science, he is trying to respond to the impracticality of naive activism, that wants renewable energy systems without recognising that they must be created with fossil fuels and these are not only climate damaging but will be increasingly in short supply".



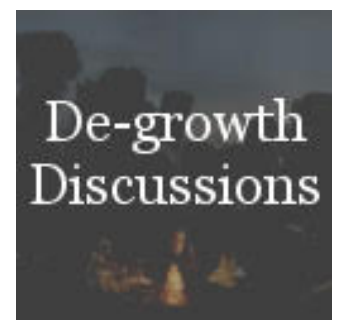
Marie McKay contributed a [review](#) of Yanis Varoufakis' book "Talking To My Daughter About The Economy", commenting that "the author actually makes the subject [of economics] interesting".

De-growth discussions

In December 2020 a new series of video dialogues about the economy, resource depletion, peak oil, energy and the environment was launched, featuring Brian Davey and Tim Watkins (author of [The Consciousness of Sheep](#)). Tim edited and curated the videos.

[Discussion 1](#): topics covered in the first instalment included the energy supply, Brexit, the Bank of England, discretionary income and bankrupt local authorities.

[Discussion 2](#): "[Nottingham or \(Probably\) Bust](#)" explored the reasons behind Nottingham's grave economic difficulties and argues that many other cities in industrialised countries are facing similar challenges.



Podcasts

We were delighted to be able to create a new ten-part podcast series in 2020, '[Bridging the Gaps](#)', in partnership with the European Health Futures Forum (following on from our 2019 series '[Beyond the Obvious](#)'). Seán Ó Conláin, David Somekh (EHFF) and Caroline Whyte planned out and hosted the podcasts.



Plays of episodes on our Soundcloud platform increased by 340% in the course of 2020 and we had overwhelmingly positive feedback on the podcasts. As with our previous series, they also helped us to forge connections with many different individuals and organisations. We plan to produce a further ten-part series in 2021, also in collaboration with the EHFF.

The theme music for the series, 'Princess Beatrice', was performed by Laoise Kelly on the harp.

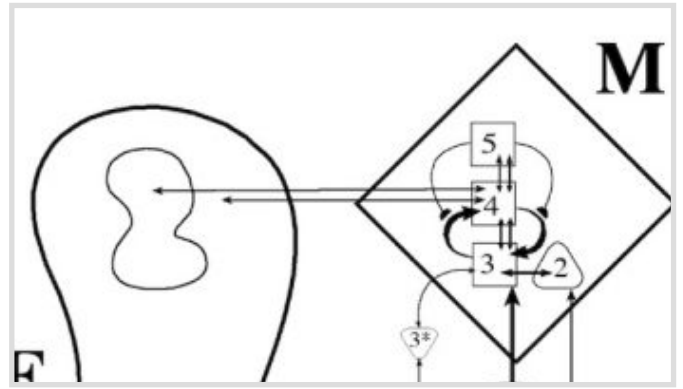


[January 31: Living well in the face of climate and ecological crises](#)

A bumper-length podcast which was adapted from a workshop organised by Feasta in December 7 2019, with reflections on preserving our mental health in these turbulent times. Contributors include John Sharry, Morag Friel, Leontien Friel Darrell, Mark Garavan, Theresa O'Donohue and John Gibbons.

[February 29: Economic and political aspects of enough](#)

This podcast begins with a short talk by Anne Ryan on the concept of 'enough' (from our December 7 event) and is followed by a discussion between David Somekh of the EHFF and ethicists Richard Turnbull of the Centre for Enterprise, Markets and Ethics and Henk Den Uijl, a policy advisor at NVTZ (Dutch society for board trustees in health and social care).

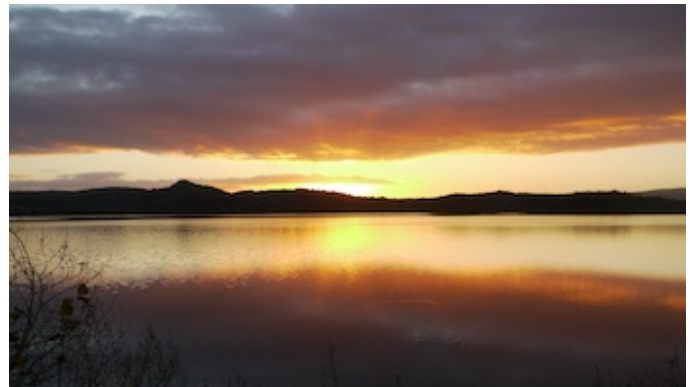


March 30: Basic Income and the global pandemic struggle

Seán Ó Conláin and Caroline Whyte interview Dr Evelyn Forget, who describes the social and health effects of a basic income trial carried out in Canada in the 1970s. Then Paul Harnett and Laura Bannister make a case for a World Basic Income that would go to everyone on the planet, as a way to help counter the COVID-19 outbreak.

June 30 : Partnership-based organisation

Seán interviews cybernetician Jon Walker; Ian Kendrick, a strategic innovator; and Mike Bewick, a former senior advisor in the UK's NHS, on applying Stafford Beer's Viable Systems Model in order to help restructure organisations in a way that can maximise the autonomy of the people involved while easing communication.



May 31: The future of transport and business travel

Seán and Caroline interview Manuel Grebenjak of the Stay Grounded network and Professor James Faulconbridge about the future of tourism and business travel in the wake of Coronavirus - bearing in mind the need to urgently reduce travel's environmental impact.

July 31: Towards well-being

David Somekh interviews Stewart Wallis, Chair of the Wellbeing Economy Alliance (see page 32) on the reasons why a large majority of people consider the current economic system to be dysfunctional and the five basic things that people throughout the world say they need.



August 31: Multiculturalism and resilience

Feasta summer intern Nadia Hansen interviews Dundalk-based social worker Dr Washington Marovatsanga on cultural competence, enforced absence, the relationship between power and knowledge production, the problematic 'palliative care' orientation of social work, and a how Global South philosophy of collectivism could help us meet environmental challenges.



October 31: Being young in a time of pandemic

David Somekh and Caroline Whyte interview three young people: Jonathan Laszlo, a health care researcher; Tommy Hickey, a law graduate; and Amber Wilmott, an A-level student. Topics discussed include the biggest challenges that young people in industrialised countries are facing, the things that governments could be doing better, and the most unexpected aspects of the lockdown.



November 20: Defending nature, supporting health

Easley Britton, a social ecologist and highly skilled surfer, and Oonagh Duggan, the head of advocacy at Birdwatch Ireland, join Seán and Caroline to discuss the current state of biodiversity in Ireland and elsewhere, and the challenges involved in trying to promote policies that protect nature. There was also exploration of the relationship between biodiversity and health.



December 31: Economic narratives and systems innovation

Seán and Caroline interview Argentinian economist Mariana Mirabile, who has a PhD in development economics and is a partner of Systems Innovation, on the reasons behind her shift in orientation away from a neoclassical approach to economics, and the potential for using narratives to achieve system-level economic change in order to help address the many challenges we're facing.

Submissions

Feasta made three submissions in 2020: one to the U.S. government and two to the European Commission. All three related primarily to energy and climate policy, although they also touched on other areas.



February 29: Submittal to the Transportation Climate Initiative (TCI) Framework for a Draft Regional Policy Proposal

This submittal calls for an upstream permit system to ensure that fossil fuel supply is gradually phased out in the northeastern and Atlantic U.S. States, along with a per-capita distribution of revenue from the sale of permits.

October 15: 'Balancing with a Doughnut': Feasta position paper on the revision of the European Commission's Energy Taxation Directive

This paper, in response to a consultation call from the European Commission, calls for the introduction of a suite of climate-related reforms in the EU that include limiting fossil fuel production and imports at source, placing a limit on carbon fees along with a quota system, introducing per-capita allocations of revenue from a carbon fee, and forming a partnership with a group of Global South countries to promote climate justice.

October 29: Feasta position paper on the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism

What can the EU do to prevent carbon leakage - the sabotaging of its climate policy by non-EU industries? As with the October 15 submission, this paper provides some suggestions to the European Commission, deriving from Feasta's CapGlobal-Carbon initiative.



Other Publications

Reports and discussion papers



Feasta input into the Irish Circular Economy Waste Advisory Group process

Ireland's waste policies were due for revision in mid 2020, and as such were reviewed and updated into a new policy with a working title of "Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy". The plan was to inform government policies in relation to waste prevention, waste management and hazardous waste.

A Waste Advisory Group was set up to feed into the plan, chaired by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment. As part of this process, five representatives from the Irish Environmental Network were invited to participate. Feidhlim Harty was nominated as the representative from Feasta to attend and input into the 6-month consultation process (Jan-May 2020). The advisory group also had representatives from the EPA, Local Authorities, trade unions, farmers groups and business sectors such as retail, manufacturing, waste management, hospitality and others.

The advisory group met for two discussion meetings in Dublin at the beginning of 2020, but the restrictions imposed in response to the Coronavirus meant that meetings were moved to an online platform for the remaining 6 sessions. Each meeting had a set topic, covering the following areas:

1. Citizen engagement in the circular economy
2. Plastics and packaging waste
3. Deposit and return schemes

4. Market structure of the waste management industry
 5. Food waste
 6. Enforcement
 7. Construction and demolition waste
 8. Waste actions for a circular economy
- Report conclusion

Feidhlim's detailed report is available on the Feasta website and includes his responses to the 8 parts described above, along with an introduction and conclusion. He was encouraged by widespread acceptance by the Group's organisers and participants of the importance of the circular economy and the ecological improvements that it promises. However, he also felt that there was insufficient realisation that we simply cannot build a circular economy on a foundation of fossil fuels; and that the scale of the changes needed is consistently being underestimated at policy level.

Basic Income and health in Ireland

Feasta member and medical doctor Elizabeth Cullen wrote a discussion paper on basic income and health in Ireland, available for download on the Feasta website, which explored the following topics:

1. The role of basic income in improving the well-being of specific groups of people in Irish society
2. How basic income, in part by increasing social capital, would impact positively on Irish society and by doing so, improve the health and well-being of all Irish people
3. The experience of basic income as it has been tried in other countries
4. The ways in which basic income challenges our current economic model, and recommendations.

Press releases

Two Feasta press releases from 2020, "[Radical reset of economy needed to offset effects of COVID-19](#)", and "[Ireland a laggard in legislating for a Well-Being Economy](#)", are available on the website. Our 25 newlist mailouts in the course of 2020 were also sent to a number of media outlets.

Groups/Activities

Climate Group

In 2020 the Feasta climate group continued its advocacy of [Cap and Share/CapGlobalCarbon](#), which is an upstream (supply-side) framework to achieve the phase-out of greenhouse gas emissions while reducing the impact of decarbonisation on vulnerable people.



Our focus this year was mainly on larger regions or groups of states, in particular the Eastern U.S. and the European Union. 2020 seemed an opportune time to enlarge our focus in this way, particularly since the European Commission is currently reforming its Energy Taxation Directive and Emissions Trading Scheme, and we were tentatively encouraged by a new discussion that is taking place on moving the control of emissions further upstream in the ETS.

Feasta's three submissions on climate policy (one to the U.S. and two to the European Commission) are described on pages 23 and can be [downloaded from our website](#).

Within Ireland, Feidhlim Harty also continued to advocate for Cap and Share, notably in his [report to the Circular Economy Advisory Group](#) (see page 24), and Deirdre Lane continued to represent Feasta in the climate coalition [Stop Climate Chaos](#), which groups together a wide range of environmental and social justice NGOs. Caroline Whyte gave an overview of CapGlobalCarbon to [Extinction Rebellion Ireland](#) during an Extinction Rebellion meeting in July.

Feasta North America/ Feasta USA

A few Feasta Trustees based in North America have begun talking about how to increase Feasta's presence on the west side of the Atlantic, which we are calling "Feasta North America" or "Feasta USA" (the name is still evolving). Initial activities have revolved around brainstorming ways to bring Feasta's global vision and systems view to American readers, thinkers, and activists.

Thus far, Feasta USA has submitted comments to the [U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on the Climate Crisis](#), and to the [Transportation Climate Initiative](#) (TCI - see page 23). We feel the political moment presents an opportunity to engage policymakers on carbon dividends and basic income.

Our initial plan is to focus on the U.S., but if there is enough interest from our friends in Canada or Mexico, a separate allied working group could be formed to focus on those countries or the broader North American context.

Feasta members who would like to get involved can email the Feasta email account (info@feasta.org). We would like to hear from you and can arrange a call/Zoom but as a guide it would be helpful to answer one or two of these:

- What issues are you most interested in?
- What type of activities would like to see from Feasta USA?
- Are you already involved with groups that overlap with Feasta's activities?
- Do you have any contacts or resources to bring to the effort?

Given the current situation in the U.S., and our country's position in the world, we feel Feasta USA can play an enormously important and urgent role in helping to turn our economic and ecological systems in a more sustainable direction.

Currency/ Money Group

Feasta's currency group is heavily influenced by the pioneering work of the late Richard Douthwaite and has been actively exploring ways to improve the financial system, both in environmental and in social terms, ever since Feasta's founding.



During 2020, Feasta's currency group activity was mainly concentrated on the reform of existing monetary policy/banking, but the group also continues to explore how the design of alternative mechanisms for exchange could help to bring about welcome change.

Virtual meetings were a great opportunity to network; for example, Deirdre Lane attended and spoke (informally) at the [Social Enterprise and Regenerative Finance](#) international conference in June.

We are concerned that the suggested 'green finance' reforms do not go deep enough, as they do not address the financial system's dependence on continual GDP growth

The recent emphasis placed on 'greening' the financial sector by prominent central bankers such as Christine Lagarde appears to us to be a step in the right direction, but we are concerned that the suggested 'green finance' reforms do not go deep enough, as they do not address the financial system's dependence on continuous GDP growth in order to be able to function adequately.

In 2020 we continued to contribute to the current lively debate on the introduction of new central bank digital currencies, as these could potentially help to render the financial system more growth-neutral. However, there are issues of accountability, transparency and user privacy which must be taken seriously.

We are also keeping an eye on cryptocurrency developments where, while many blockchain related projects are still technology looking for a use-case, a few are pushing the boundaries in their thinking about governance and about the 'vulnerable transparency' implied by the sharing of data on public blockchains.

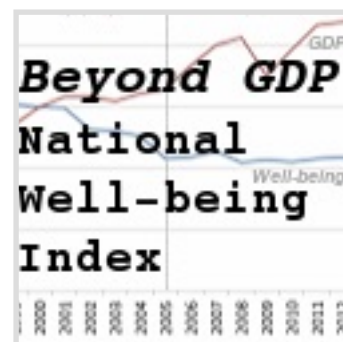
A planned bricks-and-mortar Feasta event on banking, to be held in collaboration with the [Cork Environmental Forum](#), had to be cancelled because of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, preparations were being made in late 2020 to hold an online event on the future of banking in Ireland in the early part of 2021. The focus will be on exploring ways to democratise banking and render it more transparent, and - crucially - to increase the financial sector's resilience to pronounced economic contraction that will very likely be brought about by the economy hitting against biosphere limits.

Suggested improvements to the banking system in Ireland include the introduction of community banking and 'safe haven' secure banking along the lines proposed by [Onsgeld](#), the Dutch member of the [International Movement for Monetary Reform](#). In the latter part of 2020, Onsgeld helped with the preparation of a Feasta working paper on banking reform in Ireland, due to be published early in 2021.

National Well-being Index

During 2020 a continued collaboration with our German partners at [FEST](#) in Heidelberg led to a re-appraisal of our positioning of the NWI - so-called 'National Welfare index' - in Ireland. (Please see page 7 for a description of our June 5 webinar which discussed the NWI, among other subjects.)

The index is essentially a monetised economic metric. It was recognised that while on the one hand there is an overall increasing interest in 'beyond GDP' and well-being 'dashboards', indexes, measurement in general and policy development, there is also a need to 'educate' traditional economists, policy makers and political leaders. Topics might include: importance of the economy but only part of much larger 'social and ecological picture'; the urgent need to change; the specific and important role of NWI. Several attempts were made to further this objective and these are continuing.



The concepts and vocabulary around welfare and well-being can be very misleading and loaded, particularly when it comes to translating from one language/culture to another.

We also recognised that NWI has a brand/history and 'capital' which we don't want to lose.

However, the concepts and vocabulary around *welfare* and *well-being* can be very misleading and loaded, particularly when it comes to translating from one language/culture to another. We decided to focus on the essential characteristics of NWI: it measures some aspects of welfare/well-being, however, it is not primarily intended to be a comprehensive measure. It is more a balanced and focussed 'Economic Index', which quantifies the costs of burdens/externalities, par-

ticularly in the context of economic 'growth narratives'. It is a modified GDP; a comprehensive alternative to GDP; a genuine progress indicator; a sustainable economic progress index.

Our approach for Ireland was decided: to keep the NWI branding, but to add a 'strapline' and to use this consistently. Two suggestions emerged:

NWI - The Alternative Economic Progress Indicator

NWI - The Alternative Index of Economic Progress Beyond GDP

In both cases we may add a sentence such as:

...an index which is monetised, comprehensive, balanced, and which encompasses broader social, economic and environmental considerations than GDP.

This work is ongoing.

Ecology, Language and Culture

While the Irish Programme for Government published during 2020 cited a commitment to metrics for well-being, the position of culture and language was weak. During the course of the year, Feasta highlighted the importance of cultural indicators and particularly the demise of the Irish language in Gaeltacht areas.

Seán Ó Conláin has, through his involvement with Teach Aniar - an organisation which aims to highlight this national failure - helped introduce Feasta's ecological perspective to their activities.

Mar a dúirt an tOllamh Conchúr Ó Giollagáin le déanaí 'tá an stáit ag bainistiú dul i léig na Gaeltachta'.

Forestry, Trees and Being Close to Nature

Forestry in Ireland has been undergoing a crisis in recent years and this reached a climax in 2020. The state has, since its foundation and for various historical and other reasons promoted principally an approach favouring monoculture even-aged conifers. Although other supports and schemes promoting native woodlands exist, the area planted is significantly smaller, and generally landowners have favoured adopting the short-cycle clearfell conifer schemes.

There is a growing awareness that continuous cover forestry (CCF) based on close to nature management principles could transform Irish forestry.

The central role that trees can play in nature, biodiversity restoration, soil enhancement, carbon capture and social/recreational well-being is recognised by environmentalists. There is a growing awareness that

continuous cover forestry (CCF) based on close to nature management principles could transform Irish forestry. However there are many obstacles including lack of awareness, inadequate long-term vision, educational supports and appropriate infrastructure and outlets for the harvests.

Trees have a special place in the Feasta 'psyche', as its name derives from the Irish poem 'Cill Chais', the first line of which is well-known:

'Cad a dhéanfaimid feasta, gan adhmaid'

As a member of the national executive of ProSilva Ireland and Chair of the Teagasc Forestry Stakeholder Group, Seán Ó Conláin has helped bring environmental/ecological perspectives to the ongoing discussions about CCF among professionals, policy makers and state agencies.



Networking and Partnership

Irish Environmental Network

Feasta is a member of the Irish Environmental Network, an umbrella group that works to support environmental NGOs through access to funding and services. Its thirty-three member NGOs represent a broad range of environmental interests.

Caroline Whyte continued to serve on the IEN's Board of Directors, as part of a three-year term that began in November 2018.



Environmental Pillar

The [Environmental Pillar](#) is a group of Irish NGOs with a national remit, who work together to represent the views of the Irish environmental sector.

Theresa O'Donohue is currently the Feasta representative on the Pillar. In July 2020, Theresa was also elected to the Pillar's Steering Committee, which gives her a voice in the Pillar's decision-making process and the opportunity to attend and contribute to high-level meetings.



She attended Pillar meetings with the Irish Wind Energy Association, the Irish Minister for the Environment and the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs, making a case wherever the opportunity arose for improved public participation in environmental decisions. In addition, she attended the National Economic Plan webinar in October 2020.

Caroline Whyte is the alternate representative on the Pillar. Theresa, Caroline and Seán Ó Conláin attended two virtual visits by the Pillar of the European Commission, in July and September 2020. Presentations were given by representatives of the agriculture, maritime, taxation and climate directorates. The Feasta reps took up this opportunity to send in questions and comments in advance and via the chat area of the webinars. Our questions emphasised the need for more public participation in the green transition and to take a systems-based approach, e.g. by adopting new measurements of progress as alternatives to GDP growth and placing a greater emphasis on supply-side measures.

Feasta had also requested an exchange with a representative of the Commission's economics and finance directorate (DG-ECFIN) during the visits, but this was turned down by the Commission. However, DG-ECFIN responded in writing to some questions which we asked them via email, concerning alternative measures of progress to GDP and the arguments in favour of capping fossil fuel supply, and we subsequently emailed them some follow-up questions.

As a result of an exchange during the first virtual visit with the EC's taxation directorate representative Carola Maggiulli, it was decided that Feasta would prepare two policy submissions on the energy taxation directive and on carbon border adjustment tax, both due in October 2020. These are described on p 23.

Theresa and Caroline, along with the Pillar's Coordinator Karen Ciesielski and Sonairte's Pillar representative Tommy Simpson, attended a meeting with a team of OECD economists in October 2020 on performance budgeting. This was of interest to many in Feasta as it had common ground with Feasta's Well-being Group's work on improving measurements of well-being, including developing alternatives to GDP.

Caroline took a lead role in drawing up a list for the OECD team - which included input by other Pillar representatives - of suggested improvements to the Irish government's performance budgeting framework, placing a much greater emphasis on meeting environmental and social targets such as the reduction in use of synthetic fertiliser year-to-year, the increase in the number of people using bicycles for everyday transport, or the kilometres of rail infrastructure needing to be maintained. We also took the opportunity to describe the Feasta/FEST collaboration on an alternative monetised index to GDP, the [National Well-being Index](#) (see p 28).

Wellbeing Economy Alliance

In July 2020 Feasta joined the [Wellbeing Economy Alliance](#), or WEAll. This was the confluence of various actions, which included our collaborations with [FEST](#) (Heidelberg University), the [Cork Environmental Forum](#) and [EHFF](#) (the European Health Futures Forum). Feasta brings a unique perspective based on its holistic systems-based thinking developed over many years. WEAll is a global organisation with active and influential groups for example in New Zealand, Scotland and Iceland. As an organisation they also aspire to influencing government policy through the facilitation of a policy-makers network.



Feasta have been instigative in setting up a networking Hub on the island of Ireland under the aegis of WEAll. Although in its infancy, WEAll Ireland Hub has been involved in dialogue with Government representatives on the setting up and implementing a systematic approach to well-being metrics. A vision for the Hub is to have a common set of indicators on the island of Ireland.

The formation of the WEAll Hub has also triggered conversations and potential collaborations with a number of other organisations.

Healthy Europe

Through our collaboration with European Health Futures Forum, Seán Ó Conláin participated in the development of a special report for the EU Commission - 'Zero-Pollution Ambition: Prioritising citizens' health & well-being'. The report was one of three produced by [AP4HE](#) (All Policies for a Healthy Europe), which is a coalition of Knowledge Partners aiming to influence European health policy. The report argues that environmental health & human health are intrinsically linked. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of the interlinkages between the degradation of ecosystems and the health of societies. COVID-19 has been a wake up call that we need to act on pollution and to protect people's health in a comprehensive way. The work of the group entailed a number of round-tables with leading EU Commission representatives and politicians.

The collaborative work of Feasta with FEST on NWI (see page 28) was also recognised in the work of a second Working Group of the Coalition, which focused on Well-being and Health. As part of the working of this group, Feasta facilitated a discussion between the Chairman and Dr. Hans Diefenbacher (FEST). The report of the Group also highlighted NWI.



European Health Futures Forum

The depth of collaboration between Feasta and EHFF continued to enrich both our organisations. As well as our successful podcast series (see page 20), other areas included development of the wellbeing economy all-island hub (page 32), collaboration on a futures scenario plan for European Health, development of a series of international Webinars for 2021 with [Humanity Rising](#) and mutual collaboration with [Metaphorum](#) (a specialist group of cyberneticians). The relationship is reinforced by the complementarity of the two organisations' competencies and experience. Feasta brings an emphasis on a holistic, systems based perspective, while EHFF has a primary focus on health.

Other much-appreciated collaborators with Feasta in 2020 included [Basic Income Ireland](#) (see p 11), [Afri](#), and [Irish Seed Savers](#) (see p 9).

Feasta in the news

In February 2020, as part of the *Green News* 'Ask the Experts' series in the run-up to the Irish general election, Caroline Whyte contributed an [article](#) which outlined four key policy asks from politicians: Cap and Share, 'safe-haven' public banking, basic income and land value tax.

Feidhlim Harty also contributed an [article](#) to the same series in which he advocated introducing CapGlobalCarbon (the global version of Cap and Share) and reforming Ireland's agricultural grant scheme.

On April 24, Feasta Basic Income Group member Anne Ryan [spoke](#) with the Irish Examiner's Mick Clifford in a podcast on the subject of "Enough is Plenty".

On April 29, Anne also [spoke](#) about basic income and Enough is Plenty on the Pat Kenny morning show on Newstalk Radio.

On October 28, Theresa O'Donohue was quoted (and her role as the Pillar's Feasta representative was mentioned) in an [article](#) on the Climate Bill by *Irish Times* journalist Kevin O'Sullivan. Theresa called for greater public participation in the government's policy on climate.

On November 11 an essay by Caroline Whyte, "[Income Floor, Ecological Ceiling](#)", was published on the website of the Great Transition Initiative, along with around 30 other essays from around the world, as part of a lively discussion that was initiated by UK-based economist Guy Standing in order to explore the pros and cons of Universal Basic Income and how it could best be implemented.

On December 22, an article by Caroline Whyte on the relevance of the late Feasta co-founder Richard Douthwaite's work to the current state of the world was published by the *Mayo News*, as part of their 'Unsung Heroes' series. An introductory article outlining Richard's life and philosophy and describing Feasta was also published, written by *Irish Times* and *Mayo News* journalist Aine Ryan.

Training/capacity building

Caroline Whyte and Deirdre Lane both attended a series of three messaging workshops organised by the Wheel in September 2020, called 'Storytelling for Success'.

Caroline also attended a messaging workshop on wellbeing narratives that was organised by Positive Money UK and NEON, in October 2020.



Feasta members in the North and South of Ireland, France, Germany and Canada at our holiday online gathering, December 2020

Fundraising

Feasta's funding in recent years has primarily come from the Irish Department of the Environment (via the IEN) and from individual donations and membership dues. In 2020 we decided to take a more structured approach to securing additional funding, with the aim of increasing our research and advocacy capacity - which seems to us to be increasingly important since the onset of the pandemic. We also aim to lessen our financial dependence on the IEN.

In the course of the second half of 2020, Caroline Whyte carried out some research into potential funders for both core and project funding and compiled a spreadsheet along with a funding application timeline for 2021 and beyond.

In August 2020, Feasta submitted an application for project-based funding to the VS Rasmussen Foundation, on disaster collectivism, with Brian Davey as the project lead. The application was unsuccessful but could provide a useful basis for funding applications in 2021.

Feasta applied for membership of the Lilo search engine in December 2020. If this is accepted, people who use Lilo for their internet searches will be able to opt to donate advertising revenue to Feasta.

Feasta also applied for a fundraising support grant from the IEN in December 2020, and we were pleased to learn in January 2021 that this was successful. We will use the grant partly to extend Caroline's fundraising-related activity into 2021, and partly to seek out external advice on Feasta's fundraising strategy.

Image sources

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p30: Noble Oak by Seán Ó Conláin

P33: View from Rossbeigh Strand by Morag Friel

