

County PPNs - RoN Campaign Steps.. Guidance document

Background

The Rights of Nature

A national discussion on the Rights of Nature (RoN) is currently underway on the island of Ireland. This approach recognises that Nature has an inherent right to exist and thrive. The approach recently came to prominence in Irish environmental discourse after a movement began in Northern Ireland, and after the recommendation of the Citizens Assembly on Biodiversity that such rights be adopted on a Constitutional basis by holding a referendum.

https://citizensassembly.ie/wp-content/uploads/Report-on-Biodiversity-Loss_mid-res.pdf

The Public Participation Network

*The Irish Public Participation Networks (PPNs) were established to allow the community and their representatives to participate in policy making at a local level. PPN members through linkage groups **have an entitlement to propose both Agenda items and Motions at the County Council level (This is supported by the Local Government Act 2014)**. Galway County Councils website describes PPN Linkage Groups as groups which “bring together people and stakeholder organisations with a common interest to discuss their views and interests in a specific policy area”.*

In this example a RoN motion was brought for adoption by the PPN Linkage Group to the Galway County Council Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) on Climate Change and Biodiversity. PPN groups may alternatively do this as an individual group without forming a linkage group.

The **Irish Environmental Network / Environmental Pillar** have done excellent work over the last few years, supporting local County PPNs and Environmental Network groups organise and progress issues in their areas.

See here an IEN Webinar link on a RoN Presentation by Lynda Sullivan 6.4.23 and link to website

Home - EJNI <https://ejni.net/>

<https://youtu.be/NFTnQgUbdyE?si=VrPINjzgJVsgIkRn>

Below is another link to an online IEN webinar hosted by Catherine O'Toole and Guests on how to progress a Motion in County Council generally and an example of a Pesticide Policy from last year, identifying the issues, strengths and difficulties...

https://www.youtube.com/results?sp=mAEA&search_query=putting+policy+through+the+strategic+policy+committee+as+a+ppn+rep#bottom-sheet

Making a PPN Motion and the STEPs involved

1 Firstly bring the motion to the County PPN Linkage group -

Draft and present the motion to the Linkage group and get it formally adopted (see example of motion below). This is the motion that the linkage group will recommend to go forward to the SPC meeting.

Draft and share Slides or Discussion paper for PPN linkage group (eg see link to Slides below and discussion notes -

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1nwAax29dxU_3aiyrJ_ljtgbFDa2ytsTh/edit?usp=drivesdk&oid=117517681498477984702&rtpof=true&sd=true)

The **Linkage Group Motion**: could be phrased as...

"That this Linkage group recommends that the Draft Motion on Rights of Nature proposed by be sent forward for the consideration of the Climate & Environment SPC" (check relevant SPC name in your county it could be Planning or Transportation SPC for example if there is no dedicated Climate/ Environment SPC).

You need to propose this and **seek it be seconded by a member** of the Linkage group, and agree that there are **no substantial objections**.

2 Propose the motion as an agenda item for the SPC.

This can be achieved by asking the PPN Secretariat or SPC Chairperson to add an item to the SPC agenda. Contact the environmental rep for the SPC in question and ask them to support the motion. Contact any councillors on the committee to ask for support. You can also request an opportunity to attend and give a short presentation on the motion.

3 At the SPC Meeting:

At this stage you may or may not be in the room. so you do need to trust that you have enough support in the room.

The PPN 'SPC Motion' for adoption..

"Proposes that this SPC adopt this Rights of Nature Motion and forwards to Council Meeting for further consideration and implementation through the Strategic Corporate Committee **or Corporate Policy Group** (CPG) (if applicable) and/or other relevant parties ."

You don't need a majority vote, just a proposer. (eg PPN Rep) and a **second**

As mentioned above, directly **Contacting Councillors** who are on the SPC in advance and asking for their support is a very important step. Tell them you will be doing a **PR in the local papers** about who supported the Motion and who didn't. We have been told that having a single Councillor onside can be crucial in getting the motion over the line, and indeed have found this to be the case.

Contact local papers and ask them to exercise their right to attend and report on the SPC meetings. Give them the details of time and location. After the meeting, send them a short summary of what happened for publication.

Also **contact the local papers and flag the Motion to them** and ask them to attend the SPC meeting - in most cases they have a right to do so -(however no media is currently allowed at Galway SPC - so it might vary from county to county)

4 Give a presentation

It would be good if you can give a short presentation at both meetings - eg RoN intro - slides. In our case we were asked to give a presentation at the next SPC.

 Copy of Galway County PPN - Rights of Nature.pptx

1. Linkage Group
2. SPC Meeting

to explain

1. What the Motion is
2. What it's asking the Council to do.
3. Why it is important

Troubleshooting

If you experience resistance to the idea that you can call agenda items and propose policy...

You should emphasise the reason that the PPNs were established was to allow PPN reps to participate in policy making in this way, and in particular that **they have an entitlement to propose both agenda items and Motions at the SPC**. This is supported by the **Local Government Act 2014**.

Should this right be denied you can make a **complaint to the Ombudsman**, and you could also try the **Minister for Environment**.

It's been found a few threats and inducements were effective to overcome opposition.

But for an example..

It might also help to point out that Westmeath CoCo adopted a policy proposal from a PPN rep on pesticides in July last.

Status on nationwide RoN campaigns:

Donegal - passed motion

Westmeath - **Linkage Group** agreed to forward motion **on RoN** to the **SPC** for adoption (Sept 23. **Motion before the WPPN Plenary on 18th Nov 23 to forward a letter of recommendation to support the CA Recommendations to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Biodiversity.**

Clare - checking status

Galway - SPC agreed to workshops requested in motion and requested a presentation at next SPC in Feb 2024 (Oct 23)

Chair of SPC agreed to send letter of support for CA Recommendations to Oireachtas

Galway PPN also agreed to forward letter of support CA Recommendations to Oireachtas

Draft Motion

THE MOTION:

Council notes the legal and social movement globally for the 'Rights of Nature' aimed to strengthen protections for people, place and planet.

Council recognises that 'Rights of Nature' can help catalyse an innovative rethinking about how to create regenerative, circular, not extractivist, economies while also making human and other living communities safer, stronger and more resilient.

Council commends the excellent work already being done by Council Officers on the climate emergency and biodiversity crisis but recognises the need for a rights based approach to nature.

Council will, over the next 6 months, collaborate with civic society (including local people, NGOs and trade unions etc) to explore what rights of nature mean for the people and economies of the region and to investigate how Rights of Nature could be expressed in its various level plans, objectives and other strategic frameworks.

In particular, the council will in the next 6 months hold two community workshops and work with the local community and stakeholders to draw up a Declaration for the Rights of Nature for the Council area or a significant area of nature within its functional area, to be brought back before Council for adoption.

Council asks for a report to come to Council on embedding 'Rights of Nature' as a keystone concept into Council's operational practices, planning processes and long term decision making.

Council notes our position bordering other Counties and our mutual environmental obligations and so invites adjacent County Councils, in addition to all Councils in the Ireland to also explore 'Rights of Nature' for their Council areas.