

Submission to the Our Rural Future 2026-2031 Public Consultation on behalf of the Community Resources Network Ireland (CRNI)

The Community Resources Network Ireland (CRNI) is the national representative body for the community-based reuse, repair, and recycling sector in Ireland, established to support, connect, and represent social enterprises and community organisations that deliver tangible environmental and social impact. CRNI warmly welcomes the focus on building resilient rural communities and advancing a greener rural future. Our network of community-based social enterprises is uniquely positioned to deliver on the triple bottom line of social, environmental, and economic impact, contributing significantly to Ireland's circular transition.

We offer the following insights and suggested actions, particularly in response to the core pillars of the consultation that address community empowerment, sustainability, and the circular economy:

Pillar Three: Resilient Rural Communities

The new policy must reinforce the objective concerning social equity by ensuring the strategy fully embraces the potential for social inclusion through supporting inclusive employment schemes and providing training opportunities for individuals distanced from the labour market. Between 2020 and 2025, CRNI's members provided on-the-job training to over 5,000 individuals, demonstrating the sector's crucial social role. It should be acknowledged that these opportunities are not only advantageous to the participants, but the services also provided by Social Enterprises active in rural communities are critical to the continued vibrancy and wellbeing of those communities and such enterprises require ongoing support to ensure that provide sustained employment and be a career choice for people living in rural communities and not just short training opportunities.

Pillar Four: A Greener Rural Future

CRNI members are central to strengthening the role of the circular economy in rural communities. The focus on Greener Rural Communities should facilitate community based social enterprises in playing a critical role to support the Objective for a Greener rural future. Some of the main practical challenges to be address include.

Ensuring Secure Structural Supports

Social Enterprises often highlight the challenge of securing to secure, long-term structural supports such as premises for community-based reuse and repair activities. Suitable physical infrastructure is vital for scaling activities and should be made as easily accessible to the public as traditional retail zones. The ability to store significant amounts of recyclable material is necessary to ensure that commercial recycling organisations will collect material from smaller social enterprises dealing with large items such as mattresses, furniture, or bicycles. This activity can be a source of sustainable employment in rural areas.

Addressing Insurance Barriers: The cost of product liability insurance remains a significant challenge, especially for repair enterprises and repair cafés. While measures to work with insurance bodies are proposed, explicit support should prioritise the creation of group insurance schemes or professionalising repair organisations to mitigate this problem and achieve economies of scale. This is already evident in parts of the circular economy. The EPA's Circular Insights study on business-to-consumer repair enterprises notes that the cost of product liability insurance is a significant challenge for certain repair businesses in Ireland, particularly where they work with higher-risk product categories such as electrical and electronic equipment, bicycles and furniture. While enterprises can mitigate some risk through accreditation and testing, the report makes clear that these steps do not resolve the underlying problem of high premiums.

Almost 80% of identified repair enterprises are located outside the main cities. The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Environment and Climate Action has similarly recorded evidence from community reuse and repair organisations that difficulty in securing affordable insurance is a practical obstacle to scaling social-enterprise models in the circular economy.

Stakeholders in this space point to well-known repair and reuse hubs in other European countries, from repair malls to clustered circular-economy centres, as evidence that these activities are insurable in practice. The question for rural Ireland is whether enterprises here, often working on a smaller scale and with tighter margins, can access proportionate cover on comparable terms.

Where climate and sustainability measures under Our Rural Future involve new forms of rural enterprise, circular-economy activity or public use of land, insurance implications should be considered at an early stage, in partnership with relevant Departments, regulators and representative bodies. This would help ensure that the transition to a greener rural Ireland is not unintentionally constrained by avoidable insurance barriers – particularly for the reuse, repair and circular enterprises that policy is otherwise seeking to encourage.

CRNI is dedicated to mainstreaming the Community Resource Sector and is an indispensable national network that can be leveraged to deliver transformative solutions for increased circularity. We advocate for sustained multi-annual core funding to ensure stability and allow our organisation and members to bolster successes and increase impact across Ireland. We appreciate the opportunity to engage in this discussion and would welcome any opportunities to further highlight the activities of the Community Repair and Reuse enterprises as the Department enacts this strategy.

For further information please Contact:

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