



written by Paul Durcan

Achievements in the field of the Environment

Long before Charles J Haughey was elected Taoiseach for the third time in March 1987 he was well known for his radical ideas and ability to get things done. For example, he was responsible for the Succession Act, the Extradition Act, and the liberalisation of birth control measures that were against the wishes of the Catholic Church. Artists benefited from his tax exemption provisions. He initiated with his Special Advisor Anthony Cronin many new departures in the arts, introduced free transport for OAPs, and instigated the establishment of the International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) in Dublin on the suggestion of his friend, the financier Dermot Desmond. There were many other achievements including the restoration and refurbishment of Government Buildings against savage criticism from opposition TDs, several of whom were later to enjoy, as occupants, the prestige and elegance of the Buildings. He also applied his considerable abilities to the protection of both the natural and built environment, subjects that were of special interest for him.



His love for the sea brought him in close contact the natural environment, marine creatures and all types of sea birds, while the purchase of the 170 acre Inishvickillane Island, Co. Kerry, in the 1970s, put him again in close contact with nature. It was a natural nature reserve with large populations of fulmars, puffins and storm petrels. He was concerned about the genetic purity of the red deer (living in, and on, the mountains close to the Killarney National Park) that was threatened from interbreeding with introduced Japanese Sika deer, so he introduced a small herd to the island where they have thrived and maintained their genetic purity.

CJH was the first ever Taoiseach to be seriously interested in environmental issues and took the opportunity during his last term in office to introduce many environmental initiatives. In this and other work, CJH was fortunate to have one of

the ablest Civil Servants as Secretary General of the Department of the Taoiseach, Mr. Pádraig O hUiginn, a sort of éminence grise, and former CEO of An Foras Forbartha. In January 1990, Ireland assumed the Presidency of the Council of Ministers of the European Union. CJH made environmental protection a priority of the Presidency. On 26 January the Government published the first comprehensive environmental programme ever adopted by an Irish Government. The Environment Action Programme set out systematic objectives for protecting and improving the environment across the range of relevant public sector activities. Expenditure of some £1 billion until 2000 was committed by Government.

While responsibility for drafting new environmental protection legislation rested with line Departments, CJH provided considerable "encouragement" to hurry along: the establishment of the vitally important Environmental Protection Agency, which has subsequently played such an important role in environmental management; the setting up of the Marine Institute; progressing new legislation to protect wildlife, national parks and heritage areas, together with national monuments; enhanced protection of the foreshore; improved protection of the sea from pollution and new amendments for water pollution control measures.

At the meeting of the European Summit at Dublin Castle, 25-26 June 1990, CJH realised his ambition by getting the Dublin Declaration on the Environment adopted by the European Council as the Environmental Imperative. The Declaration had been prepared principally by the Department of Environment and was the first time such an environmental declaration had been adopted in the history of the EU. The Declaration was considered to be of such significance that it was extensively used as the foundation for the European Union's 5th Environmental Action Programme that set out European environmental policy for all the Member States for the next five years, a truly remarkable achievement.

CJH was well aware of the need for the establishment of a National Heritage Council to formulate national/local policies and strategies for the protection of the natural and man-made environments. Although such a Council was proposed in a 1970 report, prepared under the aegis of An Foras Forbartha, it never travelled because of resistance by heritage jealous Departments. It had to wait for someone like CJH, who had the authority to implement it. Originally operated on a non-Statutory basis, under the Chairmanship of Lord Killanin it got its legislative feet soon afterwards. The Council has had an immense and positive impact on raising environmental awareness throughout Ireland as well as grant-aiding a plethora of projects countrywide, in addition to supporting heritage initiatives undertaken by virtually all local authorities.

Other environmental initiatives got underway by CJH included the establishment of the Discovery Programme, which provided funds for new archaeological investigations and out of this programme he provided £20,000 for the archaeological

investigations for the New Clare Island Survey, which he launched on the island. He was early in his support for organic farming and throughout many of his major speeches he made reference to the need for environmental protection. He also established the working group Green 2000 which was set up with a group of Civil Servants and environmental experts to advise the Government on new environmental initiatives. The report was debated in the Dáil and many of its recommendations have been implemented.

One bold initiative undertaken by CJH was the declaration of the Whale and Dolphin Sanctuary in Irish marine territorial waters, the first time any European State had declared such a sanctuary. The impact has been immense, stimulating research spearheaded by the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group that has led to a much better understanding of our whale and dolphin resources in our coastal waters. In addition, valuable whale and dolphin eco-tourism, principally organised by the IWDG, is rapidly developing. The Haughey family has since donated CJH's yacht, the Celtic Mist, to the IWDG as a research vessel.

One final initiative that fell foul of the political turmoil surrounding CJH's resignation as Taoiseach in February 1992, was an attempt at the re-introduction of the white-tailed sea eagle to Ireland and specifically, to a former breeding haunt on Inishvickillane Island. Formerly a well-known breeding species in Ireland, it became extinct by 1900, persecuted by game keepers and farmers. To ensure that farmers would not set poison for the introduced birds, CJH got his friend, Senator Tom Fitzgerald, to move an Order in the Senate to ban the use of the deadly poison, strychnine, used by farmers for predator control. Two sea eagles were sourced from the German Raptor Centre and another two birds were set up for breeding in Fota Wildlife Park, under the direction of Sean McKeon. The captive Fota birds were intended to provide young for subsequent release into the wild. The two German sourced eagles, Maeve and Aillil, were released on Inishvickillane but soon disappeared. The captive birds at Fota did not breed and were eventually returned to Germany. However, one good outcome of this project was the banning of strychnine. Several birds of prey such as the buzzard have benefited from the lack of strychnine in the Irish environment. The absence of strychnine has allowed the buzzard population to be extended southwards from Northern Ireland into the Republic, having been formerly confined to the North. Since this attempted re-introduction, the National Parks and Wildlife Service has undertaken a new and ambitious reintroduction programme based in Killarney National Park. Initial results to 2011 suggest that white-tailed sea eagles will hopefully be soon breeding again in Ireland. Certainly it would be true to say that when CJH quoted Othello in his Dáil resignation speech, "I have done the State some service, they know it, no more of that" that we would include services for the protection and enhancement of the natural and man-made environment of Ireland.