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Chairperson's Foreword

This annual report details the activities and progress of the Western Development Commission (WDC) in achieving its objectives and fulfilling its statutory role in 2000. The WDC was established in 1999, under the terms of the Western Development Commission Act, 1998, and is charged with fostering, promoting and encouraging economic and social development in the seven western counties of Donegal, Leitrim Sligo, Mayo, Roscommon, Galway and Clare.

In 2000, WDC built on the work begun in 1999 with the publication of *Blueprint for Success: A Development Plan for the West 2000-2006*. This set out key costed priorities and targets for western development. To continue and build on the strategic policy thrust of *Blueprint for Success*, the WDC last year prepared detailed action plans in three key indigenous resources sectors: tourism; value-added seafood; and, organic agri-food production. To address identified shortcomings in infrastructure in the Western Region specific recommendations were prepared on energy supply, essential road, rail and airport links within the region, as well as on supporting actions to ensure the development of particular projects such as Knock Airport and the possibility of developing a rapid rail transport service between Sligo and local towns. Arising from this activity, 155 policy recommendations were made to government departments in 2000 and the foundation was laid for further policy development in 2001.

The WDC also began work on tracking and evaluating progress in key sectors in the Western Region over the past two years and the results of this work will be published in May 2001.

The Western Investment Fund (WIF) was finally approved by the EU Commission in 2000. Between September and December 2000, the WDC approved investments from the Fund amounting to £1.29m in nine business and community projects.

The WDC has also endeavoured to use the Western Investment Fund to lever additional resources from public, EU, commercial and private sectors into the Western Region. In August 2000, the WDC entered into a formal joint working agreement with Clann Credo Ltd., a national social investment organisation. The purpose of the joint agreement is to provide loan finance for social economy projects undertaken by the community and voluntary sector.

Throughout the year, significant progress was made in developing a more united and strategic approach to the development of the region and its counties. A key part of the WDC's work in 2000 involved highlighting western development issues within policy-making bodies and public fora at local, regional and national levels with a view to creating a positive attitude towards integrated social and economic development of the region. In addition, the WDC supported the important work of the Border, Midland and Western Regional Assembly and the eight County Development Boards in the Western Region.

January 2000 witnessed an historic event when the first meeting of the Government outside of Dublin was held in the WDC offices in Dillon House in Ballaghaderreen. The meeting of the Government in Ballaghaderreen marked a new level of engagement by Government in the region and symbolised the commitment of the Cabinet to the WDC and to the Western Region.

Such high-level commitment by Government will be needed on an ongoing basis if the proposals and recommendations put forward by the WDC in 1999 and 2000 are to bear fruit. Strong government support will be essential to achieve accelerated development in the Western Region in priority areas such as transport infrastructure, energy, telecommunications, investment and employment.

The WDC has received enormous support and co-operation from all sectors in the past year. Particular thanks are due to those who have given their time to participate in our Steering Groups, Sector Councils and Fund Advisory Panel. We also greatly appreciate the support of government departments, state agencies, the private sector, the community and voluntary sector as well as the many other individuals and groups who have worked with us in 2000. I am particularly indebted to my fellow Commission members, to the chief executive, Liam Scollan, and to the staff of the WDC. Finally, I would like to thank Noel Davern, TD, Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, for his support and encouragement throughout the year.

Sean Tighe,
Chairperson,
Western Development Commission,
March 2001

Réamhrá an Chathaoirligh

Cur síos atá sa tuairisc bhliantúil seo ar obair agus ar dhul chun cinn Choimisiún Forbartha an Iarthair sa bhliain 2000. Bunaíodh WDC sa bhliain 1999 faoin Acht Choimisiún Forbartha an Iarthair, 1998, agus é de dhualgas air forbairt shóisialta agus eacnamaíochta a spreagadh, a chumhdach agus a chur chun cinn i seacht gcontae an Iarthair - Dún na nGall, Liatroim, Sligeach, Maigh Eo, Ros Comáin, Gaillimh agus an Clár.

Sa bhliain 2000, chuir an WDC leis an obair a tosaíodh i 1999 nuair a foilsíodh Blueprint for Success; A Development Plan for the West 2000-2006. Leag sé seo síos an costas a bhain leis na tosaíochtaí agus na spriocanna d'fhorbairt an Iarthair. Chun tógáil ar an bpolasaí straitéiseach i Blueprint for Success, d'ullmhaigh WDC mion phleananna gníomhaíochta i dtrí rannóg dhúchasacha acmhainní: turasóireacht, iasc mara agus táirgeadh orgánach talmhaíochta. Ullmhaíodh moltaí faoi leith chun díriú ar laincísí aitheanta in infrastruchtúr Réigiún an Iarthair - soláthar fuinnimh, gréasán iarnróid, aerfoirt agus bóithre sa réigiún, mar aon le tacú le gníomhaíochtaí a chinnteodh go ndéanfaí forbairt ar thionscnaimh éagsúla cosúil le Aerfort Chnoc Mhuire agus Iarnród Scioptha idir Sligeach agus bailte áitúla. Cuireadh 155 moladh maidir le polasaí faoi bhráid an Rialtais i 2000 agus tá bonnchloch leagtha again d'fhorbairt polasaí i 2001.

Thosaigh WDC freisin ag fiosrú agus ag measúnú an dul chun cinn i rannóga tábhachtacha i Réigiún an Iarthair le dhá bhliain agus foilseofar torthaí na hoibre seo i mBealtaine 2000.

Frítheadh faomhadh Choimisiún an AE do Chiste Infheistíochta an Iarthair (WIF) faoi dheireadh i 2000. Cheadaigh an WDC in fheistíochtaí de luach £1.29m ón gCiste do naoi dtionscnaimh gnó agus pobail idir Méan Fómhair agus Nollaig 2000.

Tá iarracht déanta ag WDC freisin maoiniú breise a fháil ó fhoinsí príobháideacha, trádála, poiblí agus an AE tríd an Chiste Infheistíochta an Iarthair. Rinneadh comhaontú foirmeálta oibre idir Clann Credo Tta. agus an WDC i Lúnasa 2000. Eagraíocht náisiúnta infheistíochta sóisialta é Clann Credo agus é mar aidhm ag an socrú seo iasachtaí airgeadais a chur ar fáil do thionscnaimh eacnamaíochta a dtugann eagrais dheonacha agus phobail fúthu.

Rinneadh dul chun cinn suntasach le bliain, i bhforbairt polasaí aontaithe straitéiseach i bhforbairt an réigiúin agus na gcontaetha. Ba chuid thábhachtach d'obair an WDC i 2000 aird a tharraingt ar cheisteanna forbartha an iarthair taobh istigh de na forais a shocraíonn polasaí agus ar ardáin phoiblí go háitiúil, go réigiúnda agus go náisiúnta ionas go mbeadh dearcadh dearfach cothaithe i dtaobh forbairt shóisialta agus eacnamaíochta chomhtháite. Thacaigh an WDC freisin le obair thábhachtach Thionól Réigiúnda na Teorann, Lár Tíre agus an Iarthair agus leis na Boird Forbartha Contae i Réigiún an Iarthair.

Facthas ócáid stairiúil in Eanáir 2000 nuair a bhí a chéad chruinniú ag an Rialtas taobh amuigh de Bhaile Átha Cliath in oifigí an WDC i detach Dillon, i mBealach an Doirín. Comhartha an cruinniú seo de ghníomhaíocht nua an Rialtais agus dílseacht an Rialtais don WDC agus do Réigiún an Iarthair.

Teastóidh an dílseacht sin go leanúnach más linn moltaí an WDC i 1999 agus 2000 a fhíoradh. Is riachtanach go mbeadh tacaíocht láidir ón Rialtas chun forbairt Réigiún an Iarthair a chur chun cinn i réimsí cosúil le infrastruchtúr iompair, fuinneamh, teileachumarsáid, infheistíocht agus fostaíocht.

Tá tacaíocht agus comhoibriú iontach faighte ag an WDC le bliain ó gach réimse. Tá buíochas faoi leith ag dul dóibh siúd a ghlac páirt in ár nGrúpaí Stiúrtha, Comhairlí Rannóige agus Painéal Comhairleach Ciste. Is mór againn tacaíocht ó ranna rialtais, Aisínléachtaí Stáit, an rannóg phríobháideach, an rannóg dheonach agus phobail, chomh maith leis na grúpaí agus na daoine aonair ar fad a d'oibrigh linn i 2000. Tá mé faoi chomaoin go mór ag baill eile an Choimisiúin, an príomhfheidhmeannach, Liam Scollan agus ag foireann an WDC. Ar deireadh, ba mhaith buíochas a ghabháil le Noel Davern, T.D., Aire Stáit sa Roinn Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Forbairt Tuaithe a thug tacaíocht agus ugach dúinn i rith na bliana.

Seán Tighe,
Cathaoirleach,
Coimisiún Forbartha an Iarthair,
Márta 2001.

Chapter One: The Western Development Commission

This is the second annual report of the Western Development Commission which was established as a statutory body in February 1999.

Under the Western Development Commission Act, 1998, the purpose of the WDC is to promote, foster and encourage economic and social development in the Western Region (counties Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo, Mayo, Roscommon, Galway and Clare). In practice, this involves the WDC in three main activities:

- Policy analysis and development;
- Undertaking strategic initiatives in various sectors;
- Management of the Western Investment Fund (WIF).

KEY OBJECTIVES OF THE WDC

The WDC has fulfilled its legislative remit by establishing key objectives and sound organisational structures that will enable it to respond effectively to the development needs and opportunities in the Western Region. The three key objectives are:

1. To ensure that public, economic and social policy effectively meets the development needs of the Western Region by tracking the implementation of a range of policies and recommending adjustments as appropriate, with particular reference to the need for co-ordination of the various bodies involved.
2. To identify, develop and facilitate the implementation of regional initiatives in partnership with the public, private and voluntary sectors with the support of WIF co-investment where appropriate.
3. To administer and manage the £25 million Western Investment Fund (WIF) on a commercial basis so as to address the funding needs of projects, businesses and local communities.

In keeping with its statutory responsibility to promote the development of the Western Region, the WDC continued to work in 2000 to ensure that government policies were customised to meet the particular conditions and needs of the region. This entailed wide-ranging consultations with economic and community interests and liaison with statutory agencies and policy-making bodies in order to inform and shape the policy-making process. In addition, the WDC worked to implement policies and initiatives for the region by mobilising and co-ordinating the activities of a wide range of sectors, interests and public and private bodies within the region.

This two-way strategy is critical for the successful achievement of the WDC's objectives. By harnessing and co-ordinating the energy, vision and commitment of individuals and interests across the region and in the statutory sector, the WDC maximises its effectiveness in implementing policies and secures the most efficient use of its resources.

To facilitate this strategy, the WDC works through a range of networking mechanisms and structures at regional and national levels. WDC staff liaise with and between these networking bodies and provide information, resources and administrative support.

These networking mechanisms play a vital role in informing and shaping policy for the Western Region and in implementing WDC strategies at community and industry level.

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

The WDC operates under the aegis of the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and it received £616,000 in revenue grant in 2000.

The Commission

The chairperson and members of the WDC (see Appendix 1) are appointed by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and include members from each of the seven western counties. Throughout 2000, the Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Mr Noel Davern, TD, had responsibility for the WDC.

WDC Staff

The WDC had nine full-time staff through the year 2000 (see Appendix 2). It aims to be efficient, compact and results-driven, as befits a 21st century public sector organisation. The effectiveness of its full-time staff is extended through the WDC's networking mechanisms.

To enhance its operational effectiveness, the WDC encourages e-working so that all staff can access work files and colleagues from anywhere in the region. The WDC is particularly committed to upholding family-friendly work policies.

National Networking

The WDC has established mechanisms that enable it to contribute directly to policy-making in 14 government departments and their respective agencies. Each of these departments and agencies has appointed a senior level representative to liaise with the WDC. This National Liaison Network of senior civil and public servants (see Appendix 7) ensures that the WDC can fully discuss and review its proposals with the appropriate officials in government departments and state agencies. It also facilitates the co-ordination of the activities of public bodies within the region.

In order to ensure that policy-makers are kept informed of key development issues for the region and of the WDC's various initiatives and projects, Minister Davern has convened a Forum of Ministers (see Appendix 3) from the Western Region.

Regional Networking

Throughout 2000, the WDC continued to work with a range of sectors, interests and public bodies across the seven counties of the region. Through its regional Sector Councils and industry-led Steering Groups, the WDC involved many additional people who are focused on key regional objectives.

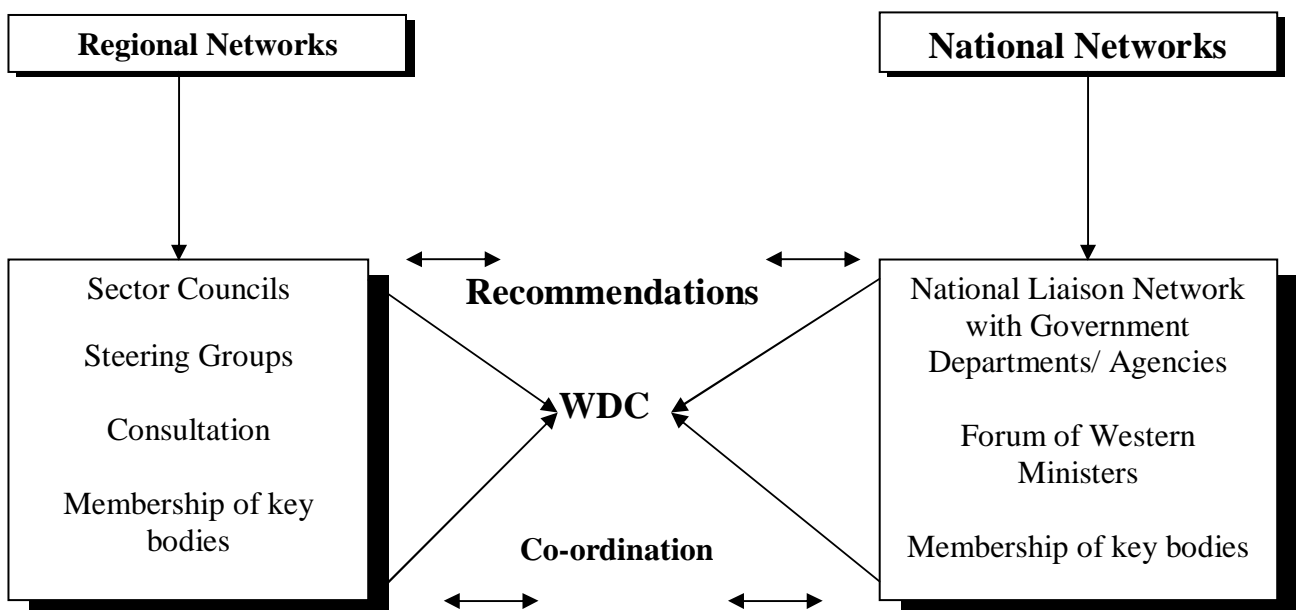
Sector Councils and Steering Groups

The WDC's Sector Councils (see Appendix 6) assisted the WDC to develop and customise key policies for the region, to identify policy inefficiencies and gaps in support, as well as suggesting development projects and regional initiatives.

The Sector Councils for manufacturing and services, natural resources, marine and fisheries and tourism met in 2000. They comprise members from the public, private and voluntary sectors in the region and each is chaired by a representative from the private sector. In 2000, the WDC also worked with special, industry-led Steering Groups (see Appendix 5) on areas such as organic food production and value-added seafood.

At both regional and national levels, WDC staff also participated in specific social, economic or policy-making bodies such as the National Organic Steering Committee of the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, the Rural Development Forum, the Operational Programme Monitoring Committee of the BMW region and County Development Boards in the Western Region. The structures that facilitated the WDC's networking are illustrated in Chart 2 below.

Chart 2: WDC Regional and National Networking



The Strategic Plan – Framework for Action

The WDC prepared a three-year Strategic Plan in 1999 which identified in detail the key objectives of the organisation (as outlined above) and how they might be implemented. The Strategic Plan sets out how the organisation can operate in partnership with the private, public and voluntary sectors in order to drive and facilitate development. In 2000, consultations with 14 government departments regarding the plan yielded a high level of endorsement for the approach being adopted. This

represented the achievement of a broad consensus on how a regional body such as the WDC could operate within the overall context of local and national development.

Implementing the Strategic Plan

The WDC was constrained in its activities in 2000, due to staff resource limitations. Thus, significant elements of the Strategic Plan could not be delivered upon. The WDC, therefore, commissioned independent consultants Farrell Grant Sparks to identify the level of human resources needed to implement the plan. This review recommended a higher staffing complement and more resources to realise its objectives. The recommendations were subsequently adopted by the WDC and supported by the Forum of Western Ministers.

Chapter Two: The Work of the WDC in 2000

In 2000, the WDC's activities in relation to its objectives represented either a continuation of work initiated in 1999 or a response to the emergence of new priorities during the year. It continued to work with government departments to inform and customise sectoral policies. In addition, it sought to facilitate and work in partnership with the public, private and voluntary sectors in order to develop strategic initiatives which could achieve significant results for the Western Region.

There was a strong concentration on policy development. Policy analysis and development are necessary precursors to action and, with limited resources, much attention was given to developing sound analyses and detailed strategies for action in key sectors.

Because of resource limitations, the WDC's regional development function was concentrated on supporting policy development activities, networking and participation in a broad range of development fora at national, regional and county levels. The WDC focused on specific areas in the productive sectors and on physical infrastructure while initiating a major exercise in tracking policy and implementation across a much wider range of economic and social policy areas.

The Western Investment Fund did not become operational until late in the year and work on the Fund was determined by this and by the nature of demand. The two-person WIF team dealt with over 500 enquiries and 73 formal applications for support from the Fund. With the approval of the WDC, a total of £1.29 million was committed in investments in nine projects in the latter part of 2000.

A. POLICY AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The policy and regional development work of the WDC in 2000 involved extensive analysis of the productive sectors of tourism, value-added seafood and organic agri-food production and the formulation of detailed programmes of action for each of them. In addition, the WDC compiled a detailed profile of the human resource base of the region based on existing data.

During 2000, the five WDC executives produced a wide range of costed, prioritised proposals with specific time frames. This work involved meeting with over 220 organisations in relation to the WDC's reports on tourism, value-added seafood and organic agri-food. Consultations included workshops on tourism, organic agri-food and value-added seafood, as well as five WIF workshops. WDC executives also had detailed discussions with 14 government departments in relation to the Strategic Plan and met with all but one of the 20 LEADER and ADM companies in the Western Region. They facilitated at least 20 Steering Group meetings and had substantial meetings with at least 15 state agencies.

With regard to physical infrastructure, the WDC's analysis and policy recommendations were concerned with road access to the region, commuter rail, and air access via Knock Airport. The Corrib gas find off the north Mayo coast stimulated ongoing analysis of the implications for the Western Region, particularly as the power deficit in the region became increasingly evident.

Work on compiling a 'State of the West' analysis began in the last quarter of the year. This involved an up-to-date socio-economic profile of the region incorporating extensive data on the human resource base and a review of progress in each of the key sectors over the last few years. This analysis highlights the barriers to development constituted by the major infrastructural deficits in the region. A report on this work, incorporating a set of recommendations for action, will be published in May 2001.

The Productive Sector – Natural Resources

Work in the key indigenous sectors in the region was stimulated and initiated by the Sector Councils in 1999 and was based on the need to give high priority to supporting their competitiveness and expansion.

BLUEPRINT FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE WEST

In November 2000, *Blueprint for Tourism Development in the West: An Action Plan for Rural Areas* was launched by the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation, Dr Jim McDaid, TD. This is a radical plan to disperse tourism growth in the Western Region beyond the established resorts and larger towns to the rural areas.

The report identified rural tourism, not as a 'niche market' but as tourism in rural areas outside of the well-established destinations. Tourism Development International (TDI) was commissioned to identify the role and contribution of tourism in the region and the barriers to the growth of rural tourism.

The methodology for the study incorporated the perspectives of tourists, rural communities, rural tourism providers and statutory agencies. In addition to a review of statistical data already available for the region, TDI undertook a comprehensive product audit of tourism facilities, a detailed survey of visitors and potential visitors to rural areas, a travel trade survey and a survey of tourism providers. TDI and the WDC consulted with more than 85 organisations, ranging from Bord Fáilte to community action groups. Submissions were invited also through newspaper advertisements. A rural tourism workshop was held in Gurteen, Co. Sligo.

Some Key Findings

- While tourism in the Western Region has grown in recent years, it is at a much slower rate than other parts of the country, notably the Dublin region.
- In the West, tourism is heavily concentrated in part of counties Galway and Clare and along the Atlantic coastline.
- The northern coastal counties are less popular than the southern ones although it is acknowledged that they are equally beautiful.
- There are major imbalances in tourism product throughout the region. Based on Bord Fáilte approved facilities, counties Galway, Clare, Mayo and Donegal have substantial accommodation banks, with 7,000, 5,200, 4,100 and 4,000 rooms respectively. Counties Sligo (2,200), Roscommon (540) and Leitrim (430) are much weaker.
- Almost two-thirds of visits to fee-paying attractions occur in counties Galway and Clare. These counties account for five of the six fee-paying attractions that draw over 100,000 visitors annually.
- Most visitors continue to enter Ireland via the east coast.

Strategic Approach

- Three types of tourism zones are identified, each needing a different strategic response that is related to their current state of tourism development.
- A sustainable approach is essential, so that relationships between tourists, landscape and the host communities will be in balance.
- The economic viability of tourism enterprises is essential and this may not always have been given priority in product development.

- The qualities which attract tourists to the west of Ireland (as articulated in market research) are: quality landscape; lack of over commercialisation; genuine welcome of the people; the sense of remoteness and peace.
- Access to the region (by air and road) must be made easier for the growing international short break market.

Strategic Priorities

- The creation of a driving force for change which can give a clear strategic direction and deliver integration of support;
- A concerted effort to improve access to the Western Region;
- A commitment to destination management and sustainability;
- The implementation of a well financed, co-ordinated marketing strategy encompassing the Western Region as a rural destination and the development of creative product packaging to meet customer needs;
- The maximisation of the product strengths of rural areas, while ensuring environmental and heritage conservation;
- Filling gaps in accommodation and other tourism infrastructure so that visitors can experience a genuine quality product;
- Creating capacity to co-ordinate and deliver quality products and excellent customer care through appropriate support and the fostering of partnership between the various tourism interests.

Recommendations for Change

Critically, the WDC concluded that tourism dispersal to rural regions does not require the creation of any new body but, rather, the co-ordinated intervention of a wide range of existing bodies.

The WDC made five key recommendations for change. These are outlined below. Forty-three further detailed and costed recommendations for action in relation to marketing, destination management, product development, improvements in access to the Western Region, quality assurance and customer care are set out in the report also.

Five Key Changes

1. Establishment of a high-level Steering Group made up of key tourism bodies and interests to oversee the implementation of the Action Plan for Rural Tourism. The Steering Group would be chaired by a senior manager in Bord Fáilte.
2. Implementation of the new strategic approach through an Action Team consisting of a co-ordinator and a team of Tourism Development Officers, funded through a partnership of tourism interests and public funding, or redeployed from existing organisations.
3. Additional funding to assist Regional Tourism Authorities (in conjunction with the co-ordinator) to develop and disseminate best practice guidelines. This would ensure that all bodies working at local, county and regional levels could follow a common strategic direction in relation to product development and promotion and the funding of such activities.
4. Implementation of the zoning strategy by encouraging the establishment of working, private sector rural tourism partnerships in each of the zones, under the Regional Tourism Authorities.

These should include major community-based initiatives and tourism entrepreneurs. Such partnerships would focus on delivering 'area-based tourism packages' in conjunction with the Tourism Development Officers and the Regional Tourism Authorities, as well as establishing strong links with the travel trade.

5. A unit in the Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation should be given responsibility for the delivery of the strategy in keeping with its overall objective of achieving dispersal of tourism to the regions.

Government Endorsement

At the launch of *Blueprint for Tourism Development in the West*, Dr Jim McDaid, TD, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation, stated that he fully endorsed the recommendation of the WDC to establish a high-level Steering Group. He also said that he had asked Bord Fáilte to nominate a senior executive to chair the group. In addition, the Minister said that he would work to ensure that the resources requested by the WDC to kick-start the process of implementing the Blueprint would be made available. Bord Fáilte also has supported fully the WDC's recommendations and the strategy will move into implementation stage in early 2001.

VALUE-ADDED SEAFOOD WORKSHOP

Introduction

The Marine Sector Council, which is composed primarily of representatives from the marine and fisheries sectors, believes there is enormous potential for growth and development in marine and fisheries in the Western Region, particularly in value-added seafood and inshore fisheries. However, in order to capitalise on this potential, it believes it is essential to promote active partnership and co-operation between all the key players in the region.

Steering Group

In light of the above, the Marine Sector Council established a Steering Group at the end of 1999 to examine the potential for the development of value-added seafood in the Western Region. The key objectives of this Steering Group were to:

- Review and analyse the value-added seafood sector and to focus on its needs in the Western Region;
- Address the role of state agencies and the private sector in meeting the needs and requirements of this sector;
- Make a submission on the future development of value-added seafood in the Western Region to the Department of the Marine and Natural Resources;
- Facilitate the implementation of recommendations arising from the submission prepared by the Steering Group to the Department.

Workshop on Value-Added Seafood

In order to address these objectives meaningfully, to ensure full engagement with the industry itself, and to inform WDC policy, the Steering Group hosted a major workshop on Value-Added Seafood, which took place in Sligo on April 5, 2000.

The workshop brought together, for the first time, the diverse interests of the fisheries industry in the Western Region. Over 80 interests were represented, from the pelagic, non-pelagic, catching, aquaculture and processing sectors, as well as representatives of statutory bodies including the Department of the Marine and Natural Resources, BIM, Enterprise Ireland, Údarás na Gaeltachta and the Marine Institute. The workshop was opened by the Minister for the Marine and Natural Resources, Frank Fahey, TD, and chaired by Connacht-Ulster MEP Pat ‘the Cope’ Gallagher.

Domestic and Overseas Influence

The primary objective of the workshop was to elicit the views of the industry on the future development of the value-added seafood sector. The workshop focused on the success of a number of companies involved in seafood processing both at home and abroad. It included agency presentations regarding their roles in developing the value-added seafood sector.

A number of overseas guest speakers highlighted their experiences in establishing and expanding their companies, the problems they encountered and the barriers they had to overcome. These included Garth Jenkins, vice-president of Polar Foods International, Canada, and Michael Gebauer, export manager, Beeck Feinkost, Germany. In particular, they highlighted how small-scale processors can overcome handicaps and become highly competitive through networking, clustering and working in partnership with state agencies. These views were expressed also by other guest speakers, Brendan Chambers, Carrokeel Seafoods, and Des Cosgrove, the Musgrave Group.

Recommendations Based on Partnership

Participants at the workshop agreed that a partnership approach, involving the private and public sectors, was necessary to ensure the sustainability and development of the value-added seafood sector in the Western Region. This would require all players to work in co-operation, especially the producers and processors, and a lead group or organisation to facilitate the implementation of the five key recommendations arising from the workshop. It was felt that the industry-led WDC Steering Group was in the ideal position to facilitate this process.

Five Key Recommendations

1. Funding for the establishment of an independent Quality Control Agency to ensure improved quality of raw materials;
2. Encouragement of clustering of companies in the Western Region in order to achieve economies of scale in distribution, marketing and processing;
3. Introduction of a process to encourage an increase in levels of non-national supplies;
4. Funding for the development of quality brand products for the Western Region;
5. Funding to carry out a strategic review of international competitors with regard to their catching, processing, marketing and funding structures.

Informing National Policy

The findings of the workshop, together with further recommendations from the industry, were compiled in a report entitled *Adding Value to Seafood*. This set out 49 key recommendations for the future development of the value-added seafood sector. The WDC subsequently presented this report to the Department of the Marine and Natural Resources.

The Department of the Marine and Natural Resources subsequently published its national strategy for the seafood industry in its report, *The Way Forward for Irish Seafood - Strategy for the Development of the Irish Seafood Processing Sector* (2001). Many of the recommendations from the WDC Steering Group have been adopted in the national seafood strategy.

BLUEPRINT FOR ORGANIC AGRI-FOOD PRODUCTION IN THE WEST

Introduction

In January 2000, the WDC commissioned the preparation of its report, *Blueprint for Organic Agri-Food Production in the West*. The impetus for the preparation of this report came from those engaged in the organic sector in the Western Region and at regional level as well as from the WDC's Sector Council for Natural Resources.

Throughout 2000, a dedicated Organic Steering Group, convened by the WDC, was involved in the preparation of *Blueprint for Organic Agri-Food Production in the West*. The final report will be the first comprehensive analysis of the organic sector to be completed in this country. It will provide a costed and prioritised action plan to promote the Western Region as a prime location for the future expansion of organic agri-food production.

In addition, the recommendations in *Blueprint for Organic Agri-Food Production in the West* are consistent with the emerging framework at national level, thus ensuring greater cohesion between developments at regional and national levels regarding the future development of organic agri-food production. Fifty-eight recommendations in total are made.

Background to the preparation of *Blueprint for Organic Agri-Food Production in the West*

Two major pieces of research were commissioned by the WDC in 2000 as part of the preparation of *Blueprint for Organic Agri-Food Production in the West*. The National Food Centre, Teagasc, undertook extensive research in Ireland and Europe on the organic market, processing, distribution, research, training and advisory services. In addition, it carried out an exploratory retail audit of organic price premia in a number of retail stores nationwide. Cera undertook the *Western Region Survey of Organic Farmers*, a detailed survey of 103 organic farmers in the region. It also undertook a survey of horticulture and nursery production in the region. In addition, both consultants examined best practices in Wales and Denmark.

To add depth to this research, interviews were conducted with producers, processors, retailers and wholesalers involved in the organic sector and state agencies. In addition, further interviews were conducted with market stall operators and suppliers of organic produce direct to consumers under the 'box' system.

Workshops

Three workshops were held with key informants from both inside and outside the region. These took place in Roscommon, Sligo and Galway. In addition, the WDC sought submissions on the future development of organic agri-food production through regional and national newspapers. Over 30 written replies were received and reviewed.

Consultations

Throughout the year, widespread consultation were held with state agencies, third-level institutions and the private sector. Meetings took place with the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Teagasc, Bord Bia, Bord Glas, Enterprise Ireland, Letterkenny, Sligo and Galway/Mayo Institutes of Technology, St Angela's College, Sligo, Organic Centre, Rossinver, the Organic Associations and other private sector representatives. The purpose of these consultations was to discuss the findings of the report, its recommendations for the future development of the industry and a workable strategy for their implementations.

The Future

The report was completed at the end of 2000 and a great impetus has been built up both in the public and private sectors to develop organic agri-food production in the Western Region. Currently, the WDC is consulting with organisations and individuals in the public and private sectors to secure the implementation of the 58 recommendations made in *Blueprint for Organic Agri-Food Production in the West*. The report will be published in spring 2001. The WDC is confident that this report will make an important contribution to ensuring the long-term development of organic agri-food production in the Western Region.

Physical Infrastructure

The case for improved infrastructure provision in the Western Region had been made in 1999 in *Blueprint for Success – A Development Plan for the West*. Throughout 2000, the WDC focused on access and energy issues. Without investment in these areas, developments in inward investment, indigenous businesses and tourism development are seriously constrained.

ROADS

In *Blueprint for Success* (1999), the WDC had recommended that £1 billion should be invested in improving national primary roads in western counties. These recommendations were reinforced in 2000 in *Blueprint for Tourism Development in the West*, in which the WDC specifically identified the need for radically improved access to the region, by road and air, to capitalise on the growing domestic and international short-break market.

Throughout 2000, the WDC emphasised that infrastructural projects in the Western Region, in particular the development of roads, needed to be expedited. This was stressed and discussed in detail at the WDC's meeting with the Cabinet in Ballaghaderreen in January. The WDC recommended specifically that the N4 and N5 routes should be added to the key infrastructure projects to be monitored by the Cabinet Committee on Infrastructure Development.

COMMUTER RAIL

One of the key issues in rural development, as identified in the Government's White Paper on Rural Development, is the need for public transport that can link small satellite communities to larger centres of population. Three communities in Co. Sligo, Ballymote, Collooney and Ballisodare, saw the potential to develop a local rail commuter service from their communities to Sligo based on the existing Dublin-Sligo line. In 2000, they put their proposal for the project, called the *South Sligo Rapid Transit Initiative*, to the WDC, who responded by working in partnership with these communities on the development of the concept. If proven feasible, it could be used as a model to determine how smaller towns and rural locations could link to larger centres of population. This then could be duplicated in other areas throughout the seven county region. A report is to be published by the project group in early summer 2001 which it will submit to the Department of Public Enterprise and to other public and private bodies.

KNOCK AIRPORT

The WDC supported action by the Knock Airport Board to ensure the consolidation of Knock Airport as an essential hub for the Western Region. In particular, the WDC supported the case for better domestic scheduling of flights and for public subvention of flights. The WDC was pleased to welcome the Government's decision to provide public subvention towards a scheduled Knock/Dublin service by Aer Arann in December 2000.

Based on analysis in *Blueprint for Tourism Development in the West*, the WDC identified Knock, along with Shannon, as the primary airports for the region. In addition, the WDC supported the efforts of the Chamber of Commerce and the business community to identify the demand for direct flights from Knock to London and other overseas destinations. The results of the market research will be published in February 2001.

GAS

The WDC made representations to the Government with a view to maximising the benefits, in terms of economic development for the Western Region, that could accrue from the Corrib gas field. The WDC raised the matter with the Departments of Public Enterprise and of the Marine and Natural Resources, and presented the case at a meeting of the Forum of Western Ministers. The WDC made five recommendations:

1. The development of the Corrib and all subsequent gas fields should be undertaken in the context of the Western Region's need to build an energy infrastructure which can underpin the development of the region;
2. The availability of a guaranteed supply of gas energy should be seen as a key resource in attracting investment to the West;
3. Construction of gas pipelines should be based on an appraisal of the routes which can maximise the development of the region;
4. A study should be commissioned to examine the economic benefits of investment in gas infrastructure provision in the Western Region, to inform the debate on the issue;
5. The assessment of the costs and benefits of exploiting the gas find should be based on a full-cycle analysis of the gas value over the field's lifetime, and not simply on maximising its short-term benefits.

B. MANAGING THE WESTERN INVESTMENT FUND

The £25 million Western Investment Fund (WIF) is an integral element of the Western Development Commission's strategy for accelerating the economic and social development of the Western Region.

The year 2000 was a watershed one in that the Fund became operational following approval by the European Commission. Noel Davern, TD, Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, officially announced the commencement of the WIF in July.¹

Special Funding Mechanism

The WIF is a unique funding mechanism for the Western Region. It provides risk capital, by way of loans and equity, on a commercial basis through three sub-funds:

Strategic Investment Fund – to fund regional initiatives that would underpin the development of the region or a sector;

Business Investment Fund – to accelerate the development of small and medium-sized enterprises in the region through investment and risk sharing;

Local Investment Fund – to make the region a more attractive place to live and work by supporting local communities to develop their areas.

The Commission established a Fund Advisory Panel (FAP) to advise it in making sound commercial investment decisions. Members of the FAP are drawn from organisations concerned with western development and have expertise in project evaluation and/or running a business (details of members are included in Appendix 4). The FAP held its first meeting in June 2000 and a further three meetings took place before the end of the year.

In 2000, the WDC received over 500 enquiries to the fund of which 73 were formal applications for funding. Executives working with the WIF have consulted with over 100 people and have organised five workshops involving over 100 participants.

¹ At the end of the year, the WIF was still awaiting formal approval from the European Commission to invest in the fisheries sector.

During 2000, the WDC approved nine investments amounting to £1,290,000. These were equity and loan investments. Some of this money was drawn down by project promoters in the year 2000.

<i>Project/Company Name</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Sector</i>	<i>Investment Approved</i>	<i>Investment Fund</i>
Bee Park Resource Centre/ Bee Park Resource Centre Ltd.	Manorhamilton, Co. Leitrim	Social Infrastructure	£100,000	Local Investment Fund
Business & Childcare Centre/ Drumshanbo Community Council Ltd.	Drumshanbo, Co. Leitrim	Social & Enterprise Infrastructure	£100,000	Local Investment Fund
National Field Study Centre/ Arrow Community Enterprises Ltd	Ballinafad, Co. Sligo	Tourism	£150,000	Local Investment Fund
Connemara Sea-Cruise/ Connemara Sea Tours Ltd.	Leenane, Co. Galway	Tourism	£130,000	Business Investment Fund
Adam Spence MBO/ NewCo.	Boyle, Co. Roscommon	Manufacturing	£200,000	Business Investment Fund
Doolin Activity Lodge/ Doolin Lodge Ltd.	Doolin, Co. Clare	Tourism	£250,000	Business Investment Fund
Mullaghmore Sailing Centre/ Mullaghmore Sailing Club Ltd.	Mullaghmore, Co. Sligo	Social Infrastructure	£70,000	Local Investment Fund
Togra na Pairce/ Comhar Caomhan Teo.	Aran Islands, Co. Galway	Social Infrastructure	£40,000	Local Investment Fund
Grianan Aileach Visitors Centre/ Grianan Aileach Interpretative Centre Ltd.	Burt, Co. Donegal	Tourism	£250,000	Business Investment Fund

Partnership in Action

It is WDC policy to utilise the WIF to develop innovative partnerships with the private sector and other public sector organisations.

In August 2000, the WDC entered into a formal working agreement with Clann Credo Ltd., a national social investment organisation. The aim of the joint agreement is to provide loan finance to groups in the community and voluntary sector operating social economy enterprises such as social housing, childcare and eldercare provision, enterprise accommodation and social and recreational facilities.

Voluntary Housing Workshop

The WDC and Clann Credo Ltd. established that, in 2000, 1,000 voluntary housing units were built nationally, while the annual target in the National Development Plan was 4,000 units. In December 2000, the two organisations held a workshop to explore issues relating to voluntary housing in the Western Region. The workshop brought together representatives of all interests in the field of voluntary housing, including local authorities, the Department of the Environment and Local Government, housing associations and community groups implementing social housing schemes.

The key objectives of the workshop were to identify the difficulties faced by community groups seeking to build more voluntary housing units in the region and to determine what measures could be taken to accelerate development.

The workshop participants identified a number of factors that prevented community groups from attempting to develop voluntary housing schemes or placed an unnecessary burden on such attempts. The key difficulty experienced by community groups was lack of finance, particularly in relation to the following:

- Funds to carry out preliminary construction work;
- Finance to purchase land for housing developments;
- Overdraft finance to provide a cushion against delays in the drawdown of site purchase grants;
- Finance for budget overruns/unexpected items.

A number of recommendations were made to address these issues. These included the provision of finance in the form of early stage development costs and bridging finance; the availability of more information; and, flexibility of schemes to address the varying needs of community-based organisations. The WDC understand that many of these recommendations are to be included in the Government's revised voluntary housing grant scheme in 2001.

Chapter Three: Presenting the Case for Western Development

An important part of the WDC's work involves advancing the case for western development and related issues to influential bodies at local, regional and national levels. A hallmark of the WDC's approach is that it prepares, presents and argues its case for western development based on thorough research and consultation. This helps to create a positive response to the articulation of western development issues in decision-making fora and in the media.

NETWORKING

Through its national networking mechanisms and other platforms, the WDC raises western development on an ongoing basis in its meetings with government ministers, Oireachtas members and senior public servants and departmental officials.

In January 2000, the WDC had a special opportunity to put forward a number of key issues to the Government when it met in Ballaghaderreen. The WDC stressed the urgency of upgrading parts of the N4 and N5. It also stressed the desirability of incorporating the WDC's experience of regional development in the drive to implement the National Development Plan.

This was built on in July with a meeting of the WDC and the Forum of Western Ministers. The WDC put forward a range of proposals of critical importance to the region, including developing tourism and fisheries, improving energy supply and telecommunications and upgrading national primary roads into the region. It also pressed for decentralisation of public sector employment to the Western Region, as a once-off opportunity to create a critical mass of knowledge-based, skilled employment in the region.

In May, the chief executive and staff of the WDC met with 17 TDs and Senators from the seven western counties to brief them on the work of the WDC and to hear their views and opinions. Discussions covered a number of important issues including the challenge of bringing industry to small towns, the importance of building a power station in the Western Region, the need to promote the tax incentive scheme for the Upper Shannon region and the need for a more integrated approach to the development of the entire Shannon corridor.

The WDC put forward proposals to modify revisions of the grant regime for micro-enterprises to be operated by County and City Enterprise Boards. In addition, it met with members of the National Liaison Network to discuss the WDC's Strategic Plan and its Blueprints for Tourism and Organic Agri-Food Production.

The WDC continues to be involved in key national committees especially in the agri-food sector. It is represented on the National Rural Development Forum and was a member of the influential Agri-Food 2010 Committee on the future of farming and the food industry. In April 2000, it welcomed the Committee's recommendations on organic farming, part-time farming and small food business in particular.

In addition, representatives of the WDC participate in the Department's National Organic Development Committee and assist the committee by sharing their experience and knowledge, based on research and consultations in that sector.

In the course of preparing its recommendations for the *Blueprint for Organic Agri-Food Production* and *Blueprint for Tourism Development in the West*, the WDC consulted with over 150 national and regional organisations. Representatives of the WDC also gave keynote addresses at national conferences and meetings including the National Conference of the Irish Organic Farmers and Growers Association (IOFGA), which took place in January, and the National Shellfish Conference, which took place in May 2000.

REGIONAL NETWORKING

The WDC is a member of the Border, Midland and Western Region Monitoring Committee.

The WDC is also represented on the eight County Development Boards in the Western Region and on a number of their working groups. In 2000, this involved up to eight meetings every six weeks for the five WDC Executives. The WDC also convened two meetings with the Directors of Community and Enterprise in the Western Region during the year. The purpose of these meetings was to establish how the WDC could work in partnership with the County Development Boards in the development of policies for the balanced growth of infrastructure, industry and investment throughout the region.

The WDC engaged with the Regional Tourism Authorities in the development of its *Blueprint for Tourism Development in the West* and had regular consultations with the leading academic centres in the region including the Institutes of Technology at Sligo, Galway/Mayo and Letterkenny, the National University of Ireland, Galway, and St Angela's College, Sligo.

LOCAL NETWORKING

The WDC met with the LEADER and area partnership companies in the Western Region in order to forge links and to help streamline and strengthen mutual strategies to provide a common structure to support region-wide co-operation under these programmes. Areas earmarked for co-operation included rural tourism, organic agri-food production and the small food sector, as well as the development of partnerships for investment. The introductory meeting between the LEADER and partnership companies and the WDC took place in July. Plans were then made for quarterly meetings between the two strategic partners.

The WDC engaged with Teagasc on an on-going basis in relation to small food producers and organic food production. In addition, the WDC met with many representatives from the private and the community sector and supported their work for change in their respective areas. The Western Investment Fund team met with finance and business sectors through three regional workshops.

MEDIA COVERAGE

Throughout 2000, the WDC secured widespread coverage for issues of western development in national and local media. The work of the WDC received supportive editorial comment in the national and regional press. On many occasions throughout the year, WDC representatives put forward the case for regional development on national and local TV and radio. In addition, specific issues and policies were reported in specialist magazines and publications.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Members of Western Development Commission

Chairperson

Sean Tighe,
MD, Clubman Omega, Buncrana, Co Donegal.

Members

Michael McLoone, County Manager, Donegal County Council, Co. Donegal.

Peadar Ó Tuathail, Leitir Mór, Co Galway.

Member, WDC Marine Sector Council

Lisa McAllister, General Manager, Herron & Son, Co. Sligo.

Member of WDC/Clann Credo Ltd. joint Evaluation Committee

Cllr. Mary Bohan, Member, Leitrim County Council, Co. Leitrim.

Member, WDC Manufacturing and Services Sector Council

Sean Hannick, MD, Killala Precision Components Ltd, Ballina, Co. Mayo.

Member, WDC Manufacturing and Services Sector Council

Maurice Harvey, Ennistymon, Co Clare.

Member, WDC Natural Resources Sector Council

Malachy King, Clifden, Co Galway.

Member, WDC Tourism Sector Council

Sr. Maureen Lally, Castlebar, Co Mayo.

Member, WDC Tourism Sector Council

Cllr. Pat McGarry, Member, Roscommon County Council, Co. Roscommon.

Member, WDC Natural Resources Sector Council

Ann Whoriskey, Ardrumman, Ramelton, Co. Donegal.

Frank O'Donnell, Department of Agriculture, Food & Rural Development.

Appendix 2

Staff of the WDC

Liam Scollan, Chief Executive

Dr Patricia O'Hara, Senior Policy Analyst

Gillian Buckley, Investment Manager

Cariosa Lynch, Regional Development Officer

Frank Doheny, Investment Executive

Theresa Higgins, Administrator²

Contract staff during 2000

Sheila Caulfield

Deirdre Frost

² Staff at 31 December 2000

Appendix 3

Forum of Western Ministers 2000

Chairperson

Noel Davern, TD,
Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

Members

Dr. James McDaid, TD, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation.

Síle de Valera, TD, Minister for Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands.

Robert Molloy, TD, Minister of State to the Government and
Minister of State at the Department of the Environment and Local Government.

Frank Fahey, TD, Minister for the Marine and Natural Resources.

Dr. Tom Moffatt, TD, Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children.

Éamon Ó Cuív, TD, Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht
and the Islands.

Noel Treacy, TD, Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science and
the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

Appendix 4

Members of WDC Fund Advisory Panel

Chair

Sean Tighe (Chair),
Managing Director, Clubman Omega.

Members

Michael Corless,
Partner, Ernst & Young.

John Dillon,
Investments Manager, Shannon Development.

Barry Feely,
Director, Feely & Sons Ltd.

Sean Murray,
Development Manager, Business Banking, Bank of Ireland, West.

William O'Brien,
Head of Commercial Evaluation, Enterprise Ireland.

John Shaw,*
Houlihan & Partners, Solicitors.

* *Resigned during the year.*

Appendix 5

Members of WDC Steering Groups

Organic Steering Group

Anne Coyne, Organic Producer, Co. Mayo (Chairperson)

Helen Scully, Organic Trust, Dublin

Noreen Gibney, Irish Organic Farmers and Growers Association, Co. Westmeath

Cáit Curran, Organic Producer, Co. Galway

Martin Reading, Leitrim Organic Forum, Co. Leitrim

Joe Fox, Enterprise Ireland

Padraic Brennan, Bord Bia

Lorcán Bourke, Bord Glas

Elmer Koomans-O'Reilly, Bio-Dynamic Agricultural Association of Ireland

Steering Group for Value Added Seafood

Michael Gallagher, Managing Director, Gundry's, Killybegs (Chairperson)

Aodh O'Donnell, Errigal Fish, Co. Donegal

Sean Gavin, Irish Seaspray, Co. Galway

James Bowden, West Coast Fish Processing Ltd., Co. Donegal

Josephine McCormick, Greencastle Seafoods, Co. Donegal

Enda Boland, Bord Iascaigh Mhara

Don McSwiney, Enterprise Ireland

Michael Seoighe, Údarás na Gaeltachta

Declan Clarke, Martin Ryan Institute, NUIG, Galway

Appendix 6

Members of WDC Sector Councils

Manufacturing and Services Sector

Ray O'Donoghue, Chairman

Tom Hyland
Dorothy Clarke
Seamus Bree
Sean Garvey
Gaye Moynihan
Tony Barrett
Sean Hannick
Cllr. Mary Bohan

Natural Resources Sector

Dan Gilmartin, Chairman

Peter Seery
Anne Coyne
Terry Gallagher
Muiris Kennedy
Cllr Pat McGarry
Maurice Harvey

Tourism Sector

Sean Staunton, Chairman

John Leonard
Gerry Finn
Terry McEniff
Patsy Daly
Maria Heneghan
Pat Nora Gallagher
Brian Quinn
Malachy King
Sr. Maureen Lally

Marine Sector

Michael Gallagher, Chairman

Richie Flynn
Michael Corduff
Richard McCormick
James Ryan
Joey Murrin
Michael Guiry
Peadar Ó Tuathail
Don McSwiney

Appendix 7

The National Liaison Network

Department	Agency
Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development	An Bord Bia An Bord Glas Teagasc
Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands	Údarás na Gaeltachta
Department of Education and Science	
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment	Forfás IDA Ireland Enterprise Ireland
Department of Environment and Local Government	National Roads Authority
Department of Finance	
Department of Foreign Affairs	
Department of Health and Children	Mid-Western, North-Western and Western Health Boards
Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform	Land Registry
Department of the Marine and Natural Resources	Bord Iascaigh Mhara Marine Institute Central Fisheries Board Coillte Teo
Department of Public Enterprise	
Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs	
Department of the Taoiseach	
Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation	Bord Fáilte Shannon Development CERT ADM Ltd

Appendix 8

Members of Tourism Steering Group

Brian Flynn, Regional Tourism Manager, West Regional Tourism Authority.

John Greene, Regional Tourism Manager, North-West Regional Tourism Authority.

John Leonard, Regional Tourism Manager, Tourism Development, Shannon Development.

Sean Staunton, Chairperson, Tourism Sector Council.