

Feasta: The Foundation for the Economics of Sustainability Annual Report 2008

Mission Statement

Feasta aims to identify the characteristics (economic, cultural and environmental) of a truly sustainable society, articulate how the necessary transition can be effected and promote the implementation of the measures required for this purpose.

The Year In Review

by Richard Douthwaite

2008 was a very good year for Feasta. Indeed, in many respects, it is hard to see how it could have been bettered.

Perhaps the main achievement of 2008 was the transformation of Cap and Share from a good idea into one so well researched independently that it must now be considered seriously by any government wishing to make drastic cuts to its greenhouse emissions. Of course, it was Comhar that organised and paid for this research but it was Feasta members who persuaded it to do so and then made sure that its consultants were well briefed and did not build any misconceptions into their studies. David Healy, Thomas Legge, Nick Bardsley and Laurence Matthews played key roles in this process. The only thing C&S still lacks is a track record in actual use and during the coming year we're going to have to work with the team of civil servants that the Irish minister for the environment, John Gormley, has said he will set up to look into the administrative problems that have to be overcome before it can be put into use.

Besides the Comhar report, two other significant studies of C&S were published during the year. These were Jeremy Wakeford's work on the likely initial effects of C&S if it was adopted in South Africa and a similar study by Anandi Sharan of the effects in India. If funding can be found, we intend to commission further reports on the effects in Brazil, Russia and China. However, the immediate task is to make the two existing studies known to development and other organisations around the world.

The meeting of the climate group at Schumacher College in February decided that it should adopt a twin-track approach. This involves seeking to cut fossil fuel emissions using C&S while simultaneously protecting the carbon stocks already held in the Earth's soils and plants and seeking to set up systems that increase those stocks. The first fruits of this decision were public lectures by David Wasdell and Peter Reid and a series of meetings over two days in April. At the meetings we were convinced by soil scientists from Teagasc and the universities that it was impossible to measure the carbon content of, say, a field sufficiently accurately to be able to reward the owner for any increase in the amount sequestered there. The alternative suggested was that methods of land use that increased carbon content should be identified and these should be made best practice, with payments to farmers being made to make it unlikely that they would adopt any other methods.

In August, thanks to proposals submitted to the Department of the Environment by Emer O'Siochru, we were awarded a three-year contract to take our interest in soil carbon and carbon sinks further in order to provide the Department with advice on policies which would enable Ireland to reduce its greenhouse emissions from non-fossil sources. This contract enabled us to recruit Corinna Byrne, who is just completing her PhD in soil carbon at the University of Limerick, as the project's part-time co-ordinator. She began work at the beginning of October and is assembling a network of all the relevant researchers in Ireland and overseas. The project's website will go live in January and a combined meeting of the Carbon Cycles and Sinks Network and the Feasta climate group is planned for late February. Corinna is now a member of the Feasta Executive Committee.

The sequestration of carbon in the soil might well involve the use of biochar, a substance in which Feasta has been interested for some time – we arranged for Danny Day to give a seminar on it in 2007. Four members attended an international conference on biochar in Newcastle upon Tyne in England in September and came away convinced that international standards were going to have to be established if the incorporation of char into the soil was ever to be rewarded under a possible successor to the Kyoto Protocol. As a result, Emer and Corinna have just submitted a proposal to the EU for €4m in funding to establish such standards in Europe. Although we initiated the project, Feasta would have a relatively minor role in the consortium to be set up if the funding is approved. The other partners would include the University of Limerick, the Irish BioEnergy Association and its British and French counterparts, the European bioenergy association, AEBIOM, and a technical consultancy, CARE, based in Northern Ireland. We will hear in May if the application has proceeded to the detailed selection stage.

Another proposal by Emer won Feasta a second three-year contract from the Department – to provide advice on novel types of taxation, particularly those which would be environmentally beneficial, to both the Department and the Commission on Taxation. Ellie Cuffe was originally recruited to run this project but she sadly had to leave shortly afterwards for personal reasons, and Patrick Magee has been taken on to replace her. Patrick is currently completing a PhD on Irish politicians' and civil servants' attitudes to climate change, under the supervision of John Barry at the Institute of Governance, Public Policy and Social Research at Queen's University, Belfast. He worked for several years in the policy unit of Customs and Excise in London and will continue to work part-time on VAT issues for Customs in Belfast, at least for a little while. His knowledge of how civil servants work and his contacts in Dublin should be enormously valuable in getting C&S through the implementation stage.

It's not just policymakers in the Department of the Environment who are seeking out our ideas. Many of the energy-related elements of the economic stimulus package presented by the government in December were included in a paper Feasta presented to Eamon Ryan at his request in October. The Irish Green Party commissioned a major study on the future prospects for economic growth from David Korowicz and its economics group is avidly discussing its findings, which one member of the group summarised as follows:

- Risk Management - Plan not panic
- Acknowledge the inevitable, don't waste resources fighting it
- Use the resources we have to build the world we will have to live in, not the one we assumed we would (renewables not airports, roads etc.)
- Localise (community resilience)
- Decouple (local currencies, local food production to combat potential experience of transfer shocks)
- Plan for restructuring employment (won't be multinationals coming to the rescue)
- Equity builds legitimacy, reduces strife (e.g rationing during World War II)
- Citizen's Income
- Establish Commons Ownership
- Get Out Of Debt
- Create Your Pension - Don't put it in the market, put it in your land or your community - something that gives you a long-term return that you can control

This is an extremely important document and we hope that David will consider it ready to release on the Feasta website soon.

The bursting of the property bubble and the subsequent decline in bank lending has created a crisis from which the debt-based money creation system will find it hard to recover. As a result, we have set up a new working group within Feasta that aims to design and introduce a non-debt money system of the sort we think is necessary. Some extraordinarily well-qualified people are working with the group.

Until 2007, it's probably fair to say that Feasta events tended to be held to present outsiders' ideas rather than those of our members. However, the balance has now changed. This was marked by a series of five midday lectures we held on Thursday in Dublin in June and July. (There were to have been six lectures in the series but one member fell ill.) In part, this series, which was launched by the Energy Minister, Eamon Ryan, emerged in response to a feeling among members of the executive that we were not keeping members in touch sufficiently well with the ideas that other members were developing. Feasta is meant to be a collective thinking process but, quite often, too few people get involved.

Another motive for organising the series was to allow policymakers to come to hear what we had to say as we felt that, in view of the pace at which the money, energy and climate crises were developing, they might be in the market for new ideas. In the event, the attendance both by members and policymakers was disappointing, perhaps because we chose the wrong time (lunchtime). However, many people around the world have been able to see the recordings of the presentations on the website. - there have been countless downloads to date. We will be organising more events primarily for members in the coming year.

From an organisational point of view, Feasta is stronger than ever before. Thanks to Morag Friel's efforts and Justin Phelan and Sandra Connell's voluntary work, our accounts are in first-class order and our financial control systems have been vastly improved. In anticipation of the extra transactions that the two policy projects and the conference will generate, Mayra Guerra has been employed as a one-day-a-week book-keeper. Our move into new offices at 14, St. Stephen's Green is working out very well, not least because of the convenience and the fact that meeting rooms are readily available. As a result the office is being better used and people are coming in and meeting more often.

For me, the main problem facing the organisation which was still unresolved at the end of the year is how we can get more members involved in Feasta's work. It is not that there is a shortage of volunteers. Fourteen of the 38 people who applied for a paid job we advertised offered to do other work on a voluntary basis when told they had been unsuccessful. No, the problem is suggesting something interesting that they can usefully do and then, in some cases, giving guidance while they do it. We've had no-one available so far with a knowledge of everything that's going on who has been able to spend the time on doing that.

The only thing to mar the year was Will Howard's death from prostate cancer. Will put his heart and soul into developing the Cap and Share concept and building an organisation to propagate it in Great Britain. Although the people he brought into C&S are working away, he is badly missed by us all. Shortly after his death, his wife and two sons generously attended the Will Howard Memorial Lecture that Feasta staged in April in Trinity College to honour Will.

Feasta is very excited about potential developments in its work in 2009, and looks forward to getting those members more involved who wish to be so. Feasta would also like to thank its members for those ongoing support and encouragement.

Feasta Developments 2008

(Some activities have been undertaken in collaboration with other partners, among them The Department of the Environment. For more information on the activities listed below, please refer to Feasta's website: www.feasta.org.)

1. Publications and Submissions

- Finalised and submitted the National Sustainable Development Strategy report.
- Published a 28-booklet on the policy of Cap and Share.
- Published Feasta information leaflet.
- Commissioned and published reports on likely outcomes of Cap and Share in India and South Africa to bring to UN Climate talks in Poznan, Poland.
- Briefing on Cap and Share to the Commission on Taxation by Richard Douthwaite
- Submission to the Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government on their guidelines for Sustainable Residential Developments in Urban Areas

2. Lectures, Workshops and Conferences

(organised by Feasta or involving Feasta members)

Biochar Presentation

January 10 – Centre for Social Innovation, Toronto, Canada.

Bruce Darrell gave a presentation about Biochar to representatives from a range of social and ecological NGOs, introducing the history, development and possible benefits of Biochar including carbon sequestration, carbon negative energy, waste management, nutrient cycling, and food security.

Public Meeting: How thinking about the climate crisis needs to change

January 18 – Totnes, Devon.

Emer O'Siochru chaired the discussion at this forum of fellow Feasta speakers Bruce Darrell and Richard Douthwaite along with Peter Barnes and David Wasdell. It was a lively meeting, with some speakers focussing on the problems of climate change and some on the solutions. It was a public meeting attended also by Feasta Climate Group members who were holding their annual meeting that weekend.

Feasta Energy and Climate Group - Strategy Meeting

January 18-20 – Schumacher College, Totnes, Devon.

Feasta's Climate group held its annual get together in the inspiring surrounds of Schumacher College. This was an intense weekend of strategic planning for the year ahead.

Debate: The Biofuel Dream is Dead

March 13 – Science Gallery, Pearse St, TCD.

David Korowicz took part in this panel debate along with with Professor Keith Smith, John Travers and Dr. Rocio Diaz-Chavez

Convergence Symposium: Ideas to Meet the Carbon Challenge – Biochar

April 5 – Cultivate Centre for Sustainable Living, Dublin.

Bruce Darrell outlined the benefits of an ancient technology used to increase soil fertility, produce carbon-negative energy, manage waste and sequester carbon.

Convergence Symposium: National Frameworks to Underpin Carbon Reduction

April 6 – Cultivate Centre for Sustainable Living, Dublin.

David Korowicz presented Cap and Share to a "Fiscal Mechanisms for Carbon Management" workshop, with support from Bruce.

DIT Green Week Lecture: 'Beating the Bust'

April 10 – Dublin Institute of Technology.

Dave Wetzel, the man responsible for developing the policy behind the successful congestion charge measures in London under Mayor Ken Livingston, gave a lecture on land value taxation. Dave gave a very comprehensive outline of the economics of various taxes highlighting the efficiency and fairness of an annual tax on land or site value. He explained how such a tax shift from work onto the natural value of land (due to soil fertility and benign climate or its socio-economic value due to its connectivity to services) could address inequality and poverty. He showed the perverse effects of not recouping community created land value for the community that created it. A recording of the presentation is available on the Feasta website. It is well worth repeat viewing to understand the basic economics.

Cap and Share Presentation with Trinity Young Greens

April 14 – Trinity College Arts Block, Dublin.

Thomas and Michaela Goetzman of Cap and Share Ireland, with assistance from Bruce Darrell from Feasta. Senator Deirdre deBurca gave input on the Green Party's position on Cap and Share.

The Will Howard Memorial Lecture – Climate Change: First the Bad News, then the Good

April 18 – Trinity College, Dublin.

Co-lecture by David Wasdell, Director of the Meridian Programme and Peter Read, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Applied and International Economics at Massey University in New Zealand,

David Wasdell delivered the bad news. He argued that greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere have already exceeded a safe limit. Consequently, not only will every tonne of CO₂ emitted from now on have to be recovered and sequestered before its full heating effect has developed but some past emissions will have to be recovered too. Peter Read delivered the good news. Plants and soil lock up huge amounts of carbon. Read contends that it would take only a relatively small increase in the levels of that stored carbon to return atmospheric concentrations of CO₂ to safe limits. This would also improve soil fertility and raise incomes for millions of farmers. A recording of these presentations is available on the Feasta website.

Degrowth Conference

April 18-19 – Paris, France.

A paper entitled "Economic Growth cannot continue", which was written by David Korowicz & Richard Douthwaite, was delivered by David at the first conference on Economic De-Growth for Ecological Sustainability & Social Justice'.

Conference: The Role of Food and Agriculture in the Design and Planning of Buildings and Cities

May 3 – Ryerson University Department of Architectural Science, Toronto, Canada.

Bruce Darrell gave a talk "Linking urban agriculture and built form to carbon cycles, energy use and nutrient flows" at this urban agriculture conference.

Post Carbon Toronto Talk - Capping Carbon

May 7 – Metro Hall, Toronto, Canada.

Bruce Darrell gave a presentation comparing the different regulatory mechanisms for reducing carbon emissions, including Cap and Share.

A Twin-Track approach to the Climate Crisis

May 9 – Centre For Social Innovation, Toronto, Canada.

Bruce Darrell hosted 2 workshops introducing the strategies for reducing emissions through Cap and Share and removing excess emissions through land based sequestration including the use of Biochar.

Biochar Briefing Session

May 12 – Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, Guelph, Canada.

Bruce Darrell gave a briefing session about Biochar that was attended by officials from OMAFRA and the Ontario Ministry of the Environment, as well as an energy and climate policy analyst from the David Suzuki Foundation.

Commission on Sustainable Development

May 12-16 – New York, USA.

Emer O'Siochru attended the CSD preparatory meeting. This is part of a two year cycle review of programmes carried out by the UN on the Millennium goals and Agenda and Action 21. Food Security was the dominant topic at the meeting. Emer attended meetings of the caucus concerned with sustainable agriculture, energy and gender issues. Emer disseminated information on Cap and Share and on the potential of biochar with relevant NGOs.

"Change Campaign" Meeting

May 23 – Customs House, Dublin.

Bruce Darrell attended a meeting in an advisory capacity to discuss the Change Campaign with the Consortium running the campaign as well as officials from the Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government. The purpose of the meeting was to explore how Feasta and other IEN member groups could engage with the Change Campaign.

IEN "Planning and Sustainable Development" Network preparatory workshop

May 27 – IEN offices, Dublin.

Emer O'Siochru participated in a workshop with the objective of identifying the fiscal, legislative and policy changes that are needed in order to ensure sustainable development.

"Sustainable Economics and the Global Ecosystem"

June 5 – Radisson Hotel, Cork.

Lectures were given by David Korowicz on the relationship between economics and the global ecosystem and by Emer O'Siochru on different economic models that serve to protect the environment. These were part of a live broadcast on the web by CEF.

Feasta Seminar Series 1: The Future's Not What It Used to Be

June 13 – The Irish Architectural Archive, Dublin.

David Korowicz gave a presentation describing how many of our civilization's key resources have become more tightly coupled and are under increasing strain. David's talk highlighted the systematic interactions of energy, greenhouse gases, food and the macroeconomy; and assessed the risks of a critical breakdown of this global system. It also outlined how risk management must be integrated into government policy. A recording of this presentation is available on the Feasta website.

Campaign against Climate Change: Climate Forum

June 14-15 – London.

Presentations by Feasta members John Jopling, Richard Douthwaite and Brian Davey.

Meeting for the Sustainable Development/Planning Policy Meeting

June 16 – IEN office, Dublin.

Emer O'Siochru attended this meeting on behalf of Feasta to prepare for a workshop with the DoEHLG.

The Global Response to Climate Change

June 17 – Meridian Centre, Hackney, East London.

Workshop headed by David Wasdell, with participation by Feasta members Brian Davey, Richard Douthwaite, John Jopling and Annie Sugrue. This workshop was initiated to explore alternative strategies and structures for global governance.

Comhar Plenary Address on Food Systems

June 18 – Issac's Hotel, Dublin.

Bruce Darrell gave a presentation about the need to create nutrient cycles within our food systems, and the possible structure of an institutional framework to create regional food security.

Global Atmosphere Trust Brainstorming Session

June 18 – Feasta Office, Dublin.

This brainstorming session allowed further development of the ideas behind the Global Atmosphere Trust or "Global Trust Initiative" as it is now known. Spearheaded by John Jopling, the GTI has been exploring the idea of an independent initiative to establish the global institution that would be needed to run a global Cap and Share scheme. GAT has also been looking at the issue of global governance to cope with not just climate change but a number of other linked issues where national governments and inter-national institutions are failing.

Feasta Seminar Series 2: Planning for Food Security

June 19 – The Irish Architectural Archive, Dublin.

Bruce Darrell outlined how global food price inflation has been driven by declining yields, commodity markets, the rush to biofuels, increased production costs and greater consumption of meat. He showed how many producing nations are restraining exports, reducing the availability of food on the global market. He argued that achieving a secure food supply globally and nationally is a major task that demands a transformation of our food supply systems. A recording of this presentation is available on the Feasta website.

Basic Income and Environmental Challenges, hosted by CORI

June 21 – UCD, Dublin.

Emer O’Siochru presented the Feasta developed proposal of Cap and Share to address climate change. The particular perspective addressed in this event was the concept of commons ownership of the Earth's natural resources and their protection and properisation in a Trust for the benefit of their owners. The owners are all residents dependent on the particular common resources. In the case of the atmosphere, all human beings and their descendants have claim to the atmosphere on an equal basis. Cap and Share creates monetary value by capping its use as a dump and the logic follows that that value should be passed back to its owners. This system can be extended to land value, water, broadcast spectrum and thereby create the basis of a citizens dividend / basic income funded from the natural capital of the Earth.

Climate Committee Briefing Session on Cap and Share

June 25th – the Dáil, Dublin.

Richard Douthwaite and David Korowicz briefed TDs and Senators about Cap and Share, and some contacts were made with TDs and some researchers.

Cap and Share discussion evening for Feasta members

June 25 – Dublin.

Hosted by David Korowicz, this informal get together allowed people to discuss and digest the full implications of what Cap and Share would do if put into effect. The members of the climate group who worked on the book "Cap and Share: a Fair Way to cut Greenhouse Emissions" felt they were still coming to terms with these implications and wanted to open up the process to other members.

Feasta Seminar Series 3: The Need for Benign Inflation

June 26 – The Irish Architectural Archive, Dublin

Richard Douthwaite argued that an inflation is needed for two reasons. One is that, as energy prices rise in relation to labour, the cost of everything needs to change by differing amounts, and the only pleasant way this can happen is if all prices move up. The other reason is that the burden of debt carried in Ireland is now out of step with incomes. Asset values are also out of line. An inflation would correct both relatively painlessly. But who would create the money which allowed the inflation to happen? This talk explored this question. A recording of this presentation is available on the Feasta website.

Feasta Seminar Series 4: Reclaiming the Commons

July 17 – The Irish Architectural Archive, Dublin

Emer O’Siochru addressed the destruction of “the commons” – the vital but undefined resources that sustain life and civilisation and that are under threat from the current system. It offered ideas about how they can be redefined, given legal protection within the market economy, their proper owners identified and champions assigned to manage and conserve them for current and future generations. The commons include the atmosphere, the oceans, surface and ground waters, aspects of land, genetic information, plant and animal diversity, scientific knowledge and culture. A recording of this presentation is available on the Feasta website.

Feasta Seminar Series 5: Global Governance for Climate Change

July 24 – The Irish Architectural Archive, Dublin.

John Jopling elaborated on the current system of inter-governmental negotiation, its inherent limitations, and moves towards designing and creating a better system. A recording of this presentation is available on the Feasta website.

2008 Irish Green Gathering

August 8-10 – Woodbrook House, Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford, Ireland.

Three members of Feasta made presentations as part of the Irish Green Gathering. David Korowicz spoke about Climate Change and Sustainability, John Jopling spoke about The Global Atmosphere Trust and Bruce Darrell spoke on the subject of food security and the possibilities of biochar.

Cap and Share Stakeholder Workshop, hosted by Comhar

August 27 – The Morgan Hotel, Dublin

Richard Douthwaite represented Feasta at this workshop, hosted by Comhar (the National Sustainable Development Council), to present the analysis of the feasibility and potential economic effects of the Cap and Share scheme undertaken by AEA Energy & Environment and Cambridge Econometrics.

Feasta Annual Lecture 2008: Capital Partnerships - a Debt-Free Solution to the Property Crash

November 5 – Central Hotel, Dublin

Chris Cook, an international expert on "Open Capital" and a widely published energy market consultant, discussed his ground-breaking ideas for capital partnerships, a financing structure that could provide a debt-free solution to the Irish property crash. Richard Douthwaite gave a stimulating introduction entitled "How Ireland got into its Property Mess". A recording of these two presentations is available on the Feasta website.

Skilling Up for Powerdown - Deconstructing Dinner

November 7 – Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford

Bruce Darrell gave a presentation about our food systems as part of the 10 week course by Cultivate.

Building the Future in an Uncertain Present

November 24 – Butler House, Kilkenny

David Korowicz presented a seminar by as part of a day-long event by Future Proof Kilkenny entitled "Future Proof Your Business". David addressed the need for resilient communities to have resilient businesses. What the business community can do now will determine how Kilkenny copes with the increasing economic impacts of a declining energy base and a world economy heading for recession. The economic impacts of Peak Oil, in particular inflation, GDP and debt financing need to be understood and planned for by any business, big or small.

Skilling Up for Powerdown - Global Citizenship: Opportunities for Change

November 28 – Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford

David Korowicz gave a presentation on international issues as part of the 10 week course by Cultivate

Community Food Initiative Stakeholder Workshop

December 1 – Comhar office, Dublin.

Bruce Darrell gave a presentation "Food Security through Community Food Initiatives" about the diverse range of community food projects and their role in establishing regional food security.

Cap and Share: A Fair Way to Cut Greenhouse Emissions

December 11 – Poznan, Poland.

Feasta hosted a side event at the UN climate conference in Poznan. Not many people in Poznan were making the case that Feasta makes; that similar policies are needed for dealing with both the oil peak and climate change. However our event was attended by some very influential attendees. One of them described the presentation as the best she had attended at the COP! Feasta's two reports on C&S in India and South Africa aroused a lot of interest and all our printed material was taken by attendees.

3. Web Developments

The discussion board on the website was extended with the introduction of a number of new forums covering broad topics such as food, energy and transport, and specific projects such as Cap and Share. A range of new multimedia material was also added to the site, including videos of all the seminars given by Feasta over the summer and the 2008 Feasta lecture. All of Feasta's 2008 publications are available for free download from the website. These include the booklet "Cap and Share - A fair way to cut greenhouse emissions" and the full text of the report to the Irish EPA assessing the adequacy of the Environmental Impact Statements prepared for major road projects.

4. Feasta Management**Staff**

Additions: Funded by our Carbon Sinks and Cycles and Smart Tax policy advice projects we've hired Corinna Byrne and Patrick McGee respectively as Lead Researchers / Project Co-ordinators. This funding has also allowed us to hire Mayra Guerra as book keeper, one day a week.

Directors

No change to our directors since last year: They are John Jopling, C  il  n Nunan, John Fitzgibbon and Mark Garavan.

Executive

Additions: Corinna Byrne and Patrick McGee.

Departures: Su-Ming Khoo, Nicola Creighton, Michaela Goetzman and Thomas Goetzman.

Continuing: Bruce Darrell, Richard Douthwaite, Gillian Fallon, Morag Friel, David Korowicz, Emer O'Siochru, Davie Philip, Mark Rutledge.