

A FLAGSHIP PROJECT FOR IRELAND

# The River Shannon

**The need for a new and bold vision to address the challenges and the opportunities the River Shannon presents.**



## **FUTURE VISION**

The recent River Shannon flooding has had a devastating effect on individuals, homes, farms, businesses and communities right up and down the River. Emotions have understandably been running high, recriminations have been flowing and quick solutions are being sought.

It is clear that some immediate actions are required to help alleviate future flooding in the areas most at

risk, but now is also a time for great vision and strategic thinking. Any solutions should be set within a wider and longer term vision for the entire River Shannon system – a River that is an incredible resource and amenity.

It is certain there is going to be a multi-million budget applied to addressing the Shannon flooding issue. However, future generations will not thank us if we don't address

the issue comprehensively and with vision.

The River Shannon has played a fundamental role in the lives of our people, our history and culture for thousands of years. It drains one fifth of our island. It has been a source of water not just for drinking, but for farming, for business, for transport, for wonderful leisure and recreation, and as a source of power. It has influenced where people live, work and visit. It is also an area of huge ecological importance, sustaining wildlife and plant life. Its role will become even more important into the future and it should be better managed to optimise this.

Ironically, given that the immediate focus is correctly on solving problems caused by a surplus of water (the flooding!), fresh water is expected to become increasingly scarce - partly due to climate change. It is estimated that less than 0.5% of the earth's water is fresh surface water (lakes and rivers); close to 98% is salt water and the rest is snow, ice or groundwater.

*"By 2025, 1.8 billion people will be living in countries or regions with absolute water scarcity, and two-thirds of the world population could live under water-stress conditions".*

**SOURCE: UNITED NATIONS**

So, while there is an immediate challenge, let's be thankful we are fortunate to have this wonderful resource which can, among other things, provide the entire country with a source of fresh water into the future. Dublin is already experiencing water shortages and water from the River Shannon has been identified as the likely solution. The River can easily accommodate this requirement, but this too should be framed within the context of a wider vision and plan for the River as an imaginative Ireland Flagship Project, one that would serve to manage and control the River to make it an even more valuable resource – and also one that is less disruptive.



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# The River Shannon - what needs to be done?

**The Shannon is a life-sustaining artery that began flowing after the end of the last glacial period. It should be shaped as a Flagship Project for Ireland.**



## ACTIONS NEEDED

- Agree that the River Shannon presents not just a challenge, but a wonderful opportunity.
- View it for what it is - a life-sustaining artery, that dominates the centre of Ireland, and that now needs intensive care.
- Create a vision for the River and deliver on it as a Flagship Project for Ireland. The visionary project should include addressing all the issues that have caused it to be disruptive, but we should also shape it to be one of the world's greatest River Tourism, Lifestyle and Environmental Projects.
- With this overall vision as the context, set up a single authority, with international expertise on-board, to be responsible for delivering on the vision into the future.
- The flood risk challenge can be defined and the multiple-causes

identified. These should be addressed over the shortest possible time, but within the context of the wider full River Shannon Flagship Project plan. The flooding is NOT being caused by climate change alone – excessive rainfall is only a contributory factor. The truth is we've not fully understood, respected or properly managed the River. The aquatic and riverside vegetation has increased; there has been encroachment of alluvial woodland into parts of the river; the drainage of our bogs and wetlands by Bord na Mona and through arterial drainage schemes and various forestry programmes has added to the flooding problem, as has certain farming practices; the level of peat and other silt has been allowed to build up over decades, and we've permitted the building of houses and other developments in areas that were clearly susceptible to flooding. These have all negatively impacted the River Shannon system. We also have too many agencies and bodies interested or responsible for aspects of the River Shannon, but none with overall responsibility. We have to reverse all of this as part of the solution.

- We should bring on-board the best expertise, wherever in the world it resides, to help advise, shape and deliver on all the actions required. For instance, the Dutch have a particular expertise when it comes to flood control, because close to two-thirds of the Netherlands is vulnerable to flooding by sea and rivers. However, if we want to create one of the world's greatest River Tourism, Lifestyle and Environmental Projects, the expertise we require is beyond just flood control. We will require a visionary plan, diverse expertise, an appropriate budget for a project of its scale and significance, and a dedicated authority, with inbuilt performance checks, responsible for its delivery into the future.



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# What could the River Shannon Flagship Project deliver?



## ACTIONS NEEDED

- An entire River Shannon system, including its tributaries and floodplains, that is far less disruptive because of a wide range of measures we will have undertaken to control the waterflows, including water absorption measures, and because we better understand and provide for floodplains.
- With fresh water likely to become scarcer into the future, a River that is an ongoing source of fresh water for Ireland... and beyond.
- The River Shannon route would be developed, in a sustainable way, to become one of the most spectacular tourist destinations in Europe. It has an incredible history and is dotted with physical reminders of our ancient past. We could interpret, present and promote it better to visitors. Its City, towns and villages could be developed as idyllic places to visit and stay, each fully embracing the River. Water and waterside activities, including cruising and angling,

could be encouraged, supported and promoted. Health tourism projects could also be encouraged. Nature could really thrive and the River system would support more abundant wildlife. It could be promoted for what it would be, a nature lovers' paradise.

- The River Shannon route could also be developed, in a sustainable way, not just for visitors – but as a lifestyle location. A wonderful place to live life and to work – with greater work opportunities, because of the proximity to the River. Ireland's growth is over-concentrated within Dublin and along the East Coast; this would also be an effective way to help optimise and disperse growth.

## CAN IRELAND AFFORD IT?

One likely question is, can we afford a visionary project of this scale? The better question is, can we afford not to do it? It will cost substantial millions to deliver it. However, think of the returns - The River Shannon is and will be a central life-sustaining artery for Ireland through the centuries ahead. The project will deliver hard economic benefits, environmental and ecological benefits and societal benefits. And, if any government is prepared, for example, to support a €2.4 billion Dublin Metro line from Dublin City to Dublin airport then they need perspective, and should be prepared to support the River Shannon Flagship Ireland Project.



**Note:** Any individual or group with an interest in the future of the River should lobby to have a River Shannon Flagship Project advanced.