

ARTICLES

Cuan Beo: reconnecting the land and the sea in Galway

Growing concern about the demise of water quality in South Galway Bay and its consequences for the quality of life in local rural villages motivated residents and businesses to come together to form Cuan Beo, a local community group.

Cuan Beo aims to work with locals to highlight the connection between water quality and quality of life.

Cuan Beo was established with the support of Bord Iascaigh Mhara's Fisheries Local Action Group (FLAG) West as a not-for-profit company with a mission of improving the quality of life, environment, economy and heritage around Galway Bay and to help develop local resources in a sustainable way. It has taken inspiration from organisations such as Burren Beo, which has had significant impact on land management in the Burren region of south Galway and north Clare.

Centred in the Kinvara Enterprise Centre, Cuan Beo is playing an active role in marine activities from Oranmore in Co Galway to Blackhead in Co Clare and surrounding catchments. Their activities focus on the belief that water and water quality underpins the economic and social fabric of the region. According to Diarmuid Kelly, Chariman of Cuan Beo, 'our aim is to raise awareness of those living in the catchment of Galway Bay, and indeed those governing it, that life quality and water quality are inextricably linked'.

To achieve this outcome, Cuan Beo has set about organising educational, heritage and resource management events to highlight the importance of protecting water quality and the marine natural resource. 'The importance of water quality to the coastal economy and livelihoods of those living in coastal communities is often overlooked' says Kelly, 'The tag line of Cuan Beo is 'reconnecting the land and the sea'. We want to help people make connections between how routine actions on land has consequences at sea. We want to connect those living inland with those in coastal communities who rely on the sea for their livelihoods. These connections have existed for millennia but have somehow eroded in recent times. Cuan Beo wishes to re-establish this connection between land and sea for the benefit of existing and future generations'.

Rather than establish new events and festivals linked to the sea, the approach used by Cuan Beo is to support existing local events such as Cruinniú



na mBad in Kinvara and the Clarinbridge Oyster Festival. The Cuan Beo 'Festival Stage' and the Cuan Beo 'Taste the Atlantic' Stage were hugely popular at this years' Cruinniú na mBad Festival. Hundreds of local, national and international visitors dropped by our stages. We had an excellent line up of speakers highlighting the importance of the aquatic and maritime resources in Galway Bay and many enjoyed the fantastic seafood available at the Taste the Atlantic Stage which was available throughout the festival. As the Cruinniú na mBad Festival coincided with National Heritage Week and Water Heritage Day, Cuan Beo, with funding from the Waters and Communities Office, organised a presentation by Professor Noel Wilkins on the heritage of the Native Oyster in Galway Bay followed by a Questions and Answers session with the popular local author.

In advance of the Clarinbridge Oyster Festival, Cuan Beo organised the Native Oyster Workshop 2017 (NOW17) which brought together Native Oyster Fishermen from the 8 remaining oyster fisheries in Ireland with the relevant Government agencies responsible for their management and protection. There is growing concern about the demise of the native oyster fisheries across Ireland and the aim of the Native Oyster Workshop was to develop a plan towards the restoration of these fisheries. The workshop heard that the Native Oyster fisheries have been in decline for the past 200 years and are currently at an all-time low. Factors such as poor water quality, absence of fishery management plans, complex governance structures and overfishing have all contributed. While a lot of work and time is required, the workshop heard that restoration efforts have been quite successful in Kerry and parts of Connemara



GALWAY HOOKERS



NATIVE FLAT OYSTER (OSTREA EDULIS)

ARTICLES



BACK ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT, OLIVER TULLY, MARINE INSTITUTE, SÉAMUS BREATHNACH, FLAG WEST, DAVE KRAUSE, COLM O'DOWD, THOMAS CONNOLLY, MICHAEL BROGAN, GERRY O'HALLORA. FRONT ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: MARY MULLINS, CLLR. EILEEN MANNION, CATHAOIRLEACH OF COUNTY GALWAY, SEÁN KYNE TD, MINISTER OF STATE AT THE DEPARTMENT OF RURAL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATIONS, CLIMATE ACTION AND ENVIRONMENT WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR NATURAL RESOURCES, COMMUNITY AFFAIRS, AND DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT, DIARMUID KELLY

through several effective management practices specific to the native oyster.

An action plan was agreed at the workshop to create a national working group in the coming weeks. The group would not just lobby for simplification in governance but also to address assessment and up-skilling of existing co-op management in each area and the provision of support and assistance in developing management plans for each fishery. Bord Iascaigh Mhara agreed to coordinate the establishment of this working group.

The day-long event concluded with the official launch of Cuan Beo, by Councillor Eileen Mannion Cathaoirleach of County Galway. The launch was also attended by Seán Kyne TD, Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment with responsibility for Natural Resources, Community Affairs, and Digital Development. Several other local elected representatives attended including Ann Rabbit TD and local councillors Martina Kinnane and Peter Feeney. The Waters and Communities Office Regional Coordinator, Ray Spain, confirmed on the evening that the local catchment which includes the River Clarin is a priority for actions to be taken to improve the water quality.

Niall Sabongi from Klaw Restaurant Dublin held a masterclass in oyster tasting with a selection of native oysters from the various fisheries across Ireland and the event was concluded with a lecture highlighting the importance of the oyster in Galway Bay from pre-historic times (4000BC) to the present day by local archaeologist and historian, Michael Gibbons.

Looking forward, Cuan Beo intends to build its membership, knowledge and capacity to support the sustainable development of resources in the coastal communities of south Galway and north Clare. Cuan Beo is a voluntary organisation and relies on funding from our many sponsors. 'While we ensure value for money from all our work, we do put emphasis on putting the money we raise to work locally and by engaging local businesses to carry out work' says Kelly. 91% of the funding Cuan Beo has raised to date has been spent in County Galway and County Clare. We would like to acknowledge and thank Fisheries Local Action Group West, the Marine Institute, the Galway County Council Agenda 21, Gastronomy 2018, Waters and Communities amongst other for their continued financial support.

Colm O'Dowd and Diarmuid Kelly, Cuan Beo
www.cuanbeo.com



NIALL SABONGI, KLAU RESTAURANT DUBLIN, AND SOME NATIVE OYSTERS