



Mountaineering Ireland Message General Election 2016

Over the next two weeks politicians will be canvassing for your vote in the General Election on 26th February. Mountaineering Ireland exists to represent and support the walkers and climbers of Ireland and to be a voice for the sustainable use of Ireland's mountains. As a Mountaineering Ireland member you can use the up-coming election as an opportunity to help protect Ireland's mountains and to secure necessary investment in our sport.

The following are critical election issues from Mountaineering Ireland's perspective which you may wish to raise and discuss with your local candidates:

Question 1 - Will you commit to providing resources for outdoor recreation?

We need a new national **outdoor recreation strategy** and the structures to implement it. This has been recommended in a recent review of Comhairle na Tuaithe. The previous National Countryside Recreation Strategy, published in 2006, had limited political support and was not properly resourced.

We need a new national outdoor recreation strategy which:

- Includes measures to **secure and improve access to the outdoors for responsible recreation**;
- Acknowledges **the value of outdoor recreation to people's health and to our economy**;
- Is implemented by **a specialist unit** within the lead Department, complemented by a new **Outdoor Recreation Council and an inter-departmental working group and is properly resourced**.

Question 2 - Will you work to protect Ireland's mountains?

Ireland's mountains provide a host of benefits to society – a range of recreation opportunities; beautiful scenery that supports our tourism industry; more than 80% of our fresh water comes from mountain rivers and streams; most of Ireland's carbon is stored in peat soils predominately in upland areas. Better management of the upland environment would help prevent flooding in lowland areas.

We need to invest to protect our upland environment for the benefit of current and future generations. We need measures to support the sustainable management of Ireland's upland areas including:

An upland agri-environment programme – as most of Ireland's uplands are privately owned the best mechanism to provide appropriate support would be through a national uplands agri-environmental scheme which recognises the eco-system services and public good delivered by hillfarmers and rewards farmers for producing a quality environment.

Implementation of the National Landscape Strategy published in 2015.

A renewable energy policy which reduces our over-reliance on onshore wind, encourages reduction in energy consumption and enables community-based energy production.

Meaningful protection for so-called 'protected areas' – Very few of the sites designated in Ireland under the Habitats Directive (Special Areas of Conservation) or under the Birds Directive (Special Protection Areas) have current management plans. Investment is urgently required for such management activities.