

**A Yes to Life, No to Mining Dispatch**

# **OUR EXISTENCE IS OUR RESISTANCE**

**mining and resistance on the  
island of Ireland.**

*Lynda Sullivan*

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*Our existence is our resistance: mining and resistance on  
the island of Ireland*  
2021

The global Yes to Life, No to Mining Network extends deep thanks to author Lynda Sullivan for the research and production of this research dispatch. We also wish to thank the many organisations, peoples' platforms and networks who have contributed their knowledge and expertise.

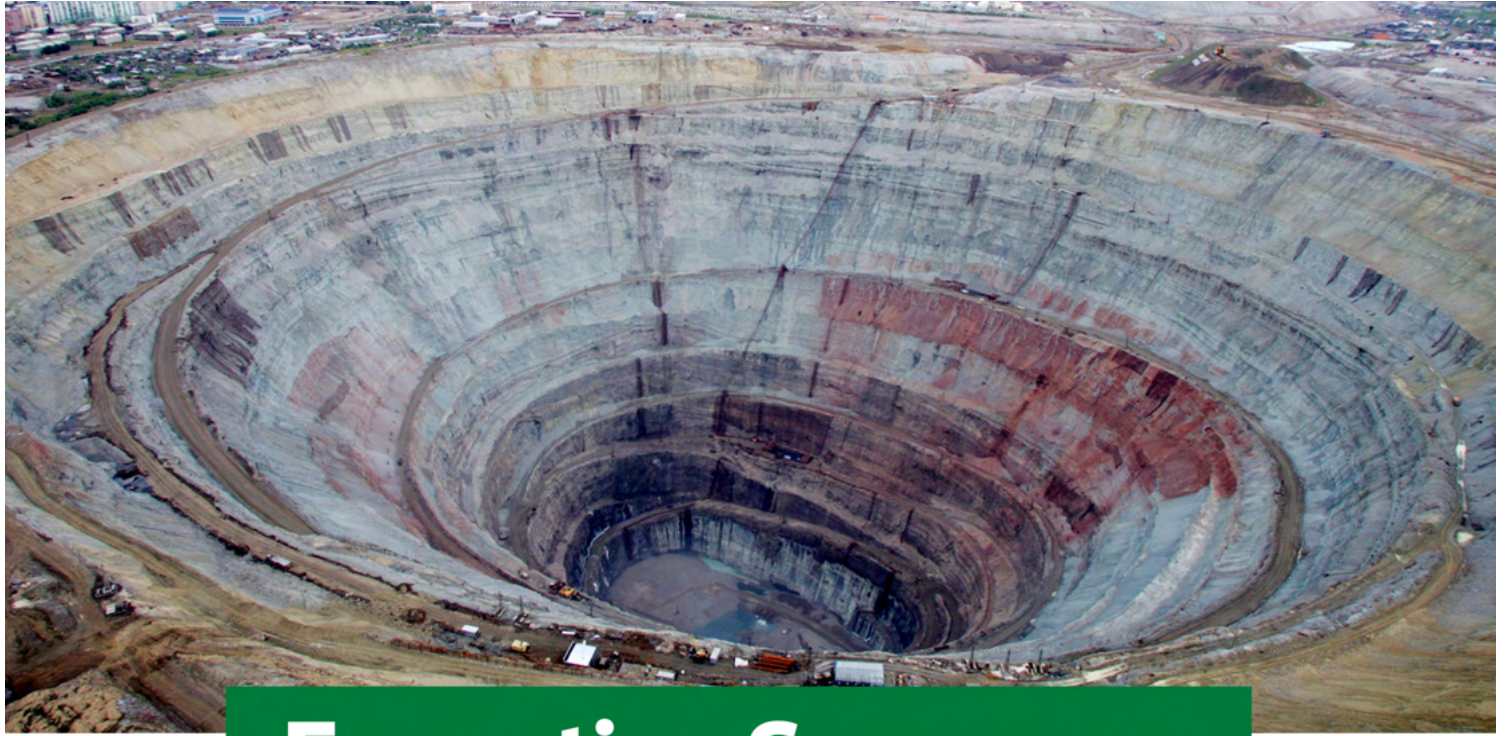
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This report is dedicated to the communities and ecosystems on the frontlines of extractive expansion across the Island of Ireland.

**Disclaimer:** All information used in this report and included in the maps produced is drawn from publicly available sources.

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# Executive Summary

The island of Ireland contains two jurisdictions, yet is one ecological area- with rivers, air, humans and pollutants flowing freely over the border. Similarly, the mining industry knows no borders and has been using similar tactics in the North and South of the island.

Ireland has a history of mining exploitation, with modern mining emerging in the 1960s in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) - after the introduction of various pieces of facilitative legislation- and in the 2000s in Northern Ireland (NI), when civil conflict abated. From that point onwards, the two governments have joined forces to sell Ireland to the mining industry as 'Open for Business'.

They have been successful: 27% of ROI is currently concessioned to mining companies for mineral exploration, alongside 25% of NI. Due to extensive mapping through the Tellus Project, funded by NI's Department for the Economy (DfE) and ROI's Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DCCAE), these figures could rise higher still - perhaps even up to 70% in NI.

Potential trade deals could further strip back regulations and open the doors for multinationals, and a new language of justification has been found through the oxymoron of 'Green Growth'. The industry and government are pushing mineral extraction as having a critical role in tackling the climate crisis, conveniently forgetting about the interlinked ecological, economic and social crises we are also facing, the common roots of which lie in the very DNA of the mining industry: extractive capitalism.



## Facilitative states

Between 1931 to 2006, the ROI enacted numerous Mineral Development Acts and is now in the process of bringing forward a new 'streamlined' Act with the aim of attracting international investment. Mineral exploitation is at the heart of government policy and planning through the National Planning Framework, backed up by the generous funding of the National Resources Programme. The ROI also either sponsors or forms part of a number of bodies that provide extensive support for the mining industry - such as Geological Survey Ireland (GSI), Irish Centre for Research in Applied Geosciences (iCRAG), the Institute of Geologists Ireland (IGI), Geoscience Ireland and lobbying body the Irish Mining and Quarrying Society.

Most of these bodies are 'all island'. That is, they span both ROI and NI. GSI and GSNI are also very closely aligned, and the lobbying body north of the border is the Mineral Products Association Northern Ireland (MPANI).

NI has only ever enacted one piece of minerals legislation, dating back to 1969. Continuing to operate under this legislation, they are ignoring the various pieces of EU and international legislation that have come into play since and which they are obliged to respect,

## Probing for projects

South of the border in the ROI, zinc, lead, lithium and gold are the main targets of exploration. Multinationals from Canada, Sweden, UK and Switzerland hope to make the next big zinc find, after previous finds at Galmoy and Lisheen, and the still operating Tara Mines. Canada and China are invested in a lithium find in Co. Carlow and Wicklow, with two Irish companies leading the exploration for gold. Irish companies have been important in many of the finds that multinational companies are now sitting on. Their tactic has been to explore, find and sell on deposits to bigger companies.

In the North, Canadian Dalradian Gold (now owned by Orion Mining Finance) have bought concessions for 10% of NI, hoping to develop a mining district beyond their current proposal for a gold mine at Curraghinalt, Co. Tyrone. As well as companies from Canada, NI concessions are also held by companies from the UK, Turkey, Australia and Ireland searching for gold, copper, cobalt, zinc, lead and silver.

The only project on the island to have a live planning application submitted is Dalradian Gold's proposal for Curraghinalt. A cyanide processing plant was originally part of this project proposal yet the company was forced to rescind this to get the project over the line.

However, the local community haven't bought into the plan to export the cyanide processing to another community elsewhere. They are also wary the company will revert to its original intentions once permission is secured. Extensive exploration has already been carried out, including over 700 boreholes and a 1700m tunnel through the hillside.

## Current projects

There are two operating metal mines on the island: Tara Mines, Co. Meath (open since 1977) and Cavanacaw Gold Mine, Co. Tyrone (in operation since 2007). Tara Mines, the largest zinc mine in Europe, plans to extend extraction by 20 years and 1.9 underground kilometres. The waste dump would consume an additional 58 hectares of land, reaching 22 stories high.

Galantas Gold's Cavanacaw Gold Mine also wants to extend underground, a shift from their open pit method of extraction, and has defeated a legal challenge that aimed to halt this expansion. However, their operations have been nevertheless halted as the PSNI have refused to use even more public resources to supervise their increased blasting plans (a requirement in NI) that Galantas Gold refused to pay for.

There is also a gypsum mine in operation at Knacknacran, Co. Monaghan, which has been the cause of significant subsidence in recent years.

Large crevices and sinkholes have left the local Gaelic Athletic Association pitch, clubhouse and community centre severely damaged and forced the evacuation of local families and businesses.

## Abandoned mines

It is not only the gypsum mine whose historical extraction is causing continued harm. In ROI, the Environmental Protection Agency has identified 27 abandoned mines that still pose a risk to the environment and human health. Four of these have operated and closed under modern legislation; the Avoca mines in Co. Wicklow, the Silvermines and Lisheen mine in Co. Tipperary, and Galmoy mine in Co. Kilkenny.





# Resistance

Resistance against mining on the island is growing. One key factor in effective resistance is to organise early. It is very difficult to stop a mine once the cart has been set in motion. This is what the communities living beside the Tara Mines found out when they tried to stop its recent expansion.

**Access to information is crucial for effective early organising to take place. Communities need access to information about the true consequences of mining and other communities' experiences around the globe. It is only in the past couple of decades that this information has become widely and freely available, thanks to the internet and rapid means of communication.**

In more recent years, local communities like those who have come together to organise against Dalradian Resources, have a better idea of what they are resisting and why. Local organising in the Sperrins has led to the formation of more than 10 community interest and environmental protection groups who are now being invited to share their experiences with others newly encountering the threat of mining in the North and South of Ireland.

The local anti-Dalradian resistance camp - the Greencastle People's Office, which serves as a hub for groups and supporters- recently celebrated 1000 days of occupation at the site designated for exploitation.

Recently in ROI a number of mining companies have abandoned prospecting licences in areas where the community has organised. Communities are now stronger, more informed and better connected across the Island.

## Alternatives & Proposals

The alternatives to extractive capitalism being discussed and promoted on the Island of Ireland can be grouped into two forms: reformative and transformative.

**Reformative initiatives hope to amend the system to incorporate better human rights and environmental protections. This also includes investing in the improvement of the recycling of minerals and metals and moving to a more circular, zero waste economy.**

**Transformative proposals involve stepping away from the system which houses extractivism and creating a new one rooted in the Rights of Communities and the Rights of Nature. It also involves becoming more autonomous in terms of food and energy. We can become food sovereign, for instance, and at the same time work to protect and re-**

The celebration of culture is also an avenue for a life-sustaining economy promoted by communities threatened by mining of the Island, who say ecologically and culturally sound tourism initiatives can offer them more lasting opportunities than mining.

On an Island riven by recent conflict, these non-extractive alternatives would help seed a peace more profound and lasting than the superficial peace that thinly veils the aggressiveneoliberal agenda promoted by both governments on the Island and embodied by the extractive industries.





# Introduction

Ireland, despite being divided into two jurisdictions for the past one hundred years, is one ecological area- with rivers, air, humans and pollutants flowing freely over borders. The global mining industry also permeates the island, and their methods of penetration are largely the same on both sides of the border.

The North of the Island has come through thirty years of recent conflict, with the beginning of the end coming in the form of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. This special context means that, despite the many similarities between North and South, differences exist in the ways the mining industry has managed to negotiate government structures and how determined community resistance to their advances has been.

Historically, Ireland has long been exploited for its minerals. Small-scale mining stretches back to the Bronze Age. Extraction expanded and intensified massively during British colonial rule in Ireland and the industrial revolution. This intensification encompasses a 'gold rush' from 1795 – 1830 and the steady extraction of copper. With the arrival of the American Civil War in the 1860s and the collapse of mineral prices, the Irish mining industry also declined. It continued to flounder into the early 1900s, unable to compete with mineral and metal mines in Africa and Spain's copper mines.

After the formation of the Irish Republic, the newly-formed state attempted to restart mining by passing various Mineral Development Acts (passed in 1931, 1940 and 1960 initially, with more to come later) and introducing tax cuts for the industry. From the 1960s onwards, extraction expanded, especially for zinc and lead – leading the Republic to become 10th in the world for zinc production and 12th for lead.

North of the border, the same was attempted, though later, with The Mineral Development Act of 1969 and the mapping efforts of the Geological Survey Northern Ireland (GSNI) (funded by the Department for the Economy, DfE), which published a geochemical survey of the mineral potential in the Sperrin Mountains in 1976.

Exploration in the 1980s led to the discovery of two major gold deposits in County Tyrone, at Curraghinalt and Cavanacaw. Northern Ireland (NI) is said to hold one of the world's richest undeveloped seam of gold. Early attempts to exploit these deposits failed, as NI was in the midst of the 30-year civil conflict, known as The Troubles, and transporting explosives around the country for mining purposes wasn't viable. It was only in the late 1990s, as the jurisdiction moved towards peace, that the industry began to re-emerge.

A neoliberal model of development was embraced as part of the Northern Ireland peace process. This meant the government in the North could join the South in advertising to the global mining industry that Ireland was 'Open for Business'.

In 2019 the Republic of Ireland (ROI) was ranked by the Fraser Institute as 2nd in the world for the "attractiveness of their mining policies", previously ranking 1st for five years in a row then dropping briefly to 4th in 2018. NI ranked 6th up until 2018 when the reporting stopped.

One mining company sums up this attractiveness:

**"Ireland has an established mining tradition, actively encouraging governments in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, user-friendly legislation, excellent infrastructure and pragmatic environmental controls. There are no restrictions on foreign investment in Ireland and no difficulties with capital repatriation."**

'Open for Business' messaging and policymaking has succeeded in making the Island of Ireland a haven for mining investment. At the time of writing, 27% of ROI is currently concessioned to mining companies for mineral exploration, alongside 25% of NI.

Communities, activists and advocates for the environment fear that this surge in extractive interest will only increase as both jurisdictions look to further open their markets through trade deals that seek to further strip back environmental regulations and democratic accountability.

ROI's government looks set to approve CETA - the EU trade deal with Canada, and NI will be subject to whatever trade deals the UK rushes to make post-Brexit. Already the UK's Conservative government is asking to join the CPTPP, a Trans-Pacific trade deal including Canada and Australia, both home to some of the world's largest mining companies, many of which have less than sparkling records on human rights, the environment and climate change.





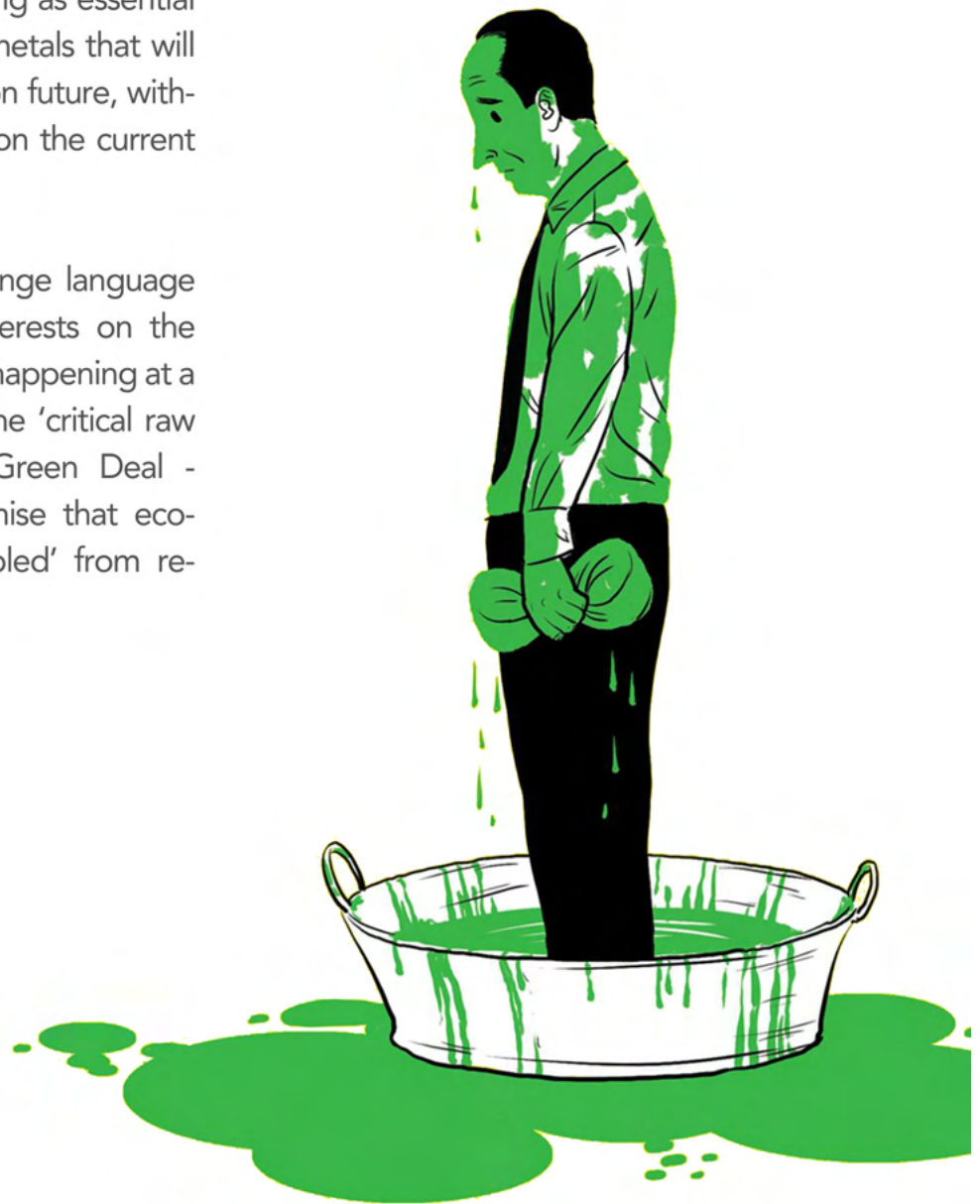
The intensification of mining on the island to fuel extractive capitalism has been a goal shared by ROI, NI and the mining industry for some time now, yet in recent years they have found a new language in which to cloak it.

In global activism calling for climate action and a Just Transition to renewable energy sources, mining interests have spotted a new opportunity to push their agenda. Ignoring the calls for system change at the heart of protest movements, company directors, PR agencies and politicians have positioned mining as essential to providing the minerals and metals that will help us transition to a low carbon future, without having to change or question the current neoliberal mindset.

The co-optation of climate change language and framings by extractive interests on the Island of Ireland reflects what is happening at a EU level in their scramble for the 'critical raw materials' for the European Green Deal - based on the impossible premise that economic growth can be 'decoupled' from resource use.

Former Minister for Natural Resources in ROI, Sean Canney, sums up this trend:

"The minerals sector is important to Ireland and to Europe as it provides the raw materials for society's needs and going forward for green energy and the circular economy."



# MINING SCOPE, OPERATIONS AND POLICY

## ROI: The facilitative state

ROI's prime position in attractiveness to mining companies, according to the government, comes from the 'clarity and transparency of the regulatory system'. However, others point to the low tax and irregular royalties that companies are required, or not required, to pay.

In 2017, a 'streamlined' Minerals Development Act was enacted (though at time of writing it is yet to commence) with a view to further 'attract international investment'. One new addition is the creation of so-called retention licences that give companies more time to deal with 'access issues' or 'environmental concerns' without losing their claims. The new Act also expands legislation for the compulsory acquisition of land and rights if the landowner refuses to sell.

Dolomitic limestone was initially included in the provisions of the Act, but was later removed due to concerns about the quarrying industry. Dolomitic limestone's exclusion from the Act is problematic as it is the host ore for all known zinc and lead deposits, creating a potential loophole for mining companies wishing to mine these minerals without adhering to even the limited regulations in the Act.

### *At the heart of state policy*

ROI has embedded extraction into the heart of their policies and programmes. The National Planning Framework, as part of Project Ireland 2040, states that "The planning process will play a key role in realising the potential of the extractive industries sector by identifying and protecting important reserves of aggregates and minerals from development that might prejudice their utilisation."

This minerals safeguarding is backed up by extensive funding. The Natural Resources Programme within the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DCCAE) was allocated €24.5m in Budget 2020 (DPER, 2020). Within its five main aims, three of them relate to supporting geoscience research, project development and job creation, with a majority percentage being aimed at the minerals sector. Their headline project is the completion of The Tellus Project through the funding of Geological Survey Ireland (GSI); an extensive mapping project of the geological and geophysical opportunities in the country. Once completed, the country will be 'the most detailed mapped country in the world.' GSI is also gathering data on offshore mineral resources through the EMODnet and MINDeSEA projects.



## *Support scaffolding*

Joining state support for the industry is a scaffolding of semi-state or state-funded bodies - which together form a fortified structure within which extractivism can thrive. The most pervasive one, illustrating the entwinement of state bodies, academia and the extractive industries, is iCRAG (Irish Centre for Research in Applied Geosciences). Four state partners join GSI, seven academic institutions and over 60 industry partners in this EU-funded endeavor. Some of the promises iCRAG makes to their industry partners are access to research, risk mitigation, tax relief, competitive advantage and access to an “exceptionally targeted and highly trained talent pool”.

This talent pool is matched not only with industry opportunities on the island but also globally through Geoscience Ireland. This body, which is sponsored by several Irish government departments, scouts for international business for its corporate membership, which comprises multinationals as well as Irish companies.

Then we have the Irish Geoscientists Institute (IGI), whose aim is to promote and advance geoscience on the Island, with mining having by far the largest share of its geoscientist members. IGI has invested much time and effort in recent years in packaging mineral extraction up as climate action.

Their 20th anniversary conference in 2019 included a panel entitled ‘Climate Emergency and the role of Geoscientists’, sponsored tellingly by Boliden Tara Mine Ltd. They invited climate scientists and a community activist (this author included), which spurred some optimism that their agenda could be debated and challenged. However, recent publications have shown a deepening of the belief that we can mine our way out of the climate crisis.

**In March 2021 the IGI produced a ‘factsheet’ entitled Mining and our Green Future where they state:**

“Climate change requires an immense response across all of society and the economy. Mineral exploration and mining are essential for ensuring a stable and sustainable supply of metals to support this.”

The premise is that energy use and consumption are increasing and so more mining is needed to provide the raw materials to satisfy this demand with renewables. Yet this leaves untouched the core of the problem which is the demand itself. The unquestioned belief in growthism has led the industry to co-opt the climate crisis as an excuse for more of what has gotten us into this mess in the first place.

# State Mining and Prospecting Areas

1 May 2021



An Roinn Comhshaoil,  
Aeráide agus Cumarsáide  
Department of the Environment,  
Climate and Communications

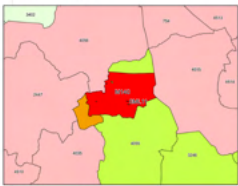
The area boundaries on this map are approximate.  
Details are available from the Geoscience Regulation Office.

0 25 50 100 Km

Current Prospecting Licences	432
Current State Mining Licences	6
Current State Mining Leases	10

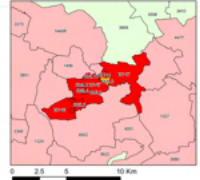


Lisheen Mine



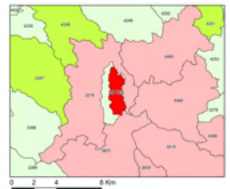
0 1.25 2.5 5 Km

Navan Mine



0 2.5 5 Km

Drummond / Knocknacran Mine



0 2.5 5 Km

## Available Ground

- Competition Area
- Open Area - No Incentives
- Open Area - Incentives

## Unavailable Ground\*\*

- Prospecting Licence Held
- State Mining Facility
- Licence Offered / Unavailable
- Competition Closed
- National Parks and other Excluded Areas

## Geography

- Lake
- Urban Area

## Licence Holders

- Adventus Exploration Ltd. (15)
- Adventus Zinc Ireland Ltd. (35)
- Aurum Mineral Resources Ltd. (1)
- BMEx Pty. Ltd. (4)
- Ballinalack Resources Ltd. (5)
- Beal Na Blath Resources Ltd. (11)
- Blackstairs Lithium Ltd. (11)
- Bolden Tara Mines Ltd. (52)
- Centenary Resources Ltd. (3)
- Connemara Granite Two (1)
- Connemara Mining Co. Ltd. (4)
- Conroy Gold Ltd. (1)
- Conroy Gold and Natural Resources Plc. (10)
- Dan Morrissey Ireland Ltd. (2)
- Diversified Asset Holdings Pty. Ltd. (3)
- Erria Zinc Ltd. (5)
- Firecrest Resources Ltd. (3)
- Foresight Exploration Ltd. (10)
- Glenore Zinc Ireland Ltd. (10)
- Gold Nole Minerals Ltd. (3)
- Great Glen Resources Ltd. (7)
- Group Eleven Mining and Exploration Ltd. (33)
- Hamman Metals Ireland Ltd. (7)
- Hendrick Resources (Ireland) Ltd. (3)
- IMC Exploration Ltd. (6)
- Irish Marine Oil Ltd. (2)
- Irish Resource Exploration Ltd. (3)
- LRH Resources Ltd. (15)
- Longford Zinc Mining Ltd. (6)
- Minco Ireland Ltd. (2)
- Minorex Ltd. (5)
- Oriel Selection Trust Ltd. (10)
- Omagh Minerals Ltd. (3)
- Raptor Resources Ltd. (65)
- Rennicks and Bennett Ltd. (1)
- Shannon Resources Ltd. (4)
- TILZ Minerals Ltd. (6)
- Teck Ireland Ltd. (49)
- Trove Metals Ltd. (2)
- Tullyduff Explorations (1)
- Unicorn Mineral Resources Ltd. (15)
- Viridian Metals Ireland Ltd. (1)
- Westland Exploration Ltd. (1)

\*\*Unavailable ground may be available for application for certain minerals. Please see the Competition Booklet for further information.

**Map 1: Prospecting  
licences ROI**

Prepared by the Geoscience Regulation Office  
Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications  
Reference Mining Licence No. EN/001723  
© Geoscience Regulation/Department of the Environment



# Probing for projects

The ROI has already concessioned 27% of the country to exploration companies. 454 prospecting licences have been sold out of a potential two thousand (with each licence normally representing a townland).

These licences are held by 46 companies. Canadian firm Group Eleven Resources holds 99 licences and Swedish company Boliden holds 55. Beyond Canada and Sweden, companies with licences are also registered in China, Australia, the UK and Ireland.

## Zinc

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Used in batteries, electric cars, solar panels and wind turbines, demand for zinc's is set to rise under the 'green growth' paradigm and the transition away from fossil fuels.

Ireland is ranked No.1 in the world for zinc found per square kilometre. The biggest extractor of this metal so far on the island has been Swedish company Boliden, which claims its Tara Mine can run for another 20 years (more information under 'current projects' below).

As Boliden expands Tara, other big hitters such as Canadian Group Eleven and Anglo-Swiss company Glencore are hot on their heels in the scramble to establish Ireland's next big zinc mine and, as Group Eleven puts it, 'to generate exponential shareholder returns'.

Both Group Eleven and Glencore have made substantial zinc discoveries at Stonepark and Pallas Green in Co. Limerick and Ballinalack in Co. Westmeath. Drilling has already commenced at these sites.

Other Canadian firms such as Teck and Adventus, with 49 and 35 prospecting licences respectively, are also vying for their piece of the pie. Irish firm Arkle (formerly Connemara Mining) has been key to some of the zinc discoveries and is a junior partner in ventures with Group Eleven and Teck.



# Lithium

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Demand for lithium, at present a key mineral for the production of battery technologies, electric vehicles and other modern technologies, is rising and predicted to continue doing so, leading to a global boom in prospecting for this 'white gold'.

The exploitation of Ireland's lithium is creeping ever closer, with the help of Canadian and Chinese companies.

After an Irish firm's decades' long rock sampling exploration efforts in Co Carlow and Co. Wicklow showed significant potential, Ganfeng Lithium Co. Ltd of China and International Lithium Corp (ILC) of Canada joined forces in 2013 to create Blackstairs Lithium Limited. They registered their creation in low-tax ROI and embarked on a campaign of drilling in what is now known as the Avalonia Project.

ILC brands itself as a world leading 'green tech resource explorer'. While Ganfeng has the expertise to carry the process on through refining and processing and into battery manufacturing.

Eventually Ganfeng intends to increase its share in Blackstairs to 79%.

# Gold

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IGI lists gold as one of the metals critical to the green economy, yet only 12% of gold produced is for industry demand (with 60% made into adornments and 28% for bank vaults and private investments) and this is not for renewables.

Despite this, Irish companies are leading gold prospecting efforts in ROI. Arkle Resources has two active exploration sites. At Mine River, near Avoca, Arkle is operating under the notion of 'closeology'- searching for gold across an area of 340km<sup>2</sup> near previous finds made during the 18th Century Wicklow Gold Rush. The company's second site is at Inishowen, Co. Donegal, where they have been drilling since 2016 and seem very enthusiastic about what the drilling has recently uncovered. The company has publicly boasted that the find is similar to that made by Dalradian Resources' proposed project at Curraghinalt, Co. Tyrone, NI.

Conroy Gold has a number of exploration sites active, with the Clontibret target (Co. Monaghan) being the most advanced. The company is currently planning a first operational open pit gold mine there. They have three other main gold targets, and some minor ones, along what is known as the Longford-Down Massif.



# Current projects

## ***Tara Mines, Navan, Co. Meath***

Tara Mines is Europe's biggest zinc mine. It's operator, the Swedish company Boliden, has been responsible for numerous environmental disasters across the globe, including in its home country of Sweden where it was responsible for what was arguably the biggest tailings dam failure in modern Swedish mining history [see Scandinavia dispatch for more information].

The company has also been embroiled in controversy over the case of Arica, Chile where Boliden shipped 20,000 tons of lead and arsenic contaminated smelter waste, knowing that the company accepting it couldn't dispose of it safely. Over 800 local residents sued the company for causing environmental poisoning, which they claim led to health problems such as cancer, breathing difficulties, rashes, aching bones and miscarriages. The lawsuit came after Boliden repeatedly refused to accept any responsibility or compensate those suffering from poisoning. In March 2018 a Swedish District Court ruled in favour of Boliden, dismissing the plaintiff's compensation claim.

Tara Mines opened in 1977 and continues to operate, with Boliden saying it could extend 20 years into the future through the Tara Deep project, which will reach 1.9 km underground. The tailings pond, where by-products and mining waste are stored, was recently granted an extension of 58 hectares, bringing it to a capacity of 13.6 million cubic metres and reaching to more than 22 metres above ground level. The company admits that after 2026 it will need to increase the capacity of the tailings pond even further.

Boliden's mine and waste pond extension was objected to by local residents, who live with the noise and disturbance of 42 lorry journeys per hour, 9 months of the year. There has already been incidences of trucks overturning on small roads not built for heavy industry. The community also questions who will shoulder the responsibility of the Tara Mine's mammoth waste dump after the closure of the mine.



## ***Drumgossatt underground and Knacknacran open pit gypsum mine, Co. Monaghan***

This soft mineral mine is owned by Gyproc, a UK subsidiary of the Saint-Gobain global brand. The company has had a presence in the area for over 80 years but now threatens the very existence of the villages that have hosted it after numerous crevices and sinkholes opened up over the past few years.

The largest occurred in September 2018, after the company pumped mine waste and unusually large quantities of water into the old, unmonitored underground mine. This weakened supporting pillar, which dissolved and eventually collapsed, causing a giant, saucer-shaped depression, 350m in diameter and 5ft deep across the Mageracloone Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) pitch which, just 36 hours earlier, had hosted hundreds of people, mostly children.

The sinkhole also split open the GAA clubhouse and adjacent community centre. Families had to be evacuated for months, moving to rented accommodation away from their homes - which have now lost their value- and their businesses - for which they can no longer get insurance coverage. Further sinkholes appeared in August 2019 and January 2020, compounding the damages and local people's troubles.

## ***Abandoned mines - legacy of contamination***

The legacy of contamination from abandoned mines in ROI suggests communities like those living near the Tara Mine have good reason to worry about end-of-life care of current or new projects. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has identified 27 abandoned mines in ROI that still pose a risk to the environment and human health. Four of these have operated and closed under modern legislation.

Copper was extracted at the Avoca mines in Co. Wicklow from 1720s to 1982, with silver, iron, gold and other targets also mined to a lesser degree. Once abandoned, mine workings have been allowed to flood, releasing untreated mine water into the nearby Avoca River. Twenty five years after mine closure the river was receiving 35 litres of acid mine drainage per second, leading locals to call it 'the poison river' and the EPA to label it as 'the most metal polluted river in Ireland'.

Another shining example of how mines continue to contaminate well after official closure, is the Silvermines, Co. Tipperary. These mine workings date back even further than Avoca. Since the 13th Century, ownership of the mines has been passed around the English landed gentry until a new variety of coloniser - multinational corporations- arrived on the scene in the 1960s.



In 1962 the Canadian International Mogul Mines took over and exploited the silver mines until 1982. They quickly sold the mine off after closure and responsibility for aftercare was passed to the state. Just two years after mine closure, the waste slurry had turned to dust in dry weather and blew toxic 'black clouds' over the surrounding area, forcing the local community to evacuate. Since that time, mine waste has continued to contaminate the land and water leading to numerous incidents of cattle deaths and increasing rates of asthma and cancer in the local population. As recently as 2017, cattle died from lead poisoning and a number of local herds were found to have unsafe levels of lead in their milk. By 2018, over 35 years after the mine closure, the construction of a mine waste management facility to deal with these contamination problems still hadn't been completed.

Two recently closed zinc and lead mines at Galmoy in Co. Kilkenny and Lisheen in Co. Tipperary were the first two mines to be opened, operated and shut under modern legislation. Mining at Lisheen, by Anglo American who then sold to Vedanta Zinc International, ceased in 2015. The mine was responsible for the contamination of two rivers, the Drish and Rosses town, with 'unsatisfactorily high levels of metals, including lead and zinc' found by the EPA. Health and Safety was also an issue, with four fatalities and one serious injury during the mine's operation.

Arcon Mining (with an Irish-Australian majority shareholder) rode out a six-year planning row in order to open Galmoy mine in 1997. Arcon later merged with Swedish-Canadian Lundin Mining in 2005. During its lifetime, the mine took the life of one worker and seriously injured another. It closed in 2012, yet two ex-managers of the Lisheen mine formed Shanoon Resources in 2018 to submit a planning application to reopen it under the new name of Garrylaun Mine. They withdrew their application in 2019, but have said they plan to apply again.

Both mines consumed huge amounts of energy and emitted enormous amounts of carbon dioxide over their lifespan. According to the EPA, the Galmoy mine consumed energy equivalent to the annual energy use of 2,000 households and a total carbon dioxide emission of 422,500 tonnes. Lisheen consumed more than three times the amount of energy as Galmoy - the equivalent of 6,600 households.



## NI: The facilitative state

NI does not have the extensive support structures the mining industry enjoys in ROI, but many of the institutions - such as IGI, are 'all island', backed up by substantial cooperation between Geological Survey Ireland and Geological Survey Northern Ireland. Indeed, GSNI led the way with The Tellus Project – mapping NI between 2004-2008. The border counties came next between 2011-2013, before moving on to ROI. GSNI is also part of the 'world-leading' British Geological Survey.

Environmental campaigners believe that through its mining regime the NI government is in breach of its obligations under EU and international law. There has been no new national legislation concerning minerals since 1969, and so by continuing to rely on this old law, the state is ignoring the supranational laws that have come into force in the intervening period.

Examples of such laws include are the EU Habitats Directive (1992), which protects rare, threatened or endemic species, and the Aarhus Convention (1998), which ensures access to justice, information, and public participation in decision making.

In addition, a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) has never been carried out on the NI mineral licencing programme, as required under the protocol on SEA in the Espoo Convention, which sets out the obligations of different parties to assess the environmental impact of projects including mining. As a result, in NI, once mining companies have a prospecting licence they are able to undertake exploratory drilling under Permitted Development Rights, without the need for any environmental assessments. This provision has recently been removed for Petroleum exploration but not for minerals.





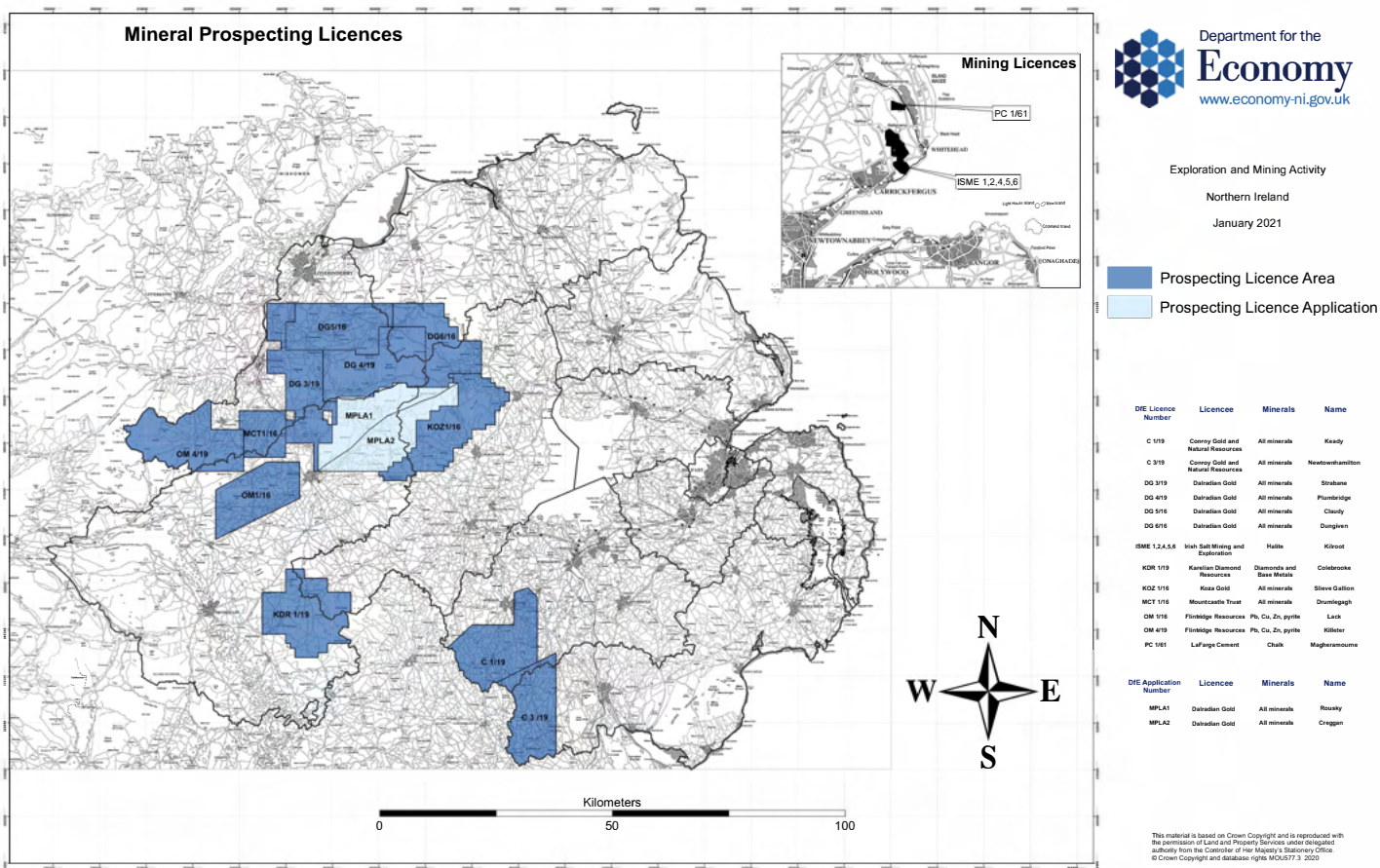
# Probing for projects

Since the Tellus Project laid bare NI’s geological composition, interest in NI bedrock has skyrocketed, with the media declaring a “mining bonanza”. Almost 25% of NI’s total land area is now under mining concession, with the potential for this to rise to 70% (DfE).

Dalradian Resources alone owns concessions for 10% of NI’s surface area, widening the company’s interest far beyond the Curraghinalt site. In 2016 the CEO of Dalradian Gold, Patrick FN Anderson stated his intentions for the Sperrins in an interview with Bloomberg:

**"I'm not talking about a single mine here, we are working on a mine camp here."**

Even before the establishment of an industrial-scale mine, Dalradian’s exploratory activities are have elicited strong concerns and resistance. Residents in the town of Omagh, for example, have raised concerns that Dalradian are drilling just 360m from Glencordial reservoir, which supplies water for 21,000 people in Omagh.



Map 2: Prospecting licences NI

Other mining concessions (excluding those identified for salt, chalk and gas extraction) sit with Flintridge Resources (a subsidiary of Galantas Gold, Canada/UK), Conroy Gold (Ireland), Koza Gold (UK subsidiary of Koza Altın, Turkey), Karelian Diamond Resources (Irish, a company established from the purchasing of Karelian Diamonds Limited from Conroy Diamonds and Gold, and Nordic Diamonds Limited from Conroy Plc. Chairman: Richard Conroy), and Mountcastle Trust (of the 5th Duke of Abercorn, landed gentry who is also behind an oil and gas prospect in NI covering 1000km).

In 2018, Conroy Gold was granted a prospecting licence (C1/18) in The Ring of Gullion, South Armagh. This is a Special Area of Conservation and part of the EU wide Natura 2000 protected areas. This area connects to their prospecting licences in ROI, completing their exploration of the Longford-Down Massif.

Flintridge Resources is a subsidiary of Galantas Gold (registered on both the London and Toronto Stock Exchanges). They were granted prospecting licence OM1/16 in January 2016 to explore for gold, lead, copper and zinc around Omagh.

Turkish company Koza has joined forces with Australia's Walkabout Resources in a joint venture to explore for cobalt, copper and silver in Slieve Gallion, Co. Tyrone. Walkabout would farm-in, or increase its shares, to up to 75% after putting up the investment.

Rare earth metals such as niobium and tantalum have been found in the Mourne Mountains, in Co. Down, but so far their exploitation has been deemed uncommercial.





# Proposed Projects

## ***The Sperrin Mountains***

A Canadian firm, Dalradian Resources hopes to open Europe's biggest gold mine in the Sperrin Mountains, within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), beside a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) and within the vicinity of many archaeological sites. The area is also of religious and historical interest, hosting a 17th century Mass Rock and the Green Road used by the last Kings of Ulster in the Flight of the Earls.

In 2017 Dalradian submitted a 10,000 page planning application to the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) for a gold mine worth £3bn with a life span of 20-25 years, at the site in Curraghinalt, near Greencastle.

The company had been conducting exploratory work since 2009. Over 700 boreholes have been dug to date, yet no assessment has been done on the cumulative effects of so much drilling. This is because exploratory drilling for minerals is considered 'Permitted Development' in NI, with each borehole considered in isolation with cumulative effects ignored. Dalradian has also excavated a 1700m horizontal tunnel into the hillside from where they removed 15,000 tonnes of sample rock in 2017. Residents of the local community allege that dried up water sources and substantial flooding due to damaged bogland have directly resulted from Dalradian's exploration activities



Objections to Dalradian's project skyrocketed when the planning application revealed plans for a cyanide processing plant, as well as a 200 feet high waste rock pile – to be situated just 1.2km from the local school, church, playing field and houses.

After sustained and substantial resistance, in August 2019, Dalradian submitted a package of Further Environmental Information (FEI) to DfI in which they announced they are dropping plans to use cyanide in their operations in Tyrone, instead outsourcing them to an unidentified site abroad. Local communities remain sceptical of this move, believing it was done so planning permission would be granted, only to be reintroduced later.

Dalradian have been discharging mining effluent into the Owenkillew River, which is an SAC and home to the endangered freshwater pearl mussel, which is protected under the EU Habitats Directive.

A local resident successfully challenged the discharge consent granted by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) in a court battle that lasted two years. However, Dalradian has since submitted three more discharge applications which the NIEA is currently considering.

The decision to approve Dalradian's planning application rests with the Department for Infrastructure (DfI). In advance of a decision, however, there will be a public inquiry run by the Planning Appeals Commission. The local community have raised concerns about the inequity of this situation, with Dalradian able to finance the appearance of expensive experts to back up their case, a luxury local residents cannot afford.



## Current Operations

### ***Cavanacaw Gold Mine***

The Cavanacaw gold mine, 3 miles south of Omagh town, has been in production since 2007 and is the only working gold mine on the Island of Ireland. Planning permission was granted to Galantas Gold Corporation in 1995 but operations didn't start until 2007 due to one of the country's longest running public inquiries, in which residents opposed the mine's opening on environmental and public health grounds. The mine went ahead in the end and in 2015 an extension was approved, moving from open pit to underground.

In 2019 Galantas had to suspend blasting operations after the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), which must observe all blasting activities, said they could not supervise the increased blasting plans while the company refuses to pay for the cost of this service. The company's share prices plummeted and Galantas subsequently cut their staff by more than half. Since then share prices have recovered somewhat, due to the increase in the price of gold, but the mine remains out of operation.



## ***Abandoned mines***

There are 2,400 known abandoned mine sites in NI, which are now property of the Department for Environment. These mines may be dangerous, with the deepest shaft measuring a 366 metre vertical drop. However, unlike the ROI, there has not been an investigation into the levels of contamination still present in or emitted from these mines, perhaps because there is no Environmental Protection Agency in the North.



# RESISTANCE TO MINING

## Republic of Ireland

When the current and previous mines in ROI opened, it was not so easy to access information about what was happening in other parts of the world, a key tool for current mining resistance groups. Tara Mines, for instance, opened in pre-internet days of 1977. The same is true for the communities of Galmoy and Lisheen. In this context, it is very easy for the rhetoric of jobs and benefits to win out. Then, when the true effects of mining are felt locally and a community wants to put a stop to operations, it is very difficult. The runaway train has left the station.

In 2010 when residents of Tara learned of Boliden's plans to expand the mine's tailings pond further, this time vertically, they could read about the company's track record of other tailings pond disasters, including at the Aitik copper mine in Sweden and another in southern Spain. They organised the Residents Against Tailings Expansion (RATE), but by then they were swimming against the tide.

More recently, communities resisting mining in ROI have seen greater success because they have organised early and access information on the countless examples of destructive mining around the world.

After a prolonged campaign from Cavan Mining Objection Group (CMOG), Australian BMEx PTY surrendered their prospecting licence for the Cavan area. Great Glen Resources did the same after the Redhills Action Against Mining organised. Save the Hills of Donegal saw off Omagh Minerals application for a prospecting licence there, as did Protect Connemara with BTU Metals Corp who wanted to prospect in an SAC. Whether or not there were unknown factors behind the scenes causing these companies to abandon their licences, the common known factor was local, organised resistance.



However, the experience of the 10-year long Shell to Sea campaign against the Corrib Gas Project in Co. Mayo, has shown the extent to which the ROI state will go to promote extractivism – with evidence of violence, threats of sexual assault, infiltration, claims of corruption and attempts divide and break the community.

It is possible that modern informed and connected resistance, equipped with knowledge and strategies, has not yet met with the discovery of a lucrative target and the accompanying oppression from the facilitative state. With 27% of the ROI concessioned and companies pouring into this 'highly prospective and underexplored region', however, it is perhaps only a matter of time.

## Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, the Cavanacaw project was the first modern mining project to open, taking advantage of newfound peace. The lack of recent mining examples, as well as the fact that communities were still reeling from 30 years of conflict, meant that the resistance against this project was small. Yet it was dedicated. Due to the tireless efforts of a few, Galantas Gold was held off for 12 years in one of the longest running public enquiries ever. Then the company was further stung when they had to pay residents compensation for effectively imprisoning locals in their homes with constant lorry flow. More recent legal action to detain the expansion of the project failed, but it could be argued that it did draw public attention back to the site. PSNI has since refused to divert public resources to supervise the company's intensified blasting programme, leading to the ongoing suspension of mining at the site.



Next to arrive was Dalradian Resources, with its cyanidation plans for the heart of the Sperrin Mountain. The company arrived in a community historically marginalised during colonisation and deeply impacted by The Troubles. Local people quickly realised, given the Cavanacaw experience, that more than legal strategies would be needed if the Canadian company's mine was to be halted.



Decentralised, grassroots organising has been the strength of anti-mining campaigns in the Sperrins. As has the community's awareness that the NI state is not likely to protect them. Several resistance groups have sprung up. Save Our Sperrins was the first group to form in June 2015.

Since that time, more than 10 other groups have emerged in the Sperrins, resisting not only Dalradian's plans for Greencastle and beyond, but the plans future companies might have for the area.

Together, these groups maintain the Greencastle People's Office protest camp, which marked its 1000-day anniversary in October 2020, on land leased by Dalradian. A welcoming cuppa is offered from cosy caravans to visitors who have come from near and far in a camp that has become a vital space for solidarity exchanges. Visitors with experience and knowledge to share have arrived from the Lakota Nation, Honduras, Romania and Canada to name a few. International solidarity has been a pillar of this campaign.



Legal strategies have also been employed. Objection letters signed (nearing 40,000 in number). When needed, these strategies have been backed up by mass mobilisation and direct action.



Campaigners in the Sperrins also continue to support communities in the rest of the island who are facing similar threats, sharing their knowledge, experiences and example.

## Caim

In February 2021 a new network was announced - Communities Against the Injustice of Mining (CAIM). This network stretches across the island, bringing together communities resisting mining and campaigning for a future beyond extractivism. It represents the vocalisation and strengthening of connections that were already forming. Caim is an ancient Irish word meaning 'protective circle', and their moto is 'ni neart go cur le cheile': together we are stronger.



# ALTERNATIVES AND PROPOSALS

In both the north and south of the Island, state mining regimes have proved grossly inadequate for protecting both human rights and the environment. Rather, they excel at putting the interests of multinationals over citizens.

## URGENT REFORMS

Activists on the Island are calling for what the UNDP calls 'Participatory and Integrated Land Use Planning', through which relevant departments and levels of government and local communities come together to plan how the land should and should not be used before any exploratory licences are granted to third parties. In other words, a democratic process in which communities have a say before the extractive industries are invited in.

Human rights assessments are also needed for any licences that are handed out, as called for by Friends of the Earth NI, as well as strategic environmental and social assessments at every stage in the exploration and extraction processes.

There is also increasing recognition that these checks and balances in the system will never be enough if the current model of extractive capitalism continues to be embraced by both states. Groups across the Island are working to address the intertwined issues of overconsumption and seed a more circular economy, reducing the need for primary mining and creating new jobs and industries in the process.



A good example of this is Zero Waste North West – an organised, non-hierarchical group of activists from Derry and Donegal who are leading the way to a zero waste circular economy in their council areas. They were key to Derry becoming the first city on the islands of Ireland and Britain to adopt a strategy to make the vision a reality. One of their initiatives aimed at tackling over consumption is their annual Enough Stuff Festival.

Another great council initiative is RepairMyStuff.ie led by Monaghan County Council yet now expanding out to cover the rest of ROI. This directory connects consumers to repair services nearby. On a community level, the now international phenomenon of Repair Cafes has also taken off, with Repair Café Ireland promoting the different volunteer initiatives across the island that repair instead of dispose of technologies rich in minerals and metals.

Other enterprises are emerging that deal in electronics recycling – both for and non-profit (see: WEEE Ireland – non-profit, RecycleIT.ie – social enterprise, Avenue Recycling – for profit).

Research is being carried out to expand what can be gained by recycling. For instance, research by EPA Ireland shows that indium, a critical mineral for solar panel manufacture, can be extracted from recycled LCD TV screens.

These are positive steps in nations that consume large volumes of minerals and metals. However, state attention and investment need to be ramped up substantially, especially when compared with far more substantial state efforts to promote extractivism.



# DEEPER TRANSFORMATIONS

State-led action cannot be relied on, however, and recycling is not enough on its own. As we have seen, both Irish states are a long way down the neoliberal pathway and intent on selling the Island to the highest, or earliest bidder. The experiences of Shell to Sea campaigners and those resisting mining in the Sperrins expose the lengths to which the two states will go to push through extractive projects. Both are deeply conflicted and at present appear to favour securing investment over their elected duty to protect citizens and the environment. This is a dilemma common to extractive states.

In this context, while states can and should play a more positive and active role, the transformative changes towards more 'post-extractive' societies will come from elsewhere. For example, from the emerging, Island-wide movement in which communities are stepping out of the 'Box of Allowable Activism', taking their power back and working locally to protect their rights and environment.

One of the ways in which communities are doing this is by working to enshrine the Rights of Communities and the Rights of Nature in local law and influencing local democracy. Recent council elections saw a move away from the larger sectarian parties, and a move towards smaller parties and independents.



Indeed some new representatives were put forward by activist movements holding back extractive projects such as fracking and mining. These new dynamics within the councils, coupled with community scrutiny and a readiness to take direct action when needed, is leading to local level democracy that is vibrant and direct.

Communities are also addressing the history of colonialism, systematic injustice and inequity and how these dynamics are present not only in continuing struggles for social justice but also environmental justice. Peace does not have to come hand in hand with neoliberalism. We can create a deep peace that respects the dignity of both people and place.



In July 2021 independent Councillor Emmet McAller brought a motion to Fermanagh and Omagh District Council which started the process of embedding the Rights of Nature into the Council's operational practices, planning processes and long-term decision making. This builds on the people of Greencastle's previous assertion of the Rights of Community when the Department for Infrastructure sought to abandon an ancient road, an act which would benefit Dalradian's proposed project. It also builds on a motion brought to Derry City and Strabane District Council in June 2021 on the Rights of Nature, a historical first for the island and wider. With similar motions also planned for Belfast City Council, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, and Donegal County Council, this growing wave has the potential to change the field of play completely.

Communities are also addressing the history of colonialism, systematic injustice and inequity and how these dynamics are present not only in continuing struggles for social justice but also environmental justice. Peace does not have to come hand-in-hand with neoliberalism. We can create a deep peace that respects the dignity of both people and place.

Part of that journey involve fortifying or rescuing our indigeneity, like the communities in the Sperrins are doing. These are communities that have been living with and caring for the land for as far back as local memory stretches. They can trace back their families to the clans of ancient Ireland.

Then, as now, the main economic activity was farming- rearing crops and animals. The Island of Ireland has in recent years been targeted by global industrial agriculture (another form of extractivism)- with the states ever too eager, once again, to facilitate this. Industrial dairy farming in ROI and poultry and pig factories in NI are squeezing out small scale indigenous farmers. Yet alternatives are emerging which are not only more healthy and fair, but also address our ecological and climate emergencies. The Lagan Valley Permaculture Networking in Lisburn is the permaculture leader in NI and organisations such as Truly Grass Fed Dairy connect over 3,000 farms across ROI in the practice of regenerative agriculture.

The need to fight for food sovereignty is growing in the face of industrial agriculture, and organisations like Irish Seed Savers are helping growers stay free from big companies like Monsanto. Indigenous traditions, coupled with new restorative practices are what more and more farmers are moving towards. Dalradian Resources has called the local community in Greencastle welly wearing sheep farmers, showing their ignorance in their assumption that this would be an insult. What nobler pursuit than being a custodian of the land for future generations?

This pride of home is also conveyed in another emerging industry - ecologically and socially responsible tourism. Ireland has a rich cultural heritage with an abundance of ancient sites across the Island, along with breath-taking landscapes and an enduring traditional culture of music, storytelling and other arts. Tourist ventures that come from and are embedded in the local community- such as the An Creagan visitors centre near Greencastle - are thriving.

On a national level, Sustainable Travel Ireland's mission is to transform the Irish tourism industry into one that respects and protects the environment, but also supports local communities and makes better places for people to live and work in . A growing sector within this is that of adventure tourism. Far and Wild, for example, operate on a leave no trace philosophy and work to connect people to nature through active exploration.

Mining threatens to disrupt and destroy sustainable activities, both old and new, that have genuine and widespread community backing. Mining companies promise jobs and progress , but the jobs are temporary and the only thing that is progressed is further damage to our environment and culture. Non-extractive alternatives are and will continue to bloom, if given the space and support to flourish.





# CONCLUSION

This report has shown the extent to which the mining industry has infiltrated the Island of Ireland, and its hopes for expansion. Both governments on the island have employed facilitative strategies to aid this exploitation. The expanded extractive plans have been brewing for many decades but in recent years, with the rise of concern for the climate crisis, industry actors and government have cloaked their intentions in a guise of benevolent public servitude, claiming more extraction is the key to a climate safe future.

This misleading claim ignores the fact that the climate crisis is intrinsically linked to the other crises we are facing - social, economic, ecological - which are all further exacerbated by increased extractivism. We cannot mine our way out of the climate crisis.

Communities across the Island instinctively know this, and are organising to protect people, place and planet. Grassroots organising has seeded an ecosystem of groups resisting mining, with its heart in the Sperrin Mountains. This is the true meaning of 'green growth'. Solidarity is what flows through its arteries, spreading knowledge, learnings and support. This happens on a local and all island level, but also globally - with connections being made with communities elsewhere in Europe, the Americas, Africa and Asia.

Along with growing and sustaining the resistance movement, communities are also building alternatives to extractive capitalism. A rich heritage of care for the land joins new life-enhancing practices such as regenerative agriculture and a tourism industry that is both culturally and ecologically responsible. The concept of the Rights of Communities and the Rights of Nature is also emerging as a way to change the rules of the game, so that in future our laws and practices reflect more fully our values and the necessity of recognising ourselves as part of the interconnected web of life.

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