

Environmental Ethics: Whose Planet is it Anyway?

On Tuesday 9th October 2007, the Irish Council for Bioethics will host a one-day conference entitled **Environmental Ethics Policy Conference: Exploring the Ethical Issues** from 9.30am in the Merrion Room, RDS, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4.

A panel of expert speakers, will debate the ethical dilemmas facing humankind in relation to the environment. **Environmental Ethics Policy Conference: Exploring the Ethical Issues** will cover the following topics:

- **Who should be responsible for combating climate change, individuals or governments?** Some argue that any efforts made by an individual to combat climate change would have a minimal impact and that it is the responsibility of governments, while others argue that even the limited actions of an individual to reduce his or her own "carbon footprint" could have a positive effect.
- **What are the rights and responsibilities of developed and developing countries when combating climate change?** Is it unjust for developed countries to restrict developing countries from undertaking industrial activities, which are causing increased greenhouse gas emissions when developed countries conducted similar activities in the past? Or do developing countries have a responsibility not to add to the already serious problem of climate change.
- **Is it acceptable for Ireland to export large amounts of waste to other countries?** Ireland exports approximately 70% of its hazardous waste for incineration abroad. Should the Government put resources into building incinerators in Ireland to deal with Irish waste or are the health and social objections to incineration too weighty to ignore. Does the current situation represent "an Irish solution to an Irish Problem"?
- **What is the benefit-to-risk ratio of using nanotechnology to reduce environmental pollution?** Research is currently being undertaken to assess whether nanotechnology could be used as a sponge to clean up severe environmental pollution, such as oil spills, thus protecting precious ecosystems. However, there are concerns that releasing nanoparticles into the atmosphere might have serious, unforeseen health and environmental impacts similar to those caused by asbestos fibres.
- **What are the main socio-economic, environmental and health impacts of climate change in Ireland?** Some scientists have predicted that, as a worst-case scenario, further increases in global temperature could lead to a rise in sea levels, leading to large scale, permanent flooding in Irish coastal areas. There are also concerns that climate change will negatively impact Irish industries, such as agriculture, fishing, forestry and tourism.
- **Should commercial organisations be allowed to patent natural resources?** Should pharmaceutical companies be allowed to patent natural resources without offering compensation to indigenous populations or should they share the profits/benefits derived from such natural resources?

Dr Siobhán O'Sullivan, Scientific Director of the ICB said: "The current focus on counteracting the adverse effects of climate change suggests that society has recognised both the importance of its role in environmental management for the benefit and use of current and future generations."

For more information see www.bioethics.ie

Date: 5th October 2007

Ends

NOTES TO EDITOR:

What is Bioethics?

Bioethics is a discipline dealing with the ethical implications of research and practice in the biological sciences and medicine. It facilitates a deeper understanding of a range of moral choices, which can inform decision-making in areas of public policy and with respect to the direction and control of science. Bioethics is also a forward looking discipline, working to anticipate future questions of concern, encourage awareness about them and stimulate progressive debate amongst the public.

What is Environmental Ethics?

Environmental ethics has been described as having a conscience or moral that reflects a commitment and responsibility toward the environment as well as present and future generations of people.

About The Irish Council for Bioethics

The Irish Council for Bioethics is an independent, national body set up by the Government in 2002 to consider the ethical questions raised by biological research and biomedicine, such as stem cell research, IVF, genetic modification and euthanasia. An important objective of the Council is to promote public understanding, informed discussion and education with respect to bioethical issues. For more information see www.bioethics.ie.