



UACHTARAN NA hEIREANN
PRESIDENT OF IRELAND

**Message from President Michael D. Higgins
To the UCD Conference on
EU INTERREG Coastal Communities Adapting Together**

Wednesday, 2nd February 2022

May I send my very best wishes to all those participating in this important conference organised by University College Dublin to showcase the work of the Coastal Communities Adapting Together project. I send my congratulations to those who in various ways may have engaged with this valuable project and, in particular, I wish to acknowledge those who have organised this important event today.

Your project, funded by the EU INTERREG funding programme, is a crucial one, not just because of its international scope which enables research teams from Ireland and Wales to collaborate together, sharing best practice, but critically because of the topic which your research aims to address, namely supporting coastal communities in Fingal and Pembrokeshire in understanding climate change and how to adapt to changes in climate. These are changes which are already being experienced in both countries, including increased frequency and severity of storms and coastal erosion.

There is scarcely anybody who has not acknowledged that climate change is the greatest existential crisis we face, one for which the time to act is closing with worryingly fast consequences. As the latest United Nations IPCC Report reminds us so starkly, the challenge of responding to climate change, denied or neglected for too long, is one for which we must all come together as global citizens responding to the great challenges it presents, both in terms of mitigating its consequences, and adapting to those changes already underway, with time-scaled, accountable strategies in policy and practical terms.

We must sustain and retain the reality of our island existence and its realities. In recent history, we have paid a high price for turning our face away from the sea. The Irish Sea and its coastal communities are directly impacted by climate change, and your project has played, and will continue to play, an important role in helping the development of innovative tools for learning, observing, awareness and innovation in the development of local responses to climate impacts. Project activities, including those such as Minecraft workshops, tree planting, heritage mapping, the wider research and demonstration activities, will all feed together into teaching and policymaking. They will thus provide seeds for further research and surveys, impact positively on dimensions of climate citizenship, awareness, adaptive capacity and observation.

Knowledge is one of the greatest tools we have in the battle against climate change. Your project's focus on improving community awareness and understanding of climate impacts through enhanced observation has results to demonstrate that it has enabled those local communities within the project's scope to engage directly with local policymakers and has facilitated community resilience in the face of increasing coastal change.

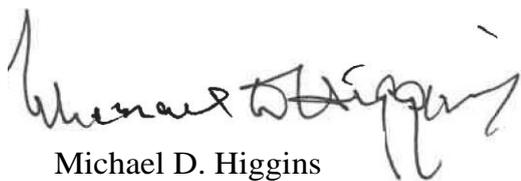
I am particularly pleased that your project has put its focus on community engagement and that it has utilised a bottom-up approach-what you term "co-creation". You have piloted novel methods for engaging communities in decision-making about future planning. Active citizen engagement and participation are crucial ingredients in a thriving democracy.

It is up to each and every one of us, as global citizens of this shared, vulnerable planet, to face up to the challenge of climate change. It is, I suggest, a first-order moral responsibility that requires us all to make significant changes, both in terms of how we balance our lives and our economic activities, be it as consumers, producers, facilitators in distribution away from fossil fuel consumption and towards more sustainable options, so that we may mitigate climate change and take measures to adapt to and enhance the changes that are already underway.

Ireland is fast becoming a centre of excellence in climate change research, and I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate the six project partners: University College Dublin who are leading the project, UCC/MaREI, Fingal County Council, Cardiff University, the Port of Milford Haven, and Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum.

May I conclude by congratulating again all those involved in this important scholarly work, and those who are putting into practice what so many feel. I am confident that your conference and the project which it showcases will be a great success, one that will produce benefits, not just for the communities at the centre of your research, but for coastal societies across our planet who face similar challenges to those experienced either side of the Irish Sea as a consequence of climate change. The inter-generational nature of your work brings the possibility of ever-deeper collaboration between activists on justice, human rights and ecological responsibility, something I so welcome.

Guim gach beannacht ar bhur obair d'on todchaid.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael D. Higgins', written in a cursive style.

Michael D. Higgins
Uachtaran na hEireann
President of Ireland