

**CRAFTS COUNCIL OF IRELAND LAUNCHES THREE-YEAR STRATEGY TO
ENHANCE COMMERCIALITY OF INDIGENOUS CRAFTS SECTOR**

MINISTER MICHEAL MARTIN UNVEILS STRATEGIC PLAN

24th April 2007 - The importance of the Irish craft sector and the estimated €122 million contribution it makes annually to the economy was highlighted today at the launch of the Crafts Council of Ireland's (CCoI) strategic plan 2007-2009.

The CCoI's strategic plan is designed to build on its previous policies for the sector. During the period 2004-2006, the CCoI developed a series of strategies focused on the five high level goals of Design, Marketing, Recognition, Education and Knowledge. The result has been an increase in domestic consumer spend on craft in the region of €24m from 2003 to 2006 despite tough market conditions.

The national and global marketplace has changed dramatically in recent years - at a pace never before experienced. The aim of the Council's Strategic Plan 2007 - 2009 is to use its knowledge of both the market and the consumer to equip the craft sector with the information and skills necessary to compete and prosper in this dynamic environment.

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Micheal Martin TD said: "The characteristics of a good craftsman - the dedication to quality, the constant learning, the blending of tradition and innovation - are characteristics that are needed in every business in our knowledge-based economy. The qualities of a good craft product - fitness for purpose, efficient use of materials, customer appeal - are qualities that are becoming more and more important as markets become more global and customers become better informed. In order for crafts to expand they must address the business aspect of their art and that is precisely what this document does."

Gerry Wycherley, Chairman, Crafts Council of Ireland said "The Crafts Council of Ireland's role is to continue to grow and strengthen the Irish crafts industry by monitoring the market and by continuing to adapt and respond to the market changes. The challenges are many but the opportunities are great."

"The onset of mass production and the phenomenon of the global brand have seen the explosion of a new consumer onto the market, one who actively seeks and desires well designed, unique, authentic and collectable product - craft has huge potential to explore and exploit this market. To take advantage of this, design and innovation are now, more than ever, important features of the Irish crafts industry and are central to its future success. In addition, the importance of marketing Irish craft is critical to enhancing the commercial craft offer, and plays a leading role in this strategic vision." explained Mr Wycherley.

The Strategic Plan 2007 - 2009, places the consumer at the centre of all activity. Understanding the consumers' needs, providing the consumer with access to craft that fulfils these needs and raising consumers' awareness of the range, diversity and quality of market-driven craft products are all central to the plan.

Supporting and facilitating this activity is a programme to attract new talent to the industry, encouraging school-leavers and graduates into the sector, facilitating the commercial development of new and emerging craft enterprises in partnership with City and County Enterprise Boards and other support agencies and educational bodies. New talent is the lifeblood of every sector and the CCoI aims to ensure the sustainability of the craft sector in the long term by attracting, developing and supporting new and existing talent.

The main focus and driving force of the CCoI's strategic objectives continues to be raising the turnover of the sector and the income of craftspeople.

The Crafts Council of Ireland has invested substantially over the past 18 months in understanding the consumer and the marketplace. From this research there is clear evidence that consumers are becoming more sophisticated and demand non-standardised, innovative and better-designed products. The international trend is moving away from the mass produced, brand-led, 'designer' products towards the more creative, authentic and unique products that are design-led and quality-driven but which offer consumers the opportunity to express their individuality, their personality and their sense of self. Craft is ideally placed to meet consumers' desires to differentiate themselves and their homes - the aim of the plan is to ensure that craft enterprises are fully equipped to avail of this commercial opportunity.

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Background

The Crafts Council of Ireland is funded through state and European funding channelled to the organisation by Enterprise Ireland on behalf of the funding department - Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. Enterprise Ireland plays an advisory and monitoring role with the organisation.