**Host community perception of the Irish tourism industry and biosecurity**

**Dr Domhnall Melly -** *Assistant Lecturer in Tourism, Department of Marketing, Tourism & Sport, Atlantic Technological University, ATU Sligo, Ash Lane, Sligo, F91 YW50*

**Dr James Hanrahan -** *Lecturer in Tourism, Department of Marketing, Tourism & Sport, Atlantic Technological University, ATU Sligo, Ash Lane, Sligo, F91 YW50*

**Dr Emmet McLoughlin –** *Senior Lecturer in Tourism and Event Management, Department of Tourism, Hospitality and Events, Cardiff Metropolitan University, Western Avenue, Cardiff CF5 2YB*

**Abstract**

Tourist vectoring of potential biosecurity threats can represent a substantial biosecurity risk for Ireland. Of particular concern for Ireland’s environment are the numbers of tourists participating in hiking/cross-country walking, angling, cycling, and water sports. This raises the prospect of significant damage to the environment within destinations from tourist vectoring. For example, with Ireland’s native white clawed crayfish (Austropotamobius Pallipes) at serious threat of 100% mortality, 20 vascular plants and 23 bryophytes critically endangered, there is a strong case for Ireland’s tourism industry to implement essential biosecurity protocols. Therefore, to examine the host community perception of these threats a qualitative data collection method was employed by the authors via semi-structured interviews with members of the host community in several well know tourism destinations throughout Ireland. Considering that tourists can inadvertently transport infectious diseases and invasive alien species (IAS) and the serious implications they can have not only for human and environmental health, but also the serious ramifications for economic and socio-cultural wellbeing within host communities. It is of little surprise that the vast majority (93.7%) of host community members in Ireland think the tourism industry has an ethical responsibility to protect the environment from biosecurity breaches because of tourist vectoring. Therefore, it can be argued that the industry clearly has an ethical responsibility to influence and adopt tourism policy that embraces a preventative approach to biosecurity and protect the environment and human health. Thus, the tourism industry should have appropriate vector mitigation measures in place to protect the environment from the negative impacts associated with tourists vectoring harmful biosecurity threats. There have been some clear examples of this in Ireland during COVID-19 and lessons need to be learned from these going forward.

**Keywords:** life on land, tourism, sustainability, biosecurity, Ireland