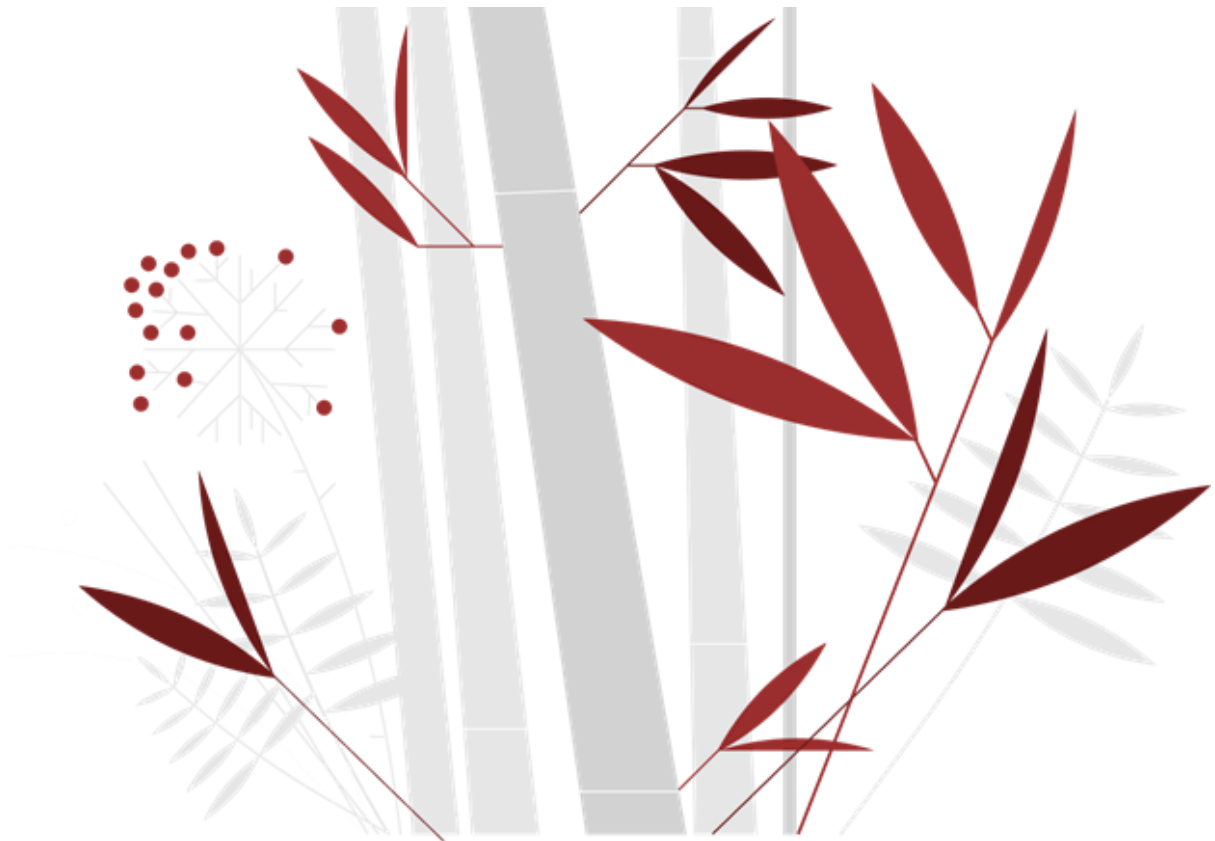


COFFEE CUPS: BREWING A CLIMATE CRISIS.

By Seán Tannam



Coffee Cups: Brewing a Climate Crisis.

When we think of things that we do on a regular basis that contribute to climate change, our use and abandonment of coffee cups may be forgotten. Most people think of the burning of fossil fuels, excessive celebrity travel, water wastage, the list goes on of critical causes that damage our environment. However, in just the UK and Ireland alone, waste related to coffee cups has been documented at 2.5 billion coffee cups per year.

While coffee is mostly served in single use “compostable” cups, the damage it causes is detrimental to our environment. Some people could easily drink two takeaway coffees a day. This tradition of drinking coffee uses 1.5 billion litres of water to just make the cups, without even thinking of where the cups may end up after their use, the majority find themselves in a landfill. It is estimated that the carbon footprint left behind by the cups is over 150,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide, a level of produce equal to what 33,000 cars also produce in a year.

It's estimated that only one in 400 coffee cups are recycled in the UK. In Ireland, a study done by Recycling List found that around 200 million coffee cups are thrown out every year, weighing the same as 148 humpback whales.

This year, the town of Killarney has fought back against this waste, banning all plastic, compostable cups. The town expects to save one million disposable cups per year, equivalent to 18.5 tonnes of waste in a year. The Killarney Coffee Cup project came into full swing on July 31st, 2023, with 46 bars, cafés and hotels united in a bring-your-own-cup system of use.

This is an example of necessary change we, as coffee drinkers, must be employing for the sake of the environment. While the average person who needs a coffee may see what they do as harmless, examples like the Killarney Coffee Cup project using reusable mugs make a greener future a reality.

If not, rising temperatures and droughts brought upon by climate change may do the job for us. Fairtrade Ireland has predicted that by 2050, close to half of the land used for cocoa farming may be unusable.

So maybe only one coffee a day, in a mug please.