Martin Hawkes from Burren Resources helped facilitate the 'Togetherness Strand' at the climate gathering.

What I came away with most strongly from Inishbofin was a sense that **something is shifting in how we need to come together**.

The Climate Gathering brought together people from rather different worlds — academia, climate negotiations, youth activism, ecology, politics, spirituality and community. What struck me was not simply the range of perspectives, but what became possible when people who would not normally find themselves in the same room were given the time and space to listen to one another.

The starting point for the Togetherness strand was the Club of Rome's observation that, without sufficient social cohesion, nothing else will work. That seems to me to have acquired an even greater significance in the world we now inhabit. We are confronted by challenges which are increasingly systemic and interconnected, yet our responses remain largely organised in silos. We have become very good at talking to people who think like us and remarkably poor at finding common ground with those who don't.

And yet there was a palpable sense on Inishbofin that **we may be reaching the limits of this way of working**. There was excitement about the possibilities when diverse groups come together, about the return of the *meitheal*, about intergenerational dialogue and about the "islands of coherence" that can emerge when people create spaces in which something different becomes possible.

At the same time, there was a recognition of how difficult this is. Polarisation is increasing. We retreat into bubbles. There is scapegoating and "divide and conquer". We find ourselves lonelier than ever, even as we become more conscious of our loneliness. And, perhaps most fundamentally, we tend to take the easy path: **it is much easier to collaborate with people who already agree with us**.

This is where the word *radical* begins to matter.

The things that prevent radical collaboration are not necessarily lack of intelligence or good intentions. They are our unwillingness to tolerate uncertainty, discomfort and failure. They are our judgements and our attachment to being right. They are the institutional and psychological silos in which we live.

So perhaps radical collaboration is not primarily a methodology. **It is a disposition.**

It involves being prepared to step outside the familiar, to enter territory where we don't know what will happen, and to trust that something may emerge from the encounter that none of us could have produced alone.

That seems particularly important now.

The climate crisis is one obvious manifestation, but the same challenge appears in relation to democracy, inequality, social cohesion, conflict, biodiversity, education and the wider sense that many of our systems are no longer fit for the world we are entering.

We need, I think, to become better at **bringing together people who normally inhabit different worlds** — and not simply for a conference or an exchange of views, but for long enough and deeply enough that something new can emerge.

This is where I wonder whether Ireland has a particular contribution to make.

We have an extraordinary combination of things that can help create the conditions for this: hospitality, conversation, landscape, music, song, story, humour and a certain capacity to create intimacy among strangers. There is something in the Irish tradition captured by *ar scáth a chéile a mhairimid* — we live in the shelter of one another. And there is the older idea of the *meitheal*: people bringing their different capacities together because something needs to be done which none can do alone.

Places like Inishbofin and the Burren seem to me to offer particularly powerful containers for this kind of work. The physical setting matters. So does the quality of welcome. So does food, music, walking, silence, art and the possibility of being together without the normal pressures of institutional life. A shared landscape can become a kind of third presence in the room.

But creating safe space does not mean creating comfortable space.

One of the more interesting aspects of our Inishbofin conversation was the desire for **more fierceness** — for the courage to say "enough is enough", to challenge the status quo and to break through complicity. I found myself wondering whether this too is part of radical collaboration.

We need to be fierce about what matters without becoming enemies of those with whom we disagree.

That is a difficult balance. But perhaps the fierceness we need is not the fierceness of opposition. It is a fierceness rooted in care — for people, for place, for nature and for future generations — which is strong enough to cross boundaries rather than reinforce them.

There was also a recognition that before we can act together we may sometimes need to **grieve together**. To acknowledge honestly what is being lost and the uncertainty of the moment may be part of what enables us to recover the will to act. Safe convening spaces can allow that to happen.

And perhaps that is what the "islands of coherence" idea is really about.

Not creating little islands of people who agree with one another, but creating **small places where a different quality of relationship becomes possible** — places where people can listen, disagree, learn, grieve, imagine and act together. If enough of these begin to connect, perhaps they can generate a different kind of coherence in the wider system.

I have a growing feeling that such **radical collaboration may be an idea whose time has come**.