



WILD ATLANTIC
NATURE LIFE

**LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature Results-Based
agri-environment Scheme (RBPS)**

Information booklet

May 2021



Introduction

LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature aims to improve Ireland's performance in conserving habitats, and in particular to improve the conservation status in the Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) Network of blanket bog, a priority habitat under the Habitats Directive. It will build on the successes of locally adapted programmes, including EU-funded LIFE and European Innovation Partnerships (EIP), to work with farmers, local communities and other stakeholders to create resilience within rural communities in the light of our biodiversity and climate crises.

Central to the project is a pilot Results-Based Payment Scheme (RBPS) which will reward participating farmers for environmental services – including biodiversity, water quality and carbon storage and sequestration – by linking payments to the habitat quality. This rewards farmers for providing public services on their land whilst ensuring the flexibility to farm.

Farmer payments relate to ecological quality for their peatland, grassland and/or woodland habitats. The higher the quality of these habitats, the higher the payment the farmers receive. The quality of the watercourses associated with farm or commonage will also influence the final payment. This approach has the effect of creating a market for environmental services, and provides an opportunity and incentive for farmers to manage their farm to deliver better quality habitats. This approach differs from traditional agri-environment schemes (e.g. GLAS) where a flat-rate payment is made independent of environmental quality.

The exact timeframe of the Wild Atlantic Nature RBPS will depend on the outcome of the CAP Strategic Plan, which is due to commence in January 2023. The pilot project will be first launched in the Owenduff/Nephin Complex SAC in 2021 and will extend to other project blanket bog SACs in 2022. It will be run by the project team who will support farmers and their advisors.



This project has received funding from the European Union's LIFE programme under Grant Agreement No. LIFE18 IPE/IE/000002.



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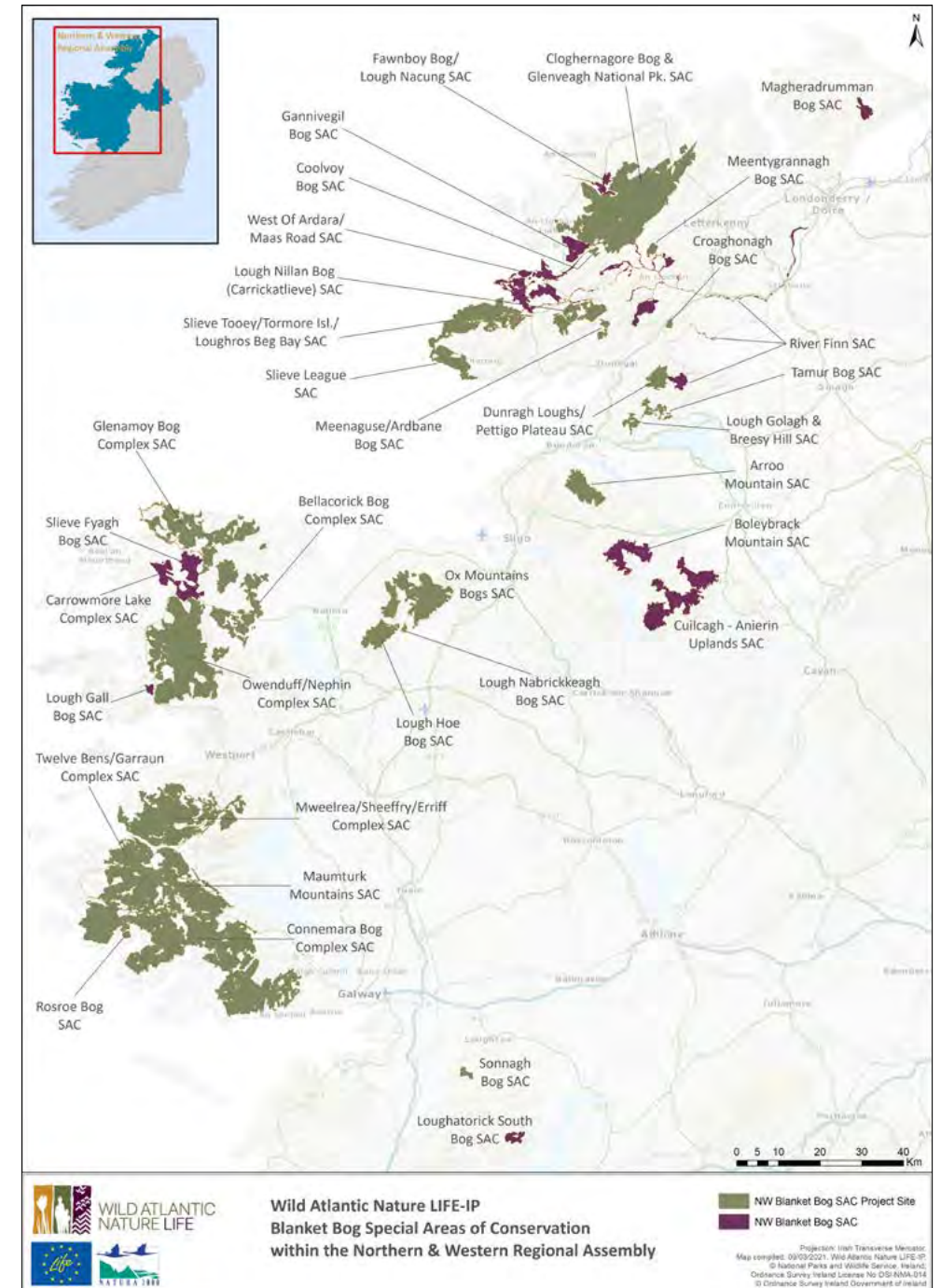
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Blanket bogs

Blanket bog spans many of our hills and mountains right along the Atlantic seaboard of Ireland. These peatlands provide essential environmental services and provide habitats for biodiversity including several endangered species. They also provide us with high quality food. Without these crucial services, we would be left with considerable challenges to the way we live.

For many decades landuse policies relating to blanket bogs have varied considerably, with mixed results. Many of these policies were born out of perceived social and economic needs at the time and were generally prescriptive and rule-based, with landowners obliged to follow particular requirements. This prescriptive-based model has been central to agri-environment policy for over 25 years and has not succeeded in halting the decline in quality of our environment. Although today, similar social and economic pressures persist, particularly in rural areas, we are now beginning to understand how to better manage our high nature value habitats and their importance in mitigating biodiversity loss and climate change.

The overall objective of LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature is to improve Ireland's performance in conserving habitats, and in particular to improve the conservation status in the Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) Network of blanket bog, a priority habitat under the Habitats Directive. The primary focus is on 24 Natura 2000 sites in the northwest of Ireland over the lifespan of the 9 year project.



Blanket bogs are home to many threatened species including curlew, red grouse, salmon & freshwater pearl mussel.

There has been a ten-fold decline in the number of pristine rivers in Ireland over the last 30 years.

Only 15% of Ireland's Natura 2000 habitats have a favourable conservation status.

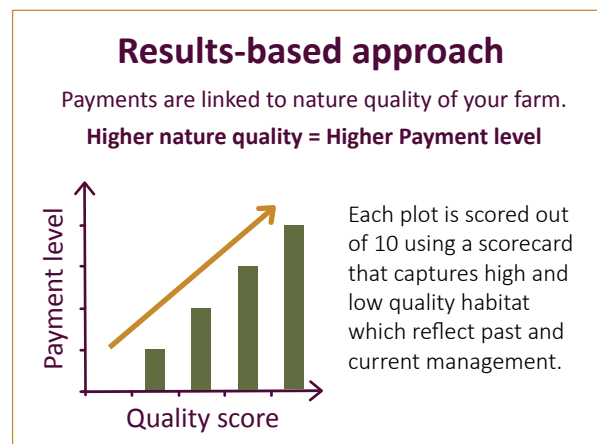
In the areas covered by the project, approximately 100,000tns of carbon are lost each year, contributing to climate change.

Results-based approach: Wild Atlantic Nature

One of the key aims of LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature is **to establish a voluntary pilot Results Based Payment Scheme (RBPS) linked to the quality of the habitat. This puts the landowner, their skills, expertise and knowledge of their land central to the development of this project.** It creates a new market for the environmental services the landowner provides through their land management. In many cases, lands may already be delivering high quality environmental services. In other cases, landowners that wish to improve the environmental quality of their lands will be supported to achieve this. This provides an exciting opportunity for farmers in the project areas to realise and be celebrated for the vital role they play in our biodiversity and climate challenges. It also provides an opportunity to enhance the resilience of farming communities in and around Natura 2000 sites.

What is a Results-Based Payment Scheme?

Results-Based Payments Schemes link payments to the environmental quality of a farm, with higher nature quality resulting in a higher payment level. All participating land, both private and commonage, is divided into plots which each receive a habitat score annually of 0 to 10, depending on environmental quality. This score determines the payment levels. The quality of water courses and, in the case of private lands, farmyard management, influences the final payment via whole-farm assessment.



Results indicators

The management of farmland has a direct influence on the quality of habitat. Higher quality habitats deliver greater environmental services including biodiversity, water management and carbon storage. While Wild Atlantic Nature is primarily focused on conserving and restoring blanket bog habitat, the project also recognises the importance of associated habitats including woodland and grassland, and the need to consider the whole farm as part of an integrated approach toward sustainable land management. For this reason results indicators related to three key farm habitats – peatlands, woodlands, grasslands – are used in the evaluation process to determine a score for **habitat quality assessment** at the farm level.

Other features that determine the quality of habitat include farmyard management, nutrient balance, and condition and management of watercourses. These factors are considered in a **whole-farm assessment**, which determines the final results-based payment.

Assessment of results

Habitat quality assessment

Habitat quality is assessed at the field level using a scorecard specifically designed to evaluate key aspects of each habitat. The scorecard allocates marks to reflect the quality of the habitat in terms of specific indicators including biodiversity (plant species), water management, vegetation structure, exposed soil and damaging activities. The better the quality of the habitat, the higher the mark awarded in each section. Habitats receive a final score on a scale of 0 (low) to 10 (high) and the level of payments are linked with this score.

The Wild Atlantic Nature RBPS programme is a pilot, which aims to demonstrate the principles of the RBPS approach. Depending on project resources, it is hoped to be able to provide a habitat score for the entire farm within the programme area. This will provide the farmer with a clear indication of its performance in the future scenario that all of their lands are included.



Floodplain quality

Lands that flood are important for maintaining good quality habitat and water management. A functioning floodplain has the effect of slowing the rate and reducing the volume of flow. This is best achieved where high quality habitats occupy the floodplain. The provision of high quality floodplains along main rivers will therefore be rewarded through the pilot.



Whole-farm (or commonage) assessment

Each farm (or parcel in the case of commonage) is subject to a whole-farm assessment (or commonage unit assessment) of environmental quality and risks. This result is used to determine the final results-based payment to the farmer. Three assessments are considered:

Farmyard management identifies any risks related to environmental issues such as inadequate storage facilities, leaking oil tanks and inappropriate facilities.

Farm nutrient balance assesses the volume of slurry generated in relation to the availability of suitable spread lands.

Watercourse condition assesses all watercourses in relation to risks arising from flow, livestock, sediment and nutrients.

Each of the three assessments are allocated a score ranging from 0.3 (poor) to 1.2 (excellent). The result of the whole-farm assessment is the lowest score (0.3, 0.6, 1 or 1.2) achieved in any individual category. The final habitat quality score is multiplied by the whole-farm assessment result to determine the results-based payment each farmer will receive.

Payment streams

Three payment streams will be available to participating farmers:

Results-based payments is based on the result of the habitat quality assessment adjusted for the whole-farm assessment result.

Floodplain payments rewards farmers for maintaining active floodplains on their land adjacent to important river habitats. Payment rates vary according to habitat quality as indicated by average habitat quality score along those watercourses.

Supporting actions payments are available for selected measures completed by the farmer aimed at improving habitat quality and reducing risk of impacts to the environment.

In addition, in 2021 & 2022, **knowledge-exchange groups** will be piloted with approximately 20 farmers in each demonstration area. The knowledge-exchange groups will be developed and implemented in partnership with Teagasc.

Results-based payments

Wild Atlantic Nature RPBS will be using similar payment structures to those developed and tested in comparable locally-led programmes. Due to the nature of the project as a pilot initiative with a limited budget, it is hoped to engage as many farmers as possible to demonstrate how the RBPS approach works and provide farmers with practical experience of RBPS.

A minimum payment will be set at €800 per annum for participation in the pilot. This means that a supplementary payment will be made to participants receiving a results-based payment of less than €800. It is important to bear in mind that this is a pilot programme and the objective is to use the opportunity to design a programme that can benefit farmers over the long-term.

All payments will be subject to the programme's Terms & Conditions, to which participants must agree and adhere.

Supporting actions payments

Supporting actions are voluntary measures that a farmer may choose to undertake with the aim of improving habitat quality.

Where a farmer (or group of farmers) wishes to carry out supporting actions, additional funding is available. Typical supporting actions that will be funded by the programme are fencing, invasive species control, livestock drinking facilities, peatland reactivation and drain-blocking. The project team will consider funding other actions that are likely to help meet the project aims, subject to value for money and the necessary consents being in place.

Project team approval for supporting actions is required prior to works commencing. Supporting actions are subject to terms & conditions. Payment for actions are made following declaration by the participant that the works have been delivered.

Applications for supporting actions on commonage are cross-checked against the relevant Commonage Management Plans to avoid double funding. Participants proposing actions on commonage will need to ensure that all necessary permissions are obtained from all other relevant shareholders in the commonage.

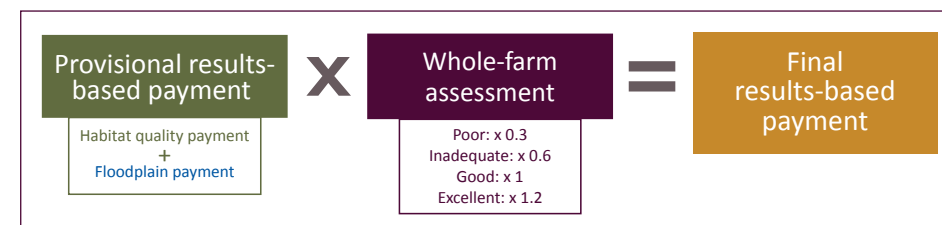
Example supporting actions:



Knowledge-exchange groups

Knowledge-exchange groups will be piloted with approximately 20 farmers in four demonstration areas. Participation in knowledge-exchange groups will be entirely voluntary and is not required as a condition for inclusion in the RBPS. Participation payments for the knowledge-exchange groups will be funded independently of the RBPS programme.

Calculation of results-based payment



Habitat quality is assessed using a specifically designed scorecard and each plot is awarded a score between 0 and 10. All farm plots are ranked according to field score in increasing order. Therefore, lowest ranking plots are paid at band A rates for the first 30ha and subsequent area paid at band B & C rates respectively, where relevant. The habitat quality payment is then calculated by multiplying area of lands by the corresponding payment rate as per the table below. A floodplain payment is added to the habitat quality payment, where applicable.

Payment rates according to quality per ha (€):

Plot score	A First 30 _{ha}	B 31-70 _{ha}	C >70 _{ha}
<4	0	0	0
4	68	15	5
5	79	18	6
6	90	20	7
7	135	30	10
8	180	40	14
9	203	45	15
10	225	50	17

In order to calculate the final results-based payment, the total of the habitat quality payment *plus* any floodplain payment is adjusted according to the whole-farm assessment result. Most farms or commonages can progressively increase their environmental score and associated payment over the lifetime of the RBPS pilot.

Floodplain payment rates:

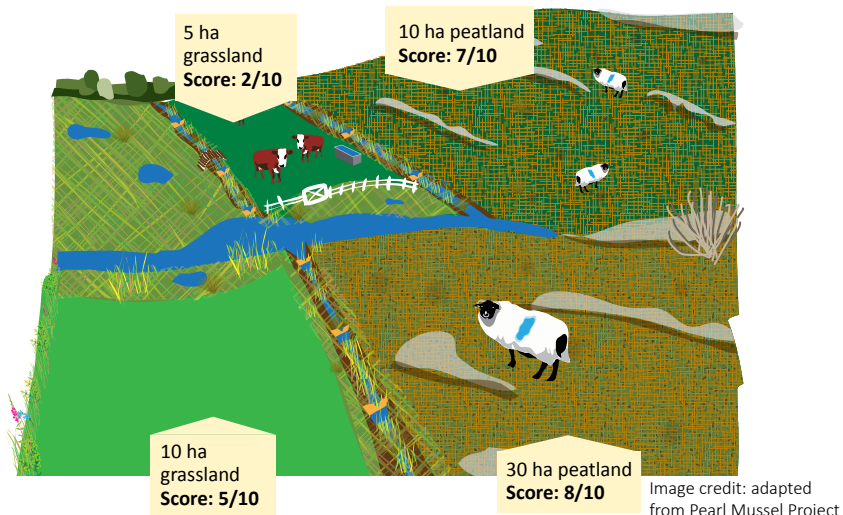
Length of river channel (m):	Average plot score:							
	<4	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
< 250m	€ 0	200	225	250	275	300	325	350
250-1000m	€ 0	280	315	350	385	420	455	490
>1000m	€ 0	400	450	500	550	600	650	700

For commonage lands, the total results-based payment will be divided amongst the shareholders proportional to their shareholding in the commonage.

Whole-farm assessment result:

Quality	Correction factor
Poor	0.3 - 30% of the potential results-based payment is awarded
Inadequate	0.6 - 60% of the results-based payment is awarded
Good	1 - 100% of the results-based payment is awarded
Excellent	1.2 - a bonus payment of 20% is applied to the results-based payment

Process for calculating result-based payment:



Provisional results-based payment

Habitat quality payment
+
Floodplain payment

X

Whole-farm assessment

Poor: x 0.3
Inadequate: x 0.6
Good: x 1
Excellent: x 1.2

Step 1

Habitat quality is assessed using a specifically designed scorecard and each plot is awarded a score between 0 and 10.

Step 2

All farm plots are ranked according to field score in increasing order with first 30ha in band A and subsequent area in band B & C. In this example:

2/10 - 5 ha grassland
5/10 - 10 ha grassland
7/10 - 10 ha peatland
8/10 - 30 ha peatland

Total area 25ha @ band A payment rate
5ha @ band A payment rate
25ha @ band B payment rate

Step 3

The habitat quality payment is calculated according to plot ranking order.

Step 4

A floodplain payment is added to the habitat quality payment (where applicable).

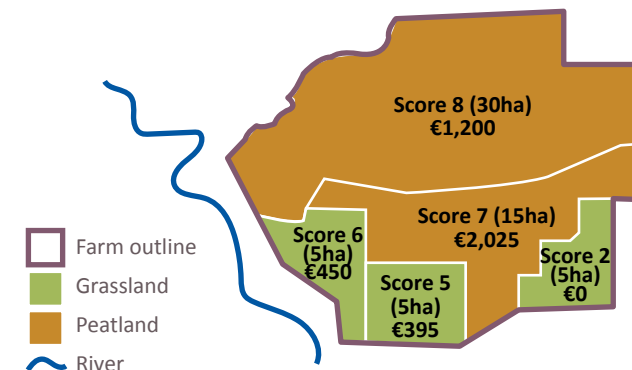
Step 5

The total of habitat quality payment plus any floodplain payment is adjusted according to the whole-farm assessment result.

Sample farm calculations

Scenario 1:

Mixed livestock farmer
No floodplain
Total farm area: 60 ha



Payment band	Plot area	Plot quality score	Payment due
A (0-30ha)	5ha grassland	Score 2	€0 (5ha @ €0/ha)
	5ha grassland	Score 5	€395 (5ha @ €79/ha)
	5ha grassland	Score 6	€450 (5ha @ €90/ha)
	15ha peatland	Score 7	€2,025 (15ha @ €135/ha)
B (30-70ha)	30ha peatland	Score 8	€1,200 (30ha @ €40/ha)
Total habitat quality			€4,070
			+
			Floodplain payment: n/a

Payment rates according to quality per ha (€):

Plot score	A First 30ha	B 31-70ha	C >70ha
<4	0	0	0
4	68	15	5
5	79	18	6
6	90	20	7
7	135	30	10
8	180	40	14
9	203	45	15
10	225	50	17

Whole-farm score: good (x 1)

X

1

=

Whole-farm assessment result:

Quality	Correction factor
Poor	0.3 - 30% of the potential results-based payment is awarded
Inadequate	0.6 - 60% of the results-based payment is awarded
Good	1 - 100% of the results-based payment is awarded
Excellent	1.2 - a bonus payment of 20% is applied to the results-based payment

€4,070

Total result payment:
€4,070 x 1

Scenario 2:

Commonage with 5 equal shares
200m along river
Total commonage area: 125ha

Payment band	Plot area	Plot quality score	Payment due
A (0-30ha)	25ha peatland	Score 7	€3,375 (25ha @ €135/ha)
	5ha peatland	Score 8	€900 (5ha @ €180/ha)
B (30-70ha)	40ha peatland	Score 9	€1,800 (40ha @ €45/ha)
C (>70ha)	55ha peatland	Score 9	€825 (55ha @ €15/ha)
Total habitat quality			€6,900
+			
Floodplain payment: €300			(average score 8 @ 0-250m band)

Payment rates according to quality per ha (€):

Plot score	A First 30ha	B 31-70ha	C >70ha
<4	0	0	0
4	68	15	5
5	79	18	6
6	90	20	7
7	135	30	10
8	180	40	14
9	203	45	15
10	225	50	17

Commonage unit score: excellent (x 1.2)
 $7,200 \times 1.2$

1.2

€8,640

Number of shares: **5**

€1,728
per share

Floodplain payment rates:

Length of river channel (m):		<4	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
< 250m	€	0	200	225	250	275	300	325	350
250-1000m	€	0	280	315	350	385	420	455	490
>1000m	€	0	400	450	500	550	600	650	700

Whole-farm assessment result:

Quality	Correction factor
Poor	0.3 - 30% of the potential results-based payment is awarded
Inadequate	0.6 - 60% of the results-based payment is awarded
Good	1- 100% of the results-based payment is awarded
Excellent	1.2 - a bonus payment of 20% is applied to the results-based payment

Scenario 3:

Commonage with 10 equal shares
No floodplain
Total commonage area: 220ha

Payment band	Plot area	Plot quality score	Payment due
A (0-30ha)	8ha peatland	Score 4	€544 (8ha @ €68/ha)
	22ha peatland	Score 7	€2,970 (22ha @ €135/ha)
B (30-70ha)	40ha peatland	Score 8	€1,600 (40ha @ €40/ha)
C (>70ha)	150ha peatland	Score 9	€2,250 (150ha @ €15/ha)
Total habitat quality			€7,364
+			
Floodplain payment: n/a			

1

Commonage unit score: good (x 1)

Number of shares: **10**

€736
per share



Who can apply?

As this is a pilot project, it is limited in the number of participants it can accommodate. Outcomes from the design of the CAP strategic plans may impact the future number and distribution of sites to be targeted for the programme. It is hoped that this pilot will transition into future schemes in the target areas.

The primary focus of LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature is on 24 Natura 2000 sites in the northwest of Ireland. For inclusion in the RBPS programme, sites were prioritised based on area (size of SAC), existence of other agri-environment projects and geographical spread. A provisional list of priority sites will be targeted for the pilot RBPS in 2021 and 2022.

The pilot project will be first launched in the **Owenduff/Nephin Complex SAC** in 2021 for a limited number of participants who will be selected following receipt of expressions of interest. It will extend to other project areas in 2022.

Lands should be declared on the applicant's most recently approved Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) application to be considered for the pilot programme. Leased or rented land must have been declared on the applicant's BPS application for the year previous to applying to participate in this programme.

Private lands

All farmland within the target areas can be considered for payment with the exceptions of buildings (and their curtilage), extensive water, farmyards, quarries and commercial forest.

Commonages

The project team will review all commonages within the target areas and select those of highest priority for entry.

On commonage lands, the fraction declared by the participant on their most recently approved BPS application is that which will be considered for payment. Where the catchment boundary splits a land parcel, only the proportion within the catchment boundary will be paid on.

How do I apply?

Complete and submit the Expression of Interest form to the project team. The form is available from the project team or the website (www.wildatlanticnature.ie).

Nominate your preferred farm advisor, who must then be trained and approved by the project team.

Prior to applying, all applicants should read this guide carefully.

Where an applicant is successful, the project team will prepare the farm plan and issue a contract offer to the farmer. This offer must then be accepted by the farmer within one month of issue.

Unsuccessful applicants will be notified at the end of the recruitment period.

Selection criteria

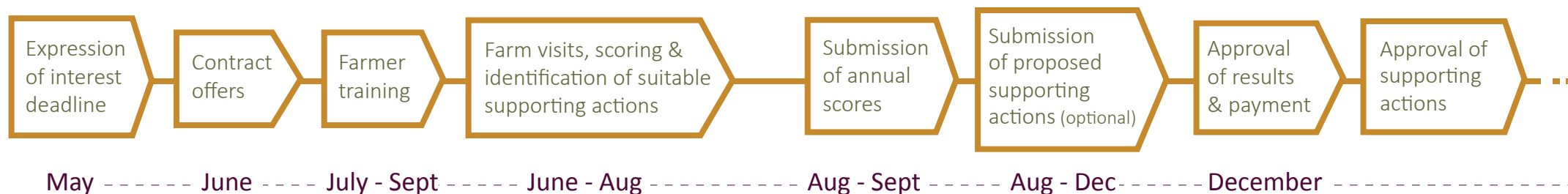
The selection of participants is based on farm information from the applicant's BPS application in the previous year. As funding is limited, it will not be possible to accommodate all eligible applicants at pilot stage.

For each Wild Atlantic Nature operational area, applicants will be ranked by the project team according to the criteria outlined below, for both private lands and commonage lands. Categories proposed, regarding the characteristics of lands, include:

1. Extent of which proposed land parcels (for both private and commonage subgroups) are situated within target Natura 2000 Sites.
2. Presence of high status objective river sub-basins that intersect target Natura 2000 sites.
3. Lands proposed contribute to a well distributed geographic spread across the project areas.
4. Notable presence of ecological features of conservation concern regularly occurring on the lands proposed.

Full criteria details will be outlined in the Terms & Conditions documents and selection process technical reports for the Wild Atlantic Nature project.

Programme participation timeline



Nominate approved advisor

At contract acceptance, the participant farmer must nominate an approved Wild Atlantic Nature farm advisor to work on the farmer's behalf. The project team will issue a copy of the farm plan to the farmer and the advisor.

Farm / Commonage assessment

On an annual basis the advisor, working with the farmer, will carry out a review of the farm operation, score all habitats on the farm, complete the whole farm assessment, and make recommendations with regards future management.

Submit results

The results of the advisors' assessment will be submitted to the project team for review and payment. All payments will be made directly to the farmer's nominated bank account and farmers and advisors will receive a summary of payment calculations.

Annual work plan

The farmer, supported by the advisor, may propose supporting actions to be submitted by the end of each year. Following approval by the project team, these actions form the annual work plan to be implemented by the farmer in the following year. Associated payment will be issued on satisfactory completion.



Frequently asked questions

How do I apply?

Submit a completed expression of interest form to the project team. Detailed information can be downloaded from the project website (www.wildatlanticnature.ie).

I'm already in GLAS/REAP, will I still be eligible to apply?

Yes. However, to avoid the risk of double payments, when the participants are in the Low Input Permanent Pasture (LIPP) or Traditional Hay Meadow (THM) measures in GLAS, there is a reduction of the Wild Atlantic Nature LIFE IP RBPS payment by 40% for LIPP and 20% for THM. Prior to any supporting actions being approved, the potential for double payment against GLAS measures (such as riparian margins) is assessed.

Participants in the new Results-based Environment-Agri Pilot (REAP) scheme may apply although it is likely that their Wild Atlantic Nature LIFE IP RBPS payment will be reduced to avoid potential double payments.

Will my BPS be affected?

The payments will be in addition to other supports such as BPS, GLAS, and ANC. The project recognises the importance of farming in sustaining a high quality environment. The actions in the project are designed to be compatible with BPS eligibility rules.

Do you need a farm advisor to get into the programme?

Yes. The farmer nominates an advisor to support them during the pilot. The advisor must be trained and approved by Wild Atlantic Nature. In the case of commonages, a single advisor will be nominated.

Can I use my existing GLAS advisor?

Yes. Applicants nominate their preferred advisor who must then be trained and approved by the project team.

Who pays the advisor?

The advisor will be paid directly by the project team. The cost of advisor input has been factored into the results payment. The advisor fee will be paid directly to the advisor prior to farmer receiving payment. An administrative allowance will be paid by the programme.

Does my land have to be designated Natura 2000 sites (SAC or SPA)?

No. All farm land within the catchments are included, however, priority access will be given to designated lands. Payments do not differ between designated or non-designated lands.

Can I apply if I only have a commonage shareholding in the project site?

Yes. However, your shareholding must be associated with a priority commonage that has been selected for the pilot.

Do all shareholders in the commonage have to participate?

No. All shareholders in priority commonages are invited to apply to join the pilot. The payment on commonages is divided amongst participants in proportion to their shareholding in that commonage.

Do I have to attend knowledge-exchange workshops and do I get paid to attend?

Workshops will be led by Teagasc and will be limited to approximately 20 participants per project area. Participants will receive a participation payment subject to Terms and Conditions. These are voluntary pilot knowledge-exchange workshops.

What measures do I have to do?

This is a voluntary results-based programme whereby the farmer gets paid according to the environmental quality result achieved. The approach allows for a high level of flexibility for the farmer. The farmer can choose the means by which they manage their lands in order to achieve the result.

How can I achieve a higher result and increased payment?

It is ultimately up to the farmer as to how they manage their farm. The project team can provide advice and there are a series of voluntary supporting actions that the farmer may choose to undertake in order to help improve the habitat quality. The better the habitat quality result the higher the payment. Supporting actions are co-funded by the programme.

Where can I get further information on the programme?

Further details on the programme including, detailed Terms and Conditions can be provided by the project team or are available on the project website (www.wildatlanticnature.ie).

LIFE programme

The LIFE programme is the EU's funding instrument for the environment and climate action since its inception in 1992.

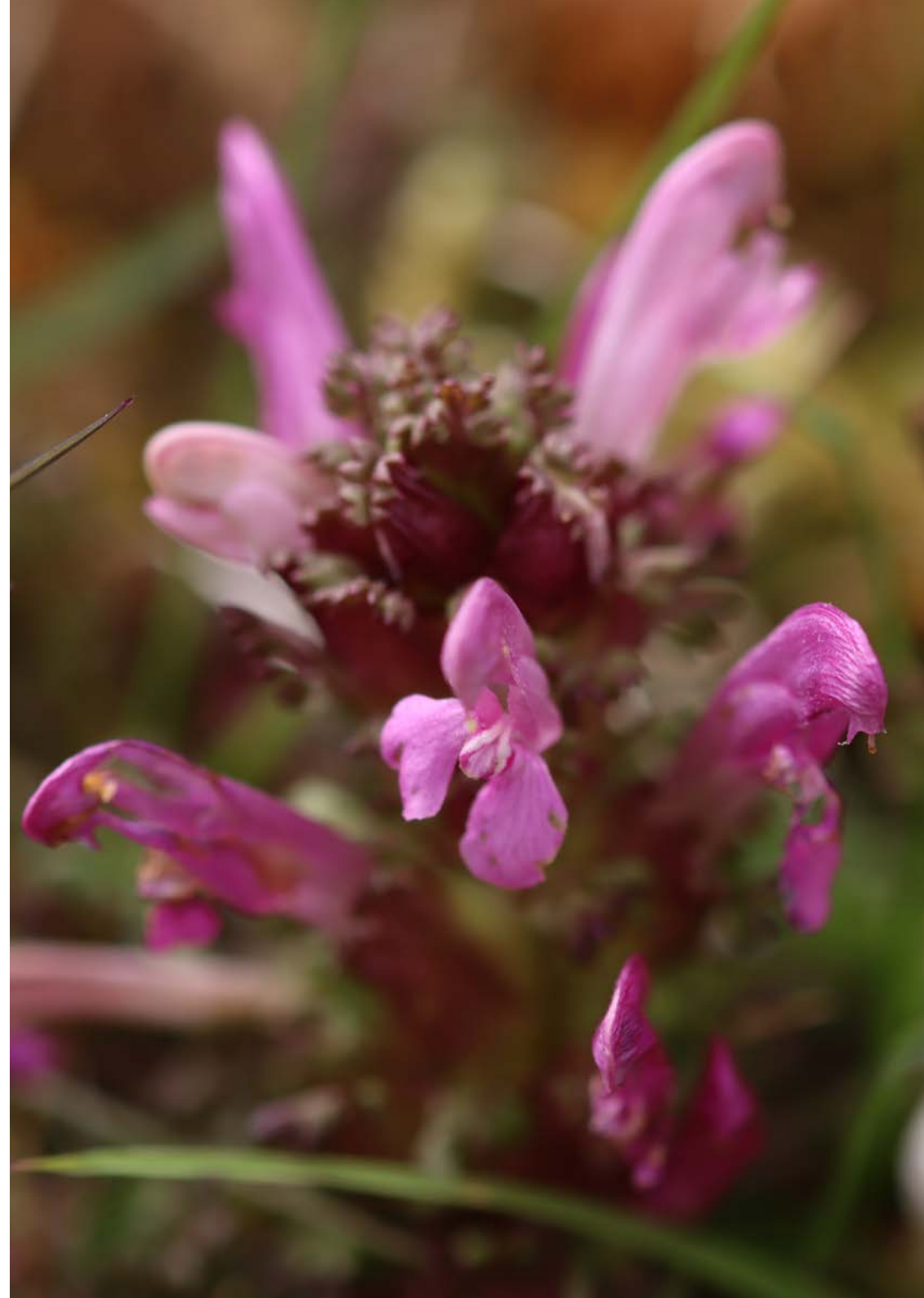
The European Union recognises that a transition to a sustainable economy requires major shifts in investments towards new infrastructures, new technologies, new business models, and new modes of production and consumption of all types of goods and services, including food and natural resources.

Through its targeted support to policy and market uptake actions, the LIFE programme aims to preserve, protect and improve the quality of the environment, protect human health and pursue the prudent and rational utilisation of natural resources. To date, LIFE has co-financed approximately 4,000 projects across the EU, contributing more than €3 billion to the protection of the environment.



Natura 2000

Natura 2000 is a European network of important ecological sites stretching over 18% of the EU's land area and more than 8% of its marine territory. It is comprised of Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA) designated by Member States under the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive, respectively. The aim of the network is to ensure the long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats. The Wild Atlantic Nature project sites are all SACs and Natura 2000 sites.





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