



LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature project launch

Ballycroy, Co.Mayo

13 May 2022



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



Introduction

LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature is a multi-dimensional project primarily aimed at the delivery of biodiversity, climate and water benefits through the conservation and restoration of blanket bog habitat in northwest Ireland. Funded under the EU LIFE programme for nine years (2021-2029), LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature works with farmers, local communities, state agencies and others across a broad range of actions spanning sectors including farming, forestry, tourism, community development, education and research. These activities aim to deliver environmental and social benefits for local areas and inform broader policy and practice across Ireland and the EU.

The official launch of LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature took place in Ballycroy Community Centre on 13 May 2022. The event was attended by more than 120 people representing a cross-section of society including government, businesses, civil society and academia. The project was launched by Minister of State for Heritage and Electoral Reform at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Malcolm Noonan TD and Minister of State for Land Use and Biodiversity at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Pippa Hackett TD. Guest speakers included Martin Gavin, Leenane Development Association, and Michael Davoren from the Burren programme. The event was widely covered in local and national media including RTÉ, The Irish Times, The Farmers Journal, The Western People, The Connaught Telegraph and MidWest Radio. A project promotional video premiered at the event was extremely popular and since viewed more than 3,000 times on social media.



Invited speakers

Invited speakers at the launch of LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature included:

- Dr Derek McLoughlin – LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature
- Minister Pippa Hackett – Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine
- Martin Gavin – Leenane Development Association
- Michael Davoren – Burren Programme
- Minister Malcolm Noonan – Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

Recording of speeches were uploaded to the project YouTube channel and can be viewed at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H97nLwLFwfg&list=PLXsj31v6sZq4ZVFmNtwHy_m1Aon2MVxXu



Attendance

The project launch was attended by more than 120 people including farmers and members of the local community, local and national organizations, community development groups, local schools, and local, regional and national media.

Table 1: Example of organizations represented at launch of LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature

ORGANIZATION	
Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage	National University of Ireland Galway
Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine	Forum Connemara
Burren Programme	Community Wetlands Forum
Leenane Development Association	Marine Institute
North West Regional Assembly	Hen Harrier project
Faite Ireland	LIFE on Machair
Heritage Council	Corncrake LIFE
National Parks and Wildlife Service	LAWPro
Irish Farmers Association	Dark Sky Ireland
Pearl Mussel Project	Atlantic Technological University
Ballycroy Community Council	Teagasc
Mayo County Council	South West Mayo Development Association
Mulranny Environmental Group	Old Irish Goat Society



Media coverage

The event received considerable media attention, with many positive articles published by local and national media outlets. A list of media appearances associated with the event is provided below. The Press Release associated with event is provided in Appendix 1.



Table 2: Media coverage of LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature project launch

TITLE	OUTLET	DATE
€20.6m bog conservation project unveiled as Biodiversity Week launched	The Mayo News	24/05/2022
Blanket bog project can earn millions for local economy	Western People	17/05/2022
Blanket bog conservation project unveiled for Donegal to Galway area	Donegal Daily	14/05/2022
National biodiversity week launches with €20m project to restore blanket bog habitat	The Carlow Nationalist	13/05/2022
National biodiversity week launches with €20m project to restore blanket bog habitat	The Waterford News and Star	13/05/2022
€20m funding approved to conserve 'vitaly important' blanket bogs in Ireland	Leinster Leader	13/05/2022
€20m funding approved to conserve 'vitaly important' blanket bogs in Ireland	Limerick Leader	13/05/2022
National biodiversity week launches with €20m project to restore blanket bog habitat	BreakingNews.ie	13/05/2022
Mayo launch of €20.6m bog conservation project	Connaught Telegraph	13/05/2022
National biodiversity week launches with €20m project to restore blanket bog habitat	Roscommon Herald	13/05/2022
€20m project to restore blanket bogs along west coast launched	Agriland	13/05/2022
Blanket bog conservation project unveiled for vast area from Galway to Donegal	The Irish Times	13/05/2022
Farmers the 'first responders' to climate and biodiversity crisis	Farmers Journal	25/05/2022
Wild Atlantic Nature project the factory Ballycroy 'craved but couldn't have'	Farmers Journal	15/05/2022
€20.6m bog conservation project unveiled as Biodiversity Week is launched	gov.ie	13/05/2022
Wild Atlantic Nature project launched in Ballycroy today	MidWest Radio	13/05/2022
€20m scheme being launched to preserve blanket bogs	Highland Radio	13/05/2022
New €20m blanket bog project being launched in northwest today	RTE Morning Ireland	13/05/2022

Appendix 1: Press release – project launch



An Roinn Tithíochta,
Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreachta
Department of Housing,
Local Government and Heritage

Press Release 13 May 2022 11am

€20.6m Bog Conservation Project Unveiled as Biodiversity Week Launches

LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature aims to deliver environmental and social benefits through the conservation and restoration of blanket bog habitat in northwest Ireland

The €20.6m LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature project was officially launched today in Ballycroy, Co. Mayo by Minister of State for Heritage and Electoral Reform at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Malcolm Noonan TD and Minister of State for Land Use and Biodiversity at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Pippa Hackett TD.

LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature is a wide reaching project primarily aimed at the delivery of environmental and social benefits through the conservation and restoration of blanket bog habitat in northwest Ireland, working closely with the local community. The project has 35 sites covering a total of more than 250,000 hectares along the Western seaboard from south Galway to north Donegal.

The project is coordinated by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. Nine other associated beneficiaries are involved in the project, including the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Teagasc, Bord na Móna, Coillte, RTÉ, Fáilte Ireland, The Heritage Council, Northern & Western Regional Assembly, and Universidade de Santiago de Compostela.

Speaking at the launch, Minister Noonan stated:

“I can think of no better way to kick off National Biodiversity Week than with a major €20m blanket bog restoration project working with farmers and communities in the northwest of Ireland. This innovative project puts people, and the ecological health of the landscapes they live and work in, at the heart of its efforts. I believe that collaborative approaches like this one are the best ways to deliver real impact for nature. A few months ago, I visited this area and met with people involved in locally-led rhododendron control under the umbrella of this LIFE project. It’s a great example of the successes already underway. The protection of our blanket bog habitats is vitally important as we work to address our biodiversity and climate crises, and I’m confident that this project will deliver many benefits to the area – social, environmental and economic.”



LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature has successfully launched a pilot Results-Based agri-environment Payment Scheme (RBPS) in the Owenduff/Nephin Complex SAC for 2021, and will expand to Donegal, Sligo and other parts of Mayo in 2022. The RBPS directly links farmer payments to the environmental quality of the farm. This approach incentivises and rewards restoration and conservation of high-quality habitats and puts farmers and their skills, expertise and knowledge of their land central to the development of the initiative. The results of this pilot will inform future results-based actions to be incorporated into Common Agricultural Policy Agri-Environment, Climate Measures (AECMs) from 2023. More than 150 farmers in Co. Mayo took part in the pilot agri-environment initiative in 2021 and have received total payments in excess of €500,000. The pilot will be expanded to other project areas in 2022, with more than 800 farmers expected to benefit from the scheme.

Minister Hackett highlighted the importance of the work already done by LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature in the development of agri-environment measures:

“LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature is a fantastic project driven by the local community and delivering results for nature and biodiversity. The results based element is very important because it supports farmers to really engage and deliver for their local ecosystem. I was delighted to be in my home county of Mayo today with my colleague Minister Noonan at the start of Biodiversity Week to see real community effort on biodiversity first hand”.

Another successful initiative in the first year of LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature is an invasive species control project to stop the spread of *rhododendron ponticum* in the Delphi area. This project, conceived by local landowners, is currently working to develop and demonstrate a community-led Rhododendron control programme at the catchment level and will produce an action plan including best practice guidelines for communities and local authorities. The project works with a range of stakeholders to develop and test best-practice methods for treating Rhododendron at different densities and maturity and provide recommendations for upscaling in other Rhododendron infestation sites.

In addition to practical conservation work, LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature will also implement a number of actions aimed at enhancing wider community engagement including

- establishing local support groups in the project sites,
- developing and implementing community knowledge exchange programmes,
- administering community outreach activities,
- developing a schools education programme,
- promotion of the Natura 2000 network,
- supporting communities to develop and manage tourism and recreational activities and develop appropriate infrastructure.

Other actions will include site surveys, ecological assessments, training for nature conservation, control of invasive species, fire prevention and water management. These activities aim to deliver environmental and social benefits for local areas and inform broader policy and practice across Ireland and the EU.

A common thread among these different project activities is the integration of various policies with practical land use. Project Manager, Dr Derek McLoughlin, views this coherence as a crucial driver of ecological restoration:

“This project aims to implement Government policies related to nature, agriculture and climate in a way that works for the local community. Ultimately we depend on landowners to manage the land to deliver the goods and services that the public want and need. We depend on existing knowledge and experience that landowners and land managers have. Therefore, we need to ensure coherent messages on the use of land and have the appropriate policy to deliver good environmental outcomes in a way that can support farmers’ livelihoods.”

According to Dr Gary Goggins of LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature:

“We have been blown away with the level of support we have received from farmers and local communities in the first year of the project. We were working in difficult circumstances with the Covid pandemic, but despite this, local people have really engaged with the project and have been extremely willing to get involved and put forward novel ideas for blanket bog conservation in their local areas. This sends a clear message that strong support through funding and advice is needed for projects that make sense for local people and for the environment.”

--- ENDS ---

Editors Notes:

About Blanket Bogs

Blanket bogs are valuable wetlands that are important from a social, economic, environmental and cultural perspective. These peatlands provide much of our drinking water, store huge amounts of carbon, provide habitats for biodiversity, and a home for many endangered and vulnerable species. They also provide us with high quality food and social and cultural amenities. Without these crucial services, we would be left with considerable challenges to the way we live.

Globally, Ireland contains 8% of the world’s blanket bog, but unfortunately much of it is in poor condition and requires careful management to bring it back to favourable condition. This is a significant challenge, which cannot be achieved without the help and support of local people, working together with landowners, state agencies and others.

About LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature

LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature is a €20.6m 9-year LIFE Integrated Project coordinated by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. It includes 9 other associated beneficiaries including the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Teagasc, Bord na Móna, Coillte, RTÉ, Fáilte Ireland, The Heritage Council, Northern & Western Regional Assembly, and Universidade de Santiago de Compostela. 60% of the project’s funding is from the EU and 40% is from project partners.

The *LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature* project is funded under the EU LIFE programme. The LIFE programme is the EU’s funding instrument for the environment and climate action. Since its creation in 1992, it has co-financed some 5000 projects across the EU, with a total contribution of approximately €6.5 billion for the protection of the environment and climate action. These



programmes are typically run by government agencies such as the National Parks and Wildlife Service, local authorities, with involvement of community groups, third level institutions, and private companies. Further information on Ireland's LIFE Projects.

Natura 2000 is a European network of important ecological sites. 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 35 *LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature* project sites are all SACs and Natura 2000 sites.

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Photos available upon request to Press Office.

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