

# RESTORATION RETROFIT PILOT PROJECT



WILD ATLANTIC  
NATURE LIFE

A landscape photograph showing a gravel road winding through a field of tall, dry grass. In the foreground, there is a large pile of dark, charred wood. The background features rolling hills under a cloudy sky.

INFORMATION BOOKLET

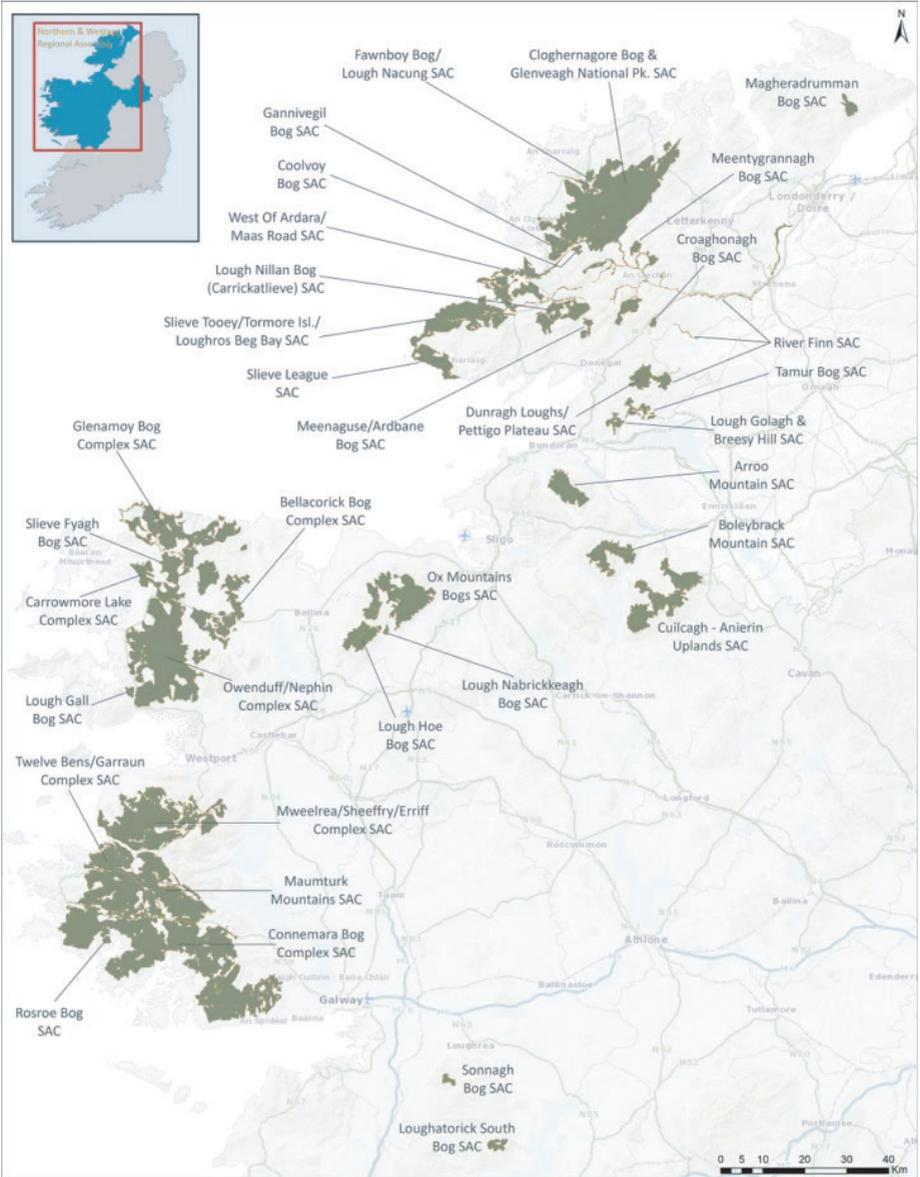
# About LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature



LIFE Integrated Project (IP) Wild Atlantic Nature is a nine-year environmental project (2021-2029) coordinated by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). The project aims to improve Ireland's performance in conserving legally protected habitats, with a focus on our Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) designated for blanket bog, a priority habitat under the EU Habitats Directive.

The primary focus is on 35 Natura 2000 sites in the northwest of Ireland. This work is led by a multi-disciplinary project team and supported by input from ten project beneficiaries.





**Wild Atlantic Nature LIFE-IP  
Blanket Bog Special Areas of Conservation  
within the Northern & Western Regional Assembly**

**NW Blanket Bog SAC**

Projection: Irish Transverse Mercator  
Map compiled: 28/07/2021, Wild Atlantic Nature LIFE-IP  
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**DEGRADED PEATLAND**  
ENERGY **INEFFICIENT** HOUSE



**HEALTHY PEATLAND**  
ENERGY **EFFICIENT** HOUSE

# Why a restoration-retrofit pilot for blanket bogs?

This project aims to reduce the need for turf in and around Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), and facilitate the restoration of blanket bogs and associated habitats. To achieve this aim, participants will have their home retrofitted to a higher energy efficiency standard and, in return, they will agree to the restoration of the bog including cutover bog/turf banks and refrain from future turf-cutting.

The project represents a significant investment in rural Ireland and will help meet national obligations for blanket bog conservation within SACs under the EU Birds and Habitats Directives.

## Turf cutting

Where turf-cutting occurs, the environmental quality of blanket bogs is generally low and this negatively affects the condition of the overall ecosystem. Poor habitat condition can also result in lower agri-environment payments for the affected land area. Moreover, burning smoky fuels such as turf has a negative impact on human health due to issues with air quality.



Nonetheless, turf is an important domestic fuel for many households. It is important to provide people with alternative options to remove the need for turf and mitigate the negative impacts of peat extraction on both the environment and human health.

**The project will reduce demand for turf and includes the restoration of blanket bogs and associated habitats.**

## Home Retrofitting

The project targets a reduction in the use of peat as a household fuel by retrofitting houses to a higher energy efficiency standard. The project provides financial support to participants and leverages grants for energy upgrades through the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). The project uses the SEAI One Stop Shop model to bring participating homes up to the required standard to receive the grants available.

# Restoration-Retrofit Pilot Project



The pilot is a **voluntary programme**, with a limited number of places. A range of criteria will be used to shortlist candidates for participation including turbary rights and ownership of lands within the target SAC.



A pilot programme with the objective to **provide a viable alternative to turf** for rural households & to **protect and restore peatlands**



## Voluntary programme

Co-designed with communities



## Reduce the need for turf

Promotes reduction in use of turf as household/domestic fuel



## Peatland restoration

Restoration of bog including cutover bog/turf banks where present



## Home retrofit

Deep retrofit of home to higher BER

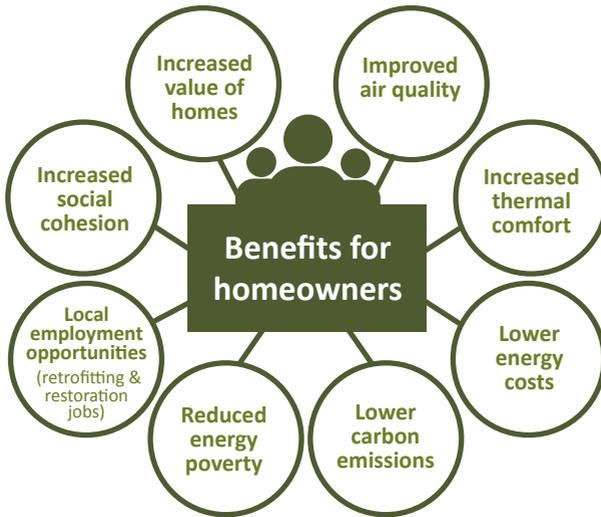
**Note:** *Current cutting and/or burning of turf will not have any influence on eligibility to apply for the programme or in the prioritisation of applications*

## Objectives

- To demonstrate how the retrofitting of homes reduces the demand for turf and therefore facilitates a reduction in the use of turf in and around Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) designated for blanket bogs.
- To help meet obligations for blanket bog conservation within SACs, designated to conserve species and habitats under the EU Habitats Directive.
- To help achieve Ireland's Biodiversity Action Plan vision where by 2050 biodiversity is valued, conserved, restored and sustainably used, maintaining ecosystem services, sustaining a healthy planet and delivering benefits essential for all people.
- To help achieve Ireland's National 2050 Climate Objective target to significantly and urgently reduce the use of all fossil fuels and improve energy efficiency in homes with resulting benefits for all householders in terms of efficiency, comfort, health and wellbeing.

# Why get involved?

In addition to the environmental benefits from the reduction in turf cutting, there will be a number of other benefits for the homeowner as shown below.



## Pilot Project Stages

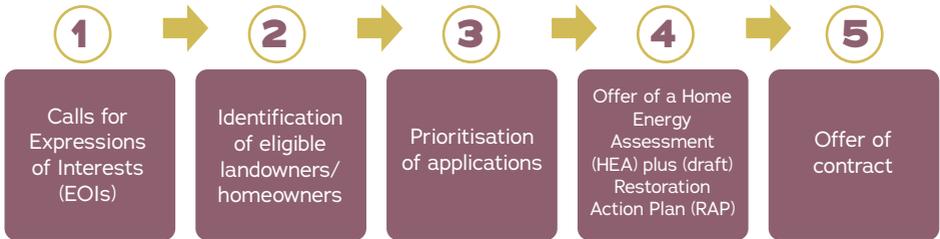
There are two major components of the pilot comprised of the peatland restoration and the home retrofit. The different stages for both components run concurrently as highlighted below.



# Landowner/Homeowner Recruitment

## 1. Expressions of Interest

This is a voluntary pilot programme with a limited number of places. Those expressing interest in this programme, and whose eligibility is confirmed, will be considered as potential participants for the pilot project. Recruitment of participants is undertaken over a number of stages including identifying eligibility and prioritisation of applications based on a number of criteria.



## 2. Who is eligible to apply?

Those who meet **all** the following criteria can apply for the pilot:

- ✓ Owners of lands and/or turbary rights within the target Special Area of Conservation
- ✓ Where their primary residence is within the identified SAC or identified buffer area
- ✓ Meet eligibility requirements for SEAI One Stop Shop Service, including owning your primary residence, which was built/occupied before 2011, and has a Building Energy Rating (BER) of B3 or lower.

**Note:** Current cutting and/or burning of turf will not have any influence on eligibility to apply for the programme or in the prioritisation of applications.

Expressions Of Interest will be assessed by the project team and each applicant will be notified whether or not they have been successfully chosen to participate, pending receipt of documentary evidence satisfying eligibility criteria.



Scan QR Code for Eligibility Criteria for SEAI One Stop Shop Service

### 3. Prioritisation

Given that there are a limited number of places on this pilot, not all of those that meet eligibility requirements will be offered the full retrofit/restoration package. Prioritisation of applications will be based on a number of factors and candidates will need to:

- ✓ Be able to provide evidence of ownership of lands within the target SAC, and associated dwelling house for which turbary rights can be attached or have turbary rights for lands within the target SAC;
- ✓ In conjunction with home retrofitting, be willing to engage in restoration activities relating to peatland habitats including any cutover bog/turf banks on their lands;
- ✓ Submit folio numbers to confirm eligibility i.e. owns lands within the target SAC and confirmation of being the homeowner of their primary residence;
- ✓ Be aware that prioritisation will be given to landowners where their primary residence is within a certain distance of the SAC

To maximise impact of the pilot programme we seek to ensure a geographic spread of participants across the target SAC. The pilot will also include representation from current LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature demonstration farmers.

The Restoration-Retrofit Pilot project steering group will have the final say on prioritisation of participants where two or more applicants are of equal stature.

#### 4a. Home Energy Assessment

All prioritised candidates will be offered a Home Energy Assessment (HEA) free of charge, which will be undertaken by an SEAI approved contractor. At this stage, there will be no obligation to proceed with the home retrofit or peatland restoration. Completion of a HEA does not oblige full participation in the retrofitting pilot.



**The cost of Home Energy Assessments (HEAs)** will be covered by Wild Atlantic Nature and an SEAI grant. The HEA is a detailed report on the energy performance of your home and will include a Building Energy Rating (BER) assessment. The HEA will identify and detail the works needed to bring the home to meet the minimum requirements, with the cost of each measure itemised.

## 4b. (Draft) Restoration Action Plan

In cooperation with participant landowners, LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature will discuss potential areas for restoration on participants' lands and develop a draft Restoration Action Plan for their consideration. Activities may include reprofiling of turf banks, water table management, restoration, and revegetation of bare soil.

## 5. Contract for participating in the pilot

Before deciding whether to proceed, potential participants will need to review the retrofitting plan for their home and the final Restoration Action Plan for their lands. Once satisfied, participants will be required to enter a legal agreement with LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature/Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (or any subsequent successor as NPWS's parent department) to permit access to their lands for peatland restoration activities as agreed in the Restoration Action Plan. They will also be required to cease turf cutting activities and refrain from future turf cutting.

The two major components of this pilot, the home retrofit and peatland restoration, run concurrently. The following sections provide background on the processes of each component.



Participants will enter into a contract with NPWS for restoration of lands and where applicable to stop cutting turf. A signed legal agreement for the restoration will need to be in place before any retrofitting works will be undertaken on the home.

# Home Retrofit

Wild Atlantic Nature commissions an SEAI approved contractor to carry out a Home Energy Assessment for selected participants. The participant is provided with information on the recommended retrofit measures and costs for their home. Once satisfied, participants will enter into a contract with an SEAI approved contractor for completion of retrofit works. Participants must also agree to the Restoration Action Plan for their lands.

The retrofit is financed by LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature & SEAI grants, plus a homeowner contribution, if required.

- LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature provides a maximum of €40,000 (or up to €50,000 for those in receipt of a qualifying social welfare payments\*).
- SEAI grants cover up to 50% of the cost of a home energy retrofit, once requirements are met
- Any additional costs to be covered by homeowner

Information on the home energy grants available through the National Home Energy Upgrade Scheme/One Stop Shop service are listed on the following webpage:

<https://www.seai.ie/grants/home-energy-grants/one-stop-shop>

## \*What is a qualifying social welfare payment?

You must be in **receipt of one** of the following welfare payments to be eligible for the higher finance package:

- Fuel Allowance
- Job Seekers Allowance for over six months & have a child under 7 years of age
- Working Family Payment
- One-Parent Family Payment
- Domiciliary Care Allowance
- Carers Allowance and live with the person you care for
- Disability Allowance for over six months & have a child under 7 years of age



**Note:** Only a limited number of spaces are available for the higher finance package and applicants will be required to provide Department of Social Protection verification of payment.

# Home Energy Assessment

Wild Atlantic Nature will contract an SEAI approved contractor to carry out a Home Energy Assessment for those selected participants.

A Home Energy Assessment (HEA) includes the following:

- A Building Energy Rating (BER) assessment.
- A full technical report on the energy efficiency of your home.
- Details on the energy upgrades needed to get your home to a higher rating.
- A heat pump technical assessment detailing the energy upgrades required to make your home suitable for a heat pump.
- A report explaining how the recommended energy upgrades will improve the comfort of your home and help to reduce your energy bills.
- An estimate of the costs of the recommended energy upgrades.



This gives the homeowner an understanding of the level of work that is required to retrofit their home in order to reach the minimum required energy efficiency level.

## One Stop Shop energy upgrade

An SEAI approved 'One-Stop-Shop' contractor (*via a contract for services with LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature*) will administer and deliver the overall retrofitting programme. SEAI grants will be paid directly to the One Stop Shop (OSS) provider.

The One Stop Shop energy upgrade allows for a fully managed solution for home retrofits including a wider range of grants, less disruption and Home Energy Upgrade Loan Scheme. It also facilitates multiple upgrades, a fully managed service, and grant deduction from cost of works upfront.

## Who covers the cost of the retrofit?

LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature will provide a maximum of €40,000 (or up to €50,000 for those in receipt of a qualifying social welfare payment) toward the retrofit. The amount of funding available from SEAI depends on what specific retrofit measures are being used, but up to 50% of the cost of a home energy retrofit standard is available.

Where applicable, any additional costs above those covered by LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature and SEAI grants will be paid for by the participating household.

**Note:** Any SEAI and/or EU/DHLGH funding is not considered to be taxable income for the homeowners once the EU/DHLGH funding will be paid to an SEAI registered OSS service provider and aligns with SEAI's National Home Energy Upgrade Scheme.

**The schematic below demonstrates example costs and funding of retrofits\***



*\*The median cost of the works for the retrofit of a detached house between January and June 2025 through One Stop Shop was €69,577. The median grant amount was €23,400 and the median cost to owner was €43,711. Average BER improvement was going from D2 to A2 BER.*

# Peatland Restoration

LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature will work with participants to develop a draft proposal for restoration actions on their lands. Once the landowner is in agreement with the measures to be included, a full Restoration Action Plan\* (RAP) will be developed.

For financing the restoration works, LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature will ensure compatibility with existing payment streams (e.g. ACRES CP) and seek complementary supports from both exchequer and non-exchequer funds, where required.

*\* Restoration Action Plan provides detail on scope and scale of works, costs, potential sources of funding, regulatory obligations etc.*

**Home retrofit works will not start until there is a signed landowner contract in place for the restoration of lands.**



# PEATLAND RESTORATION COMPONENT OF THE PILOT



1	2	3	4	5
<b>Assessment &amp; planning</b>	<b>Draft restoration action plan</b>	<b>Final plan &amp; consent</b>	<b>Implementation</b>	<b>Monitoring &amp; maintenance</b>
Initial review to identify potential restoration actions and site suitability, including site visit with landowner	Proposal of restoration actions agreed with landowner. Draft Restoration Action Plan prepared by LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature. Landowner decides whether to proceed to contract stage.	Plan is agreed with landowner and screened/ consented by relevant authority. Final amendments complete and necessary approvals obtained. Formal contract signed by landowner.	Tenders sought and contractor appointed. Restoration works completed as per the RAP.	Restoration monitored to ensure effectiveness and identification of maintenance needs, where appropriate.



Timber dam



## WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT PEATLAND RESTORATION?

LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature has developed a blanket bog restoration toolkit as part of the WaterLANDS project. The toolkit explains the different types of measures that are used to restore and improve peatland habitats.



The document is free to download from the Wild Atlantic Nature website; scan the QR code to access.



**NPWS**

An tSeirbhís Páirceanna  
Náisiúnta agus Fiadhúlra  
National Parks and Wildlife  
Service



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