

# Shared Island Initiative PEATLAND PROGRAMME



Shared Island  
Initiative

## CASE STUDY

**Natura Communities** is a locally embedded nature conservation programme, guided by national policies on biodiversity, climate, and water. Restoration in Ireland has traditionally been implemented through direct payments to landowners, such as in the case of agri-environment schemes (AES), or via specialist contractors, who are often employed to deliver once-off or ad hoc projects. In both cases, projects are usually short-term, with little or no support for long-term management and maintenance. Moreover, skills and capacity developed within short-term projects are often lost across space and time.

Natura Communities builds capacity for local communities to deliver restoration projects, and provides a framework for an integrated approach to sustainable landscape management. The ultimate goal is to improve the conservation status in the Natura 2000 network in Ireland, including Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs).

## METHODS & APPROACH

By directly investing in communities within and adjacent to Natura 2000 sites, Natura Communities supports long-term conservation, where experience and expertise is developed and retained within local areas.

Since 2024, there are three Natura Communities groups operating across seven blanket bog SACs in Ireland, with plans for further expansion in 2026.

Tasks undertaken by the groups include stakeholder engagement, mapping threats and pressures, training local operatives in peatland restoration, implementing restoration actions across their local Natura 2000 sites following best practice methods, and technical reporting.



## RESULTS

Building capacity to engage in this type of work has two broad benefits; it delivers social benefits for people in these areas whilst improving the ecological quality and resilience of protected habitats.

Through this initiative, National Parks and Wildlife Service has invested more than €5.1m in the rural economy, with more than 40 people directly employed across the three Natura Communities projects. The initiative has delivered more than 2,000 ha of peatland restoration. The work is in compliance with regulations and delivers on national policy objectives.

## KEY LESSONS

Farmers and other landowners are often interested to do restoration work, but they do not always have the time, skills or physical capacity. Locally embedded teams can tap into this opportunity to deliver restoration. This requires a high level of administrative and technical capacity, which needs to be met by existing resources or through training and capacity-building. Knowledge exchange between Natura Communities groups is key to this development. Importantly, local communities in active regions are starting to view Natura 2000 sites as an economic resource, providing employment and training opportunities in otherwise economically disadvantaged areas.

TO FIND OUT MORE, VISIT:  
[www.naturacommunities.ie](http://www.naturacommunities.ie)

