



WILD ATLANTIC  
NATURE LIFE

# Conservation of Ireland's Natura 2000 network of blanket bog habitat with farmers and payment schemes

Landcare Europe Workshop

Dr Gary Goggins, 18<sup>th</sup> April 2023



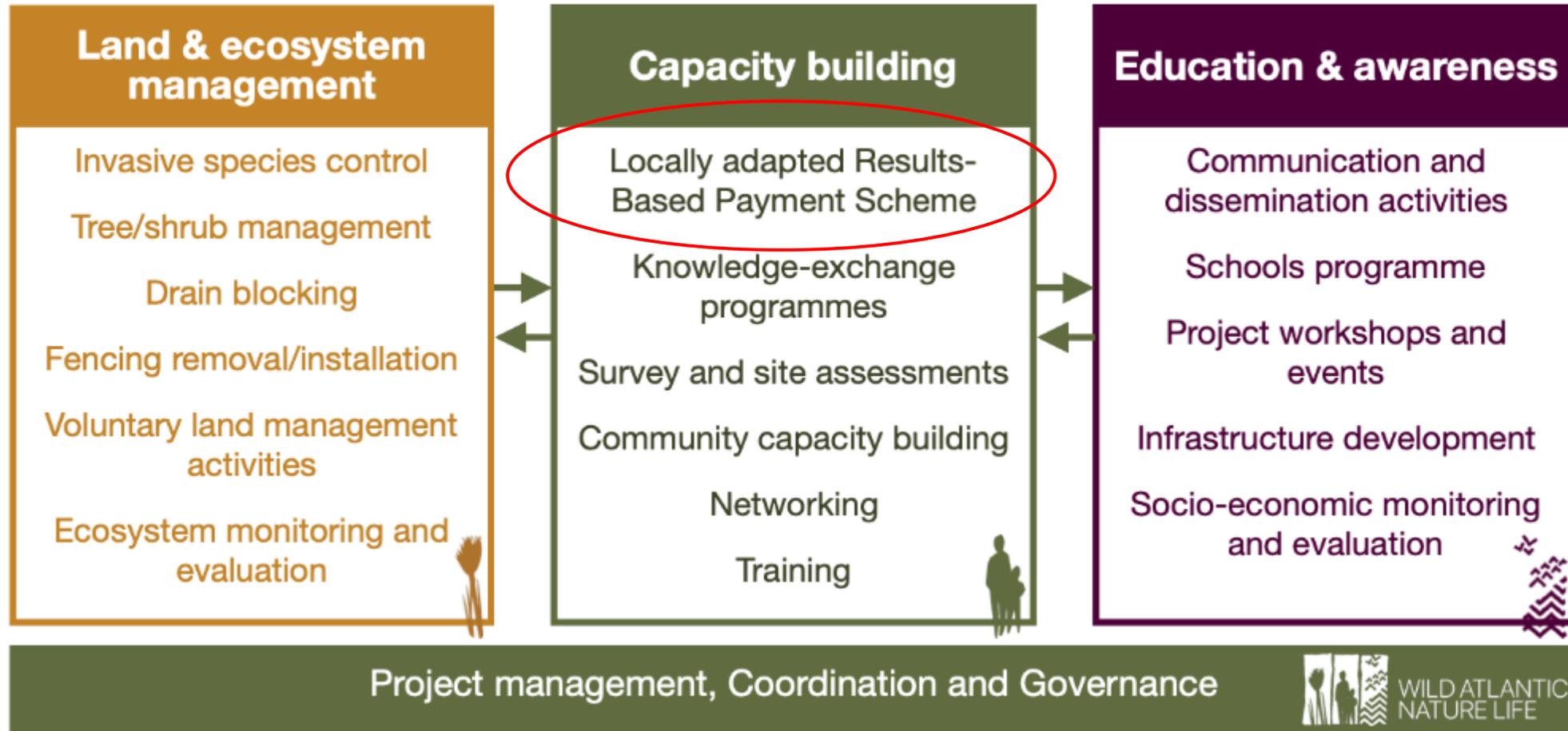
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# LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature overview

- Long-term project (-2029) funded under EU LIFE
  - Coordinated by DHLGH, 9 partners
- Total budget €20.6m (EU €12.3m)
  - Remit to attract complementary funding
- Aimed at management of Natura 2000 network
  - Specific focus on Ireland's SAC network of blanket bog
- > 75 project actions (A, C, D, E, F)
  - Farmer, community focused, supported by government

# Wild Atlantic Nature programme approach



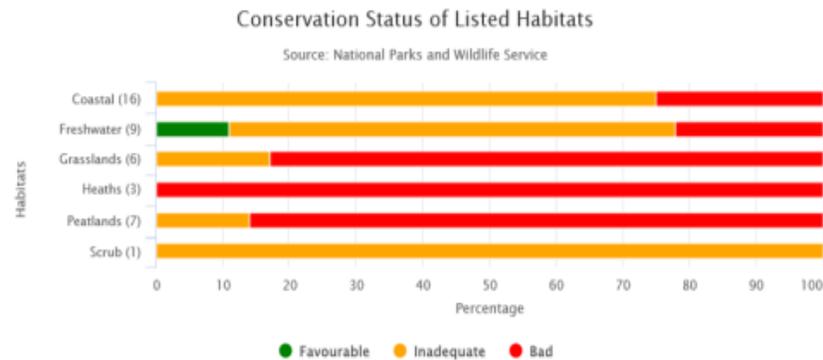
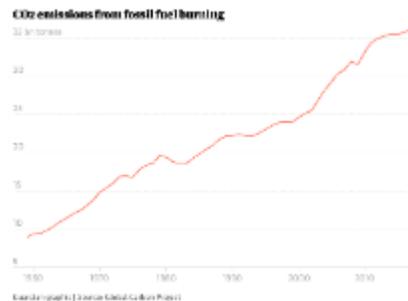
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# Organizational and institutional barriers to environmental improvement

Often, our land use policies don't align!



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# What have we learned in the past 30 years?

- Successful (agri-environment) programmes should
  - Be locally adapted, practical and results focused
  - Be developed with local people (farmers, communities)
  - Be properly and fairly funded
  - Facilitate flexible and adaptive management
  - Build local trust and capacity
  - Facilitate improvements
  - Account for factors outside farmers/communities control



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# (Hybrid) Results-based agri-environment programme (RBPS)



### WILD ATLANTIC NATURE LIFE Peatland Habitat Score Card

Farmer ID: \_\_\_\_\_ Surveyor: \_\_\_\_\_ Total Score: (A+B+C) /100  
 Plot number: \_\_\_\_\_ Survey date: \_\_\_\_\_

Which of the following best describes the plot (land parcel) (tick most appropriate):  
 Blanket bog  Heath  Mosaic of heath & bog  Mosaic of heath with grassland

#### A Ecological Integrity

**Positive indicators:** (tick those present)

<b>Moss Layer:</b>	<b>Sedge / Herb Layer:</b>	<b>Shrub Layer:</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Branched Mosses	<input type="checkbox"/> Bog Asphodel	<input type="checkbox"/> Bell Heather
<input type="checkbox"/> Non-crustose (bushy) Lichens	<input type="checkbox"/> Bog Bean	<input type="checkbox"/> Bilberry
<input type="checkbox"/> Sphagnum Mosses	<input type="checkbox"/> Bog Cotton	<input type="checkbox"/> Bog Myrtle
	<input type="checkbox"/> Deer Grass	<input type="checkbox"/> Cross-leaved Heather
	<input type="checkbox"/> Lousewort	<input type="checkbox"/> Ling Heather
	<input type="checkbox"/> Sundews	<input type="checkbox"/> Western Gorse
	<input type="checkbox"/> White-beaked Sedge	

**Negative indicators:** (tick those present)

- Bramble
- Conifers (Sitka Spruce or Lodgepole Pine)
- European Gorse
- Nettle
- Rhododendron
- Other alien invasive

**Total score A (sum of A1 to A5):** /55

**A1** How many positive indicators are present in the plot?  
 Count total number of positive indicators present:

No. of plants:	Score	No. of plants:	Score
Low: 0-4	0	High: 7-8	5
Medium: 5-6	2	Very high: 9+	10

**A2** What is the combined cover of positive mosses & lichens (listed above) throughout the plot?

Cover:	Score	Cover:	Score
Rare: 0-5%	0	Abundant: 21-30%	15
Frequent: 6-20%	10	Dominant: >30%	20

**A3** Presence of non-native species within the plot (rhododendron, self-sown conifers, other alien invasive)?

Present	Score
Absent	0

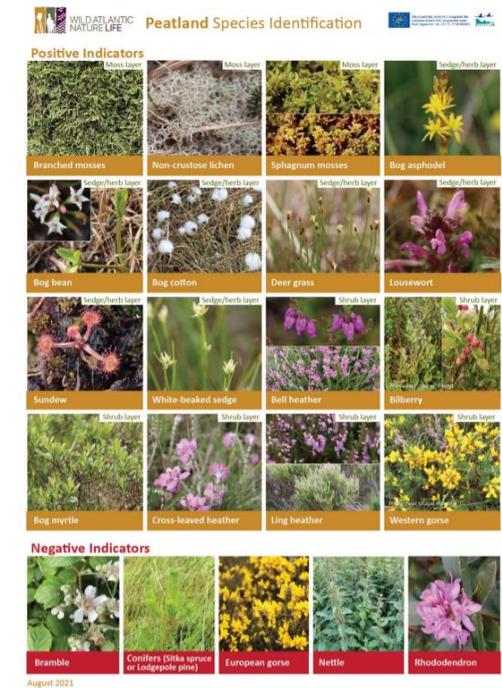
**A4** What is the combined cover of all negative indicators/weeds (listed above) throughout the plot?

Cover:	Score	Cover:	Score
High: >25%	-15	Med-low: 1-10%	-5
Medium: 11-25%	-10	Absent/negligible	10

**A5** Quality of vegetation structure?

<b>Very Poor</b> Vegetation height is uniformly low. Little or no heather present on wet heaths. Often lacking moss and shrub layer. Often resulting from over grazing or recent peat cutting. Score -15	<b>Poor</b> Rank sward. Purple moor-grass/mat-grass and rank senescent heather dominating. Litter cover high, thatch forming in large continuous patches. Poorly developed ground layer. Often resulting from under grazing. Score -10	<b>Moderate (high grazed)</b> Significant areas (>25%) of the plot have tight uniform vegetation although not throughout. Score 0	<b>Moderate (low grazed)</b> Significant areas (>25%) of the plot have rank vegetation although not throughout. Score 0	<b>Good</b> Sward in good condition, abundant grass and sedge-like vegetation on blanket bog with hummock, hollow, and pool complexes on bog. On heath, all stages of heather / shrub growth present, mostly >30cm. Mix of bog and / or heath vegetation at varying heights throughout. Well structured vegetation with all three layers (moss, sedge / herb, and shrub) well represented. Score 15
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May 2021



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Delivery for water quality,  
biodiversity, climate &  
communities (**aligning policy**)

- Farm systems generally have grassland and peatland (some woodland)
- **Whole-farm approach** is essential

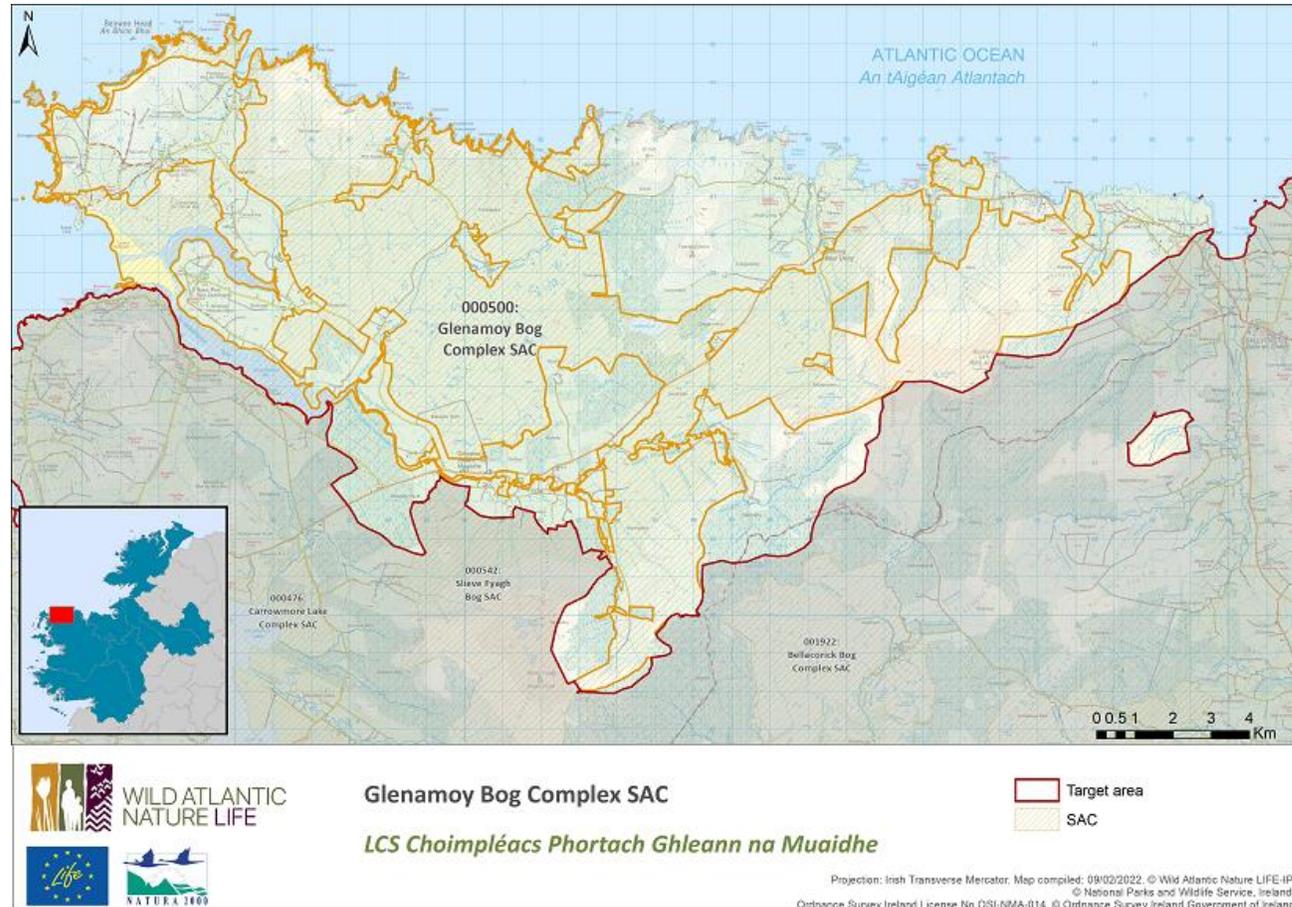


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# Target landscape level

Prioritization based on geographical area (**SAC + Catchment**)

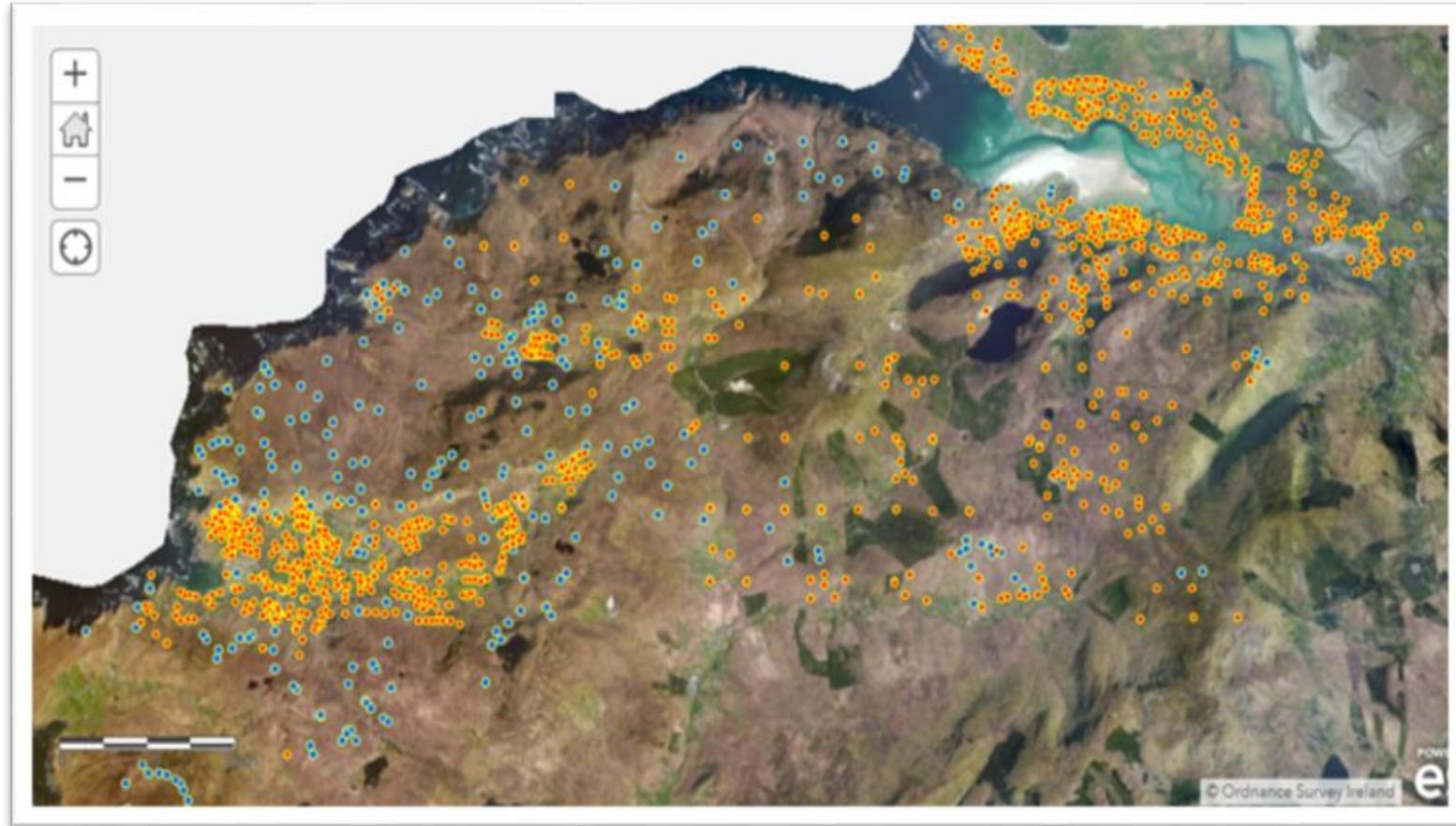


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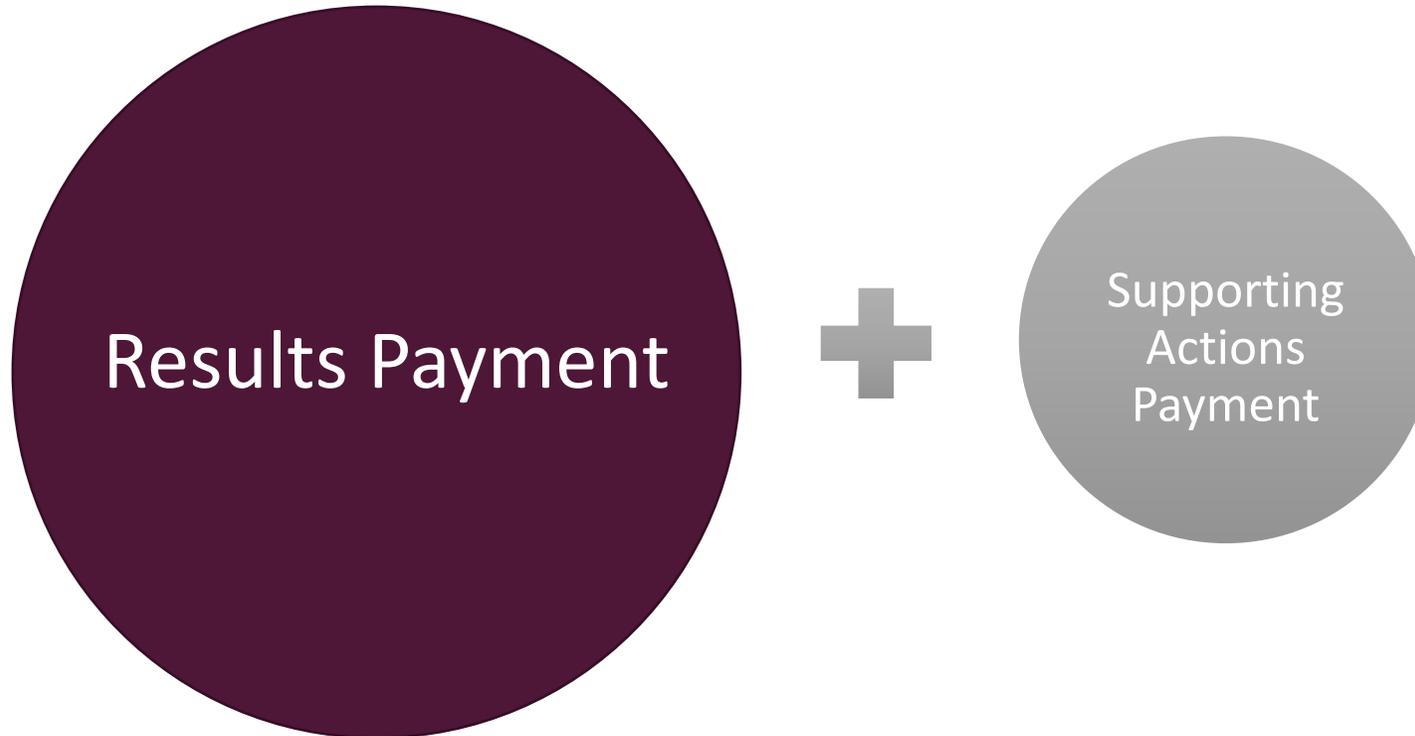


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# Payment streams

Need to **reward** high quality but also **incentivise** improvement of poor quality

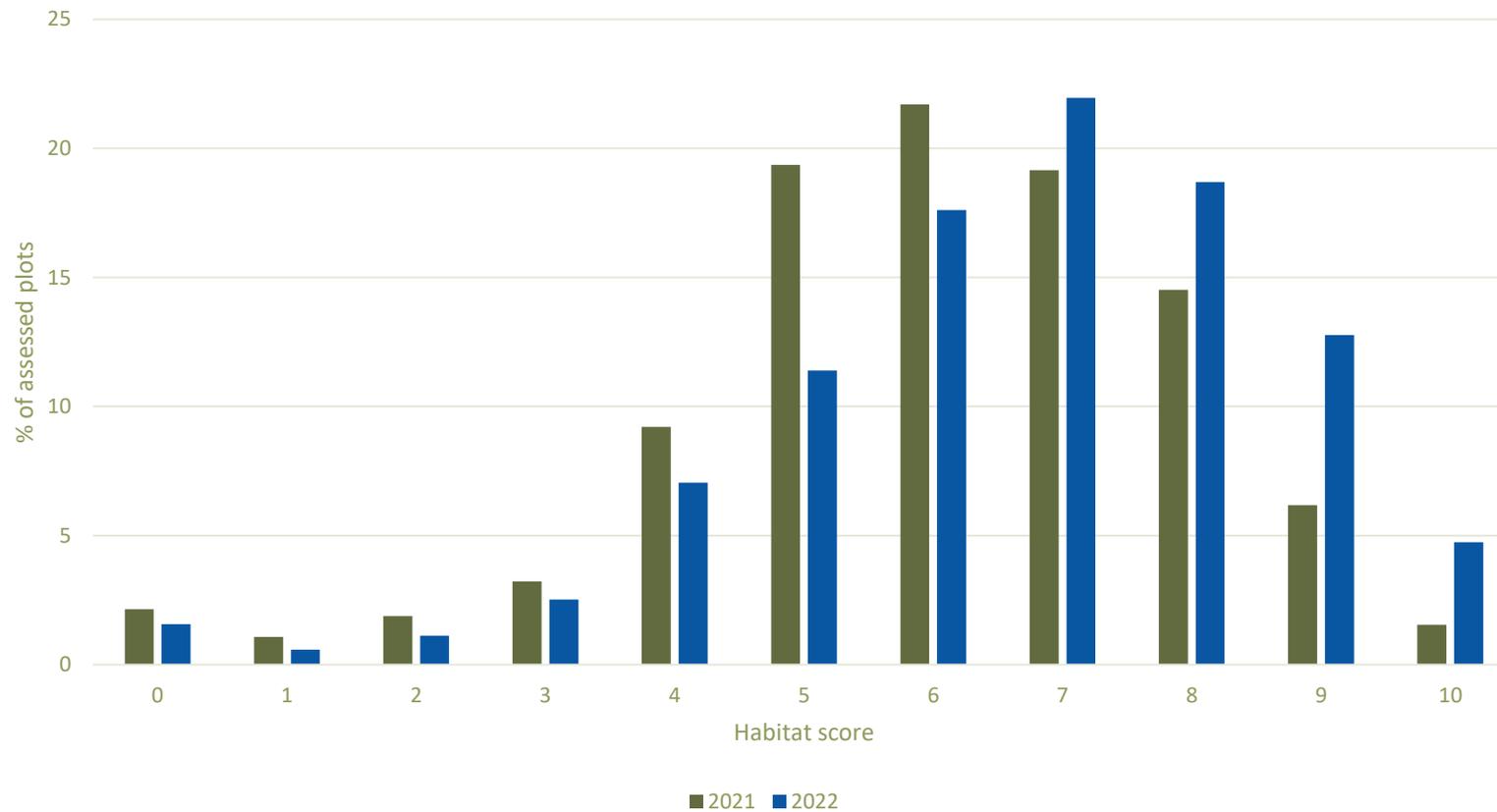


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# Supporting actions

- Assists with better farm management & improved ecological quality



Examples from Pearl Mussel Project EIP



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# Supporting actions



Photos: Pearl Mussel Project EIP



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# Habitat quality payment

**Digressive payments & area banding** are important principles

Payment rates according to quality per ha (€):

Plot score	A First 30 <sub>ha</sub>	B 31-70 <sub>ha</sub>	C >70 <sub>ha</sub>
<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



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# Whole-farm assessment

Ensures good farm(yard) mgt, strong focus on **risk** to water quality

## Whole-farm assessment result:

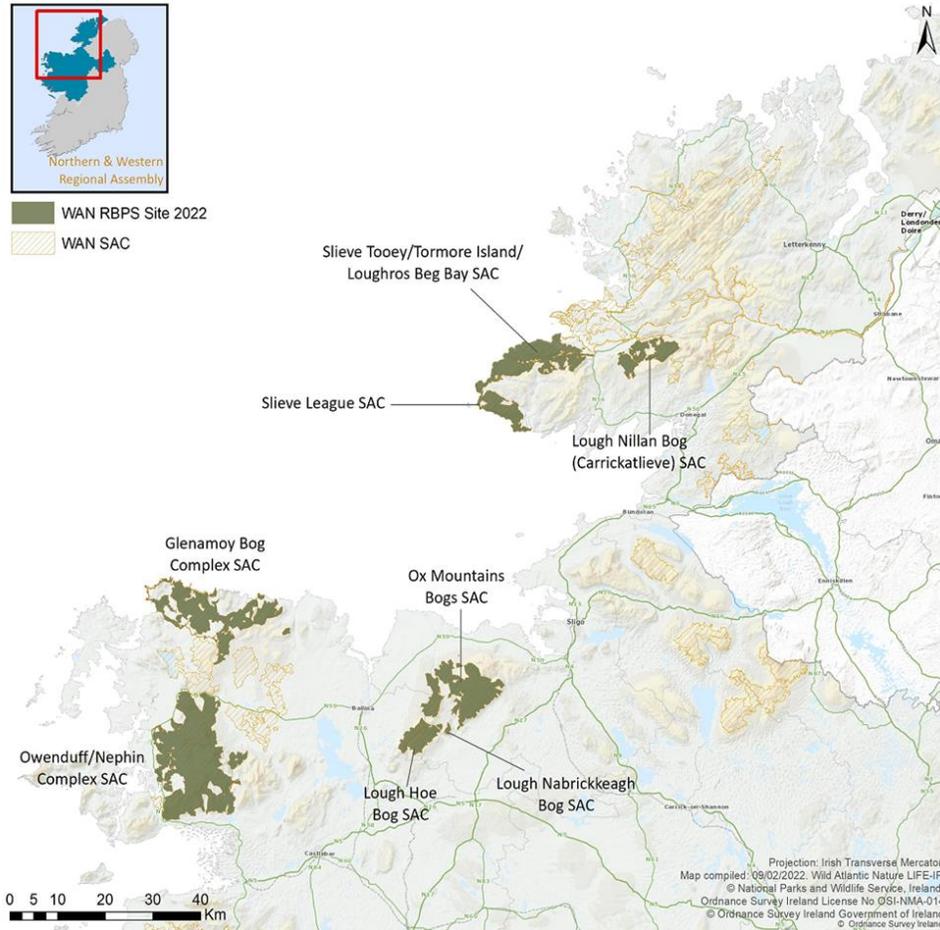
Quality	Correction factor
<b>Poor</b>	0.3 - 30% of the potential results-based payment is awarded
<b>Inadequate</b>	0.6 - 60% of the results-based payment is awarded
<b>Good</b>	1- 100% of the results-based payment is awarded
<b>Excellent</b>	1.2 - a bonus payment of 20% is applied to the results-based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



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# RBPS 2021/2022



- Design of RBPS programme
- Implemented across 6 SACs
- 820 farmers
- >50 advisors trained
- 63,000ha land surveyed
- ~ €2.5m direct farmer payments
- €680,000 additional funding
- Training for DAFM/DHLGH staff
- Lessons for CAP SP



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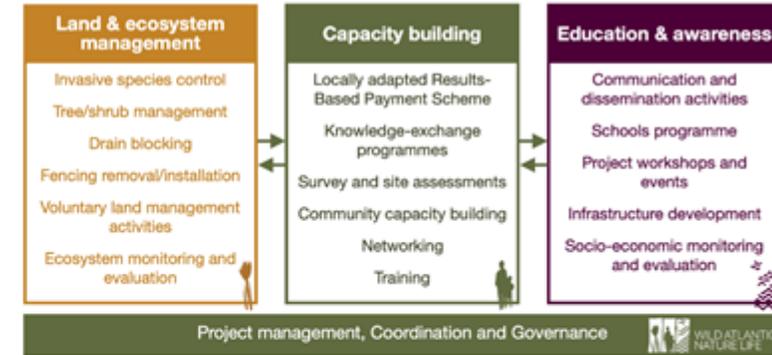
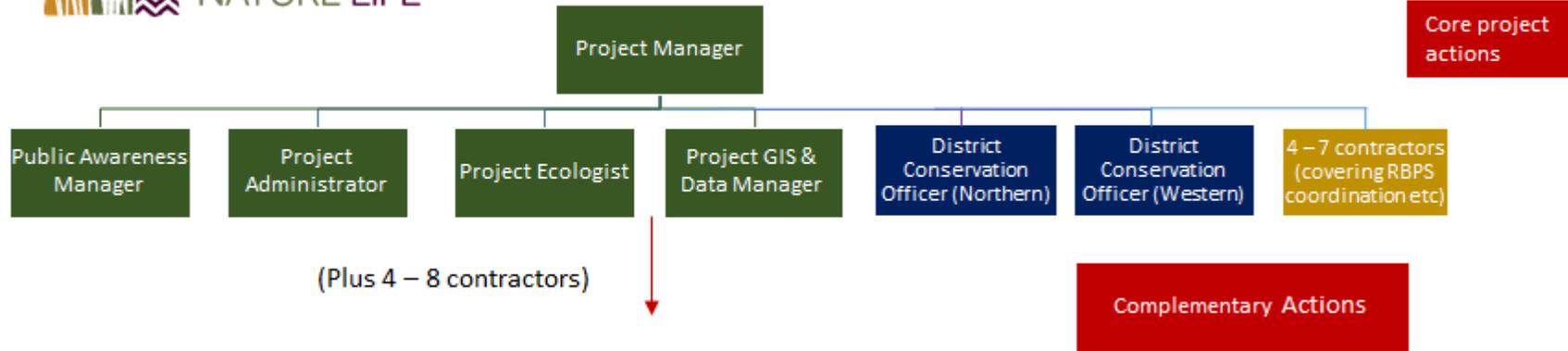


# Communication, dissemination & exploitation

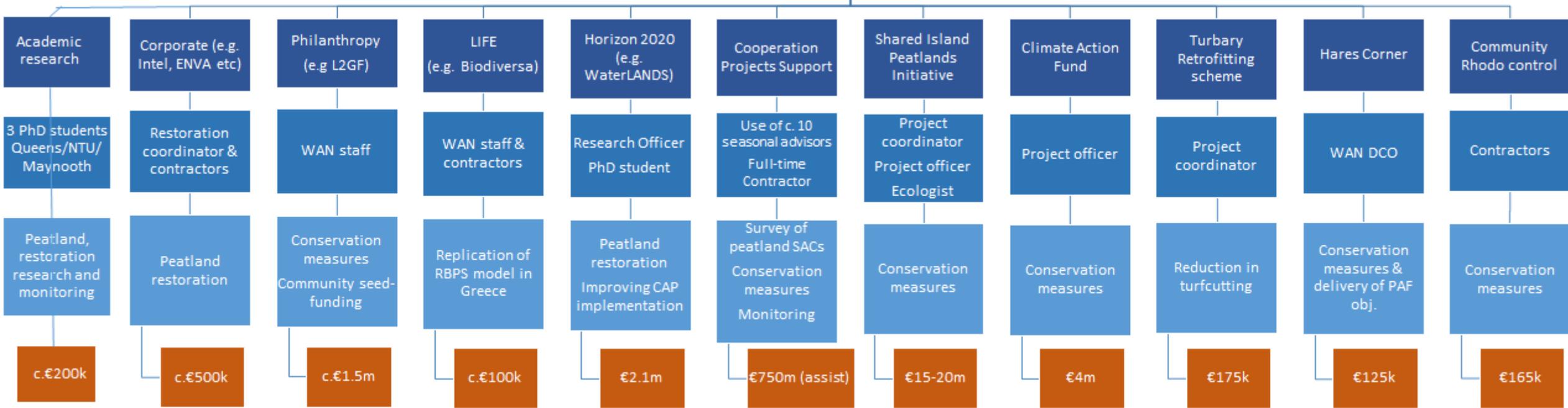


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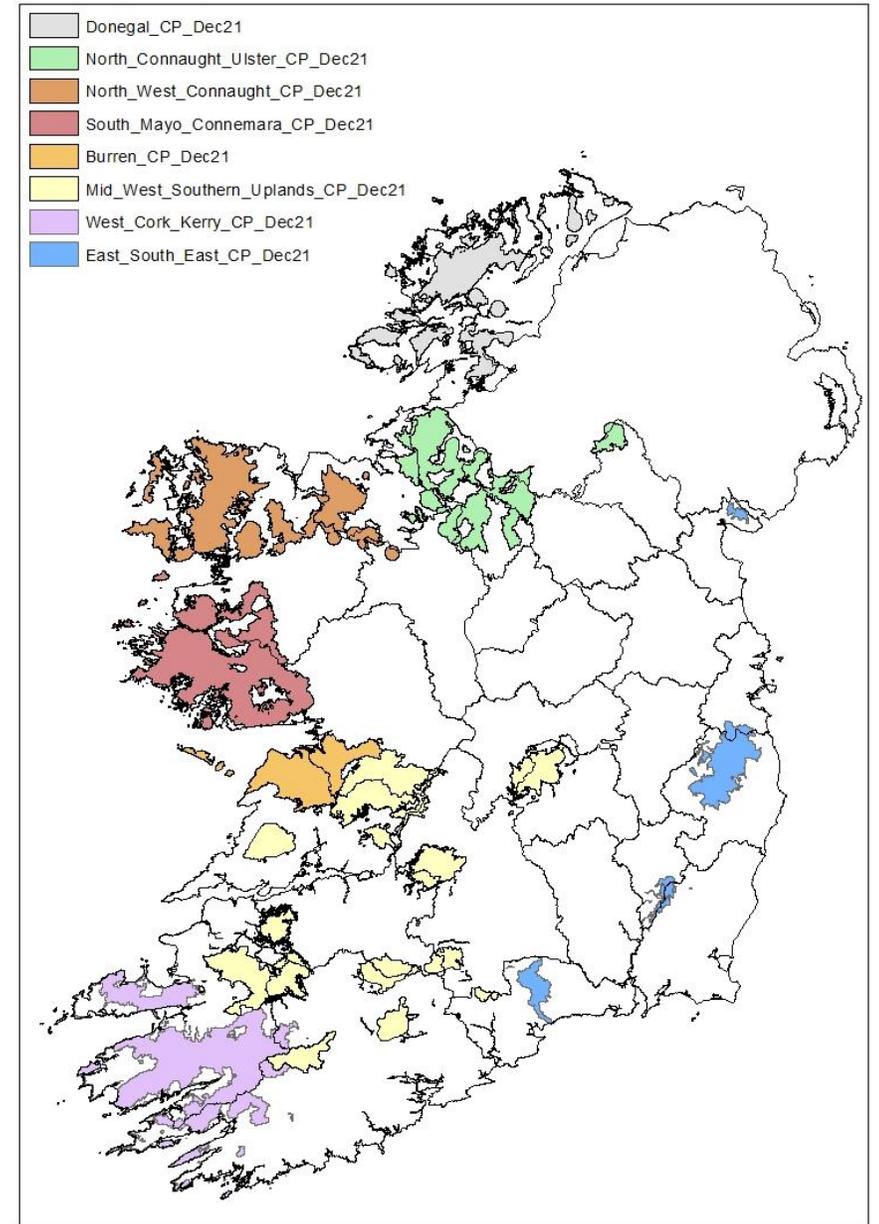


**Complementary Actions**



# CAP Strategic Plan 2023-27

- ACRES Cooperation Projects
  - Development of previous EIP & LIFE programme learnings
- Roll out to 20,000 farmers
  - Funded via AECM, NPIs, Cooperation Articles
- Opportunity for farmers (added value to HNV lands)
- Opportunities for integrating land use policies through delivery of carbon, biodiversity, water
- Need for strong ecological restoration funding (from outside CAP)
  - Support for Co-operation projects, farmers and landowners for complex issues



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# Evolution and transferability

- Greater alignment of land use policy
  - Replacing contradictory existing farm payment schemes
- Greater collaboration across public bodies to work effectively
- Important data source for informing future policy
  - RBPS used as a landscape land use planning tool and a driver for ecological conservation and restoration
- Get solid financial/admin systems in place
  - Administration and IT capacity is the primary limitation!
  - Need guidance on the development of sustainable agriculture programmes from a technical, financial, administrative, IT and social perspective



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# Potential regulatory changes

- Integration of CAP pillar strands to reflect ecological quality
  - Pillar 1 scheme (e.g. BPS) payment could depend on delivery of quality in Pillar 2 (environmental schemes)
- Improving ability to pay for ecosystem services
  - WTO rules (costs incurred/income foregone); full costs of management
- Whole farm approach is very important
  - Review how RBPS has led to changes in policy, which aspects of RBPS have failed to be further developed by policy makers and why
- Clearly link RBPS to Natura 2000 to add benefit to these areas
  - How to deliver environmental improvements in intensive farming area?



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



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An Chomhairle Oidhreachta  
The Heritage Council



Thank you for your attention!

[www.wildatlanticnature.ie](http://www.wildatlanticnature.ie)

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