

Hedgerows, ditches and open drains are designated as Landscape Features for the purposes of the Single Payment Scheme.

Requirement to designate

The recent 'health check' of the Single Farm Payment has placed increased emphasis on the protection of Landscape Features. Therefore the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has decided to designate hedgerows, ditches and open drains as Landscape Features under the Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC) of Cross Compliance with effect from 2009. This designation also means that all areas under these features are now eligible for payment under the single payment and Disadvantaged Area Scheme rules.

While hedgerows are an important visual feature in the landscape and form part of the historical and archaeological heritage of the country, they also serve a number of very important functions at farm level such as:

- ü Stock proof boundaries particularly important for animal disease control;
- ü Shelter and shade for farm animals and shelter for crops from possible wind damage;
- ü Physical barrier to restrict soil and water movement thus reducing soil erosion and protecting water quality.
- ü Providing habitats for wild life in circumstances where the proportion of natural woodland in the country is low;
- ü Nature corridors to allow the free movement of wildlife.

These landscape features are now protected under the requirements of Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAEC). This means that in general they **cannot** be removed. Hedgerows must also be maintained and not allowed to become invasive thereby reducing the utilisable area of the field and consequently impacting on the area eligible for the single payment.

Where, in exceptional circumstances, a hedgerow must be removed as for example to facilitate farmyard expansion, a replacement hedge of similar length must be planted at a suitable location on the holding in advance of the removal of the existing hedgerow.

Maintenance

The height of a hedgerow is not of concern however its width at the base must be maintained at a reasonable width. Where new saplings and or briars have established and are extending the base of the hedge, these must be controlled through normal hedgerow maintenance as otherwise they will be in breach of the GAEC rules. It should also be noted that hedge maintenance cannot be carried out during the closed period from 1 March to 31 August in any year as required under the Wildlife Act of 1976. With regard to drains, normal maintenance can be carried out as required. Drains under this designation cannot be piped and closed in.

Where drains or hedgerows have been fenced such as to comply with REPS requirements, the area within the fence is now eligible for single farm payment.

FAQ

Q Why is DAFF now designating drains and hedgerows as landscape features?

A Following the health check there is now a compulsory standard under the GAEC requirements to protect landscape features included among which are hedges, ditches and trees. In designating these features their benefits for farming and wildlife are assured into the future.

Q Are there any circumstances where I can remove a hedgerow?

A Yes provided there is good reason to do so and a new hedgerow of equal length is planted in advance on the same holding.

Q Do I now need approval to move a hedge?

A No, provided that an equivalent replacement hedge has been planted prior to removal.

Q Can I remove a hedgerow that is no longer stock proof?

A Yes provided there is good reason to do so and a new hedgerow of equal length is planted in advance on the same holding.

Q Can I remove a section of hedge and replace it elsewhere on the farm in order to improve the efficiency of machinery use?

A Yes

Q Does the width of the hedge matter?

A While the canopy of the original hedge can be of any width or height the base must be maintained to prevent the establishment of new growth extending out into the field.

Q. What type of hedges are covered under this designation?

A. Under this GAEC requirement a **hedge** or **hedgerow** is a line of shrubs and/or tree species, planted and maintained in such a way as to form a barrier of sufficient width to control animals or to mark the boundary of an area of land. Traditionally they were planted on a raised earthen bank formed by digging one or two shallow trenches, with the dug material used to form the bank in the middle. Hedgerows can range from neatly trimmed lines of dense shrub and tree species which generally form a stock proof barrier to a line of individual mature trees with no stock proofing quality and all states in between.

Q. What type of open drains are covered?

A. A **drain** covered in this designation is an open trench which is dug to improve the drainage of agricultural land. It generally starts within the holding and is linked directly or indirectly through other drains, to a stream or river which passes through or alongside the holding. It may contain water permanently or only following heavy rain.

Q. Are streams regarded as Landscape Features?

A. No – these do not come under the GAEC designation of open drains.

Q. Is the area under Landscape Features eligible for Disadvantaged Area Payments as well as the Single Farm Payment?

A. Yes

Q. I have a new hedge that is fenced off to protect it from cattle. Is this area eligible?
A. Yes

Q I have some hedges on my farm with drains on either side. Do these come under the designation of landscape features?

A Yes.

Q I need to create a new field entrance. Will this be a breach of the GAEC Cross Compliance requirements?

A Where justified a short length of hedge may be removed to create a new field entrance or to widen an existing field entrance.

Q How will sanctions be applied for breaches of these requirements?

A Depending on the extent severity and permanence of the breach, sanctions extending to the full single payment, DAS and REPS4 are possible under the single payment cross compliance rules. Where a hedge is not maintained and is extending into the field in a scrub like manner then an area reduction to the field may result with consequent impact on the payment.

Q How will this requirement to protect landscape features be controlled?

A The latest aerial mapping and remote sensing imagery will be used in cases selected for inspection to ensure that none of these features are being removed in contravention of the requirements.

Some examples



Typical example of a designated Hedge meeting the GAEC requirements



Example of a hedge and drain combination which is protected.



Example of trees in a line which are protected



Example of a fully compliant hedge which is well trimmed at base and with a wide canopy



Example of a poorly maintained hedge leading to a potential reduction in the eligible area of the field



Example of streams/ivers which are not designated landscape features.



Serious case of poor maintenance of a hedge. New saplings are beginning to become established and are extending for a considerable distance into the field. If allowed to continue significant reductions in eligible areas will be required.