



An Roinn
Ealaíon, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta
Department of
Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

Your Ref: -----

Our Ref: **G Pre00099/2015**

(Please quote in all related correspondence)

07 May 2015

Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
Economics and Planning Division
FAO Siobhán Dowling
Agriculture House 6C
Kildare Street
Dublin 2
Via email to: 2025strategy@agriculture.gov.ie

Re: Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine Agrifood Strategy 2025

A chara

On behalf of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, I refer to the recent communication in connection with the above.

Outlined below are heritage-related observations/recommendations of this Department under the stated heading.

Nature Conservation

The Department refers to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine's correspondence of 10th April 2015 on its scoping for Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Agri-Food Strategy 2025. The Department notes that a draft Issues Paper for SEA and a Policy Guidance Note for AA (Appropriate Assessment) have been provided, and an initial consultation platform was held on 9th April to discuss key issues. As it previously advised¹, this Department was unable to attend the meeting as key staff were unavailable due to the short notice of the invitation, but offered to meet separately with DAFM and its consultants. The Department also recommended that its previously submitted observations to DAFM on a number of its Programmes and associated environmental assessments should be considered within the scoping exercise. The Department's observations should be read in conjunction with the observations provided on the programmes listed below as they come within the scope of the Agrifood Strategy 2015 and the associated assessments. The issues raised within will not be repeated exhaustively below, in the interests of efficiency. The Department would be happy to provide copies of these earlier observations to DAFM again, if that would be of assistance.

The observations provided on relevant programmes and policies include:

- Food Harvest 2020
- Rural Development Programme, including GLAS

¹ By email from John Fitzgerald, Principal Officer, NPWS to S Dowling, DAFM, 2nd April 2015

- Pillar 1 and Land Eligibility
- Forestry Programme 2014-2020
- Seafood Development Programme.

These observations will be useful in informing the scope of the assessments required and in improving their robustness, if account is taken thereof.

The following observations are provided to assist DAFM in meeting its obligations in relation to biodiversity and natural heritage. These include the Birds and Habitats Directives and the relevant national transposing regulations, as well as other national wildlife legislation and policies.

Regulatory Context:

Before more specific comments on the assessments are provided, this Department would first like to draw DAFM's attention to the regulatory context within which the Strategy and its appropriate assessment sit.

Regulation 27 Duties of public authorities relating to nature conservation:

Pursuant to Regulation 27 of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011², all public authorities "*having or exercising functions, including consent functions, which may or have implications for or effects on nature conservation shall exercise those functions in compliance with and, as appropriate, so as to secure compliance with, the requirements of the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive and these Regulations*" and amongst other things, "*shall take the appropriate steps to avoid, in European sites, the deterioration of natural habitats and the habitats of species as well as the disturbance of the species for which the areas have been designated in so far as such disturbance could be significant in relation to the objectives of the Habitats Directive.*" Regulation 27 goes on to set out further obligations in this regard, and these should inform the development of this Strategy to ensure its compliance. This Regulation gives effect to the obligations of Article 6 (2) of the Habitats Directive.

Part 5 Appropriate Assessment: Regulation 42 etc.

This Part of the Regulations sets out the requirements, standards, tests and consultations that are to be applied to screenings for appropriate assessment and appropriate assessment of plans and projects that are undertaken or adopted by public authorities. "Plans" are defined in Part 1: Interpretation of the Regulations. Other Regulations relevant to the assessment process include, amongst others, Regulation 61 concerning the Retention of Records.

The Strategy documentation should also make specific reference to the regulatory context in which this assessment is undertaken.

THE STRATEGY:

The Strategy will incorporate a number of other significant national programmes that have been adopted by Government, or are still under development. These programmes will also have been subject to the requirements of the SEA and Birds and Habitats Directives and due regard should be given to the mitigation requirements for those and their relevance to/incorporation into this Strategy and its assessments (e.g. RDP, Seafood, Forestry etc.).

IMPLICATIONS FOR NATURE CONSERVATION:

The Strategy will have significant implications for nature conservation, and due regard must be given in it and in the assessments to the existing status of Ireland's wildlife, where such

² Available at: <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/2011/en/si/0477.html>

information is available. A summary of the findings of the most recent reports on the conservation status in Ireland of habitats and species listed on the Birds and Habitats Directive is provided as an appendix. As noted above, DAFM is requested to take account of previous observations provided by this Department to inform its assessments of the Strategy and the development of the Strategy itself. Attention is drawn in those observations to implications for nature conservation that have not been identified in the circulated documentation, though the Department acknowledges that this may be a product of the summary nature of the description of the relevant issues, rather than oversights/omissions. These include:

- Increased water abstractions and drainage to support intensification, and the implications of knowledge gaps (such as soil productivity and drainage maps);
- Implications for high nature value farmland outside European sites;
- Implications of on-going/increased fertilisation/pesticide use, such as neonicotinoids on invertebrate populations, including pollinators and Annexed species, such as the marsh fritillary;
- Implications for birds in the wider countryside;
- It is suggested that increased GHG emissions from an increased dairy herd could be offset by, for example, investing in sustainably managed carbon sequestration in peatlands and forestry. However, the source of such investment is not stated, which is particularly significant in relation to peatland conservation. This Department will be investing in some peatland restoration works, including potentially through a LIFE project for a number of designated sites. Further detail can be provided in due course. In relation to forestry, it is not clear to this Department how it will be assessed and determined at the project/application level that afforestation will result in a net gain in respect of carbon sequestration.
- For meat and cereals, it is suggested that only water quality and connectivity issues will arise as this Department's process for regulating Activities Requiring Consent will ensure no permanent loss of habitat will arise. While the consent process issue is addressed elsewhere, other effects may arise, such as causing deterioration to habitat quality.
- The implications of knowledge gaps for the assessments and a research and development strategy to address these should be considered and incorporated into the strategy.

DAFM's attention is also drawn to Ireland's Prioritised Action Framework for the Implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directive³, as well as the Programme of Measures⁴ resulting from the Judgement of the Court of Justice of the European Union in Case C-418/04 (the "Birds Case") that should inform the Strategy and its assessments.

DATA/INFORMATION SOURCES:

The National Parks and Wildlife Service website (www.npws.ie) is a key source of data, information and publications, including GIS datasets, on nature conservation sites⁵ and biodiversity issues of relevance to the Strategy and its associated environmental assessments. This includes site boundaries, site synopses, lists of qualifying interests (SACs) and special conservation interests (SPAs), conservation objectives (European sites – see also below), features of interest (NHAs), and dates of site designation. GIS datasets are available for download for certain habitats and species

³ Available at <http://www.npws.ie/news/prioritised-action-framework-launch>

⁴ Available at <http://www.ahg.gov.ie/en/Heritage/HeritagePublications/BirdsCasePoMApril14.pdf>

⁵ Special Areas of Conservation (SACs, currently known as candidate sites but fully legally protected); Special Protection Areas (SPAs); Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs); and also proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs)

arising from various sources, including national surveys⁶. Other NPWS-held data on habitats and species may be requested by submitting a 'Data Request Form'⁷.

Site-specific conservation objectives⁸, and associated backing documents and GIS datasets, are available for download in the case of some European sites. The limitations of the data, however, should be noted as outlined, for example, under 'Notes/Guidelines'⁹. As noted below, generic conservation objectives are available for all other European sites.

Additional information about sites, habitats and species will become available over time. It is recommended that the most up-to-date data and information available from the NPWS website should be accessed and used at each successive stage of the plan-making process.

With specific regard to pollinators, a National Pollinator Plan is currently in development; a consultation draft is currently available¹⁰ should be considered in the development of the Strategy and its assessments. IPBES is also preparing a global assessment on pollination which is currently at draft stage. It will be available for Government review from 22 May and prior to the completion of the Strategy. Lastly, a Red list of European bees has been recently produced. This includes two Irish bumble bees (*Bombus muscorum* and *Bombus distinguendus*) and one solitary bee (*Colletes floralis*) as VU- Vulnerable.

SCREENING AND NATURA IMPACT STATEMENT:

Conservation Objectives:

It is noted that a screening for appropriate assessment has not yet been undertaken. Screenings, and appropriate assessments, are to be undertaken in view of the conservation objectives of the European sites. The conservation objectives for European sites (whether generic or site-specific) are to *maintain or restore* the qualifying interests to favourable conservation condition. These requirements must be used in the analysis of the implications of the Strategy for the sites (both for the SEA and the AA).

Best scientific knowledge:

It is noted that the Policy Guidance Note for the Protection of Natura 2000 sites includes a list of activities known to be threats to Annexed habitats and species in Ireland. It is recommended that an extensive review of relevant peer-reviewed literature is undertaken in order to ensure these assessments use "*best scientific knowledge*" and is evidence-based (Regulation 42 (9)).

Consistency between the Environmental Report and the Natura Impact Statement

As the two assessments will deal with related issues, and should be used to inform each other and the Strategy, it will be important that the findings of each are consistent, integrated and complementary. The Department notes that some statements within the SEA Issues paper that relate to the appropriate assessment process are inaccurate. Care should be taken to ensure both assessments and the associated documentation are coherent in order to ensure their compliance, the clarity of their conclusions and the robustness of the assessments. This may require the establishment of an integrated quality control process, if different teams are involved in the preparation of the respective assessments.

⁶ <http://www.npws.ie/maps-and-data/habitat-and-species-data>

⁷ <http://www.npws.ie/maps-and-data/request-data>

⁸ When using these objectives, it is essential that the Version date is referenced and that relevant backing/supporting documents are consulted, particularly where instructed in the targets or notes for a particular attribute.

⁹ Including: Please note that the maps included in this document do not necessarily show the entire extent of the habitats and species for which the site is listed. This should be borne in mind when appropriate assessments are being carried out.

¹⁰ Available at: <http://pollinators.biodiversityireland.ie/home/all-ireland-pollinator-plan-2015-2020/>

- It is stated in Section 1.5 of the SEA Issues paper that “*although consultation is not a mandatory requirement under AA, consultation with NPWS is best practice*”. DAFM is advised that consultation with this Minister is required when a public authority is undertaking an appropriate assessment. The requirements (including timeframes) of the consultation are set out in Part 5, Regulation 42 (9) and (10). A public authority “*shall take account of any submissions made to it by the Minister*” in this regard.
- Section 1.3 of the SEA Issues Paper refers to the preparation of a “Natura Impact Report”. The correct term to be used, pursuant to the Regulations, is rather “Natura Impact Statement”. The term “Natura Impact Report” refers to those undertaken for land-use plans, pursuant to the Planning and Development Acts (as amended).

As noted earlier, one of the key purposes and benefits of the environmental assessment processes is to influence and inform the Strategy during its preparation, and to integrate ecological obligations therein. However, the implications of the plan for European sites, in view of their conservation objectives must also be assessed. The findings of the NIS must be taken into account when DAFM completes the appropriate assessment and makes its determination as to whether or not the Strategy will adversely affect the integrity of European sites. European Union and Irish jurisprudence have established that the appropriate assessment cannot have lacunae and must contain complete, precise and definitive findings that remove all reasonable scientific doubt as to the effects on a European site.

Based on the Department’s experience of providing observations on NIS/NIRs national/regional plans, programmes and land-use plans, the following advice is offered in relation to preparation and content of the NIS:

1. The need for an NIS follows on from screening which is carried out by the relevant public authority (DAFM, in this instance);
2. The NIS should be a scientific assessment that presents relevant evidence, data and analysis, not just commentary, lists, tables, etc.;
3. Best scientific knowledge and objective information, which are specified in legislation in relation to screening, are also required to prepare an NIS;
4. The relevant environmental baseline and trends should be taken into account, including changes and in combination effects that have occurred since site designation;
5. When an NIS is required, it should assess the entire Strategy, not just parts thereof;
6. The NIS should focus on the likely significant effects of the plan on European sites in view of their conservation objectives, whether generic or site specific. Of particular importance in the case of the latter, are the attributes and targets, and whether the objective is to maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition;
7. Examination of the potential or existing effects of the plan, and the resources and services on which it is reliant, must be undertaken to identify what European sites, and which of their conservation objectives, are potentially at risk. In combination effects must also be taken into account. This examination is also required to determine a ‘zone of influence’ or ‘zone of impact’ of the plan area, if this concept is used. It should be noted that the 15km distance for plans in existing guidance is an indicative figure and its application and validity should be examined and justified on the basis of scientific information in each specific case;
8. The scientific basis on which sites, qualifying interests and conservation objectives are included or excluded from assessment and analysis should be presented;

9. The scientific basis on which plan objectives and other plan elements are included or excluded from more detailed assessment and analysis should be presented. This should apply to all parts of the plan and all objectives;
10. Where plan level mitigation measures are put forward, the necessary analysis should be presented to demonstrate that these will be effective in avoiding or removing risks of adverse effects on the integrity of European sites, or in managing future proposals where adverse effects may be unavoidable;
11. The NIS and plan level mitigation measures should go further in scope than altering the wording of objectives to say that future assessment is required or will be undertaken *i.e.* plan-level mitigation is required, not solely project-level assessment. Where lower-level plan or project detail is not yet available to inform the assessment, it should be considered and set out in the NIS how these will be "captured" in subsequent consent or authorisation processes, to demonstrate that all effects that may arise in due course will be fully assessed, in compliance with the requirements of the Habitats Directive. This will allow the identification of plan-level mitigation measures and commitments that may be required across a range of public authorities. Programme-level analysis of such issues and the development of programme-level mitigation (rather than use of project-level assessment to avoid and mitigate effects) provides a critical opportunity to identify the systems and information needs that will be required to facilitate project-level implementation and delivery in a timely, cost-effective manner to achieve the Programme's goals.

To illustrate this point, attention is drawn to the following statement in the Natura 2000 policy guidance in 2.4.5 Meat and Cereals (p6) that *"there are mechanisms in place to prevent the loss of habitat in SACs through the issuing of permits via the "Activities Requiring Consent" Scheme. Therefore the AA may focus on the indirect effects on water quality and the severance of ecological connectivity or stepping stone sites between European sites"*. It is not clear to this Department that all activities that may arise through the Meat and Cereals objective will in fact be an Activity that Requires Consent, pursuant to the Birds and Habitats Regulations. It may be regulated through other means and consent processes, particularly when an appropriate assessment is required (which would be triggered by an indication that the activity will significantly affect a conservation objective through the permanent loss of habitat). This may move the activity into the consent process of another public authority (such as DAFM, under the EIA Agriculture Regulations, or a local authority if it involves drainage of a wetland). Thus, it should be set out in the Strategy

- how further detail/layers of implementation will be developed and authorised/consented to,
 - where further assessment responsibilities lie and with which authorities,
 - how and when plan-level mitigation will be implemented, and by which authorities/stakeholders.
12. The NIS and appropriate assessment should reach a clear and precise conclusion as to the implications of the plan for the conservation objectives of the relevant European sites.

SCOPE OF THE SEA:

The Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna section of the SEA should be undertaken by or in conjunction with a suitably qualified ecologist(s), and other specialists as necessary, and in conjunction with the NIS to ensure full integration of biodiversity issues and concerns, particularly in relation to nature conservation sites, protected species, and ecological corridors and stepping stones, such as

those referred to in Article 10 of the Habitats Directive. The EPA's *Integrated Biodiversity Impact Assessment* best practice guidance is of particular relevance in this regard.

The Environmental Report is required to contain information on the environmental characteristics of the areas likely to be affected significantly by the plan. For biodiversity, flora and fauna, the scope of the SEA should include:

- All nature conservation sites, including European sites, sites protected under national legislation, National Parks etc.;
- Species of wild flora and fauna, including rare and protected species and their habitats; Annex IV (Habitats Directive) species of flora and fauna, and their key habitats (i.e. breeding sites and resting places), which are strictly protected wherever they occur, whether inside or outside sites, (including data on rare and protected species from NPWS, the National Biodiversity Data Centre, BirdWatch Ireland, etc.);
- Other species of flora and fauna and their key habitats which are protected under the Wildlife Acts, 1976-2000, wherever they occur;
- 'Protected species and natural habitats' as defined in the Environmental Liability Directive (2004/35/EC) and European Communities (Environmental Liability) Regulations, 2008, including:
 - o Birds Directive – Annex I species and other regularly occurring migratory species, and their habitats (wherever they occur)
 - o Habitats Directive – Annex I habitats, Annex II species and their habitats, and Annex IV species and their breeding sites and resting places (wherever they occur)
- Stepping stones and ecological corridors including nature conservation sites (other than European sites), habitat areas and species' locations covered by the wider obligations of the Habitats Directive.
- All watercourses, surface water bodies and associated wetlands, including floodplains and flood risk areas;

The Environmental Report is required to contain environmental protection objectives. For biodiversity, flora and fauna, these should integrate with the objectives and obligations of other directives such as the Habitats Directive, the Birds Directive, the Water Framework Directive and the Floods Directive, and with the Wildlife Acts, 1976-2000 (not 2012 as stated on page 12), and the National Biodiversity Plan.

GUIDANCE:

A short list of guidance relevant to appropriate assessment and other relevant studies is provided below.

- Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government. 2009. Appropriate assessment of plans and projects in Ireland: Guidance for planning authorities. Available on www.npws.ie.
- European Commission, 2000. [Managing Natura 2000 sites: The provisions of Article 6 of the 'Habitats' Directive 92/43/EEC](#).
- European Commission, 2001. Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6 (3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC.
- European Commission, 2013. EC Study on evaluating and improving permitting procedures related to Natura 2000 requirements under Article 6.3 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC.
- European Commission, 2014. Guidance Document: Farming for Natura 2000.

All European Commission guidance and publications are available at:
http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/guidance_en.htm.

JURISPRUDENCE:

While existing guidance on appropriate assessment should be followed in general terms, there should also be due regard to developments in the interpretation and application directives and legislation arising from jurisprudence of the Court of Justice of the European Union, and of the Irish courts, particularly in regard to Article 6 of the Habitats Directive. These include, amongst others:

- European Court of Justice Ruling [C-241/08](#) concerning the term "*not directly connected with or necessary for the management of the site*".

Procedural Obligations

- Kelly v An Bord Pleanála (Judicial Review, Ireland, 2014)
- Sweetman v An Bord Pleanála (Case C-259/11) (2013)

Mitigation versus Compensation

- Briels (2014) Case C-521/12

You are requested to send the acknowledgement to this letter and any further correspondence to this Department's Development Applications Unit at manager.dau@ahg.gov.ie (team monitored); if this is not possible, correspondence may, alternatively, be sent to:

The Manager
 Development Applications Unit
 Department of Arts, Heritage & the Gaeltacht
 Newtown Road
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Is mise, le meas



Muiris Ó Conchúir
 Development Applications Unit
 Tel: 053-911 7387

Appendix: Overview of 2013 Article 17 and Article 12 summary data

Background

In accordance with the requirements of EU law, the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht has prepared a Report on the status of Ireland's Habitats and Species and a Report on the status of Ireland's Birds. These reports have informed the development of a Prioritised Action Framework which is intended to inform the Government and the European Commission on the actions needed, and finance required, to protect and improve Ireland's most important and vulnerable habitats and species.

In terms of our habitats, the reports show continuing declines or serious threats to Ireland's raised bogs, blanket bogs, coastal dune systems, areas of limestone pavement and some native woodland areas. Regarding non-bird species, there has been some improvement in the status of key species since the last report including the Otter and Atlantic Salmon. It is notable, for example, that the Irish Hare is considered to be in good conservation status. On the other hand the Freshwater Pearl Mussel, found in clear inland waters, shows continuing and worrying decline.

The health of Ireland's bird populations is mixed: some species such as the Buzzard and Blackcap are expanding and some new species have arrived, such as the Little Egret and Great Spotted Woodpecker.

However, other species have undergone significant declines in their long-term breeding distribution: Corncrake (92%), Curlew (89%), Whinchat (77%), Grey Partridge (74%), Woodcock (68%), Lapwing (56%), Red Grouse (52%) and Redshank (50%). The hen harrier remains in long term decline.

These results inform where conservation action must be targeted. In this regard, the key priorities include:

- Restoration of raised bogs,
- Better protection for blanket bogs and Ireland's uplands generally,
- Better management of Ireland's dunes and machair systems,
- Better protection for turloughs,
- Measures to protect Ireland's remaining Freshwater Pearl Mussels.
- New measures to protect birds in decline such as the Corncrake, waders and Hen Harrier.

These priorities are now set out in a structured way in Ireland's first Prioritised Action Framework.

Reports under the EU Nature Directives

The EU Habitats Directive (Directive 92/43/EEC) and the Birds Directive (Directive 79/409/EC) form the cornerstone of Europe's nature conservation policy. They are built around two pillars: (i) the Natura 2000 network of protected sites (called Special Areas of Conservation in the Habitats Directive, and Special Protection Areas in the Birds Directive); and (ii) systems for the protection of species outside those protected areas.

Both Directives include a requirement for periodic reporting on implementation. Article 17 of the Habitats Directive requires that Member States must undertake national assessments, on a 6-year cycle, of the conservation status of habitats and species protected under the Directive. The Habitats Directive report for Ireland was submitted in electronic form and in a technical format in June 2013. The Minister will publish an accessible overview version of the report very shortly.

The requirements for reporting under Article 12 of the Birds Directive were recently changed from 3 years to 6 years and streamlined with reporting cycles under Article 17 of the Habitats Directive. The changes also included a new requirement to report on the size and trends of the populations

of birds in each Member State, and provide information on changes in distribution. The Birds Directive report for Ireland was submitted in electronic form and in a technical format in February 2014. As the overview information is also contained in the recently published Birds Atlas of Britain and Ireland it is not intended to publish an additional public report on the Birds Directive. The Minister will however bring the attention of the public to the main findings when launching the Habitats Report.

Findings of the Reports

The Habitats Directive Report (Article 17)

The Report for 2007-2012 found that only 9% of habitats were "Favourable", 50% as "Inadequate" and 41% as "Bad", as defined in the EU guidance on reporting. Since 2007 16% of habitats demonstrate a genuine improving trend, but 31% of habitats are considered to be declining. No change is reported for 48% habitats and an unknown trend reported for 5% of habitats. Among the key findings are:

- Some of the marine habitats are considered to be improving, and to have better prospects, due in part to implementation of other EU environmental Directives.
- Raised bogs are "Bad" and declining as restoration is necessary to cause improvement, notwithstanding the cessation of cutting on SAC bogs.
- Blanket bog is also assessed as "Bad"; the report notes that, as one of the main impacts on this habitat is grazing, an improving trend might be expected due to the Commonage Framework Plans. However, this improvement appears to be offset and even exceeded by on-going deleterious effects such as peat cutting, erosion, drainage and burning.
- Although some of our woodlands are rated as "Bad" because they are patchy and fragmented, considerable improvements have been noted due to afforestation, removal of alien species and control of overgrazing.
- Losses of limestone pavement has been recorded outside the SAC network, however the BurrenLIFE and Burren Farming for Conservation Programme have significantly improved the quality of pavement and its associated habitats.

As in 2007, the picture is better for the species assessments. 52% of species are assessed as "Favourable", 20% as "Inadequate" and 12% as "Bad" with the remainder unknown or considered to be vagrant species (figure 3). Since 2007, 6% species demonstrate a genuine improving trend, 10% species are considered to be declining, with no genuine change reported for 82% of species. For example:

- The Irish Hare is now considered "Favourable" status, due in part to better knowledge and data. This is of significance in the debate on coursing licenses.
- The otter has also been assessed as "Favourable" with evidence of an expanding range.
- The salmon is showing signs of improvement and the Killarney Shad is assessed as "Favourable", but some other fish remain at "Bad" status.
- The Freshwater Pearl Mussel is "Bad" and declining.

The Birds Directive Report (Article 12)

The Report covers 196 species, which includes species which live in Ireland all year round, and others which migrate here for summer or winter. Data is collated from a number of sources and surveys. This offers a picture of both short-term and long term trends for some species, and similarly a view of the breeding range trends in some species. However there is an absence of long-term data for some species.

The report requires information on trends rather than a conclusive assessment of status.

Overview of Population trends

Percentage of species					
	Increasing	Stable	Decreasing	Fluctuating	Unknown trend
Short term	37	21	27	10	5
Long term	30	6	28	Not applicable	36

Overview of Breeding range trends

	Increasing	Stable	Decreasing
Short term	58	24	18
Long term	27	34	39

Some species have had significant increases in population over the long term, including Raven, Collared Dove, Buzzard and Blackcap. Some species that did not breed in Ireland in the 1970s and 1980s are now regular breeders and continue to increase their ranges (e.g. Little Egret, Great Spotted Woodpecker).

However, other species have undergone significant declines in their long-term breeding distribution: Corncrake (92%), Curlew (89%), Whinchat (77%), Grey Partridge (74%), Woodcock (68%), Lapwing (56%), Red Grouse (52%) and Redshank (50%). The Hen Harrier, which had been increasing in numbers, shows an overall short-term decrease of 11%.

Some of these species benefit from targeted conservation action. For example, the severe long-term Corncrake decline of 85% has substantially slowed in recent years with the short-term population still in decline but at a much reduced rate of 16%. Recent increases in the northwest of the country are positive. The Grey Partridge was nearing extinction at the turn of the century but has enjoyed a short-term population increase to approximately 1,000 birds due exclusively to the targeted conservation work at Boora Co. Offaly. Meanwhile improved management of grazing in western hills has brought about the resurgence of the grouse population there.

However, there is an urgent need for measures to halt the declines noted above, most of which are due largely to changes in farming practices and intensity, and also the increase of activity in extensively farmed uplands through forestry and wind farm construction.