



# The Common Agricultural Policy

## Post-2020

*BirdWatch Ireland Submission  
to the consultation on the shape of the Common Agricultural Policy post 2020  
for the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine*

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## Contents

<b>Contents</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Summary</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>3</b>
1.1 Background to Birds and Biodiversity in Ireland .....	3
1.1.1 <i>Addressing Farmland Bird Declines</i> .....	4
1.1.2 <i>Halting further Breeding Wader Declines</i> .....	5
1.1.3 <i>Addressing the loss of farmland pollinators</i> .....	6
1.1.4 <i>Tackling the Loss of HNV farmland and Semi-natural grassland Habitats</i> .....	6
1.1.5 <i>Tackling the Loss of High Status Water Bodies</i> .....	8
1.1.6 <i>Restoration management of grazed peatland habitats</i> .....	9
1.2 Background to CAP economics and environment in Ireland .....	10
1.3 Compliance with Environmental Law .....	12
1.4 Background to the CAP post-2020 consultation .....	12
<b>2 A vision for a new CAP post-2020</b> .....	<b>14</b>
2.1 Principles for a new policy .....	14
2.1.1 <i>Transition to sustainable farming</i> .....	14
2.1.2 <i>The principle of ‘the polluter pays’</i> .....	14
2.1.3 <i>Making payments fit for purpose</i> .....	15
2.1.4 <i>Ensuring sustainable rural development</i> .....	16
2.1.5 <i>Managing risk in sensible ways</i> .....	16
2.1.6 <i>Establish a new model for funding nature conservation.</i> .....	16
2.1.7 <i>Creating a food policy for Europe</i> .....	16
2.2 Content for a new policy .....	17
2.2.1 <i>Objectives</i> .....	17
2.2.2 <i>The Common Food &amp; Land Policy’s funding structure</i> .....	17
<b>3. A review of current CAP measures</b> .....	<b>21</b>
3.1 Eligibility of land for CAP payments .....	21
3.2 Monitoring and Evaluation.....	22
3.3 Agri-environment climate measures.....	23
3.3.1 <i>Priority Environmental Actions</i> .....	23
3.3.2 <i>General Environmental Actions</i> .....	24
3.3.3 <i>Selection Criteria</i> .....	25
3.3.4 <i>Funding and Costing</i> .....	25
3.4 Locally-Led Agri-Environment Schemes (LLAES) .....	25
3.5 Knowledge Transfer and Information Actions .....	25
3.6 Advisory Services.....	26
3.7 Investments in Physical Assets .....	27
3.8 Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) .....	27
<b>4. Submission Form for CAP Post 2020 Consultation</b> .....	<b>29</b>
4.1 Simplification: .....	29
4.2 Direct Payments .....	30
4.3 The Environment.....	31
4.4 Risk Management .....	32
4.5 Young Farmer Supports.....	32
4.6 Research, Innovation, Technology Transfer .....	33
4.7 On Farm Investment .....	34
4.8 Strengthening the socio-economic fabric of rural areas.....	34
4.9 Health, Nutrition, Food Waste and Animal Welfare .....	35
4.10 Position of the Farmers in the Supply Chain .....	35
4.11 Any Other Information .....	35

## Summary

Ireland's natural heritage is under severe pressure. Many threatened habitats are in danger of being lost, and many species are threatened with extinction. Climate change will affect not just species and habitats, but also impact on people's lives and livelihoods. Nature also has a role in helping mitigate climate impacts and helping communities adapt to a changing climate through carbon sequestration, flood water retention and coastal protection amongst others. Ireland must address these and other issues to ensure future economic, social and environmental sustainability. It must seek to reduce climate impacts, mitigate for existing actions and adapt to changes as required. Ireland must halt the loss and destruction of important habitats in the Irish landscape, whether in designated areas or in the wider countryside. Biodiversity declines must not just be halted, but reversed. Populations of threatened species need to be not only stabilised, but also restored to parts of their former range. Government Policy, backed up by sufficient resources, must prioritise safeguarding all aspects of Ireland's natural heritage and wider environment for future generations.

Existing legislation must be embraced, acted upon and, where possible, enhanced or exceeded. For biodiversity, the long-overdue fulfilment of the EU Natura Directives is an essential first step. The full suite of all suitable sites must be designated so they can be fully and properly protected. Within these sites, comprehensive management plans, with targets and objectives and, crucially, the means to achieve them, must be clearly set out. Outside of these sites in the wider countryside, actions are required to protect priority, threatened species and habitats. A properly reformed and re-visualised Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has a crucial role to play in this ambition. However, to achieve these goals, a reformed CAP must sit within a coherent set of EU policies and be backed up by appropriate national legislation.

To protect our natural heritage, actions and measures must be underpinned by the best information available. In some cases, we must improve our understanding of threats in order to properly deal with them through new research. Information on how to deliver on objectives and priorities must be available to everyone involved in delivery at all levels (from the Government Ministers to individual citizens), seeking out experts on certain issues where required, and ensuring dissemination is accessible to all. An integrated monitoring and evaluation programme is essential to ensure that policies and actions are delivering on objectives. Monitoring needs to be at many levels, and must use indicators that reflect the actual impacts of the actions on objectives and priorities. Evaluation must ensure that strengths are highlighted to show the value of the work being done. It must also ensure that any gaps are addressed to ensure a comprehensive delivery.

Ireland's natural environment should be there to be cherished and appreciated by all. Its value in everybody's lives, the services it provides and the benefits it offers society as a whole must be better communicated. Increasing awareness and understanding of the necessity of our natural heritage is essential in securing it.

The Cap post-2020 must support farmers in achieving sustainable, long term food security whilst ensuring a healthy natural environment. The natural environment is the basis for the health and productivity of Ireland's agriculture and many rural communities. The next CAP must contribute to the stepped-up response that is required to address observed trends of severely declining biodiversity in Ireland's farm lands and deliver commitments to maximise coherence between biodiversity protection objectives and agricultural policy and supports.

Birdwatch Ireland recognises the benefits of supporting sustainable agricultural production, and works with numerous stakeholders already within the Irish agri-food sector. However, the agri-food sector cannot exist in isolation of national and international initiatives to tackle some of the most pressing issues of our time: loss of biodiversity, degradation of ecosystem services, climate change, and declining water quality. Furthermore, the continued emphasis on economic growth within the Irish agri-food sector, and the CAP as a whole, as a key to the success of the policy ignores the reality that we are living on a finite planet with finite resources, and a finite ecological carrying capacity. Numerous EU citizens, whose taxes fund the CAP, have shown that they want to see food produced in a way that protects the environment. Policies must act to protect our ecological assets. These assets are at the core of our long-term wealth and well-being. The success of human society can no longer be based solely on financial metrics; sustainability must be considered differently, being linked to concerns for our environment, our communities and long-term human health and well-being.

## 1. Introduction

BirdWatch Ireland welcomes the opportunity from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) to make a submission in relation to the future of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) for the next programming period (2021-2027). This submission is in response to a request from the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine for input and views on the shape of the CAP post 2020. Although BirdWatch Ireland appreciates that there are many aspects within the remit of the Minister and the CAP, this submission is substantially focused on the protection and conservation of birds, habitats and biodiversity and its relationship with agriculture.

This submission is presented in four sections. The first section provides background information on birds, biodiversity, farming and the CAP in Ireland. Part 2 presents a coherent vision for a new CAP that can deliver on environmental, social and economic objectives. The third part is focused on more detailed consideration of individual measures, largely linked to experiences of existing elements within the CAP. The final section provides responses to questions within the *Submission Form for CAP Post 2020 Consultation* as published by the Department for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) in February 2018.

### 1.1 Background to Birds and Biodiversity in Ireland

Humans depend upon biodiversity for health, wealth and survival. Biodiversity provides the basis for agricultural productivity, providing ecosystem services such as pollination, maintenance of soil fertility and control of crop pests. As well as agriculture benefitting from biodiversity, many species benefit, and are even dependent upon, farming to create and manage the habitats they require. Many semi-natural habitats and the associated flora and fauna depend on sustainable management, in relationships that have evolved over thousands of years. We would have far fewer Yellowhammers if we had no cereal crops, and probably no Corncrakes without late-cut hay meadows. However, changes in recent decades have occurred too rapidly for many habitats and species to adapt, hence the catastrophic losses in biodiversity we are witnessing today.

Ireland's biodiversity is facing very severe threats, as evidenced by declining populations of many bird species and the loss in extent and quality of many semi-natural habitats. In Ireland, many previously common birds have suffered major population and range declines since the 1970's<sup>1</sup>. Declining bird populations often indicate declining health of the natural environment. They reflect losses in habitat extent and quality and often equate to losses in ecosystem services which are a valuable asset to Ireland. The decline in farmland bird populations is telling us that we need to do more to maintain a healthy balance of nature across Irish farmland.

Birds are indicators of the health of the countryside. Like the "canary in the coalmine", birds can provide early warning systems for the degradation or loss of ecosystems, and the services such ecosystems provide. Birds satisfy many of the criteria of effective indicators, are often used as an early-warning system to detect emergence of environmental problems<sup>2</sup>. Bird indicators have been widely used to inform decision making and land use management policy including within agricultural ecosystems<sup>3</sup>.

The Overall Target of Ireland's National Biodiversity Plan is "*that biodiversity loss and degradation of ecosystems are reduced by 2016 and progress is made towards substantial recovery by 2020.*"<sup>4</sup> Internationally, Ireland has obligations for biodiversity conservation at a European level (preventing biodiversity loss is a priority for the Europe 2020 strategy)<sup>5</sup> as well as globally<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Colhoun K. & Cummins, S. 2013 Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland 2014-19. *Irish Birds* 9:523-544.

<sup>2</sup> 2010 Biodiversity Indicators Partnership 2010

<sup>3</sup> Gregory, R. D., A. van Strien, P. Vorisek, A. W. Gmelig Meyling, D. G. Noble, R. P. B. Foppen and D. W. Gibbons. 2005. Developing indicators for European birds. *Philos. T. R. Soc. B* 360: 269-288.

<sup>4</sup> Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, 2011. *Actions for Biodiversity 2011-2016: Ireland's National Biodiversity Plan*. Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Dublin.

<sup>5</sup> European Commission. 2010. *Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*. Communication COM(2010) 2020 final, European Commission, Brussels. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:2020:FIN:EN:PDF> (accessed January 2013)

<sup>6</sup> Convention on Biological Diversity. 2010. *Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020*. <http://www.cbd.int/decision/cop/?id=12268> (accessed August 2012).

### 1.1.1 Addressing Farmland Bird Declines

It is well-documented that many modern, intensive farming practices leave little space for birds or biodiversity<sup>7</sup>. Many birds that use farmland habitats that were previously common have suffered major population declines since the 1970's. As a group, farmland birds have experienced some of the largest population declines and range contractions of any bird species in Ireland. Corn Bunting (a tillage-specialist) has become extinct as a breeding bird in Ireland, with the last confirmed breeding in the 1990s<sup>8</sup>.

The Countryside Bird Survey (CBS) monitors farmland bird populations (as well as the populations of other bird species occurring in the wider countryside). However, it was established in 1998 and as such was arguably too late to pick up many of the more dramatic or long-term declines that have taken place in farmland species, many of which occurred prior to this period, and especially from the 1970s onwards. These earlier declines have been illustrated by bird atlases. They have also been shown in other western European countries that have had ongoing monitoring schemes in operation since the 1970s, such as Britain and France, where similar changes in agriculture have taken place.

Figure 1 shows the breeding season range (as expressed by the number of occupied 10km squares in Ireland where breeding was either confirmed or considered probable) from the three breeding bird atlases undertaken in Ireland (around 1970, 1990 and 2010) for the nine lowland farmland bird species that are Red-listed in the Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland (BoCCI)<sup>9</sup>. For all nine species, the number of occupied 10km squares has at least halved since 1970.

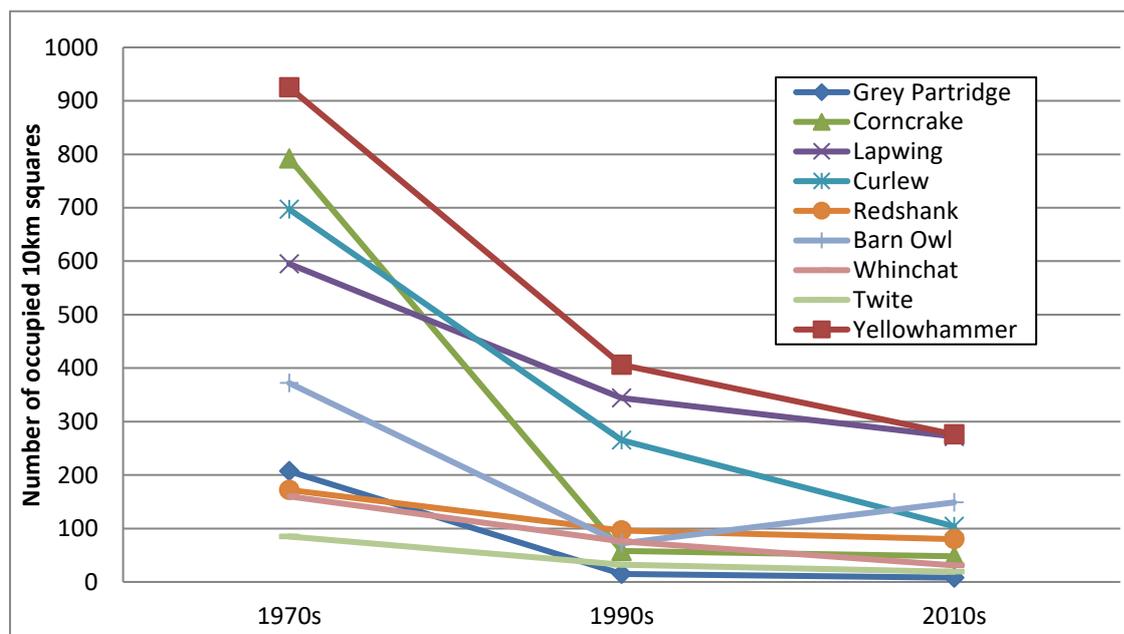


Figure 1: Range (number of occupied 10km squares) in 1970, 1990 and 2010 breeding bird atlases of Red-listed lowland farmland bird species in Ireland

There has been extensive research in the UK in particular which has related farmland bird declines to changes in agricultural practices since the 1970s. Specific causes for change included a variety of practices, including increased use of pesticides and fertilisers, increased mechanisation and loss of hedgerow extent and quality. These changes in agriculture also took place in Ireland over the same period.

<sup>7</sup> Newton, I. 2004. The recent declines of farmland bird populations in Britain: an appraisal of causal factors and conservation actions. *Ibis* 146: 579-600.

<sup>8</sup> Lynas, P., Newton, S.F. & Robinson, J.A. (2007) The status of birds in Ireland: an analysis of conservation concern 2008 – 2013. *Irish Birds* 8: 149-166.

<sup>9</sup> Cummins, S. & Colhoun, K. (2013) Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland 2014-2019. *Irish Birds* 9: 523-544.

Since 1990, only one Red-listed species (Barn Owl) has shown a range increase in the bird atlas data. This is most likely due to greater recording from an intensive project underway since 2006. This work has been focused on locating Barn Owl nesting sites throughout the country, providing Barn Owl nesting boxes in key areas, and studying aspects of the species ecology, particularly the appearance and spread of two introduced prey species.

For other species, the rate of decline between 1990 and 2010 has reduced compared to that between 1970 and 1990. In some cases, these slower rates of decline may be linked to a reduction in the level of agricultural intensification in the last twenty years compared to the twenty-year period before that, when larger areas of farmland would have been agriculturally improved (cleared, drained, re-seeded, etc.). In other cases, the reduced rate of decline may be linked to direct conservation action, such as the Corncrake Grant Scheme which was introduced in Ireland in the early 1990s. However, for some species (such as Curlew, Whinchat or Twite) the rate of decline is such that further extinctions of these breeding species is likely without targeted and sustained intervention.

### 1.1.2 Halting further Breeding Wader Declines

Recent data from the 2007-2011 Bird Atlas confirms that, as a group, breeding waders in Ireland are experiencing significant declines in populations size and range (see Figure 1 for trends for Lapwing, Curlew and Redshank). Many breeding wader species, including Curlew, Lapwing, Redshank and Snipe are largely dependent upon grassland habitats. The decline in many of these species has been linked to various effects of grassland intensification, including drainage, increased use of fertilisers, re-seeding and increased stocking rates<sup>10</sup>. Agri-environment measures that are being trialled in Ireland (and elsewhere) have shown that population declines can be halted, provided that sympathetic grassland management techniques are used.

Many breeding waders are dependent upon farming, such as extensive grazing of upland commonages or machair grassland, to create and maintain habitats that offer all their ecological requirements (e.g. appropriate vegetation for nests, chick-feeding areas, etc.) during the breeding season. Dunlin and Golden Plover are listed on Annex 1 of the Birds Directive; Curlew has recently been added to the IUCN Red List of globally threatened species; Lapwing, Redshank, Curlew and Golden Plover are now on the Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland, due to significant population and/or range contractions over the last 50 years, with Snipe and Dunlin on the Amber List because of similar, though less severe, declines.

Although there has been no national survey of breeding waders in the Republic of Ireland, trends have been calculated from the best available data (see Figure 2). As can be seen, these national estimates indicate very serious declines of Curlew, Lapwing and Redshank in particular. We estimate that there may have been around 5,000 pairs of Curlew in Ireland in the late 1980s. The population has subsequently undergone a decline of 97% in 40 years. The number of breeding pairs remaining in the Republic of Ireland is so low that the species is now facing national extinction.

These declines are confirmed by recent atlas data, which records a 54% loss of occupied 10km squares for Lapwing, 53% reduction for Redshank, 85% decline in occupied 10km squares for Curlew and 34% range contraction for Snipe. The changes are largely attributed to land use changes, in particular those associated with agricultural improvement, including:-

- The widespread loss of wetlands; more than 600,000 acres of agricultural land were drained between 1947 and 1997.
- The more intensive management of grasslands; for example, fertiliser use increased by 400% in the second half of the last century.
- Direct loss of marginal upland habitat through, *inter alia*, afforestation. For example, there was a 60% increase in the area of forestry between 1980 and 2000.

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<sup>10</sup> Lauder, C. & Donaghy, A. 2008. *Breeding waders in Ireland 2008: A Review and Recommendation for Future Action*. Unpublished BirdWatch Ireland report to the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

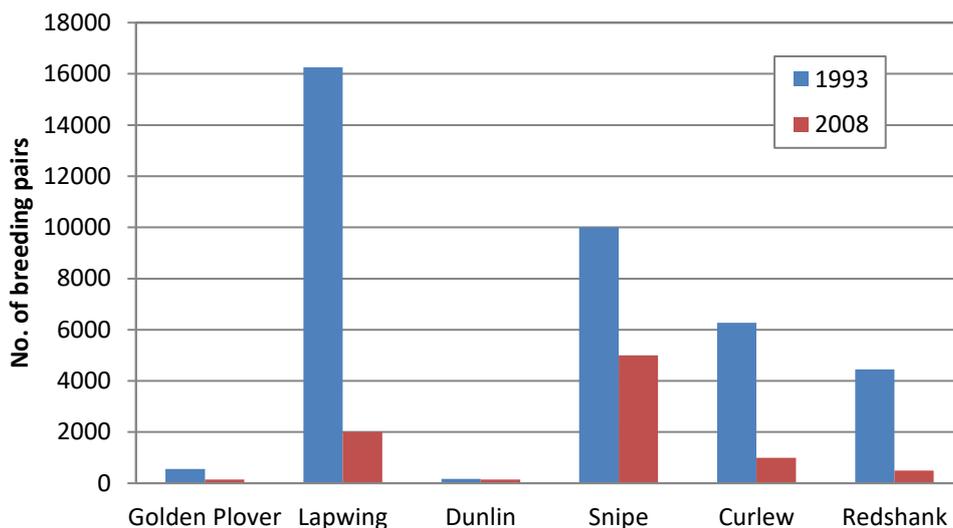


Figure 2: Number of breeding pairs of six key wader species in Ireland between 1993 and 2008 (data from Lauder & Donaghy, 2009)

### 1.1.3 Addressing the loss of farmland pollinators

Pollination, which plays a vital role in the reproductive cycle of flowering crops and wild plants, brings substantial economic benefits to agriculture, tourism and exports, as well as human health and wellbeing. Pollinators are important to farmers who grow pollinator-dependent crops and to those of us who want to grow our own fruits and vegetables. Even if we don't currently grow these crops, we should aim to retain the ability to do so for future generations. We know that 78% of our wildflowers also benefit from being pollinated by insects - without bees we will lose the colourful and distinct natural beauty of our landscape which makes it a pleasant place to live, an attractive destination for tourists, and a selling point for our agricultural produce abroad.

Unfortunately our pollinators are in decline, and the problem is serious. One third of our 98 bee species are threatened with extinction from the island of Ireland. If we want them to be here to pollinate crops and wild plants for future generations, we need to manage the landscape in a more pollinator friendly way and create a network of diverse and flower-rich habitats. The All-Ireland Pollinator Plan 2015-2020<sup>11</sup> is supported by over 68 governmental and non-governmental organisations who have pledged to deliver 81 actions to achieve this goal and make Ireland, North and South, more pollinator friendly.

Appropriate land management practices are essential to conserve pollinators in Ireland. Traditional farming was very pollinator friendly because it was naturally flower-rich. There were hay meadows, annual flowers in cereal crops, more wildflowers along lanes and in field corners due to less spraying, more flowers in hedgerows due to less mechanisation and we grew more of our own fruits and vegetables. In the past 50 years, changes in farming have reduced the amount of flowers and, therefore, we now have fewer bees. A reformed CAP must make space for habitats that pollinators can use.

### 1.1.4 Tackling the Loss of HNV farmland and Semi-natural grassland Habitats

Within the EU it is recognised that the loss of semi-natural habitats associated due to agricultural intensification is a major driver of biodiversity loss. Over 50% of Europe's most highly valued biotopes occur on low-intensity farmland. Of Europe's most threatened habitats and species, 57 types of habitat and 257 species depend on or are associated with farming. Worryingly over 75% of these habitats and at least 70% of the species are in unfavourable conservation status.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.biodiversityireland.ie/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/All-Ireland%20Pollinator%20Plan%202015-2020.pdf>

The need to protect farming systems in Europe of greatest biodiversity value is recognised as being necessary if the EU is going to halt biodiversity loss under the 2020 biodiversity agreement . These farming systems have been defined by the EU Commission as High Nature Value (HNV):

*“High Nature Value farmland comprises those areas in Europe where agriculture is a major (usually the dominant) land use and where that agriculture supports or is associated with either a high species and habitat diversity, or the presence of species of European, and/or national, and/or regional conservation concern, or both.” Indeed “the highest grade of HNV farmland is that which supports the presence of species of European conservation concern.”*

Semi-natural grassland habitats, which are often extensively grazed, are rich in flora and fauna and are hugely valuable to agriculture and wider society. These threatened habitats are one example of threatened HNV habitats in Ireland. Extensively grazed grasslands have many species of seed producing grasses which support a variety of invertebrates and birds. Some semi-natural grassland habitats are protected by the Habitats Directive because they have declined so much in extent across the EU and will be lost unless measures are taken to protect them and ensure that they are managed appropriately. Annex I habitats under the Habitats Directive which are reliant on farming practices include Calaminarian grassland, Molinia meadows, Hydrophilous tall herb, Lowland hay meadows and the priority habitats Orchid-rich calcareous grassland and Species-rich Nardus upland grassland. However, many semi-natural grasslands are not protected by legislation, and are therefore considered vulnerable due to poor conservation status<sup>12</sup>. Extensive grazing has maintained these HNV farmed habitats for thousands of years and such HNV farming needs to be maintained if they are to continue to deliver the range of public benefits which they are valued for.

In Ireland, the overall quality of each of the Annex I grassland habitats surveyed in response to Article 17 requirements of the Habitats Directive was ‘Unfavourable – Bad’, emphasising their vulnerability in Ireland and the urgency with which they need to be studied, monitored and offered suitable management support measures. In most cases the implementation of appropriate management would improve the condition of the habitat, and assessment scores of Favourable would be attainable in the medium term<sup>13</sup>. The “main threat recorded for Annex I grassland habitats surveyed in 2009 was encroachment/undergrazing, highlighting the urgency with which the problem of land abandonment needs to be tackled.”<sup>14</sup> Agri-environment measures that are being trialled in Ireland (and elsewhere) have shown that wildlife population declines can be halted, provided that sympathetic grassland management techniques are used.

The aim of the Forestry Programme 2014-2020 is to increase the forest cover area in Ireland, from its current level of 10.7% towards a target of 18% forest land cover by 2046. To achieve this the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine (DAFM) have set an afforestation target of 10,000ha per annum up to 2015 and 15,000 ha per annum for the period 2016 to 2046. Given the challenge of land mobility and the demand for agriculturally productive land the expansion of forestry in Ireland is being targeted within areas with marginal farmland. These areas often coinciding with peat soils and located in the Ireland uplands and western counties which due to a range of physical and socio-economic factors have avoided the scale of agricultural intensification which has occurred in other parts of the country. These areas are often dominated by extensive grazing and tradition forms of land management. Extensive forms of grazing in particular are positively correlated with HNV farming. The afforestation of these areas is leading to the irreversible loss of HNV farmland and the exacerbation of many of the negative socio-economic issues such as emigration and ageing demographics which have historically plagued these communities. Farming is the backbone around which many of these marginal communities have evolved and their loss due to Government policies and capital investment is a serious threat to the social cohesion of communities right across the West of Ireland. The CAP investment must do more to support HNV farmers who provide a vast wealth of public goods and services but receive a fraction of financial support.

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<sup>12</sup> O’Neill et al; Irish Semi-natural Grasslands Survey, Annual Report No. 4, November 2013. National Parks and Wildlife Service [https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/ISGS13\\_Western\\_Report.pdf](https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/ISGS13_Western_Report.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> O’Neill et al; Irish Semi-natural Grasslands Survey, Annual Report No. 3, December 2010. National Parks and Wildlife Service [https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/O'Neill\\_et\\_al\\_2010\\_ISGS.pdf](https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/O'Neill_et_al_2010_ISGS.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> O’Neill et al., 2009, from the Irish Semi-natural Grasslands Survey Annual Report, National Parks and Wildlife Service [https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/O'Neill\\_et\\_al\\_2009\\_ISGS.pdf](https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/O'Neill_et_al_2009_ISGS.pdf)

### 1.1.5 Tackling the Loss of High Status Water Bodies

Diffuse agricultural pollution is known to be one of the greatest pressures on water quality and freshwater biodiversity in Ireland. According to the NPWS only five (11%) of Irelands water-dependent habitats are deemed to be at Favourable Conservation Status, while only eleven (50%) water dependent species are at Favourable Conservation Status. The loss of high ecological status is a critical conservation issue for Ireland’s internationally important populations of Freshwater Pearl Mussel (*Margaritifera margaritifera*) the endemic subspecies the Nore Freshwater Pearl Mussel (*Margaritifera durrovensis*) and the Atlantic Salmon (*Salmo salar*). The Freshwater Pearl Mussel and the Nore Freshwater Pearl Mussel are listed under Annex II and V of the Habitats Directive while salmon are an Annex II species. According to the NPWS both species have bad conservation status with an overall declining trend in conservation status. These species require high water status and agricultural intensification and its associated water quality impacts of eutrophication and sedimentation are having a negative impact on their conservation status. Diffuse pollution to surface waters due to agricultural activities are considered as one of the greatest threats to these species.

A significant decline in the number of high ecological status river water bodies from 287 in 2007–2009 to 245 in 2010–2015 has occurred (see Figure 3). The percentage number of sites assigned to the highest ecological status (Q5) has also continued to decline going from 1.5% (no. 38) of sites in 2007–2009 to 1.0% (no. 27) of sites in 2010–2012 and 0.7% (no. 21) of sites in 2013–2015. In contrast 13.4% of sites were at Q5 status between 1987 and 1990. There are 130 river and lake water bodies that are at risk of not meeting their high ecological status objective under the Water Framework Directive.

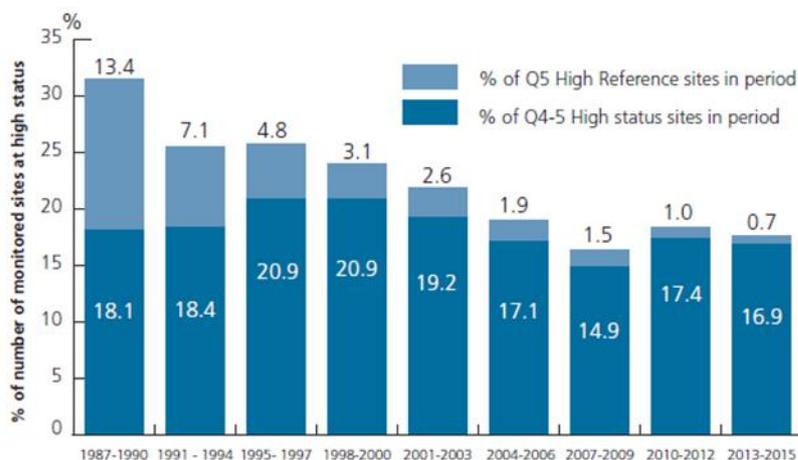


Figure 3: Long term trends (1987 - 2015) in the percentage number of high ecological quality (macro-invertebrate) river sites (Q5 and Q4-5) in each survey period.

There is a strong positive correlation between high status waterbodies and traditional extensive farming. As a result, like High Nature Value farmland Irelands most important remaining high status water bodies are associated with farming in Ireland upland and Western counties. High-status sites are protected under the Water Framework Directive and many are also protected under the Habitats and Birds Directives due to the presence of important water-dependent habitats and species. Where these designations overlap Ireland is legally required to prevent a deterioration in water quality under both the WFD and Habitats and Birds Directives. The CAP has an important role to play in meeting Irelands obligations under the WFD. This will involve promoting measures which address diffuse agricultural pollution right across the country and also supporting framing systems which are associated with the protection of High Status Waterbodies and freshwater SACs and SPAs.

### 1.1.6 *Restoration management of grazed peatland habitats*

Healthy peatlands are valuable to society for the range of services they provide, including water regulation and purification, carbon storage and sequestration and biodiversity. Restoration and conservation management of peatland habitats is widely lauded as a prime example of a nature-based solution to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Peatland habitats in Ireland are in extremely poor condition in Ireland, with all of the annexed peatland habitats (wet heath, dry heath, blanket bog and raised bog) found to have 'bad' conservation status<sup>15</sup>. While there are a range of threats to peatland habitats, many designated and undesignated peatland habitats are managed by extensive grazing on upland peaty soils. Upland sites with thin peaty soils are sensitive to overgrazing. Once eroded, appropriate grazing levels alone is insufficient to restore the habitats ecological functioning. Eroded peatlands result in climate change emissions, reduced water quality downstream, loss of wildlife and ecosystems services, damage to fisheries and increased costs of treatment for drinking water.

Taking even the climate change mitigation ecosystem services associated with peatlands highlights the importance of managing this national asset sustainably. Covering a mere 3% of the world's terrestrial surface, peatlands contain an estimated 550 Gigatonnes (Gt) of carbon. This is equal to 30% of all soil carbon, as much carbon as all terrestrial biomass, and two times the carbon sink of all forests in the world. In Ireland peat soils cover 20.6% of the national land area and contain more than 75% of the national soil organic carbon. It was revealed that near-intact peatlands may actively sequester c. 57,402 t C/year over the whole country. However, damaged peatlands are a persistent source of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and, at the national level, Irish peatlands are a large net source of carbon, estimated currently at around 2.64 Mt C/year.

This is a very real cost to society, in terms of both the loss of valuable ecosystem services as well as actual damage to habitats and fisheries interests.

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<sup>15</sup> Conservation Status in Ireland of Habitats and Species listed in the European Council Directive on the Conservation of Habitats, Flora and Fauna 92/43/EEC. NPWS, 2008.

## 1.2 Background to CAP economics and environment in Ireland

Data published by the DAFM in the CAP beneficiaries database<sup>16</sup> reveals an allocation of just over €1.6 Billion to the Irish agri-food sector for all measures under CAP (Pillar 1 and Pillar 2) in 2016. Within this allocation, nearly €365 million (22.7% of the total CAP budget) was drawn upon from Pillar 2 for measures ‘Improving Environment and Countryside’. However, the allocation of these funds across Ireland is very different (see Figure 4 and Figure 5).

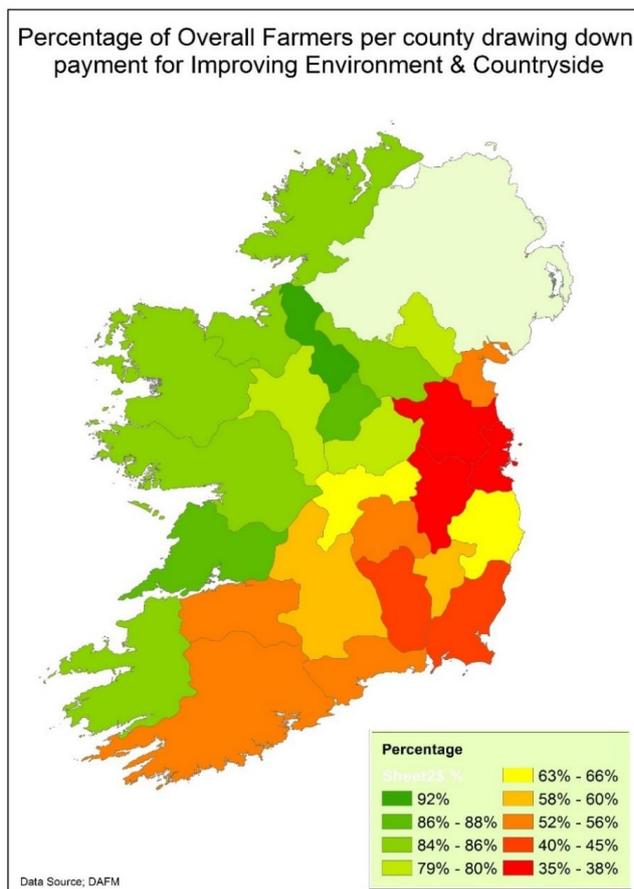


Figure 4: Number of farmers (as percentage) drawing down payments from CAP in 2016 for Improving Environment and Countryside as a percentage of overall farmer numbers (farmer numbers derived from the CSO farm census 2010)

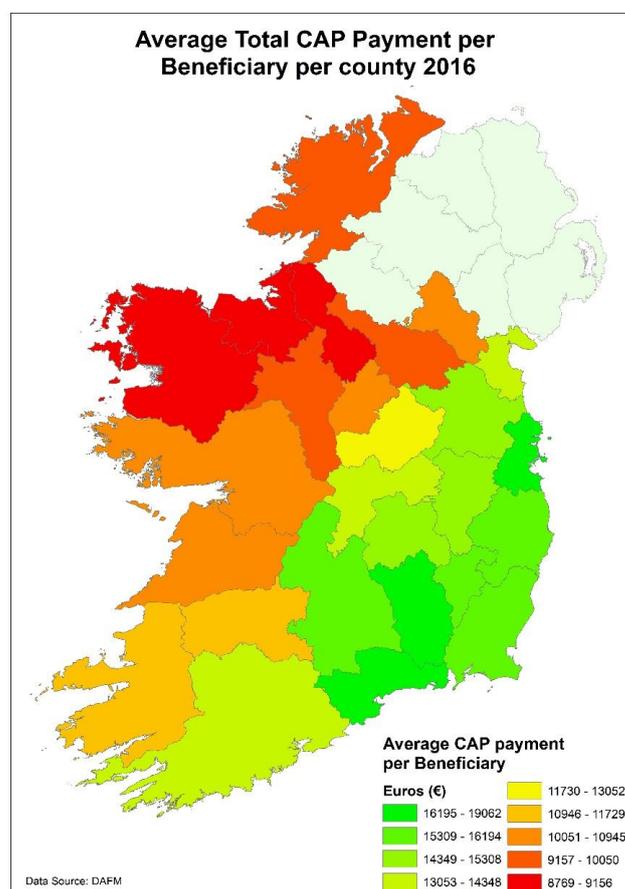


Figure 5: Displays the average total CAP payment received by individual beneficiaries in each county of Ireland for 2016.

Figure 4 shows the proportion of farmers drawing down Pillar 2 payments for measures associated with “Improving the Environment and Countryside” in 2016 on a county-by-county basis. The number of farmers in each county is based upon CSO statistics from 2010 (the most recent census data available). The Pillar 2 measures include agri-environment schemes and the Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) schemes. By contrast, Figure 5 shows the average payment per county to CAP beneficiaries (under Pillar 1 and/or Pillar 2) in 2016. The differences between the two figures are striking, with a clear north-west: south-east divide. The scale of this divide is also substantial, with farmers in Cos Kilkenny and Waterford receiving almost twice the average CAP payment compared to farmers in Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim, yet perhaps only half the proportion of farmers in these areas undertake environmental management measures in comparison to the north-west.

<sup>16</sup> Data derived from CAP beneficiaries database (<https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/agri-foodindustry/euinternationalpolicy/commonagriculturalpolicy/cap/capbeneficiariesdatabase/>); accessed Jan-18

What is even more stark, and when considering the value for money of overall CAP funding, is to compare these economic maps with indicators for the delivery of public goods. For example, Figure 6 shows the likelihood of HNV farming in Ireland. This map uses five variables (Corine landcover data split into three classes; farmed semi-natural land, semi-natural land and non-semi-natural land; average stocking density; hedgerow density; river and stream density and soils diversity) that are available at a national scale to map HNV farmland likelihood at an Electoral Division scale<sup>17</sup>.

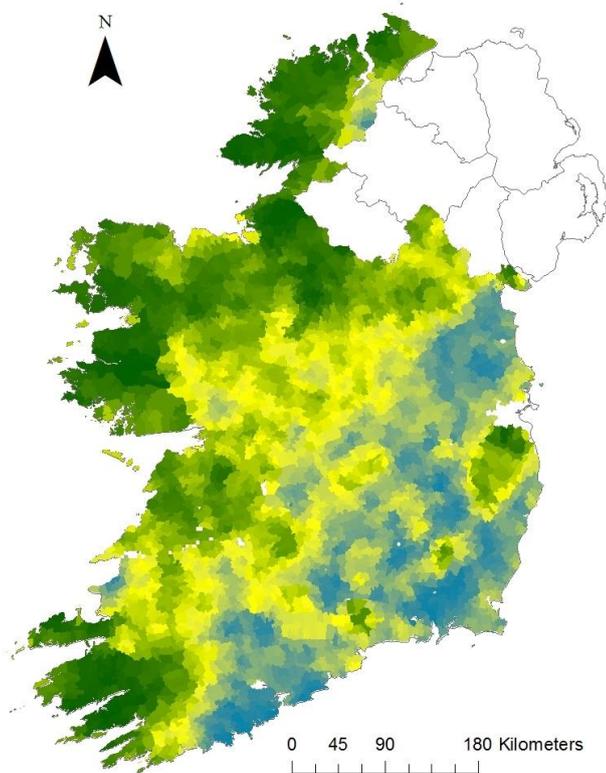


Figure 6: Map showing likelihood of HNV farming in Ireland; green indicates high likelihood; yellow indicates intermediate likelihood and blue indicates low likelihood of having HNV farmland. (Map sourced from IDEAL-HNV (<http://www.high-nature-value-farmland.ie/hnv-distribution/>)).

It is clear that HNV farming occurs where average CAP payments are lowest (e.g. the north-west) and the proportion of farmers drawing down payments to improve the environment and countryside (such as agri-environment or ANC payments) is highest. To meet CAP and EU objectives, funding should be directed towards areas delivering non-market, public goods (such as a healthy environment). It is clear from Figures 5 and 6 that the current CAP model instead directs money to areas where environmental outputs are low.

<sup>17</sup> This map was downloaded from the IDEAL-HNV project <http://www.high-nature-value-farmland.ie/hnv-distribution/> (accessed March 2018); please see this website for further information on HNV farming, and the uses and limitations of this map.

### **1.3 Compliance with Environmental Law**

In addition to threats to species and habitats within EU-designated sites (SACs and SPAs), there are a number of requirements in the Birds Directive, the Habitats Directive, and the EIA and SEA Directives to protect species and habitats outside of designated and protected areas. In ECJ Ruling C418-04, the Court found that despite a requirement for Member States to “make a serious attempt at protecting those habitats which lie outside the SPAs” Ireland had not “transposed that provision fully and correctly by taking suitable steps to avoid pollution or deterioration of the habitats lying outside the SPAs. It is thus clear, in the present case, that Ireland must endeavour to take suitable steps to avoid pollution or disturbances of the habitats”<sup>18</sup>. This case is still open.

In pursuing the range of targets associated with government policies, such as the increase of agricultural production, flood control, housing or other development, there will be a general requirement for a change, intensification or industrialisation of land use. Although in some areas on certain land types this may be achieved without any significant negative impacts on the natural environment or on protected species and habitats, there may be other cases where this could result in damage reducing potential for a range of species and habitats to meet the Favourable Conservation Status required by law. It is necessary to develop and implement a range of effective regulatory measures which ensure, beyond reasonable doubt, that such impacts will not occur, before such actions are implemented.

The Habitats Directive, also applicable to Birds Directive, outlines a hierarchy of avoidance of adverse impacts, followed by mitigation of those impacts. Mitigation measures are measures which avoid or reduce the impact of the (proposed) activity or activities to the point where the plans or proposals no longer have a risk of an adverse effect. This procedure is laid out in Article 6 of the Habitats Directive and there is a body of guidance and case law which clarifies the requirements.

It is also important to note that European Court of Justice case law against Ireland in the nature and environment field illustrates Ireland’s legacy of failures to adequately implement Environmental Law including the Nitrates Directive, the Birds Directive, the Habitats Directive and the EIA Directive and Regulations. This situation reflects how Ireland still does not benefit from a cohesive body of legislative instruments, policy and procedures to protect the environment from accelerating degradation and points to the need for assessment of the impacts and measures to mitigate potential impacts at the source of policy developments rather than any approach which might rely on existing Irish law and policy to ensure compliance.

Despite these well-recognised failures on Ireland’s part in implementing nature protection requirements, it is clear that significant short-comings still exist. Within the new Programme for Government<sup>19</sup> there is neither mention of biodiversity conservation nor protection of nature, beyond the very limited measures already agreed and in operation through EU-funded schemes.

### **1.4 Background to the CAP post-2020 consultation**

To date, the European Commission presented its vision for a future CAP in its communication in November<sup>20</sup>, and the Council of EU Agriculture Ministers presented its Presidency conclusion in response to the commission communication in March<sup>21</sup>. It is unclear where the consultation exercise launched by the Irish Minister for Agriculture to develop an Irish position on the future of the CAP fits into this process. Nevertheless, this consultation by the Minister is very welcome; not all Member States have undertaken such a wide-ranging stakeholder engagement process and the opportunity for input to Ireland’s position by this consultation is appreciated by the BirdWatch Ireland.

In its November Communication, the EU Commission has indicated that it is prioritising environmentally sustainable activities and basing rewards on these. This was echoed by the Council of EU Agriculture Ministers, which supported a higher level of environmental ambition for the CAP in the future. BirdWatch Ireland would

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<sup>18</sup> JUDGMENT OF THE COURT (Second Chamber) 13 December 2007; Paragraphs 179-181 of C418-04

<sup>19</sup> [http://www.merrionstreet.ie/MerrionStreet/en/ImageLibrary/Programme\\_for\\_Partnership\\_Government.pdf](http://www.merrionstreet.ie/MerrionStreet/en/ImageLibrary/Programme_for_Partnership_Government.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/sites/agriculture/files/future-of-cap/future\\_of\\_food\\_and\\_farming\\_communication\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/sites/agriculture/files/future-of-cap/future_of_food_and_farming_communication_en.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/agrifish/2018/03/19/>

strongly endorse these statements, and would be keen to continue to work with agricultural interests to ensure environmental measures are adequately financed.

Another innovative element of the Commission Communication was a focus on results-based actions. BirdWatch Ireland already work on several results-based agri-environment projects, including the Results-based Agri-environment Payment Scheme (RBAPS) as well as two of the recently-funded European Innovation Partnership (EIP) projects. Again, we would strongly support an approach that is focused on delivering results, rather than the more abstract indicators currently used to monitor or evaluate the implementation of the CAP.

A third emphasis from the Commission suggests giving increased powers to individual Member States when deciding how to spend CAP funds. Although there is concern from environmental NGOs in some Member States that this may create a “race to the bottom” in terms of ambition for the policy, an ambitious CAP programme in Ireland that seeks evidence-based measures to deliver results represents a timely opportunity for Ireland to realign its food production system with sustainable practices. This approach is also highlighted with a briefing paper from the European Court of Auditors (ECA) published in March<sup>22</sup>:

*“A key element of the Communication is advocacy of a “new delivery model” – based on increased flexibility and subsidiarity and giving Member States more responsibility for performance. In our view, the success of the new delivery model requires:*

- Measures designed on the basis of solid scientific and statistical evidence demonstrating that they will deliver desired results;*
- The new “CAP strategic plans” setting relevant, ambitious and verifiable targets that are aligned with EU objectives;*
- A robust performance monitoring and evaluation framework; and*
- A solid accountability and audit chain providing assurance on both compliance and performance.”*

Furthermore, with a likely reduced CAP budget for the next programming period, a Member State that can demonstrate that the content of its CAP programme is ambitious; seeks to build upon a strong foundation of evidence, best practice and inclusive stakeholder engagement and has social and environmental sustainability as core objectives is likely to be seen favourably during budgetary negotiations.

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<sup>22</sup> [https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/Briefing\\_paper\\_CAP/Briefing\\_paper\\_CAP\\_EN.pdf](https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/Briefing_paper_CAP/Briefing_paper_CAP_EN.pdf)

## 2 A vision for a new CAP post-2020

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) plays a major role in the development of a socially, environmentally and climate-destructive model of farming across the EU. Over the decades, the CAP has been subject to repeated attempts at reform in order to address its original objectives which are enshrined in the Treaty of the EU, in addition to addressing changing political objectives. In the light of current challenges, the ‘two pillar’ system of agricultural support has proven to be unfit for purpose. It is neither effective nor efficient from the perspective of sustainable food production, rural development, environmental protection or supporting farmer’s incomes.

The 2013 CAP reform was meant to ensure that measures securing the sustainable management of natural resources would receive public money, with funds ring-fenced for environmental protection. Unfortunately, attempts at real reform were thwarted by vested interests lobbying Member State governments and MEPs for a “business as usual” approach to the intensification of European agriculture through CAP supports. It is to be hoped that such a short-sighted approach will not be the conclusion of the current reform process as a failure to address important and urgent issues in the EU covered by CAP may cause long-term and irreparable damage to the agri-food sector and rural Europe as a whole.

Due to the concurrent crises in the agriculture and food sector of environmental degradation, loss of economic opportunity in the farm sector and erosion of trust in the EU as a whole, a major shift of the policy towards sustainability economically, socially and environmentally is urgently required. This requires a major reform and a new set of policy objectives and instruments.

BirdWatch Ireland calls for a new Common Food & Land policy for Europe to replace the existing CAP structure. It would be designed to meet today’s challenges such as tackling climate change, improving public health, restoring Europe’s biodiversity and sustaining rural populations. This new policy seeks to support a healthy agricultural sector, diverse in types of farming, produce and demography, based within a rural landscape that sustainably manages our natural resources, and where biodiversity can thrive. To realise this vision, the next policy must have a major focus on transitioning the sector to sustainable food production.

The new CAP must be:

- Environmentally Sustainable – for clean air and water, healthy soil, and thriving plant and animal life.
- Fair – for farmers and society. Those who deliver the public goods which markets do not pay for can receive public money, whilst those who pollute our environment should be penalised.
- Healthy – for the wellbeing of all people and communities
- Globally Responsible – for the planet’s climate and sustainable development around the world.

### **2.1 Principles for a new policy**

#### **2.1.1 Transition to sustainable farming**

The current CAP does not sufficiently help farmers who wish to transition to sustainable farming methods. We recommend a set of principles that deliver a transition in economic, social and environmental terms.

#### **2.1.2 The principle of ‘the polluter pays’**

A strong legal framework is the basis of this principle. The CAP system of cross compliance (Statutory Management Requirements (SMRs) and maintaining land in Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC)) has proven to be wholly ineffective in ensuring the protection of the environment. In their briefing paper on the Future of the CAP<sup>23</sup> the EU Court of Auditors state that:

*“While cross-compliance requirements apply to most CAP beneficiaries, the entitlement to CAP support does not depend on following them, and penalties for non-compliance for individual farmers, expressed as a percentage, tend to be low”*

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<sup>23</sup> [https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/Briefing\\_paper\\_CAP/Briefing\\_paper\\_CAP\\_EN.pdf](https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/Briefing_paper_CAP/Briefing_paper_CAP_EN.pdf)

Furthermore, the cross-compliance system creates a perverse incentive, causing farmers to destroy habitats simply to retain eligibility for payments, often farms with the most ecologically sensitive systems. The results of such land management, particularly where burning has been used to clear land, have resulted in numerous damaging and dangerous wildfires in many areas in Ireland. This situation should be replaced with a more meaningful system of controls and checks that, whilst not onerous, will ensure that the environment will be protected. This would include genuine implementation of conditionality which would ensure that beneficiaries of payments would be appropriately penalised if found to be contravening any environmental protection laws. Finally, the proper enforcement of environmental law, and adequate resources to do this, is essential.

Ending environmentally harmful subsidies and incentives is essential for the next policy. Land managers who pollute the environment should not be entitled to receive public money (apart from during specific transitional periods) and public money must not be used simply to pay or compensate for compliance with the law. This is especially the case with the basic safeguards for ecosystem functions related to water, soil, air and climate. Public incentives are needed in areas where society depends on the active intervention of farmers, particularly in the area of nature conservation.

Create a real disincentive to pollution through the introduction of a levy on the products responsible, mainly artificial fertilizers and pesticides. This should be at an EU level, however any lack of progress at this level should not prevent Ireland from taking the initiative. In Ireland, this would mean that farmers seeking to breach the requirements of the Nitrates Directive (currently permitted through an annually-sought derogation by DAFM), would no longer be allowed to receive any public funding for such farming practices, and any such polluting actions are paid for (or taxed), with the funds used to support sustainable farming actions.

### *2.1.3 Making payments fit for purpose*

CAP payments need to be targeted to recipients that are directly implementing actions to address EU priorities as defined by the objectives of the CAP. It is likely that this will require a substantial shift from the current distribution of payments under the CAP and it is recommended that this shift occurs in a defined and transparent way during the course of the next programming period to maintain stability within the sector and allow existing CAP beneficiaries to re-align their activities to the market or the mechanisms that a new CAP would support.

The current CAP includes contradictory aims within both pillars and is both highly inefficient and complicated. In particular, the 'Basic Payments Scheme' is not meeting its objectives and jeopardizes the long-term viability of the sector. The distribution of the Basic Payments Scheme results in over 80% of the funds going to less than 20% of farmers; severely failing the average farmer. For example, land prices can also be pushed higher by the capitalisation of the payments into land values whilst the policies that reinstate coupling and schemes to increase herd sizes also create long term structural problems for the farming sector.

There is no longer a justification for any unconditional basic payment or single area scheme. BirdWatch Ireland therefore proposes to replace the current one with an entirely new system, moving away from the two-pillar system and establishing the principle of 'paying public money for public goods'. This entails that those food producers who are not managing land sustainably should not receive any public support. While transition periods may be required (the 2021-2027 EU budgetary period is suggested) it must be ensured that from the next EU budgetary period (post-2027) no further financial support should be provided for environmentally damaging farming practices. If this is not implemented then taxpayer's money would continue to create costs to society (such as damage to the environment) which will have to be paid by taxpayers again to address, if such repairing such damage was even possible.

Part of the approach in designing a CAP that is fit for purpose, and to support the Commission's simplification objective, would be the rationalisation of CAP schemes. Rather than farmers having to go through a multitude of contracts and agreements (such as application for Basic Payment Scheme (BPS), Areas of Natural Constraint (ANCs), agri-environment schemes (such as GLAS), non-productive investment schemes (such as TAMS) or other elements (such as the Beef Genomics Data Programme)), farmers should have a single contract encompassing all the elements of the CAP. Such an approach would see not only improved simplification for participating farmers (as they would only need to go through one set of paperwork) but also improve the integration of actions

and undertakings between each of the elements currently operated as separate schemes. Such a co-ordinated approach could better address environmental requirements (such as linking Pillar 1 Greening with agri-environment or non-productive investments) but also link production activities (supported by BPS) with non-productive investments, appropriate Greening or agri-environment measures.

#### *2.1.4 Ensuring sustainable rural development*

Whilst managing to deliver some crucial environmental outcomes, the current Rural Development ‘pillar’ still retains many environmentally harmful measures, and the new policy must facilitate the transition away from these harmful measures to increased sustainability. In Ireland, Pillar 2 measures are sometimes used to further mechanise the agriculture sector (through the Targeted Agriculture Modernisation Scheme), and further intensify production beyond ecological boundaries. Recent crises clearly indicate specialisation (focusing on single commodity output farming (e.g. just dairy with no beef)) increases exposure to price fluctuations for producers, and over-production (particularly increased cattle numbers in Ireland) has led to fodder shortages, requiring the importation of expensive replacement animal feeds, which itself carries health and environmental risks. CAP rural development policy must focus non-production investment supports away from specialisation or over-production, and instead focus on supporting diversification and a shift to more sustainable farming practices.

Although the proportion of Pillar 2 funding which is directed towards positive environmental goals in Ireland compares very favourably with other EU Member States, this is still not enough to protect our biodiversity, water and soils, and for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Furthermore, the overall funding committed to Pillar 2 measures continues to be small in comparison to the untargeted subsidies in Pillar 1. A future policy without the ‘two-pillar’ structure must ensure that rural communities benefit from initiatives that meet sustainable criteria to ensure long term prosperity.

#### *2.1.5 Managing risk in sensible ways*

The introduction of publicly financed risk management instruments that insure against price volatility is counterproductive in many ways. It provides a further incentive to unsustainable intensification and specialisation. It also does not contribute to addressing any environmental challenges, and may likely make them worse, potentially creating the risk of public money supporting damaging practices, which additional public funds would be required to reverse or address. Further, it will divert CAP funds away from land managers wishing to transition to sustainable land management, and will reduce funds for incentivising important environmental measures. The principle of risk management should be promoted through farm diversification and knowledge transfer, rather than complex and costly financial instruments.

#### *2.1.6 Establish a new model for funding nature conservation.*

In order to reverse the trends of biodiversity decline, there must be a renewed focus and emphasis on protecting and re-establishing nature. This requires a major new funding stream in the next iteration of CAP. This policy should be developed by decision makers with expertise beyond the agricultural sector, and should be co-managed by those at member state level with responsibility for protecting the natural environment.

#### *2.1.7 Creating a food policy for Europe*

The next policy should have an intrinsic coherence mechanism set with other policies. In particular, this means the next policy should ensure that food produced by Europe’s agri-food sector is in line with the other objectives of the European Union. That would mean that the way our food is produced would be beneficial to biodiversity, would help and support Europe in meeting climate change targets, and would contribute to other challenges, such as reducing diet-related illness and improving the general health of the European citizens whose taxes pay for the policy implementation.

## **2.2 Content for a new policy**

### ***2.2.1 Objectives***

This new policy must facilitate the transition of the EU's food and farming system to environmental, social and economic sustainability across all sectors, in particular by

- a) ensuring sustainable production, processing, trade and consumption of food and other products without harm to the environment in the EU and elsewhere, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals
- b) providing adequate financial support for farmland and other land uses, in particular by co-financing the implementation of the EU Nature Directives
- c) creating conditions for healthy, transparent and informed consumption of food in the EU
- d) minimising food waste and progressing the circular economy

The next policy must replace the outmoded two pillar system, using sustainable development as a future framework for the policy. The principle underpinning the policy should be that those farmers who deliver high levels of public goods are those that could receive public money to improve their income – essentially it should support farmers that support sustainable food production. The reform should apply the 'contractual' approach to all funding between farmers, land managers and society. Any new payments system should build upon existing programmatic approaches to payments, with explicit objectives at a national level, which would be assessed by the European Commission to ensure that all payments have a clear public interest, and that no environmentally harmful practice receives public funding. A data baseline would be required for such an assessment, against which environmental and social outcomes could be measured and evaluated over the course of the programming period. The baseline and indicators should reflect the content, measures and objectives of the new policy, and seek to look at specific outcomes rather than more generic uptake or scaled measures (e.g. number of farmers participating in an environmental scheme does not reflect the success of that scheme on the environment). Such an approach echoes the desire of the Commission not only to increase subsidiarity within the new policy but also make the new policy more focused on outcomes and results and simplify the complexity of the current two pillar model.

### ***2.2.2 The Common Food & Land Policy's funding structure***

The future policy must, once the current EU financial period ends, replace the current two pillar system of the CAP with a new set of funds that serve the principle of an EU "budget for results", another objective highlighted in the Commission's Communication. Whilst a transition period will be required (we suggest the 2021-2027 programming period), the new structure must be determined from the very start of the next financial period, with a clear timetable to its completion

- I) A **"Space for Nature payment"**. An area based entry level payment scheme for dedicating a varying percentage of each farm to non-productive use only. The aim of this payment is to support biodiversity and ecosystem services.
- II) A **"Nature & Biodiversity Instrument "**. Establishing the central mechanism for financing the implementation of EU nature legislation and other key biodiversity measures on privately-owned land. This fund must be adequately funded and provide attractive income generating payments for public services delivered by farmers and land managers
- III) A **"Transition Instrument for sustainable farming"**. With the long term goal to make farming sustainable and independent from public subsidies this temporary investment fund (limited to the 2020-2027 funding period) should help farms switch to a high-quality, nature and animal friendly, and profitable economic model, and invest in healthy, economically diverse rural areas.
- IV) A **"Sustainable Food Instrument"**. Given the importance of food and health aspects in the European population, specific investments are needed to build up sustainable value food chains, reduce food waste and promote healthy and environmentally sound consumption of food.

#### 2.2.2.1 A public goods payment “Space for Nature”

In light of the major failure of current ‘greening’ requirements within the basic payment system, and the need for simplification, a simpler, more effective, voluntary system to ensure actual biodiversity conservation across the agricultural landscape is needed, entitled the “Space for Nature” scheme.

The aim would be to ensure that natural vegetation can be found across the rural landscape, such as fallow land and other landscape features. The payment is considered to be an “entry level” measure, allowing easy accessibility for the vast majority of farmers and contributing, together with legislation and targeted schemes, to the health of larger ecosystems in rural areas. There should also be the option to have multi-annual agreements to create long term habitat in the agricultural landscape. This is an evolution of the existing Pillar 1 Greening, taking the EFA model and improving its ability to successfully deliver environmental objectives.

Agreement with this style of approach is evident with the Presidency conclusions from the Council of EU Agriculture Ministers, which states that it:

*“SUPPORTS the Commission’s intention to make the new “green architecture” simple and more efficient and CALLS for the streamlining of the current requirements in relation to greening and cross-compliance”*

The Space for Nature scheme consists of a contractual payment for dedicating an area of land to non-productive use and biodiversity conservation. The payment is established at farm level, where a payment is given according to the amount of area dedicated as a Space for Nature. The scheme would apply to both crop and grassland systems, and the agreements would also involve mandatory basic management requirements of chemical controls. Such an approach needs to be underpinned by an integrated and comprehensive advisory systems, including the use of specialist advisors (particularly to identify habitat and biodiversity actions) and knowledge transfer (to include targeted third-level research supporting the objectives and operation of the programme).

This measure would be beneficial to ecosystem services as it would likely host much functional biodiversity such as pollinators and pest predators, which are necessary for the long term viability of our agricultural production as well as other farmland biodiversity.

#### 2.2.2.2 Nature & Biodiversity Instrument

So far, despite legal requirements and global commitments, the EU has failed to provide adequate co-funding for the implementation of its biodiversity strategy and nature conservation legislation. At the same time the CAP has been found to severely undermine the objectives of the EU’s biodiversity policy. As a consequence, a new Common Sustainable Food and Land Policy must have a significant strategic focus on the tackling the biodiversity crisis. The policy should contain the central EU financing tool to pay for biodiversity action undertaken by farmers and other land managers, following a contractual, income generating approach such as through targeted agri-environment measures. To this end it is necessary to establish a distinct Nature financing instrument within the new policy.

The new Nature Instrument must be a distinct funding stream, programmed and steered by environmental authorities. Financing from the Nature Instrument must be clearly ring-fenced with no possibility to use this funding purposes other than nature conservation and biodiversity. Beneficiaries of the Nature Instrument would be all those who implement the eligible measures, in particular farmers, land and forest owners, and environmental organisations that undertake appropriate land management.

The priorities of the Instrument are to support Member States in

- Restoring and maintaining species and habitats of EU importance to a favourable conservation status
- Completing and managing the terrestrial Natura 2000 network according to legal requirements
- Undertaking other key targeted biodiversity measures, as well as monitoring and communication activities that underpin the achievement of EU biodiversity policy

This instrument should be in addition to a significantly strengthened LIFE programme.

### *2.2.2.3 Transition instrument for sustainable farming [including sustainable rural development]*

The most effective way to ensure Europe benefits from generational renewal in rural areas, sustainable management of resources and better market resilience in the farming sector is a transition to sustainable farming, both economically, socially and environmentally. A key element of the new policy therefore should be an investment stream for the transition to sustainable farming, allowing farmers to access the required finances to change their farm structure, management practices and infrastructure. As an outcome farmers should be able to meet ambitious legal requirements as well as to generate an adequate income, without permanent basic subsidies.

The investment instrument should include an improved system of advisory services for farmers, that will include training, information provision for innovation, cooperation and association promotion, capital investment grants as well as support for land management planning. The instrument would refocus the policy to a new rural economy, higher environmental and animal welfare standards, support of switching to organic farming, the objective of a circular economy and sustainable bio-economy, as well as farm business diversification and short supply chains. The instrument should take a 'whole farm approach', ensuring that the entire farm holding transitions, and not simply aspects of it. It would also be designed for specific sectors, with recommendations and requirements for each system, such as dairy farming. The investments would aim at focusing a farmer's ability to 'add value' rather than increase production.

This instrument, programmed by Member States, should take the form of multi-annual payments for projects, but each measure or programme should have a clear set of objectives which can be checked against its social, economic and environmental impacts as well as a targeted and robust monitoring and evaluation system, providing safeguards to ensure genuine sustainability.

### *2.2.2.4 Sustainable Food Programme*

The new European Food & Land Policy must be more coherent with the consequences of the production patterns it supports. Primarily, it must only support the production of sustainable foods, with a view to the climate impact and on tackling the 30% food wasted in Europe. Secondly, it should also support sustainable and healthy processing, trade and diets. For the latter, dedicated funded programmes should be established. The next policy should:

Whilst it is appreciated that increased exports are desirable in the agri-food sector, reducing Ireland's reliance on imports by meeting the need from domestic producers is equally important. Further opportunities to explore aspects within the domestic market should also be considered, such as encouraging shortening supply chains by increasing awareness and value of buying produce locally. This not only rewards local artisan producers, but will also encourage increased social cohesion through supporting rural communities, and encouraging more local, rural enterprises. In addition to the social benefits, artisan producers offering products locally tend to benefit the environment through increased local awareness and reduced "food miles" linked to products.

Recent threats to food safety tend to have arisen through a drive to lower prices at the expense of quality production, and increased reliance on external inputs to production systems (such as chemical fertilisers and pesticides). Improving the quality associated with food being produced and taking the emphasis away from solely seeking to drive down production costs, requires a substantial change in the mind-set of the mainstream EU agri-food sector. However, through proper controls, regulation and compliance monitoring, including enforcement and penalties as required, would be essential to ensure resilience in the system.

Reducing dependency upon external inputs such as chemical fertilisers and pesticides, is also essential. Again, this can be done through appropriate legislation and enforcement, not least by enshrining integrated pest management obligations from the Sustainable Use Directive within Member State legislation and policies. Further improvements in this area, by enhancing the legislative baseline required, could add further value and efficiency, whilst reducing reliance on and exposure to such inputs.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, efforts must be taken to improve ecological functioning within production systems. This would be partly addressed by meeting obligations under the Sustainable Use

Directive, but efforts to ensure ecosystem services are recognised and preserved must go further than basic legislative requirements. A healthier environment produces more resilient and healthier food. Furthermore, such an approach reinforces the environmental quality associated with Irish food production that the Irish agri-food sector should be seeking to exploit in order to maintain a competitive edge in national, European and global markets.

#### *2.2.2.5 Raising revenue from polluters*

The next policy should establish a system of revenue raising measures to further disincentivise irresponsible or unsustainable land management practices. In particular, there needs to be progressive taxation of pesticides and synthetic fertilisers. The proceeds from this taxation system can be fed back into the agricultural sector by funding other parts of the policy, such as the Transition and the Nature Fund. This should also be complimented by a robust regime of sanctions for infringements to regulations and contractual requirements, the proceeds of which would go to supporting the work of farmers managing the land in a sustainable way.

### 3. A review of current CAP measures

A core priority of the EU programming period for 2014-2020, and the various elements within the current CAP is the restoration, preservation and enhancement of ecosystems dependent upon agriculture. Several measures within the CAP as it is operated in Ireland, and particularly within Ireland Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2013-2020 have the potential to address threats to biodiversity from agriculture. However, many of these have been limited in focus and extent through implementation rather than being limited by the policy. The section seeks to review existing CAP measures (principally within Pillar 2) and offer recommendations on how these could be adapted to improve delivery for biodiversity.

#### 3.1 Eligibility of land for CAP payments

In the previous two programming periods (2007-2013 and 2014-2020) there have been many well-documented environmental issues in relation to the management of scrub and other important habitats on Irish farms (and, indeed elsewhere in the EU). Small areas of non-crop habitats, such as trees or scrub, are a traditional part of the agricultural landscape, and can indeed have an agricultural purpose e.g. acting as a shelter area for stock. The fact that in some cases, farmers are being told to exclude such features may perversely incentivise their destruction in order to reduce the likelihood of a farmer being penalised after submitting a claim. These often correspond with areas of High Nature Value farming. The exclusion of environmental features making up part of the farmed landscape is also contrary to the rationale for Direct Payments, which are described as<sup>24</sup>:

*European Union (EU) farmers receive support in the form of direct payments, on the condition that they respect strict rules on human and animal health and welfare, plant health and the environment.*

Texts in the current Direct Payments Regulation (Article 4(h)<sup>25</sup>) have clarified the eligibility of habitats for these payments, explicitly stating that scrub can form part of the forage area of a holding:

*"permanent grassland and permanent pasture" (together referred to as "permanent grassland") means land used to grow grasses or other herbaceous forage naturally (self-seeded) or through cultivation (sown) and that has not been included in the crop rotation of the holding for five years or more; it may include other species such as shrubs and/or trees which can be grazed provided that the grasses and other herbaceous forage remain predominant as well as, where Member States so decide, land which can be grazed and which forms part of established local practices where grasses and other herbaceous forage are traditionally not predominant in grazing areas.*

However, widespread and large-scale removal of these habitats, followed by burning of cleared vegetation, is likely to have severe environmental impacts in terms of biodiversity and air quality, and contribute to production of greenhouse gases. One of the reasons put forward for such clearance and burning is the need to maintain land as "utilisable agricultural area" in order to receive EU farm payments, with current Pillar 1 payments (the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS)) is only payable on agricultural land.

The exclusion of non-productive features makes nonsense of many GAEC measures which require their preservation or good management. If they are not included in the area of the claim, it raises questions about whether they really are protected. In some cases, incentives to introduce similar features are also paid for through agri-environment programmes. It is not good use of taxpayers' money to penalise farmers in cases where they are producing for free, environmental benefits which, the taxpayer is willing to pay for.

Furthermore, BirdWatch Ireland has significant concerns about the loss of valuable habitats for wild birds through scrub clearance and uncontrolled burning activities. While the loss of habitats for wild birds is a concern already highlighted by the European Court of Justice in a ruling against Ireland, a proactive and coherent approach to habitat protection for wild birds both within and outside of designated areas is still urgently needed and particularly lacking in Ireland.

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<sup>24</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/direct-support/direct-payments\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/direct-support/direct-payments_en)

<sup>25</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013R1307&from=en>

Additionally, according to Teagasc<sup>26</sup>, such land management strategies (specifically burning) may actually make the suitability and management of such land for agricultural more challenging. Burning in March would promote the growth of the very scrub species which burning is supposed to control, specifically:

- **Bracken** - Burning in general, speeds up the spread of bracken as the rhizomes are better able to withstand fires than more shallow-rooted plants such as heather.
- **Gorse / Furze / Whins** - Gorse regenerates prolifically from the seed bank after a fire, and ideally should be kept under control by grazing.
- **Heather** – Burning should be controlled, irregular and in patches. Burning is only recommended when followed with sustainable levels of livestock grazing. Mechanical cutting of heather can be used to make fire breaks and fire control lines for prescribed burning, at a later date.

The Forestry Service's own Forestry Standards Manual also states that:

*"the burning of gorse (or furze) will not give long-term control, and may actually contribute to the further development of the species following burning and subsequent planting. Attempts at burning large areas of gorse may easily give rise to wildfire conditions and damage to land, habitats and other resources. Ideally, gorse should be treated by flailing."*

In relation to heather management, research in Scotland<sup>27</sup> states that *"Regeneration was more prolific after burning in autumn than in spring, contrary to the traditionally held belief"*. From both an environmental, farming and a health and safety perspective, the best time to burn is between September and November. Burning is also no substitute for sustainable grazing with traditional, upland cattle and sheep breeds.

To tackle this issue, it is essential that agricultural subsidies must not be provided where land management results in damage to the habitat requirements of birds, either within or outside of the breeding season (such as through scrub clearance). Furthermore, subsidised management needs to be compatible with environmental as well as climate change objectives. Burning activities, particularly on peat soils, also need to be assessed in the context of climate change and the need to ensure the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. The clearance of scrub habitats, with a view to receiving subsidy payments through the CAP, is contrary to requirements of the EU Birds Directive and environmental objectives associated with the use of public funding.

The removal of scrub and the destruction of other valuable habitats in order to qualify for Direct Payments through Pillar I of the CAP must therefore cease. It is also essential that scrub is not allowed to develop on other valuable natural habitats such as semi-natural grasslands. Aerial photography can be used to identify areas of established scrub, and also identify areas where scrub has more recently appeared. The maintenance of semi-natural grasslands should be supported through CAP Pillar II schemes (including agri-environment measures, or through supports for Areas of Natural Constraint (formerly Less Favoured Areas), including scrub removal where appropriate. However, damage to sensitive habitats, including established scrub, must be avoided.

### **3.2 Monitoring and Evaluation**

BirdWatch Ireland welcomes the EU Commission's focus on outputs and results within the next CAP. To establish these results and outputs, monitoring and evaluation needs to be integrated and coherent within the policy. As with any such policy, the CAP must be monitored and evaluated at many levels. There are varied purposes to such actions: the identification of unsuccessful options; the demonstration of benefits; the improvement of existing measures or the identification of gaps in the programme where new measures are required. There is likely to be a requirement for overall monitoring and evaluation of the programme as a whole. However, individual measures and actions (or even components of some actions) may also require separate monitoring and evaluation work to be undertaken.

The need to ensure the effectiveness of schemes, and to be able to fully document it, is strengthened by the budgetary pressures and widespread calls to reduce public spending on agriculture. Monitoring is even more

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<sup>26</sup> Byrne et al., 2017 Farming the Uplands – Where to from here?

[https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/publications/2017/Agri\\_Conference\\_2017.pdf](https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/publications/2017/Agri_Conference_2017.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> Miller G.R. & Miles J. (1970) Regeneration of heather (*Calluna vulgaris* (L.) Hull) at different ages and seasons in north-east Scotland. *Journal of Applied Ecology*, 7, 51-60

important in the current financial climate, where there is a much higher level of scrutiny of public expenditures in terms of value for money. Schemes that can be shown to deliver tangible benefits to society, that are flexible enough to meet identified shortcomings and are able to adapt to new challenges will have a substantial edge in a competitive funding market.

On an individual contract basis, reports should be produced annually by each beneficiary so that their achievements can be assessed and compared to expectations. Inspections of a sample of agreements will be necessary, but the focus of such inspections should ensure that compliance can be improved, rather than penalties for non-compliance being applied.

It is recommended that any monitoring and evaluation programme be carried out independently to ensure transparency of the process. It is preferable that several specialist agencies undertake monitoring and evaluation of different sectors of the RDP, rather than try to achieve such work within one government department or external agency.

### **3.3 Agri-environment climate measures**

BirdWatch Ireland has widely welcomed and supported the new Green, Low-carbon Agri-environment Scheme (GLAS). The architecture of GLAS is a substantial improvement over previous schemes, with actions targeted to specific priority environmental challenges. The tiered style of this scheme, with core requirements, priority environmental actions and general environmental actions provides a simple way to bring together basic environmental actions in the core requirements for all participants, then build upon this by delivering priority environmental actions as a first requisite for scheme entry, followed by participation in lower-priority actions as funds permit.

Four core requirements are presented which must be undertaken by all participants. The requirement for an approved agricultural planner to prepare the GLAS application is a welcome. However, it is essential that such planners are appropriately qualified to identify the priority actions relevant to each participant, as these have to be delivered in the first instance within each plan. There are further notes below on the training and qualification requirements that such planners need to have available to them, but for some of the priority actions, such as plans dealing with Natura 2000 sites or priority species of conservation concern, appropriately qualified specialist advisors should be consulted in drawing up plans to maximise conservation delivery.

Two of the core requirements “Training in environmental practices and standards” and “Record keeping of actions required” must be expanded to include a requirement for mapping designated sites on the holding (including Natura 200 sites, Natural Heritage Areas and sites of archaeological or heritage interest). Furthermore, for sites designated for nature conservation, the reason for their designation and list of qualifying interests must also be made clear. Awareness of such sites on a holding and the values behind the designation, will likely reduce damage, and may provide increased opportunities for the protection and/or management of such sites.

#### ***3.3.1 Priority Environmental Actions***

BirdWatch Ireland welcomes the targeting of GLAS towards priority environmental actions. However, The specific and targeted nature will need to be further refined to avoid extinction of threatened species in Ireland’s agricultural landscapes and meet the legal requirements of European Court of Justice Ruling C418-04 (‘The Birds Case’). This can be done most effectively by sub-dividing this tier, and prioritising access for the most crucial actions. Although this tiered structure adds complexity to the proposed GLAS structure, this additional level of targeting will be necessary to ensure that the most crucial issues are highlighted for inclusion in GLAS agreements. Four sub-divisions of Tier 1 are suggested:

Tier 1A	Targeted Conservation Actions
Tier 1B	Farmland Habitat Conservation Actions
Tier 1C	Water Protection Actions
Tier 1D	Environmentally Sustainable Production Actions

Tier 1A (Targeted Conservation Actions) are recognised as being the top priority conservation issues for the RDP to address in Ireland. Action in this sub-tier are urgently required to protect priority habitats and red-

listed bird species of conservation concern, which are as being at risk of being lost or are facing extinction. The species and habitats are already defined, and include:

- Priority species and habitats as identified in Ireland's Priority Action Framework (PAF). These PAF-priorities include upland Natura 2000 sites, Freshwater Pearl Mussel and species-rich grassland SACs, SPAs designated for Corncrakes, Hen Harrier and Chough, and breeding waders sites (for Curlew, the Shannon Callows and machair)
- Priority Red-listed bird species in the wider countryside, such as Corncrake, Hen Harrier and Chough (outside of Natura 2000 sites), as well as Twite, Grey Partridge and breeding waders (particularly Lapwing).

Tier 1B (Farmland Habitat Conservation Actions) should largely be targeted at priority habitats in Ireland, particularly those of European importance ("Annexed" Habitats from the Habitat Directive). Examples of these priority habitats occurring outside of protected sites must also be included, along with areas of all commonage areas (which offer particular challenges for management) and the uplands as a whole. The locations for many of the areas covered by the list below where these habitats occur are well known:

- Natura 2000 sites that are not identified as being a priority in the PAF
- Commonages in uplands and lowlands, and privately-owned areas of the uplands
- Annexed habitat outside Natura 2000 (especially grassland types)

Tier 1C (Water Protection Actions) are aimed at addressing issues particularly associated with the protection of water quality, although biodiversity in water courses is also likely to benefit from some of these actions. Management in this sub-tier would require fencing of all watercourses on grassland farms or creation of buffer zones along all watercourses on tillage farms. In order to make the water management measures effective, these will need to be more comprehensive than just fencing or buffer zones, with a suite of water protection measures in place including nutrient management at a higher level than baseline requirement.

Tier 1D (Environmentally Sustainable Production Actions) meet a diverse suite of environmental challenges, including climate actions, water protection and biodiversity conservation. Participation in this sub-tier would include low emission slurry spreading and wild bird/flower cover from grassland farmers, and minimum tillage and green cover establishment from a sown crop for tillage farmers. In order to qualify for the priority entry to Tier 1D, farmers would be required to undertake two actions on their farm.

### 3.3.2 *General Environmental Actions*

The list provided for the general environmental actions needs to be revised. In the first instance, existing measures need to be evaluated against objectives, and it is hoped that the ongoing GLAS evaluation being undertaken under contract to DAFM will deliver such information. In addition to revising existing measures, it would be worthwhile to look at other agri-environment schemes in other countries to expand this list (such as control of invasive species, creation of fen or retention of winter stubbles).

The operation of various actions in combination to achieve enhanced environmental delivery should be considered. For example, although Yellowhammers are still widespread in Ireland during the breeding and winter seasons, their breeding range has declined by 61% in Ireland since 1970 and 37% since 1990, and their wintering range has declined by 38% since 1980. The reasons for the decline have been linked to changes in farming practices. Given the recent declines since 1990, these changes are still taking place in Ireland. As a seed-eating passerine, the availability of winter food is often a critical limit to survival, and the current Yellowhammer distribution reflects the distribution of tillage (and particularly cereal growing) in Ireland. However, Yellowhammers also require dense hedgerows in which to nest. In order to conserve this species, therefore, good hedgerows are required in cereal-growing areas, along with a secure winter food supply (either by retention of cereal stubble cover winter or provision of appropriate wild bird cover). If measures are operated in isolation then the resources in an area would not be sufficient to sustain a Yellowhammer population. However, by combining hedgerow management options with provision of over-winter food, it is likely that Yellowhammer populations could be maintained. There are likely many other examples where simple measures acting in combination could address biodiversity issues in the wider countryside (e.g. for Barn Owls, Kestrel or Stock Dove), and these should be given priority with GLAS.

### 3.3.3 Selection Criteria

BirdWatch Ireland supports the use of selection criteria, provided that these criteria reflect the objectives of agri-environment-climate measures. However, the inclusion of intensive farmers within the selection criteria is not appropriate. Although we appreciate the need for GLAS to deliver on multiple objectives, including water quality and climate mitigation measures, the action to achieve these objectives (such as low-emission slurry spreading and minimum tillage) are already included within the Tier 1 (D) Priority Environmental Actions. As a result, there is no justification on environmental grounds to retain intensive farmers as a selection criteria; indeed giving priority to such farmers over more extensive farmers is likely to result in loss to important (but non-designated) habitats in the wider countryside which are likely to be more prevalent on extensive rather than intensive farms. As noted above, BirdWatch Ireland are concerned that the inclusion of these intensive farmers is a way of mitigation against the negative environmental impacts of Food Wise 2025, the CAP is not an appropriate funding mechanism to deal with environmental damage caused by the Irish agri-food sector which, as the polluter, should be sourced within the industry itself.

### 3.3.4 Funding and Costing

As already noted above (Section 2.2.2) a ring-fenced budget for biodiversity is required.

At present, within GLAS, BirdWatch Ireland has serious concerns at the legitimacy of a funding cap for each applicant. The reason for this funding cap seems to be to try and have as many farmers as possible participating in the scheme. However, increasing the numbers of participants is not an objective of this measure. Rather, the funding should be directed at the priority measures, and their uptake should dictate the maximum payment levels that farmers can attract.

## 3.4 Locally-Led Agri-Environment Schemes (LLAES)

BirdWatch Ireland welcomes the introduction of a measure for output-based agri-environment measures within the current RDP, and congratulates DAFM on pioneering and supporting their delivery. It has been shown in several cases (including the Burren Farming for Conservation Programme) that this type of delivery approach can offer both better outputs for biodiversity as well as improved value-for-money from the results achieved, though some drawbacks have also been identified and careful consideration of the best approach is required, depending on the aims of the project.

With most of these new schemes only just at the very early stages of development, few conclusions can be drawn. However, the new CAP must facilitate these schemes; in particular, flexibility in payments levels and approach must be permitted within the new CAP, with a recognition of the importance of expert scientific and advisory inputs to the operation and evaluation of such schemes, and the additional controls that these bring to such actions.

## 3.5 Knowledge Transfer and Information Actions

There has been a widely-recognised requirement for improved knowledge transfer and information actions for most environmental issues, especially biodiversity, in the agriculture. This has been flagged through numerous reports and studies linked to CAP, the RDP (both the current and previous one) and other related policies (such as Food Harvest 2020 and Food Wise 2025). The SWOT analysis of the RDP noted that:

*“As farms are small and habitats are fragmented it can be difficult to disseminate information related to biodiversity. There could be improvement in the linkage between advisory services and the targeting of measures in priority ecosystems.”*

In addition, The SWOT analysis also notes that:

*“There is an opportunity to better target and integrate training needs and to tailor training of farmers in the delivery of environmental and public goods. Some examples might include the targeting of advice towards farmers in priority areas such as high status sites, Freshwater Pearl Mussel, Natura 2000, HNV and holdings with specific derogations.”*

The use of Knowledge Transfer Groups (KTG) to disseminate best proactive advice is well recognised. Farmers appear to respond well to peer-to-peer learning, and the combination of structured information sessions accompanied by practical, on-site demonstration of issues (through farm visits) has been successful where deployed on a production sector basis (e.g. dairy or beef KTGs). Within the RDP, KTGs are included for the

various production sectors, requiring farmers to attend for three year periods, with five meetings/events per annum. However, and despite being included as a priority area for consideration in RDP SWOT/Needs analysis (as noted above), biodiversity actions have been largely excluded from the KTG approach. Instead, the RDP requires farmers participating in GLAS to attend a six hour course.

Adopting the KTG model to focus on biodiversity issues could substantially improve the understanding, and successful delivery, of biodiversity conservation measures. Rather than having a production sector as a focus for the KTG, the focus area could be related to an individual priority species included within the RDP (e.g. Hen Harrier, Corncrake, etc.), where farmers in a specific area (such as the pre-defined GLAS target areas for Hen Harrier or Corncrake measures) can come together to discuss the operation of the scheme, delivery of the measures, etc. Such a group would also allow ecological experts to provide additional and further information to farmers within these important areas on the species or habitats being managed. Similarly, it would also be possible to develop focus groups on species priority habitats in an area (such as a Natura 2000 sites) to manage the habitats in those areas, or even on individual GLAS measures such as Wild Bird Cover, where participating farmers could exchange information on locating these crops, species mixes to sow, etc. Such a group could also explore the effect of combining GLAS measures together for greater benefits (e.g. Wild Bird Cover with hedgerow management and bird or bat boxes).

### **3.6 Advisory Services**

The value from delivering information actions (as described above) is often dependent upon the advisor that is delivering the information. Clearly, actions aimed at improving the skills within the advisory service, particularly in area of environmental protection and biodiversity management, are essential. In many cases, through the network of agricultural advisors in Ireland, there is substantial experience and ability in the delivery of such information. However, there is a recognised need that some aspects of advisory support, particularly in relation to knowledge on biodiversity and its protection and conservation, may be limited in certain areas or specialist fields. This potential deficit is acknowledged in the RDP SWOT analysis, which states:

*“The potential skills and awareness shortage in relation to the environment and ecology in the farming and agricultural professional sector is a threat to the sector’s Green reputation”*

Although the SWOT analysis identified the need for training for advisory services in Ireland in relation to biodiversity, the RDP itself fails to target this area for the Continued Professional Development (CPD) for agricultural advisors. CPD is included as a measure in the RDP, but to date has only focused on issues surrounding animal health and welfare.

Furthermore, in some cases and particularly when dealing with aspects of biodiversity conservation, the expertise required for this is not normally available or adequate from agricultural advisory or other such services and specialists are needed for specific advisory roles. This need is reflected in the Rural Development Regulation, requiring that those delivering such advice shall be appropriately qualified and have “advisory experience and reliability with respect of the fields in which they advise” (Article 15 (3)). It therefore needs to be acknowledged that simply up-skilling agricultural advisors won’t be enough to deliver biodiversity objectives as this is insufficient to ensure that farmers implement the measures effectively. The use of specialist biodiversity advisors (as distinct from (the equivalent to GLAS) planners, whose knowledge base is wider but more general) is an established principle, and has been shown to be highly effective through scientific research .

As limited knowledge about aspects of ecology, biodiversity and its conservation within agricultural advisory services has been identified as a limiting factor to the successful delivery of measures within the RDP, specialist and targeted biodiversity training needs to be developed and delivered. This could be operated through the existing measure for CPD for agricultural advisors, which allows for areas where skills enhancement has been identified as a need for agricultural advisors have arisen. Given the ongoing development of biodiversity-related schemes actions within the RDP, this needs to be done in the short term to ensure that such measures can be delivered to the maximum potential.

The need to support specialist biodiversity advisors, either to train agricultural advisors as described above, or to deal directly with farmers delivering increasingly complex and detailed actions through the various RDP

schemes is also essential. It may not be possible to support such advisors through the existing RDP but, given the pivotal role they could play in the success of schemes within the RDP, external support may need to be sought as a priority.

### **3.7 Investments in Physical Assets**

This measure offers farmers and land managers supports to undertake one-off capital project than are not available through annual payments, such as agri-environment-climate schemes. Within the RDP, this measure is used to support GLAS actions in relation to fencing, provision of bee, bird and bat boxes, planting of trees, etc. It is also used, through the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme II (TAMS II), to fund capital investments in a number of target areas to promote increased competitiveness (by supporting farmers investing in new technologies, such as new dairy equipment, upgraded animal housing, etc.) and sustainability (e.g. for the purchase of low-emission slurry-spreading equipment, improved farm nutrient storage, etc.).

Article 17 (1) of the Rural Development Regulation states that:

*“Support under this measure shall cover tangible and/or intangible assets which:*

- (a) improve the overall performance and sustainability of the agricultural holding*
- (d) are non-productive investments linked to the achievement of agri-environment-climate objectives as pursued under this regulation, including biodiversity conservation status of species and habitat as well as enhancing the public amenity value of Natura 2000 area or other high nature value systems to be defined in the programme.”*

It is these non-productive investments that feature in GLAS. However, these could be very substantially expended; examples of non productive investments may include: creating woodland patches, planting scattered trees and hedgerows, creating small ponds, removing invasive or non-native species from semi-natural grasslands, removing drainage infrastructure to raise water levels and restore wetlands, birdwatching hides and information points, etc.

The operation of a scheme for larger capital works that supports biodiversity is needed. Funding for this could be managed in a similar way to the existing GLAS Traditional Farm Buildings Scheme, whereby a competitive fund is established and the projects demonstrating the greatest return for the environment are supported. Even the allocation of a small portion of the funding available through this measure to such non-productive investments, that could be linked to achieving agri-environment-climate objectives in GLAS, would be beneficial. Examples of such non productive investments may include: creating scrapes, tree and scrub removal and erection of predator proof fences at GLAS priority breeding wader sites, creating small ponds, removing invasive or non-native species from semi-natural grasslands, investments for extensive and non-productive livestock grazing (e.g. fencing off biodiversity margins or buffer strips) or removing drainage infrastructure to raise water levels and restore wetlands in Natura 2000 sites.

For other actions under this measure, impacts need to be fully determined, in addition to legal obligations under EIA. All operations with potentially negative impacts on RDP objectives, including restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems, should be explicitly excluded from support (e.g. land drainage and removal of landscape features; unsustainable intensification of grasslands; new roads and buildings sealing farmland and fragmenting landscapes; modernisation of farm buildings removing nesting sites for threatened birds (amber list/red list species) and bats; cables and other structures posing risks of collision for birds, etc.).

### **3.8 Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC)**

In the previous RDP (2007-2013), when they were known as Less Favoured Areas (LFAs), this measure delivered little in terms of known benefits to ecosystems, although they were considered very valuable as a socio-economic tool in maintaining economically-marginal farming systems, particularly in areas where rural communities are threatened with depopulation. As a result, the socio-economic benefits of ANCs in Ireland may have consequences for halting land abandonment (the SWOT analysis comments that “land abandonment (potentially due to a combination of low productivity and the aging profile of farmers) is a threat to biodiversity, as it can reduce the habitat available for certain species”) or preventing smaller, extensive farm land being subsumed into larger, more intensive farming enterprises, but this is also difficult to determine. This is reflected in the SWOT analysis for the 2013-2020 RDP, which noted that “supporting farmers in

addressing land abandonment and viability issues in Areas of Natural Constraint (formerly LFAs) represents a further opportunity in addition to the protection and restoration of priority habitats/species on and outside Natura 2000 sites that are under varying degrees of threat". Therefore, while income support is important on farms where productivity is curtailed by difficult physical conditions is important, it is also necessary to target opportunities within this measure to maximise environmental outputs.

In the previous programme, in addition to LFAs failing to deliver on their stated objective of "restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems", another criticism related to the complexity and lack of transparency in designating areas as LFAs. In May 2010, Ireland's Minister for Agriculture (Brendan Smith) stated:

*"The EU Court of Auditors raised concerns about the procedures for the designation of intermediate Disadvantaged Areas (also known as Less Favoured Areas) in the European Union. The concerns related to the number and variety of criteria used to designate such areas - Member States have used more than one hundred criteria - and the lack of transparency. The EU Commission has made a number of attempts to address these criticisms: During 2004/2005, the Commission proposed these areas be designated using criteria based on area classification, reflecting poor soil qualities and climate conditions (e.g. average cereal yields, stocking density, percentage of permanent grassland, etc.) but this approach was rejected by the Council of Ministers."*

The clear need for reform of ANCs was largely by-passed in the development of the current CAP legislation. However, Article 32 of the Rural Development Regulation (Regulation (EU) 1305/2013) states that the ANCs have to be designated by 2018 according to three criteria (Mountain areas; Areas, other than mountain areas, facing significant natural constraints; Other areas affected by specific constraints).

The significant natural constraints are listed as eight biophysical criteria (low temperature, dryness, excess soil moisture, limited soil drainage, unfavourable texture and stoniness, shallow rooting depth, poor chemical properties and steep slope; details of the definitions and thresholds under these criteria are appended to Regulation 1305/2013), and areas are categorised as ANCs if 60% meets at least one of the criteria listed. These are subject to a fine-tuning exercise, where, if economic data indicate that the constraint is not an impediment to market access or income (i.e. these areas are not disadvantaged economically), then they are not eligible for the ANC payment.

Specific constraints are defined where it is necessary for land management to be continued in order to conserve or improve the environment, to maintain the countryside, to preserve the tourist potential of the area or to protect the coastline. Farmland Natura 2000 sites can therefore be considered for ANC designation due to the additional requirements (constraints) the designation places upon farmers in relation to undertaking certain activities (subject to the fine-tuning exercise). It seems likely that most Natura 2000 sites will already be designated as ANCs under the eight biophysical criteria. Therefore, the additional burden that may be associated with certain Natura ANCs, is likely to be over and above non-Natura ANCs (which are otherwise the same in relation to classification according to biophysical criteria).

Several studies have shown the importance of low stocking densities in maintaining specific habitat types. Because of their characteristics (thin soils, aspect, etc.), these habitats are often very fragile and, as a direct result, are now not only scarce or threatened themselves, but also many of the species that depend upon these habitats and the farming practices that maintain them are of conservation concern. With low Direct Payments associated with such land (due to historically low production levels), directing ANC payments to the areas of High Nature Value Farming substantially reduces the potential risk of abandonment. Although HNV farmland cannot be designated as an ANC in its own right, the fine-tuning exercise can ensure that HNV farming (and, by extension, farmed Natura 2000 sites) is retained as eligible for these payments.

Due to the often negative perception within the farming community of Natura 2000 designations, offering additional payments to farmers in such areas is likely to increase their overall acceptance. This has been seen already with some of the Tier 1 Priority Environmental Assets in GLAS, with some farmers seeking to have their land designated in order to avail of the high payments associated with such measures. An increased payment to farmers with Natura ANCs could similarly improve the perception of designated farmland areas, provided that appropriate caveats regarding meeting management obligations within the sites are met.

## 4. Submission Form for CAP Post 2020 Consultation

### 4.1 Simplification:

*How can the CAP be simplified for beneficiaries and administrators, while maintaining an appropriate balance in terms of public accountability and value for money for EU taxpayer's funds?*

With such a large proportion of the EU budget allocated to CAP it is essential that correct control procedures are in place to ensure these funds are spent correctly. Fundamental to this is to ensure transparency within the CAP, so that taxpayers (EU citizens) can see where the money is going, what it is being spent on and what it is delivering. Furthermore, the administrative burden associated with the allocation of funds to CAP beneficiaries should reflect the amount of money being spent. For example, small farmers in receipt of low payments should not have to go through the same levels of control and verification procedures that those in receipt of large payments are required to undertake. Some of the differences in administration need to be internalised by the relevant managing authorities in Member States to facilitate smaller enterprises, but overall there needs to be recognition at the EU level of the prohibitive nature of administration for some of the schemes and programmes operated through the CAP and that this needs to be tackled at EU level.

One approach would be the rationalisation of CAP schemes. Rather than farmers having to go through a multitude of contracts and agreements (such as application for Basic Payment Scheme (BPS), Areas of Natural Constraint (ANCs), agri-environment schemes (such as GLAS), non-productive investment schemes (such as TAMS) or other elements (such as the Beef Genomics Data Programme), farmers should have a single contract to deliver on varying obligations under CAP. Such an approach would see not only improved simplification for participating farmers (as they would only need to go through one set of paperwork) but also improve the integration of actions and undertakings between each of the elements currently operated as separate schemes. Such a coordinated approach could better address environmental requirements (such as linking Pillar 1 Greening with agri-environment or non-productive investments) but also link production activities (supported by BPS) with non-productive investments, appropriate Greening or agri-environment measures or similar, and agreement with such streamlining of the policy has been indicated by both the Council of EU Agricultural Ministers and the European Court of Auditors.

For simplification (and transparency) it is critically important that the elements within the CAP are delivered using the best available science. Furthermore, decisions on how schemes operate must not be allowed to be rendered ineffective through failures to deliver on this best science or best practice, or made too complicated by creating loopholes to allow CAP beneficiaries to avoid delivering meaningful results. The current status of Pillar 1 greening is an excellent example of this, where the original Commission proposals for linking Pillar 1 payments to the delivery of environmental public goods were either rendered ineffective by determining that large number of CAP beneficiaries did not have to undertake the measures at all – the “green by definition” loophole, or through the introduction of huge complexity to the system (such as the conversion and weighting factors associated with the Ecological Focus Areas). If the science indicates that a proportion of agricultural land needs to be managed to sustain biodiversity, then that proportion needs to be identified and delivered on the ground. Again, the European Court of Auditors echo this requirements, stating that simplification of the CAP is needed, but not at the cost of effectiveness.

Whatever approach is taken, scheme documentation, including forms and guidance leaflets, must be presented in simple and clear language that is easy for non-specialists to understand. Part of this will require appropriate supports for participating farmers through a comprehensive advisory and knowledge transfer support system that is available to all participants. This must not just include agricultural advisory supports but also specialist inputs in environmental and other areas to ensure farmers understand what is required of them to enable them to make the best decisions about how to manage their individual farms to deliver the best results.

Ultimately, CAP payments should be closely linked to the delivery of agreed and defined union priorities. For example, extensive, low-input production should be rewarded (better social/economic/environmental outcomes) while industrialised, high input production should be penalised (negative social/health/environmental impacts). This linking of production, employment and environmental measures that address EU objectives should always be to the fore when developing or designing the new CAP and associated schemes and programmes and the CAP can be simplified by linking content to these criteria.

## 4.2 Direct Payments

*Having regard to both the Food wise 2025 and the CAP ambition to support economic development and employment creation, particularly in rural areas, what are your views on potential proposals to target direct payments differently?*

EU payments need to be targeted at farmers and land managers that are directly implementing actions to address EU priorities as defined by the objectives of the CAP, and this vision is shared by the EU Court of Auditors. It is likely that this will require a substantial shift from the distribution of payments under the current CAP, and it is recommended that this shift occurs in a defined and transparent way during the course of the next programming period, to maintain stability within the sector and allow existing CAP beneficiaries to re-align their activities to the market or the mechanisms that a new CAP would support.

In the short term, direct payment urgently need to be redistributed to ensure the survival of smaller farms in marginalised areas, and to promote farming systems with positive environmental, social, health and wider rural economic development outcomes. Direct payments should not be paid to highly industrialised farm units, non-farming agribusiness processors and other agribusiness interests. In the medium term, farmers taking positive long-term steps towards regenerative farming systems which sequester carbon, improve water or soil quality, or increase biodiversity, wild spaces and agroforestry and woodland should be rewarded. Payments should be redistributed according to quality of farming practices and the delivery of non-marker public goods as opposed to being based on historical, production-related figures.

Recipients of any CAP payment must adhere to the requirements of EU law, including environmental legislation, as a basic requirement. Failure or breach of these laws should result in a warning being issued to rectify the breach within three months. Failure to address these breaches within this timeframe should result in CAP payment being withheld, and penalties applied to rectify damage done (following the polluter-pays principle). This should include farmers in breach of limits set for chemical applications under the Water Framework and Nitrates Directive. With a continuing decrease in Irish water quality, spreading high levels of fertilisers can no longer be justified under the Nitrates derogation system which is currently operated. If farmers wish to apply for the derogation, then all CAP payments are forfeited and some level of compensation must be paid to support remedial works to improve water quality in the catchment.

Payments should absolutely be capped at the average industrial wage per active full-time farmer on farm. There must also be certainty of timing of all CAP payments for farmers. Having a single CAP contract (see simplification above) should assist in ensuring that payments can be made on a defined timetable to ensure payment schedules are transparent and appropriate.

All farmed land should be eligible for CAP payments, as should land managers (not just farmers) that seek to support habitats and land uses that deliver on EU objectives for CAP. This should include areas where non-forage vegetation, such as scrub, trees or woodland are present but where agricultural activity can continue. For scrub and woodland habitats within a mosaic farming landscape, these should be identified, and their retention required as part of any CAP agreement (much as the retention of landscape features is currently required). Encroaching scrub (which can be separated from established scrub from aerial photos) should be controlled mechanically outside the bird nesting season to preserve open, high nature value farmed habitats such as semi-natural grasslands.

### 4.3 The Environment

*What do you believe should be the environmental priorities under the next CAP?*

*Bearing these priorities in mind and considering Ireland's ambition for the sustainable development of the food sector, how should pillar I (direct payments) and pillar II (rural development) combine with private sector funding post 2020, to help the sector contribute to National climate change obligations and increase its contribution to water quality and biodiversity?*

As explicitly noted in the Commission Communication on the CAP and the Council of EU Agriculture Ministers, more has to be done to meet environmental objectives. The full suite of environmental objectives must be fully realised, to include climate action, protection of water, soils and air and the conservation of biodiversity. As a baseline, no CAP-funded action can have a detrimental impact on the environment and, where this occurs, environmental damage must be dealt with through fines or penalties sufficient to address any damage arising. TO date, this has not happened, with the European Court of Auditors noting that *"While cross-compliance requirements apply to most CAP beneficiaries, the entitlement of CAP support does not depend on following them, and penalties for non-compliance for individual farmers, expressed as a percentage, tend to be low"*.

A fundamental re-think not only about the nature of many CAP supports or payments, but also the nature of farming in the EU as a whole is required. Such a re-think is essential if international environmental obligations and targets are to be met by the agriculture sector in the EU.

Going forward, food production in Ireland must have quality rather than quantity as an objective in order to balance social, economic and environmental needs. Increasing quality and aiming for added value markets (such as organic, locally-branded or artisan production) as opposed to higher volume would reduce stocking pressure on farms and allow for the development of mixed farms, rotational grazing, increased agroforestry and other wildlife friendly measures. Specifically, much work needs to be done in Ireland to explore and promote non-livestock farming systems, particularly to establish which plant crops that are best suited to the Irish environment (e.g. fruit, vegetables, etc.). Furthermore, farming in Ireland should be limited to the carrying capacity of the Irish ecosystem instead of supplementing fertility with artificial fertilisers and feeds with imported GM Soya and other feeds. Not only are these often themselves the product of highly unsustainable farming practices and deforestation overseas, but such an approach would reduce sectoral risks from, for example, the current fodder crisis.

Part of a general shift towards truly sustainable farming systems must include schemes and programmes to support farmers in making such a transition. Greening and an extension to GLAS should be integrated into the direct payments scheme and obligatory on all farms regardless of size. Supports should also be available for developing small scale production, processing and distribution chains which bring farmers and consumers closer together. Such an approach could develop local and overseas marketing measures to add value to locally processed production.

#### **4.4 Risk Management**

*What sort of risk management measures for primary producers should be considered under the next CAP and how should they complement current EU measures such as intervention, Aids to Private Storage and Exceptional Measures ?*

The current focus on farming in Ireland seeks to increase production levels and specialise production methods. Both these carry substantial risk. In the case of specialisation, farmers may be limited to a single market and the volatility intrinsic to individual, specialised markets (e.g. dairy) whereas traditionally they may have been selling into multiple markets (e.g. beef and dairy). Putting all the eggs in one basket in terms of commodity production, and with price volatility evident on agricultural commodity markets as seen in recent years, support for diversification of farming should be encouraged rather than advised against.

Additionally, a focus on quality rather than quantity in production and marketing in Ireland, as well as bringing production more in line with the carrying capacity of Irish ecosystems would mean less risk and instability. Farmers would not be forced to constantly increase production and enter into increasing debt and risk to increase land holdings, acquire stock or feed for them. Risk management should mean avoiding dependence on imported feeds, such as has been seen in the recent fodder crises (and avoidance of such risk would also have positive environmental outcomes), avoiding increased farm debt, ensuring prices paid to producers cover the costs of production, and diversification of the farm economy.

With many small farmers in Ireland, it is essential to focus on supporting the farm family rather than solely the agricultural business, which gives preferential treatment to the larger factory farming, which also deliver fewer public goods and place increased pressure on the environment. A failure to focus on the wider rural economies, as can be seen throughout Ireland, places pressure on these areas to support, keep or attract young people.

Finally, the supports already available to farmers through Direct Payments provide a safety net to income, and essentially operate as a risk management tool; diverting CAP funds to other risk management measures will put undue pressure on an already over-stretched CAP (and EU) budget.

#### **4.5 Young Farmer Supports**

*How should the CAP encourage young people into farming, the exit of the older generation and facilitate succession planning*

There is an imminent crisis in farm succession in Ireland, with an ageing farming population and an exodus of young people from rural areas. In order to reverse this trend, there is a need to open up access to land for landless young people in Ireland who wish to engage in farming. The alternative will see a huge drop in the number of small-medium sized farms which make up the main structure of rural economies and social life.

To support young farmers, who will be essential to the re-imagining of the CAP and the future of farming in Ireland, there must be a concerted effort to invest in training and education opportunities. These investments in education and training must focus on ensuring that farming in Ireland is sustainable, and young farmers must be supported to transition into sustainable agriculture. However, the first part of this process must be to listen to young farmers to see what they want, what the need, and how this can be realised to maximise benefits.

In addition to supporting young farmers deliver sustainable agriculture, there also needs to be investment in the fabric of rural Ireland to ensure that young farmers want to stay and work in these areas. This includes suitable infrastructure such as broadband, but also social supports (such as rural transport). Additionally, there needs to be promotion of farming as a career to make it attractive to new, younger entrants. The link with food production, and particularly quality, artisan or environmentally or socially-sustainable production systems may be useful mechanisms to do this.

Similarly to supporting young farmers, action needs to be taken to support women in the agri-food sector in Ireland. This includes supporting women entering farming as well as developing and supporting opportunities within the CAP for artisan food processing and related markets, that would support wider diversification on individual farms to encourage greater resilience within farming families.

#### **4.6 Research, Innovation, Technology Transfer**

*How can the CAP be used to build a smarter agriculture, and to translate research outcomes into real technology adoption that contributes to improved margins, greater resilience and better environmental impact on farm?*

*What role should vehicles like advisory services and producer organisations play?*

There urgently needs to be a focus away from “conventional” chemical and high-input agriculture towards regenerative, agroecological approaches which integrate farms into functional ecosystems and increase biodiversity, landscape and human health, and legitimise the subsidies paid to farm production in the eyes of the public. The current research focus on increasing production levels from existing farming practices, and grass-based systems in particular, needs to be examined to determine overall value for money, particularly in light of current agricultural systems failing to meet existing needs to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, protect water, air and soils, enhance food security and conserve biodiversity. Maximising production at all costs (and irrespective of environmental damage) is no longer appropriate given the huge gap that exists between current agricultural production systems and the sustainability of the environment on which it depends. This is particularly the case with greenhouse gas emissions, where reducing total emissions is the only option to meet climate targets. Ultimately, a revised agriculture research programme is urgently needed in Ireland where the requirements for a vision for agriculture in 2030 can be delivered. Maintaining the status quo of production and output-based research cannot continue as this not only fails to address urgent environmental needs, but is making the problem worse.

Advisory organisations should play a positive role in farm education and in diversification. Support needs to be given to specialist advisors across the range of topics facing the agri-food sector, including environment, but also (for example) advisory services to encourage the formation of new producer’s organisations which reflect the changing interests of Irish farmers. The need for an agriculture qualification to give advice to farmers may not be appropriate in all cases (e.g. in the delivery of environmental advice, business planning, etc.) and the need for an agricultural qualification alone for agri-environment planning clearly needs to be revised. To support a diversified advisory service, the role of specialist NGOs must be acknowledged, and their advice sought and supported to help farmers, and the farming sector as a whole, deliver on its aims and objectives.

Finally, simplification in the draw-down and delivery of EU research funding is urgently required, particularly where this can be targeted to smaller-scale research projects seeking to specifically tackle issues around the sustainability of farming in the EU.

#### **4.7 On Farm Investment**

*What should the on farm investment priorities be in the next CAP and how can financial instruments (or loans) play a role?*

Investments on farms will be crucial in delivering a re-imagined agriculture sector. Investments can be thought of in two ways: those that seek to improve efficiency or profitability (including diversification into alternative farming practices, alternative land-use management, including non-farming activities) and those that seek to deliver non-market public goods. For the latter, support is needed for farmers to undertake such actions, and this should continue to be delivered through schemes such as agri-environment (GLAS) or non-productive investment schemes (TAMS), where only non-market public goods are created or supported. In addition to the existing types of actions already available in agri-environment schemes, consideration should be given to flood management and alleviation works, such as the creation of wetlands to reduce down-stream flood events.

For investments that will deliver financial benefits to the recipient, consideration should be given to part-funding such works, with the beneficiary required to offer some level of co-financing. These need to be considered on a case-by-case basis to determine what an appropriate level of co-financing would be to support the beneficiary in taking in new (and potentially risky) ventures, but the need for co-financing should reduce risks to the spending of public money. In support of such investment activities, the provision of targeted financial instruments, such as low-interest or long-term loans may be appropriate, particularly if these loans can be used to invest in new technologies that deliver environmental as well as economic benefits. It is important that those seeking to invest in such a way can be supported as much as possible to ensure they can take on the responsibility of such innovation with reduced financial stress. Examples of these could include investing in renewable energy systems on farms, or development of new, sustainable cropping systems, anaerobic digestion, pollution control or improved housing for livestock.

#### **4.8 Strengthening the socio-economic fabric of rural areas**

*How can the CAP complement other European Structural and Investment Funds and the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development to support the social and economic development of rural communities, including through the development of new value chains such as clean energy, the emerging bio-economy, the circular economy or rural tourism?*

Education, particularly at primary and also secondary level, is essential to support the fabric of rural areas by creating a local identity to make communities proud of their area, and young people want to stay and work in these areas.

The CAP can support rural areas by helping to rebuild broken and disjointed local food production systems, stimulating the rural economy and local employment. Creating a market for local produce, though labelling or local promotion (including farmer's markets, but also labelling initiatives to support locally-sourced food), may be a very useful way of sustaining local jobs. Such an approach would deliver far more benefits nationally than the focus on export-driven production, which only seeks to improve profit margins for a small number of large companies.

In a similar vein, CAP should encourage renewable energy production on farms where it is ecologically appropriate, mainly wind, solar and hydro power. These systems should be locally installed and maintained, again creating and maintaining long-term, sustainable jobs in local areas.

Finally, CAP must continue to support farm diversification, through activities such as rural tourism, particularly off the main tourist routes, through walking, cycling and other initiatives. Supports for on farm accommodation and other measures should be introduced to stimulate this.

#### **4.9 Health, Nutrition, Food Waste and Animal Welfare**

*Can the focus of the CAP in these areas be sharpened, and can it complement other measures in emerging areas of concern such as food waste or anti-microbial resistance and if so how?*

The industrial food chain (production, processing, distribution etc) is responsible for negative human health outcomes, excessive food waste, and poor standards of animal welfare. Recent studies have shown the food grown in soils today have fewer nutrients than they did in the past, illustrating the damage that intensive, high-input agriculture is having on the long-term sustainability of food production systems. Citizens and the state can no longer justify supporting this model financially and politically. Ultimately the solution to these issues lies in a change to the farming model as well as educating consumers to create the market demand for sustainable food. Our current consumption patterns are simply not viable and farmers and consumers must work together to instigate the change that is needed. This should underpin all facets of the new CAP arrangements. Any other short-term measures looking to address food waste or anti-microbial resistance will inevitably fail to justify the taxpayers money invested in its implementation.

In relation to health, it is worth emphasising the risks from anti-microbial resistance, and the industrial pork and beef production systems which use inordinate amounts of antibiotics as a matter of course that are contributing to this problem. CAP should work towards moving consumers and farmers aware from meat and dairy consumption and production respectively.

#### **4.10 Position of the Farmers in the Supply Chain**

*Can the CAP post 2020 do more to complement other measures to strengthen the position of farmers in the supply chain and if so how?*

Farmers have consistently been told that there is nothing they can do about price, all they can do is increase production, which is categorically untrue. Meat and dairy processing in Ireland exert an inordinate dominance in the food chain. This urgently need to be tackled politically in order to reveal the extent of their influence in the Irish food system, and their imprudent control over policy.

The CAP should introduce mechanisms for farmers to establish marketing boards independent of the large processors, provide funding for new small and medium scale processing units. Farmers should be encouraged to market their produce both in local and regional markets directly and through cooperatives, thus bypassing the monopoly of agribusiness interests which dominates Irish farming. Supporting local markets not only has benefits for farmers through improving farm gate prices, but also has added benefits of supporting local communities, and the reduction in “food miles” (and associated transport costs and emissions) has environmental benefits as well. Furthermore, identifying food needs at local levels also allows farmers to diversify into gaps in the market, increasing resilience of farming locally along with reduction in risk to farm incomes.

#### **4.11 Any Other Information**

There is a critical need to provide support for environmental NGOs to engage with CAP. This is needed at both the policy level as well as at an operational level to allow expertise in these organisations to be available to DAFM (and other implementing bodies).