**The interaction of Biodiversity and Agriculture**

DAFM measures and actions

Biodiversity is supported through a variety of schemes and programmes at national and local level.

The Green, Low-Carbon, Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS) has approx. 49,600 participating farmers. It includes agricultural actions that promote and preserve biodiversity both directly and indirectly. The three-tier hierarchy system prioritizes actions which target the preservation of priority habitats and species, for example, the Farmland Habitat action aims to protect vulnerable habitats of private Natura land. General biodiversity actions, climate change and water quality actions also provide biodiversity benefits for agricultural habitats and species through promotion of sustainable management practices and traditional farming practices e.g., low-input permanent pasture, planting of new hedgerows.

The Burren Programme began in 2016 and builds on the progress of previous farming for conservation projects. A two-tier approach, with payments for actions and payments for results, delivers agricultural results and environmental benefits. There are now over 300 farmers working towards the conservation and sustainable management of habitats and species in the Burren.

Locally Led and European Innovation Partnerships (EIPs)

The Hen Harrier Programme was launched in December 2017. The five-year programme has been allocated €25 million. This programme will be administered directly by the Hen Harrier Project in the six Hen Harrier Special Protection Areas (SPAs). Payments will be awarded through a Results-Based Payment Scheme, complimentary actions and Hen Harrier payments. Approximately 1400 farmers are participating.

A Locally Led Programme for the Fresh Water Pearl Mussel was awarded in April 2018 and will concentrate on habitat management in eight priority catchment areas.

European Innovation Partnerships (EIPs), A total of 23 projects have been awarded under two open call for EIPs, with the second call announced by the Minister in October 2018. A majority of the awarded schemes focus directly on Rural Development Priority Number 4(a) ‘Restoring, preserving and enhancing biodiversity’, including both protected Natura sites and other farmland habitats of the wider agricultural landscape. Other schemes are aimed at sustainable agriculture management practices which will also have positive implications for biodiversity.

In line the EU Biodiversity Ambitions (Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategy), DAFM are actively developing agri-environmental measures to benefit Biodiversity & Agriculture.

The Pilot Farm Environment Survey and Soil Sampling programmes are aimed to bridge the knowledge gap of what habitats are present at farm level in Ireland. This knowledge transfer will help farmers, with support from their Advisors, to inform their management practices with Biodiversity and the environment in mind, along with yielding higher quality outputs

The REAP project was launched in April this year. This project is applying principles from established locally led Agri-environment projects and schemes to be implemented at a national level. This is scenario testing trials for grassland and field margin habitats using results-based scorecards.

New initiatives such as Project Woodland, launched by DAFM will help towards our tree planting goals under the EU Biodiversity Strategy.

Two large-scale Agri-environment projects that commenced this year; Wild Atlantic Nature (WAN) and Corncrake LIFE, of which DAFM are a key beneficiary and in partnership with NPWS. DAFM have worked to develop the Result-based measures with those project teams.

WAN aims to support, innovate results-based management in blanket bog areas from Galway to Donegal.

Corncrake LIFE will be working with farmers and landowners to improve the habitat conditions and range of Concrake areas between Galway and Donegal.

Pollinators. A DAFM Pollinator Network was established in April 2018 ahead of World Bee Day 20th May 2018 in order to drive activities to promote protection of pollinators, to coordinate activities across the department, to increase stakeholder engagement and collaboration and to inform policy decisions.

DAFM are also members of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan (AIPP) steering committee and work together with the National Biodiversity Data Centre and other agencies and researchers by supporting the development and implementation of the actions of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan. Following the success of the inaugural All-Ireland Pollinator Plan 2015-2020, the second plan for 2021 – 2025 was launched in March this year. DAFM provide funding of €15,000 annually to the AIPP. This funding has allowed for the publication of the very successful series of public guidelines on pollinator actions, available on the AIPP website, including the ‘Farmland: actions to help pollinators’ on which DAFM worked closely with the National Biodiversity Data Centre. The suite of guidelines developed by the project provide guidance on how evidence-based actions for homes, communities, on our farms, in our businesses, sports clubs, transport corridors, will make our landscape pollinator friendly. In effort to bolster the work of the AIPP, DAFM have committed to funding a full-time Farmland Pollinator Project Officer to help deliver the actions under Objective 1 of the second plan, to make farmland more pollinator friendly.

Support and communication.

DAFM plays an active role a number of multi-agency working groups and steering committees dealing with a wide range of issues regarding the conservation of biodiversity, for example, the Irish Ramsar Wetlands Committee and the Curlew Task Force. On-going communication, support and advice are provided on issues surrounding biodiversity in agriculture.

Ireland will focus on creating space for biodiversity in our agricultural landscape, building on our current significant network of hedges, field margins and areas of value to biodiversity to support an objective of an average of 10% farmed land with high biodiversity value outside of lands currently designated.